

CHAPTER II

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION:

THE ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, OXFORD COPY

This chapter presents a bibliographical description of Caxton's second edition of the *Canterbury Tales*. Since I have not seen all the exemplars of this edition, I describe the only known 'perfect'¹ copy available, which is in St. John's College Library, Oxford.² After describing the St. John's Copy of Cx2, I examine the evidence, analyse the data and conclude by putting forward a hypothesis concerning the number of compositors who worked on the printing of Cx2.

Although the following description is, as far as it is possible, based on bibliographical standards, some clarification of the nomenclature used may be required for a clear understanding of this chapter. Caxton was very consistent, in his second edition of the *Canterbury Tales*, in placing signatures only in the first half of the quire, i.e. on the first three leaves of the quires of six bifolia (v, ii, and L), and on the four first leaves of the quires of eight bifolia. To make explicit that the numbers in

¹ The St. John's College, Oxford, copy of Cx2 has been described as perfect by De Ricci (1909) and Dan Mosser (1996, 2000). The copy, although not bibliographically complete, has a complete text.

² There are practical reasons for choosing a single copy to be described. The main criterion for choosing the St. John's copy is that this was described as 'perfect' by Mosser and De Ricci (See previous footnote). It would also be extremely difficult to examine all the surviving copies of Cx2. According to Mosser, who renumbers the remaining copies and also offers De Ricci's numbering, there are fifteen, which are: (1) St. John's College, Oxford (De Ricci 23.1); (2) British Library (IB. 55095) (De Ricci 23.2); (3) British Library (De Ricci 23.3); (4) Yale Center for British Art (from the Paul Mellon Collection) (De Ricci 23.4); (5) Cambridge, Magdalene College (Pepysian Library) (De Ricci 23.5); (6) John Rylands Library (De Ricci 23.6); (7) Pierpont Morgan Library PML 693 (De Ricci 23.7); (8) Bibliothek Otto Schäfer (De Ricci 23.8); (9) Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, Coligny-Genève, Switzerland (De Ricci 23.9); (10) Untraced? (De Ricci 23.10); (11) Untraced? (De Ricci 23.11); (12) Indiana University, Lilly Library (De Ricci 23.12); (13) Beinecke Library, Yale University (De Ricci 23.13); (14) Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales; (15) Takamiya Collection (See Mosser 1996).

the second part of the quires are not present in the book square brackets are used, as indicated by Bowers for inferred signatures (1949, 201 and ff.).³ For example, the second quire of Cx2 has been numbered b j, b ij, b iij, b iiij, followed by four folios which do not have explicit numbering. The first four are represented in the traditional way as b1, b2, b3, b4. Folios in the second half of the quire have been numbered as [b5], [b6], [b7], and [b8]. To avoid confusion, recto and verso are referred to by superscript 'a' and 'b' respectively.

1. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE COPY OF CAXTON'S SECOND EDITION OF THE *CANTERBURY TALES*

Chaucer, Geoffrey *THE CANTERBURY TALES* Westminster, 1482

Edited by WILLIAM CAXTON, with a 'Prohemye'

Title Page:

Without extant title-page.

Collation:

Format: fol.: a⁽⁸⁻¹⁾ b-t⁸ v⁶ aa-hh⁸ ii⁶ A-K⁸ L⁽⁶⁻¹⁾, 312 leaves (f. 312 blank).

The first folio (a1) has been cut out, perhaps to repair other leaves.⁴ [L6] has also been cut out.

Colophon:

No extant colophon.

Contents:

³ However, these are not inferred signatures as Bowers would use them. The brackets just mark signatures which are not present in the copy, but with no implication that they should be present. Absent signatures are explicitly mentioned under 'Signatures.'

⁴ See the printed appendix on the restoration work done to this exemplar (appendix 1).

No extant table of contents.

Signatures:

\$4 signed (except g4); \$3 v ii L (except i2)

Foliation:

The book has 312 folios, the final one blank. The foliation has been added in pencil. It originally had 314 folios, as the collational formula will confirm. The first and the last folios were cut out.⁵ The last extant folio --[L5]-- is blank so we may conclude that the final one (which has be cut out) was also blank. If the first folio --a1-- had been used to repair the other leaves we should know it was blank.⁶

Twenty-six woodcuts.⁷

Running titles:

There are running titles for all the tales, as well as for GP and the introduction by Caxton. Usually they appear on both the recto and the verso of every folio.

RT] (on recto) a2 Prohemye; a3-[c5] Prologue; [c6]-g3 The knyghtis tale; [g4] The Myllers prologe; [g5] The Mylleres tale; [g6]-[h5] i4 The Myllers tale; [h6] The Reues prologe; [h7]-i3 The Reues tale; [i5] The Cokis tale; [i6] [i7] The man of Lawys Prologe; k1-k4 14 The man of lawys tale; [i8] [k5] [k6] The man Lawys tale; 11- 13 The man of lawes tale; [k7] [k8] [l5]-[l7] The man of Lawes tale; [l8] The marchauntes Prologe; m1-[n7] The marchauntes tale; [n8] The squyer Prologe; o1-o4 The Squyers tale; [o5] The squyers Prologe; [o6]-p1 The squyers Tale; p2 The Frankeleyns Prologe; p3-p4 q1-q4 The Frankeleyns tale; [p5]-[p8] [q5] [q6] The

⁵ These leaves might have been used to repair some damaged leaves. However, I have not found concrete proof of this use.

⁶ In order to prove this, we would need to find either the watermarked page --a1 must have had a watermark since its conjugate lacks it--, corresponding to those used by Caxton in one of the repaired leaves, or carry out a chemical analysis which would be destructive and, therefore, unlikely to be authorised by the library. For the position and kind of repairs see the appendix 'Restoration Work on the St. John's Copy' (See printed appendix 1).

