

A rare early quarto of Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 2*

William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part 2*. London: Andrew Wise, 1600. 6 3/4 inches x 4 15/16 inches (171 mm x 125 mm), [88] pages, A–D4 E4 (-E3, 4 +E3, 4, 5, 6) F–K4 L2 (last leaf blank).

The | Second part of Henrie | the fourth, continuing to his death, | *and*
coronation of Henrie | the fift. | With the humours of sir Iohn Fal- | *staffe,*
and swaggering | Pistoll. | *As it hath been sundrie times publikely* | acted by
the right honourable, the Lord | Chamberlaine his seruants. | *Written by*
William Shakespeare. | [ornament] | London | Printed by V. S. for Andrew
Wise, and | William Aspley. | 1600.

Shakespeare's quartos, so named because of their format (a single sheet folded twice, creating four leaves or eight pages), are the first printed representations of his plays and, as none of the plays survives in manuscript, of great importance to Shakespeare scholarship. Only twenty-one of Shakespeare's plays were published in quarto before the closure of the theaters and outbreak of civil war in 1642. These quartos were printed from either Shakespeare's "foul papers" (a draft with notations and changes that was given in sections to actors for their respective roles); from "fair copies" created from foul papers that presented the entire action of the play; from promptbooks, essentially fair copies annotated and expanded by the author and acting company to clarify stage directions, sound effects, etc.; or from a previously published quarto edition. The quartos were inexpensive to produce and were published for various reasons, including to secure the acting company's rights to the material and to bring in money during the

plague years in London when the theaters were closed.

Henry IV, Part 2 opens in the wake of the Battle of Shrewsbury. The play chronicles the ongoing conspiracy against Henry IV by the Archbishop of York and other nobles and the responses of the Lancastrian loyalists. The end of the play brings the death of Henry (1413) by natural causes and the coronation of his son, known as Prince Hal, as Henry V. Despite the challenges to his father's legitimacy, Henry V was to reign unchallenged until illness claimed his life in 1422. Both parts of *Henry IV* feature the memorable character Sir John Falstaff, an overweight reveler and shirker of duty.

Now at the British Library, this copy of the 1600 *Henry IV, Part 2* contains two corrected leaves, E3 and E4, and two additional leaves, E5 and E6, to remedy an omission (Act III, Scene 1) discovered during printing. This volume was bound by the British Museum Bindery in a nineteenth-century red half sheep binding with gold tooling, and boards covered with comb-marbled paper. "SHAKESPEARE. THE SECOND PART OF HENRY THE FOURTH. LOND. 1600." is lettered in gold up the spine below the emblem of King George III. "George Steevens" is written on the title page.

This quarto was previously owned by George Steevens (1736–1800), an English Shakespeare editor who collaborated with Samuel Johnson in issuing a complete edition of Shakespeare, *The Works of Shakespeare with the Corrections and Illustrations of Various Commentators* (10 vols., 1773). He owned roughly fifty quartos, and his sale (13 May 1800) was the first large Shakespeare collection to appear at auction. The book was then added

to the library George III (1738–1820), who reigned as king of Great Britain and Ireland from 1760 until his death. At the start of George III's reign, there was no royal library to speak of; his grandfather, George II, had presented his library to the British Museum in 1757. In 1763, George III began his collection in earnest with the acquisition of the library of Joseph Smith, the former British consul in Venice whose collection contained many early printed books and classics. The king's agents attended many English and Continental auctions, and they purchased both single volumes and complete libraries on his behalf, steadily enlarging the royal collection. In 1774 Frederick Augusta Barnard was appointed Royal Librarian, a post he held for the remainder of George III's reign. Barnard, with the advice of such men of letters as Samuel Johnson, enlarged the king's library in a methodical fashion, assembling a fine collections of religious texts, English and European history, classics, English and Italian literature, and such incunables as a Gutenberg Bible and a first edition of Caxton's *Canterbury Tales*. By 1820, the library included 65,000 printed books and nearly 20,000 pamphlets; George IV, who succeeded his father on the throne, donated the library to the British Museum in 1823.

Octavo code: **shahew**