

An early quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Henry V*

William Shakespeare, *Henry V*. London: Thomas Millington and John Busby, 1600. 7 3/16 inches x 4 3/4 inches (183 mm x 121 mm), [56] pages, A–G4 (G4 blank).

The | cronicle | History of Henry the fift, With his battell fought at *Agin Court* in | *France*. Together with *Auntient* | *Pistoll*. | *As it hath bene sundry times playd by the Right honorable* | *the Lord Chamberlaine his seruants*. | [Creede's device] | London | Printed by *Thomas Creede*, for Tho. Millington, and Iohn Busby. And are to be | sold at his house in Carter Lane, next | the Powle head. | 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 V takes place in England and France at the beginning of Henry's reign. The action opens before the 1415 Battle of Agincourt and presents the events leading to the conflict and preparations for battle. The English arrive in France, take control of a town, and are cautioned by the French who vow not to back down. On the eve of battle, Henry wanders anonymously among his soldiers and expresses his doubts, yet he gives them a rousing call to arms the following day. The English prevail, and King Charles VI of France consents both to Henry's marriage of his daughter, Catherine of Valois, and to Henry's eventual succession to the French throne. (Henry died only two months before Charles, narrowly missing his chance to become king of France.)

This first quarto of *Henry V* is considered a "bad" quarto, believed to be a memorial reconstruction by actors of a shortened form of the play. It is bound in nineteenth-century purple morocco, lavishly decorated and with the emblem of King George III tooled in gold in the center of both the front and rear pastedowns. "SHAKSPERE. HENRY THE FIFT. LONDON. 1600." is lettered in gold up the spine. The turn-ins are also elaborately tooled.

This copy of *Henry V* was previously in the library of 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.

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