Frankeleyns Tale; [q7] [q8] [r5]-[r8] The Wyf of Bathe Prologe; r1-r4 The Wyf of
 Bathe prologe; s1 s2 The Wyf of Bathes prologe; s3-[s7] The Wyf of Bathes Tale;
 [s8] The Freris Prologe; t1-t4 The Freris Tale; [t5] The Freris tale; [t6] The
 Sompnours Prologe; [t7]-[v6] The Sompnours Tale; aa1 cc4 [cc5] [dd5]-[dd7] [ff6]-
 [ff8] [hh6] ii2 F4 [F5] G1-G2 The Prologue; aa2 bb1 bb4 The clerkis tale of oxenford;
 [aa5]-[aa8] [bb5]-[bb8] cc1-cc3 The clerkis tale of Oxenford; aa3 aa4 bb2 bb3 The
 clerkis Tale of Oxenford; [cc6]-dd4 The Tale of the Nonne; [dd8] [ee8]-ff1⁸ The tale
 of the chanons yeman; ee1-[ee7] The Tale of the chanons yeman; ff2-[ff5] The tale of
 the doctour of physyk; gg1-gg4 The tale of the Pardoner;⁹ [gg5]-[gg7] The tale of the
 Pardoner;¹⁰ [gg8] [hh5] The Tale of the Shypman; hh1-hh4 The tale of the Shypman;
 [hh7] [hh8] The Tale of the Prioress; ii1 The tale of the Pryoresse; ii3 [ii5] Of Syr
 Topas¹¹; ii4 Of Syr Topas¹²; [ii6]¹³ The Wordes of the hoost; A1-C4 The Tale of
 Chaucer; [A5]-[A7] The Tale of Chawcer; [C6]-[C8] The Tale Of the Monke; D1-
 [D8] The Tale of The Monke; E1 The Tale of the Monke; E2 The prologue; E3 E4
 The Tale of The Nonnys preest; [E5]-F3 The Tale Of the Nonnys preest; [F6]-[F8]
 The Tale of the Mauncypl; G3-H1 [H5]-[H8] I4-[I8] K2-L4 The Tale of the Parson;
 H2-H4 I1-I3 K1 The Tale Of the Parson.

(on verso) a2 Prohemye; a3-[c5] Prologue; [c6]-g2 The knyghtis tale; g3 g4 The
 Mylleres prologe; [g5]-[h5] The Myllers tale; [h6] The Reues Prologe; [h7] [h8] i5

⁷ These are described in detail below.

⁸ The signature in this folio is 'i' instead of 'j.'

⁹ Blades presents the complete typesets of Caxton's types 2 and 4. Both 'r's are roman, that is the first lower case type presented by Blades 1863, vol II, plate XVIII.

¹⁰ The first 'r' --in bold-- in the word 'pardoner' is the second lower case presented by Blades, that is a 2-shaped 'r.' This 2-shaped 'r' has also been referred to as 'ragged r' by John Smith in his *Printer's Grammar* (Smith 1775, 117) a reference that I owe to Professor David L. Ganz. The second 'r' in the same word is Blades' first case, that is a roman 'r'. The 2-shaped 'r' is represented in the running titles by **r**.

¹¹ The 'r' at the end of 'syr' is a roman 'r.'

¹² The 'r' at the end of 'syr' is a 2-shaped 'r.'

¹³ The rest of ii 6a, and the whole of ii6^b are blank.

The Reues Tale; i1-i3 The Reues tale; i4 The Cokis Prologe; [i6] The man of lawys prologe; [i7] [i8] k3-[k8] [l5] The man of lawys tale; k1 k2 l1-l4 [l6] The man of lawes tale; [l7] The marchautes prologe; [l8] [m5]-[m8] [n5]-[n7] The marchautes tale; m1-m4 n1-n4 The marchauutes tale; [n8]-p1 The Squyers tale; p2 The Frankeleynstale; p3-[q6] The Frankeleyns tale; [q7] [q8] [r5]-[r8] The Wyf of Bathe Prologe; r1-r4 The Wyf of Bathe prologe; s1¹⁴ The Wyf of Bathes prologe; s2-s4 The Wyf of Bathes tale; s5-s7 The Wyf of Bathes Tale; [s8]-t4 The Freris Tale; [t5] The Sompnours prologe; [t6]-[t8] v4-[v6] The Sompnours tale; v1-v3 The Sompnours Tale; aa1 cc4 [cc5] [dd5] [dd6] [ff6] [ff7] C4 [C5] E2 F3 F4 G1 The Prologue; [aa5] [aa6] The clerkis tale of oxenford; aa2-aa4 bb1-bb4 cc1-cc3 The clerkis tale of Oxenford; [aa7] [aa8] [bb5] [bb8] The clerkis Tale of Oxenford; [bb6] [bb7] The clerkistale of oxenford; [cc6]-dd4 The Tale of the Nonne; [dd7] [dd8] ee2-[ee8] The tale of the chanons yeman; ee1 ff1 The Tale of the chanons yeman; ff2-[ff5]¹⁵ The Tale of the doctour of physyk; [ff8] [gg5]-[gg7] The tale of the Pardoner;¹⁶ gg1-gg4 The Tale of the Pardoner;¹⁷ hh1-hh4 The Tale of the Shypman; [gg8] [hh5] The tale of the Shypman; [hh6]- ii1 The tale of the Prioress; ii2 Of Syr Topas;¹⁸ ii3 ii4 Of Syr Topas;¹⁹ [ii5] The Wordes of the hoost; A1 [A5]-C3 The Tale of Chaucer; A2-A4 The Tale of Chawcer; D1-D4 The Tale Of the Monke; [C6]-[C8] [D5]-[D8] The Tale of the monke; E1 The Tale of the Monke; E3 E4 F1 F2 The Tale of The Nonnys preest; [E5]-[E8] The Tale of the Nonnys preest; [F5]- [F8] The Tale of the Mauncypl; G2-G4 H1-[H7] I1-I4 [I6]-K4 [K8]-L3 The Tale of the Parson; [G5]-[G8] [H8] [I5] [K5]-[K7] The Tale Of the Parson.

¹⁴ Long 's' is used for the signatures.

¹⁵ This running title has a 2-shaped 'r' for the word 'doctour.'

¹⁶ Both 'r's in the word 'Pardoner' are 2-shaped 'r's.

¹⁷ In the word 'Pardoner' the first 'r' is a 2-shaped 'r,' the second 'r' is a roman one.

¹⁸ The 'r' at the end of 'syr' is a 2-shaped 'r.'

Paper:

Sheets: at least 392 x 267 mm. yellowish-white rough laid with watermarks (bull's head, unicorn, shield with fleur-de-lis) thickness 0.155 mm. ([D7])²⁰ yellowish white.

Leaves: at least 267 x 196 mm. (k), chainlines vertical, total bulk 51.2 mm.²¹

Binding:

Dark brown leather --perhaps calf, as pointed out by Mosser-- over boards. The binding shows signs of having had two clasps to close it, and also three small holes that mark the place where it was chained to one of the library's bookshelves. The binding is likely to be 17th century, and shows a series of stamps engraved on the leather one within the other. These consist of rectangles fitting into each other like Chinese boxes, and have some ornamentation in the corners. The biggest has three lines and has no ornaments. Some 23 mm inside this, we can see the second one. It also has three lines and ornaments in the corners (17 x 17 mm). The smallest one is some 20 mm inside the second one, it also has similar ornaments. In the centre of the rectangles there is a rhomboid figure with flourishes which ends in two fleur-de-lis. The front and back covers have the same design.

The spine bears an ink stamped rectangle and inside which are the stamped and then gilded letters that read 'CHAUCERIBYICAXTON. Four cords are visible.

In the inside of the front cover part of a leaf of a Latin manuscript, which was used in the binding, can be seen. The dating of this manuscript would offer a *terminus a quo* for the binding; the library does not have any records of attempts to date it. A St. John's plate has been pasted on top of the manuscript leaf.

¹⁹ The 'r' at the end of 'syr' is a roman 'r.'

²⁰ The thickness as measured in other leaves is: 0.14 mm. dd7; 0.135 mm. p1; 0.170 mm. h8; 0.155 mm. D7; 0.135 mm. D6; 0.12 mm. K3; 0.15 mm. K5.

²¹ The bulking thickness of the paper is 0.164 mm. Tanselle explains that the bulking thickness is usually larger than the thickness of leaves that have been measured individually. See Tanselle 1971, 59.

Typography:

38 ll. + running title 193.5 (206) x 129 mm.²² (c3^a -[b8]^a). Verse measure, 92.5 mm (dd1^a) prose measure, 125 mm (K1^a) woodcut measure, 129 mm ([b8]^a) Caxton's Types 2* and 4* (Blades 1863) 100.5 mm. For 20 ll. ([E6]^a) illuminated capitals that alternate blue and red backgrounds with brown letters and flourishes in gold ink. Most of the illuminated capitals fit into a square, of which some are bigger than the space left for them and spread beyond the left margin (cf. [a6]^b [a7]^b).

Woodcuts and minor illumination:

There are twenty-six different woodcuts in this book, but some have been used more than once. In this copy they have been carefully illuminated. As well as colour, details have been added, such as irises and trees in the background. Some of the trees have shields hanging from their branches, perhaps intended to have had names written on them. The pilgrims have been coloured to be made more easily recognisable.

a3^b The Knight: hand-painted with details of trees added. A bush and a tall tree with a shield added on the left. A small forest and a tall tree on the right.

a4^b The Squire: One tree added on the left. The squire has blond hair.

[a5]^a: The Knight's Yeoman: A tree added on the left.

[a5]^b: The Prioress: One tree added on the left.

[a6]^b: The Monk: one tree added on the left and a small bush on the right.

[a7]^b: The Friar : a bush added on the left.

[a8]^b: The Merchant: The merchant wears a pinkish shirt and two trees have been added.

²² Since the measurements of the total of the type page are expected to cast light on the height and total opening of the chase, the width of the prose texts has also been measured.

b1^a: The Clerk: Dressed in bright red with a bow in his hand. Two trees have been added on the sides.

b1^b: The Man of Law: with a gown in pinkish-red and a tall tree added on the right. Some flowers, perhaps irises, have been added on the right.

b2^a: The Franklin: this is the same woodcut as is used for the Merchant. The colours are different and his shirt is bright red. One tree has been added on each side. On the right bottom corner there are some irises.

b3^a: The Carpenter:²³ a small bush added on the left and a tree on the right.

b3^b: The Cook: one tree added on each side.

b4^a: The Shipman: The Shipman is dressed with a grey shirt and yellow pants. One tree added on each side.

b4^b: The Physician: Dressed in a pinkish red gown. A tree has been added on the left.

[b5]^b: The Wife of Bath: Dressed in pinkish red. Some bushes have been added on the right.

[b6]^a: The Parson: The woodcut is the one used for the Physician. The Parson is dressed in bright red. A tree has been added on the left, but has deliberately been drawn differently from that in the Physician's illustration.

[b7]^a: The Plowman: three trees have been added. Two on the right and one on the left.

[b7]^b: The Miller: a tree added on the left and a bush on the right.

[b8]^a The Manciple: a bush with irises has been added on the left, and a tree on the right.

[b8]^b: The Reeve: a tree added on the left and a bush on the right.

c1^b: The Summoner: it is the same woodcut as that used for the Merchant and Franklin. The colours are different again. The shirt is purple. One tree has been added on each side. There are some irises but they appear on the left, near the tree.

c2^b: The Pardoner: red hat and yellow boots. Irises have been added on the left and a tree on the right.

c4^a: The Pilgrims at the tabard: Only colour has been added. No new details.

c4^b: The Knight: the colours have changed and only one tree has been added on each side.

[g4]^b: The Miller: The same woodcut, but the colours are different. Bushes have been added on the bottom of the frame.

[h5]^b: The Reeve: Same woodcut as in GP, but different colours. It seems that a different technique may have been used to colour the sky. A tree has been added on the left and a bush on the right. More bushes on the bottom corners.

[i5]^a: The Cook: same woodcut as in GP. The colours are very similar but the details are different. A tree added on the left and a bush on the right. Grass at the bottom of the frame.

[i7]^b: The Man of Law: same woodcut as in GP, but different colours. He is dressed in a purple gown. A tree has been added on the right and some bushes on the left. Grass at the bottom of the frame.

[l8]^a: The Merchant: same woodcut as in GP with different colours. The shirt is pink. One tree has been added on each side, and grass in the bottom corners.

[n8]^b: The Squire: same woodcut as in GP with different colours. No additions were made. The colouring seems rougher.

²³ This figure could represent the Carpenter, but there is no conclusive evidence of this.

p2^b: The Franklin: The woodcut is different from the one assigned to him in GP. It corresponds to that for the Manciple in GP. There are variations in colour. A bush has been added on the left and a tree on the side.

[q6]^b: The Wife of Bath: Same woodcut as in GP, similar colouring and additions and some grass at the bottom of the frame.

[s8]^b: The Friar: Same woodcut as in GP. Very similar colours and additions.

[t5]^b: The Summoner: Same woodcut as in GP. The colours are different. The shirt is pink. A tree has been added on the left, a small bush on the right, and some grass near the bottom corners.

aa2^a: The Clerk: same woodcut as in GP. The colours are different --pink coat. A tall tree has been added on the left and a smaller one on the right.

[cc6]^a: The Nun: This woodcut appears here for the first time. A tree has been added on the right and grass on the bottom corners.

[dd7]^b: The Canon's Yeoman: The woodcut is the same one as that which illustrates the Shipman in GP. Colours are different --orange shirt and brown pants--, and the additions have changed --a tree on the left and bushes on the right.

ff2^a: The Physician: same woodcut as the one used in GP --also the same used for the Parson. The additions remain the same but the colours --bright red gown-- resemble those used for the Parson more than those used for the Physician.

[ff8]^b: The Pardoner: same woodcut as in GP. The colours vary --rougher colouring. A small tree added on the left and a tall one on the right.

[gg7]^b: The Shipman: same woodcut as in GP. The colours are different, now the Shipman has blond hair. A tall tree added on the left and a small one on the right.

[hh5]^b: The Prioress: same woodcut as in GP with similar colouring and additions.

ii^{2b}: A bearded man --presumably Chaucer, but perhaps Sir Thopas: This woodcut appears here for the first time. Bushes have been added on the left, a tree on the right, and grass at the bottom.

A1^a: A bearded man: same as the one at the beginning of TT. The colours are different. A small tree added on the left, a tall one on the right, and grass at the bottom.

[C6]^a: The Monk: same woodcut as in GP. The colours are similar as are the additions. The quality of the painting, however, is surprisingly different. The same can be said about the quality of the drawing which looks poorer, as if whoever added the colours was in a hurry.

E3^a: The Nun's Priest: this woodcut appears here for the first time in this book. A small bush has been added on the left, and a tree on the right.

[F5]^b: The Manciple: same woodcut as in GP. The colours are different, and so is the quality of the painting and of the drawing. One tree has been added on each side.

G2^b: The Parson: same woodcut as in GP. The colours are different. Again, one can see a very different --poorer-- quality in the drawing and paint.

It seems that there is a clear change of quality of the work of illumination done to the woodcuts. There might be several reasons for this. Time may have been a factor: more care was taken on the first images than on the later ones. Another possible explanation might be that different artists illustrated different parts of the book. This would account for the disappearance of the irises and the changes in the treatment of leaves on the trees.

The book has illuminated capitals, which alternate gold on blue, and silver and gold on red. The first letter of Caxton's preface is, as described by Mosser, '...a

painted red and gold initial 'G' on a blue field' (2000);²⁴ he does not describe the golden flourishes, the snail and flowers inside the letter. The paraphs alternate red and blue, as it is commonly found in manuscripts.

The whole book has been ruled by hand in red.²⁵

Annotations:

There are very few notes in the St. John's copy of the *Canterbury Tales*. Some more can be found in the other books bound with it:

a4^a pen trials

[b7]^a Constat Wyllmⁱ | Myddelton

c3^a 'tabard' in a very small handwriting, at the same height and glossing the word 'Taberd'

[q6]^b Constat Wyllamⁱ | Myddelton

s2^b Constat Wyllmⁱ | Myddelton

F2^a There is a symbol on the left of the line that starts 'O Gaufryste.' On the right margin, there are two lines written: Gaufride [x]me[x]al[xx] |Richard the first

This is the same handwriting of 'tabard' in c3^a.

Copy examined: MS. 266.²⁶

Held by: St. John's College Library.²⁷

²⁴ He, however, tells us that this letter is found in a2^a of *Troilus and Criseyde*.

²⁵ *Troilus and Criseyde* and *Quattor Sermones* have been ruled with the same colour.

²⁶ The library has numbered this book as a manuscript because the three printed texts are bound with a manuscript of Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*.

²⁷ The library records indicate that the book belonged successively to 'Roger Thorney, mercer of London (d. 1515), William Myddelton, John Stow (?), and Sir William Paddy, who gave it to St. John's College early in the 17th century (See the St. John's College Library records, 20).

2. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS

2.1 The Collational Formula

Although there are two pages missing from the St. John's copy, it has nevertheless been described as perfect by Dan Mosser (1996, 2000) who probably based this part of his description on De Ricci (1909) who in turn might have taken it from Blades (1861).

2.1.1 *The Ideal Collational Formula*

Mosser gives the collation for Cx2 as follows: "312 leaves (1 is blank): a-t⁸ v⁶ aa-hh⁸ ii⁶ A-K⁸ L⁶ (following Needham's revision of previous collations, which posit a gathering of four)" (2000). Needham's collational formula is: "F^o a-t⁸ v⁶ aa-hh⁸ ii⁶ A-K⁸ L⁶: 312 leaves" (1986, 87), where he corrects the last gathering from four leaves, as proposed by De Ricci, to six. In *A Census of Caxtons*, De Ricci had proposed the following collational formula: "312 leaves (1 is blank): a-t⁸ v⁶ aa-hh⁸ ii⁶ A-K⁸ L⁴" (1909, 27), with a final gathering of four leaves and a total of 312 leaves for the complete book. It should be kept in mind that all the previous collational formulae reflect the state of the book at the time of publication, when, by definition, should have been complete. Another important aspect to take into consideration is that, after Needham's revision of the number of folios in the last quire, he did not change the total number of leaves for the book. The result of this is that, on one hand, De Ricci's collational formula is consistent in the sense that the number of leaves and the formula correspond with one another. On the other hand, Needham presents a

collational formula which adds up to 314 leaves, by asserting that the final quire has six leaves, not four while stating that the book has 312 leaves. It is likely that Mosser copied the formula from Needham without realising the inconsistency in the numbers given. The main problem posited by Needham's updated collational formula is that if this is correct, the book should have 314 folios; if what is correct is the number of leaves, this collational formula has two extra leaves and does not show the correct quiring.

2.1.2 The Collational Formula of the St. John's Copy

The St. John's copy has 312 leaves and it is evident that the first and last leaves have been cut out from the *Canterbury Tales* (a1, [L6]).²⁸ The quires can be easily checked and show that the Needham collational formula for an ideal copy of Cx2 is correct, which confirms that the book originally had 314 leaves. When Mosser comes to the description of the St. John's copy his unusual collational formula reads 'perfect' (2000).²⁹ However, Mosser is not the only one who uses this term when referring to this particular book. In the facsimile we also find it: 'Only thirteen copies of the book are extant, and all are imperfect save for that in the Library of St. John's College' (Bennet 1972). Probably, both Mosser and Bennet have taken the term and their idea of the completeness of the St. John's copy from de Ricci, who also describes the book as perfect (De Ricci 1909, 28). However, a collation of the St. John's copy will show that it has 312 pages and so must be imperfect.

²⁸ There is another leaf missing from *Troilus and Criseyde*.

²⁹ This term cannot be found on any standard manual of bibliography. Cf. Bowers (1949); McKerrow (1928); Gaskell (1972).

De Ricci also describes leaves which are now missing in *Troilus and Criseyde*, but because of this mistake in the description of the *Canterbury Tales* one might feel inclined to doubt the correctness of this. If the St. John's copy of the *Tales* had been complete in 1909, not only would De Ricci's collational formula be wrong, but also the actual number of leaves found in the St. John's copy would have been different, that is he would have said there were 314 leaves and would have provided a different collation formula.

The librarians at St. John's Library could not provide any further information about any restoration attempts on this copy. However, there is evidence of different restoration techniques on the lower part of some leaves.³⁰

2.2 Decoration and Illumination

As with many other early printed books, a great deal of effort was made to make this book look more like a manuscript. It has been decorated in such a way as to resemble a handmade production. However, unlike other incunabula, the author of these modifications has taken it to extremes, as we can see in the many elements added to the woodcuts. All the capitals have been illuminated, some of them with very delicate golden flourishes and the paraphs alternate blue and red.

The rulings are the most remarkable addition made to the book. From these, we learn that the person in charge of the changes made to this book had a real commitment to the idea of making it look as similar to a manuscript as possible. The rulings --present in the three printed texts in the St. John's volume-- were presumably

³⁰ For details on the possible methods used to restore the book and for the positions of the restoration work, see the printed appendix 1.

made at the same time, since they present a similar colour throughout the books, and this suggests that the printed texts were bound together from the beginning.³¹

2.3 Number of Compositors

The variants in the running titles seem to indicate that the compositors did not reset them. They were probably resetting the rest of the text without paying too much attention to the running titles. This means that when a particular bifolium had been printed, the types were taken out from the forme, but the running titles were not changed unless there was a change of tale. This would explain the appearance of 'The Myllers tale' in i4^a, a page that should read 'The Reues tale;' and that of 'The Reues Tale' in i6^b, which should have read 'The Cokis tale.'

Blake has suggested –although he has recently changed his mind—that the three sets of signatures might indicate three compositors:

Since the compositors of the second edition were working from the first printed edition and since the text was a poetic one which could easily be broken down into the requisite pages of type, the most reasonable explanation of the collation of the second edition is that there were three presses working on at the same time. Each press with its own compositors was given a section of text and a different kind of signature letter to use. If this did happen, it is the only direct evidence we have that Caxton used more than one press, though by this date they need not all have been in his

³¹ De Ricci has pointed out that the copy of Cx2 held at the John Rylands Library is also bound with *Troilus and Criseyde*. Although I have not had the opportunity to examine this copy, it seems curious that *Troilus* and the *Canterbury Tales* appear bound together in two separate copies of Caxton's printings.

own shop. This example shows how detailed study of Caxton's texts may help us to understand the organisation of his shop and the methods he used. (1976, 63)

In 1976, Blake's interpretation of the three sets of signatures was literal: he thought it meant that three presses and three separate groups of compositors were working simultaneously on the production of the second edition of the *Canterbury Tales*.

Blake's own counter argument is as follows:

Although I have previously suggested that the three sets of signatures probably indicate three separate compositors, we now know that Caxton had only two compositors to start with during his early years at Westminster. Cx¹ was set up by two compositors working on two presses. There is nothing to suggest that this workshop staffing had changed by the time Cx² was printed. Consequently we need to look more closely at the question of the number of compositors used in Cx². (2000, 143)

This new argument about the number of compositors is, in the first instance, based on evidence provided by Lotte Hellinga in her book *Caxton in Focus*. Hellinga suggests that the work of two compositors can be distinguished by analysing the use and distribution of two types of 'a':

[T]his is the most convenient way to distinguish the work of at least two compositors. One of them gave the double *a* the status of a kind of capital, of somewhat less importance than *A*. He used it in names as in the name *arcite* in the *Canterbury Tales*, or in peculiar and obscure words, such as the titles of the learned books of the scholar Nicholas in the Miller's Tale... (1982, 61)

Hellinga makes it clear, at this point, that the evidence indicates at least two compositors, but here she does not dismiss the possibility of the workshop having more than two compositors. In fact, she later keeps this alternative open when she states:

[T]he evidence provided us also with some insight into Caxton's rapidly expanding printing business. At first this consisted of one press, with one compositor working on it, using one typeface; soon one, possibly even two larger presses were added (working concurrently on the two halves of the *Canterbury Tales*... (1982, 84)

Hellinga leaves open the possibility of a third press and, perhaps, a third compositor, but Blake has interpreted her text as if she had put forward a much more forceful statement about there being only two compositors in Caxton's workshop. It seems that Hellinga left clear the way for further research into the number of compositors working in Caxton's workshop. Blake, on the other hand, has offered two distinct hypotheses about the staff at the Westminster press.

In order to find out whether Blake was correct when he wrote in 1976, mentioning three compositors or in 2000, when he stated that there were only two, we need not only to analyse the signatures, but to analyse them in conjunction with other features of the text, for example, the running titles and the type distribution throughout the book --as suggested by Hellinga's study.

2.3.1 The Running Titles

The single lower case signatures go from a to v, this last quire having only three bifolia. The running titles in this first part are long and read, for example, 'The squyers Prologe,' as opposed to just 'The Prologue' as in the other two sets of signatures.³² In the first set of signatures, containing only GP, the word 'prologue' is spelt with a 'u.' On every other occasion we find it spelled 'prologe.'³³ In the double lower case signatures (aa-ii) the spelling is always 'Prologue,' and the running titles in the different prologues are not specific to the tale. In other words, in the double lower case signatures, all the prologues have running titles that read 'Prologue.' The same happens in the upper case signatures (A-L). This seems to indicate that the person that set up the first set of signatures usually spelt 'prologe,' while the compositor of the second and third sets spelt the word as 'prologue.' The different spelling in the GP --in the first set of signatures-- could be the result of someone --perhaps Caxton himself³⁴-- giving an example to the first compositor on how to set the text. The running titles for this part of the book --GP-- were not altered. This was not necessary because the running titles did not need resetting each time the forme changed. Instead, they were altered only when it was required because the text was that of a different tale. Once the compositor reached 'The Miller's Prologue' he changed the spelling to what then became his standard one: 'prologe.'

It is conceivable that the compositors were working simultaneously, that they had divided the text and that the amount of work each received was miscalculated. The

³² See the printed appendix for the schematic distribution of the running titles.

³³ Blake observes that there is another instance of the spelling 'prologue' in the rubric at the end of the 'Man of Law's Prologue' (1976, 145).

³⁴ We must remember that the first two pages carry Caxton's 'Prohemye,' and it is possible that Caxton set the text for this part of the book himself, which might explain the different spellings found here. See Blades 1863, 163.

third set of signatures starts at TM, the first tale in prose. Blake assumes that the compositor of this part of the book could have started to compose it even before the single lower case signatures were set up:

Apart from the matter of the woodcuts, another reason for setting part III before part II is that part II begins in prose for which the manuscript Y was not needed, because the prose is not corrected against Y. (2000, 151)

Here Blake is following Dunn, who pointed out that the prose was hardly altered from Cx1 to Cx2. Because the prose was to be set up directly from the off-print of Cx1 and had not been altered, we know that ω was not necessary to make any changes to this part of the text. Blake seems to imply that it is possible that the rest of the copy-text for Cx2 was being prepared while the third part of the book was being set up. If this is true, then the third part of the book, corresponding to the upper case signatures, would have been the very first one to be ready. Unfortunately, this undermines his best argument: that the text was started at TM to prevent an overlap in the use of the Clerk's woodcut (Blake 2000, 143).

Blake's argument for two compositors appears plausible, but one could also hypothesise a different explanation: the compositor or supervisor --perhaps Caxton himself-- who divided the text, possibly misjudged the amount of time needed to set up the prose, and decided to start with what was at the time the second part of the book, with TM. The same number of pages might not have had the same weight in the division of the text as the amount of text itself. The prose tales were probably deemed to be a much longer task than those in verse. The compositor who set the text that is signed A-L, however, finished sooner than expected, and the text therefore was divided again and he was assigned the parts that bear the signatures aa-ii, i.e. he

started with 'The Clerk's Prologue,' although he used a running title which reads 'Prologue.' This could explain why the spelling of 'prologue' changes in both the second and third parts. Blake also points out the overall change in the running titles of the double lower case signatures and upper case signatures: "...each tale has the pattern 'The Tale of X' rather than 'The X's Tale'" (Blake 2000, 146). This element in combination with the changes in the position of the woodcuts with reference to the rubrics, led Blake to the conclusion that the same person set up the second and third parts of the book, and that there were only two compositors working on Cx2. Although Blake's argument seems feasible, it fails to explore alternative interpretations of the case. For example, even if the running titles in the leaves signed with double lower case and their counterparts in the single upper case signatures are consistent with each other, this does not have to be interpreted as one person having set both of them. Instead, this similarity might suggest that two compositors had a similar style or that one of them was imitating the other.

The position of the three quires of six folios, all of them at the end of a particular group of signatures, is perhaps a sign that there was no more text to set since it had been already been assigned, and had been set by the other compositor. The last page of SU ends the last quire with the first set of signatures (v), and has only two lines of verse, and three that are the final rubric. After the second double lower case signatures, we have 'The Wordes of the hoost' that actually finish in [i6]^a, leaving more than a page and a half of blank space. [L5] is blank, as pointed out before, which suggests that it is likely that [L6] was also blank. The fact that the last two pages were not printed with the text of the *Canterbury Tales* suggests, once more, that the person supervising the book and the compositors were allowing for extra pages to print the text if these were needed. Because there was no need for extra leaves, they

used quires of six at the end of each set of signatures and this, in turn, might be a sign that three different compositors were working on the book at the same time.

In the running titles of the book the pattern of the book's composition can be traced. The bifolia were first printed on one side and subsequently the other side was printed. An example of this are quires m and n. In these there is a mistake that occurs in the verso of the first half of both quires, the word 'marchautes'.¹³⁵ From this we know that the compositors kept the running titles when they were composing the text, and also that the inner formes of both quires were printed in a continuum. This fact is not so evident in any other place of the book. In quire A the running title in the inner forme reads 'The Tale of Chawcer' in A2^b A3^b A4^b [A5]^a [A6]^a [A7]^a, but this was corrected in quires B and C, and we do not have any way of knowing if the inner formes on the three quires were printed consecutively. In other words, further research on the typographical aspects of the book is required before further conclusions concerning this area can be drawn.

2.3.2 The Type Distribution

Although the different pattern in the running titles appears to suggest that only two compositors were involved in the setting up of Cx2, with the second compositor setting the double lower case signatures and the single upper case signatures, this needs to be investigated further by taking into account the distribution of individual types.

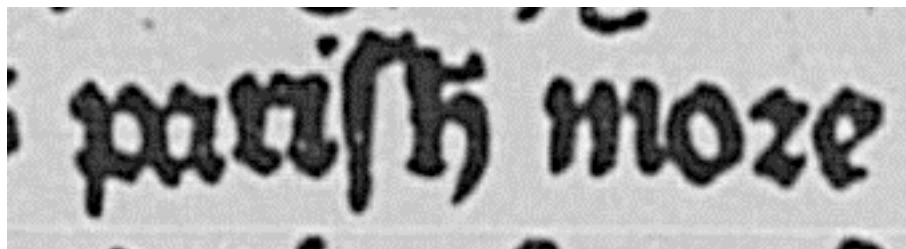
³⁵ See the printed appendix on running titles.

2.3.2.1 The 'sh' Ligature

The compositor of the single lower case signatures --from **a** to **v** -- most commonly uses two separate types for the letters 's' and 'h' when they appear in a cluster --for example, in words such as 'she' or 'shall' --in line 28, i2^a,³⁶ even though he has available a typeface with a ligature for 'sh.' This type can be distinguished by the bar in the crossed 'h' which is attached to the long 's.' An example of the use by the compositor of two separate types for the 'sh' cluster can be seen towards the middle of line 6 of i2^a:



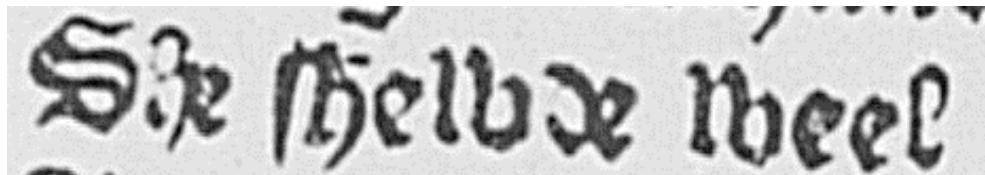
In the above example, two separate types can be clearly seen, but even in cases in which the compositor is using the 'h' it is possible to distinguish two different types. The following example is from [b6^b], line 14:



³⁶ The Canterbury font --used for all of the Canterbury Tales Project's transcriptions-- does not allow the distinction of the single type 'sh' ligature from the separate types for 's' and 'h.' For this reason, it is impossible to offer numbers such as the ones obtained for 'And' and ' And' --which were produced using automated searches.

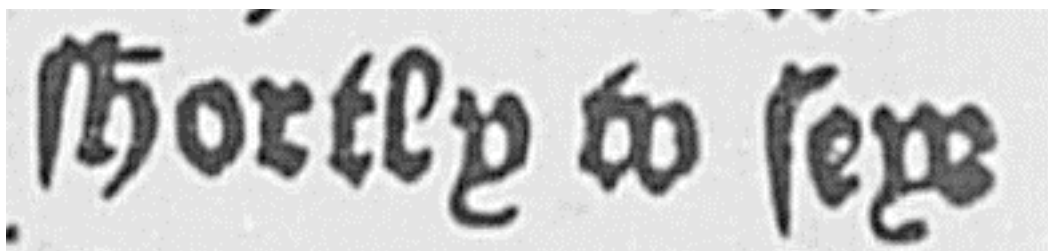
The word 'parish' shows two distinct types used for the long 's' and the crossed 'h'. The bar of the 'h' is at a completely different height from that in the typeface with the 'sh' ligature. The compositor of the single lower case signatures regularly uses two separate types for the 'sh' cluster even when he uses an 'h' instead of an 'h'.

The importance of this usage resides in the fact that the compositor of the double lower case signatures --from **aa** to **ii**-- gives preference to the use of a single typeface which has the ligature of both 's' and 'h'. This type can be distinguished because it has a crossed 'h' --h̄-- and this letter and the long 's' appear interlocked. An example of this can be found in line 24 of bb4^a:



Here the single type for the 'sh' ligature can be seen. The bar of the 'h' runs from the long 's' uniting both characters: a single type has been used to in the word 'shewde.' In line 18 of the same folio we can find the word 'she' for which the compositor has used two separate characters, and a normal 'h' instead of 'h'.

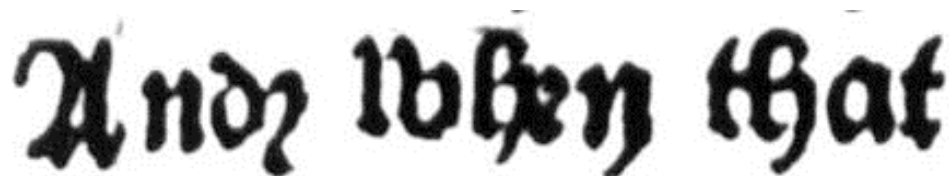
In the single upper case signatures --from **A** to **L**--, the compositor uses most commonly the 'sh' ligature. The following example can be found in line 5 of [C7a]:



Once more, the single type is clearly visible. Moreover, in this particular folio all instances of these letters --appearing as a cluster-- have been set up using the single type.³⁷ This appears to support the suggestion that the parts that are signed in double lower case and single upper case might have been set by the same compositor.

2.3.2.1 The 'd' at the End of the Word 'And' in Initial Position

The compositor of the single lower case signatures, always uses a 'd' at the end of the word 'And' when this word is at the beginning of the line. An example of this can be seen at the beginning of line 10 in folio i2r:

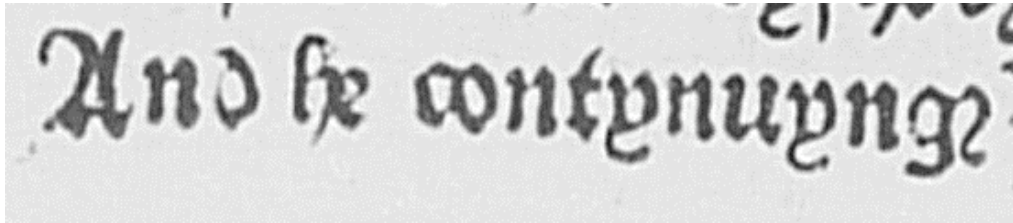


And ibey hat

This is the most common type choice for this word in the single lower case signatures. The proportion of the use of the 'd' is overwhelming. There are 1656 instances of the word spelt 'And', but only 55 of 'And.' Clearly, this compositor has a strong preference for the use of 'And'.

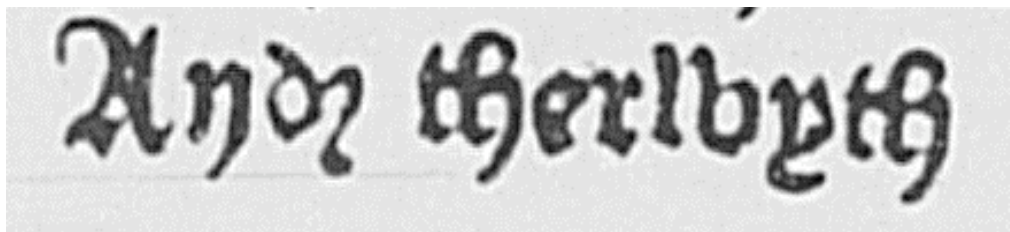
In the double lower case signatures, given the same conditions, we find the 'd', without the tail. An example of this can be found in bb4^a, line 6:

³⁷ These can be found in lines 5, 21, 22, 25, 27 and 31.



These signatures have 245 instances of 'And^o,' while 'And' can be found in 413 occasions. The different behaviour from that found in the single lower case signatures suggests, once more, that this part of the text might have been set up by a different compositor.

In the single upper case signatures, the 'o' reappears at the end of the word. The following example has been taken from line 20 of D4^a:



In this part of the text the distribution becomes clearer than in the double lower case signatures. There are 548 instances of 'And^o,' and 148 of 'And.' Although it is possible to see a pattern in these distributions, this requires some further investigation before it can be considered as a serious hypothesis. The different treatment of the final 'o' in the word 'And' in initial position indicates a different typesetting style being used for the double lower case signatures from that of the single upper case signatures, and suggests that, in all likelihood, these were set by two different compositors.

2.3.2.3 How Many Compositors?

The combination of these two elements --the final 'd' in the word 'And' in initial position, and the 'sh' ligature -- suggests that there are three different idiosyncrasies in the composition of Cx2. In the single lower case signatures there is an overwhelming majority of 'And' combined with the use of two separate typefaces for the 'sh' ligature, even where a crossed 'h' is used. In the double lower case signatures 'And' is most commonly found: the compositor shows a clear preference for the 'sh' ligature. In the single upper case signatures, the compositor uses 'And' in an overwhelming proportion, but does so in combination with the 'sh' ligature. It is unlikely that any compositor might have changed his habits from one part of the book to the next. For this reason we have to be open to the possibility of Cx2 having had three different compositors. However, further study of the type distribution is needed in order to confirm this hypothesis and to try to establish whether there is any difference in the accuracy of the compositors working at Caxton's workshop at the time of the printing of Cx2, around 1482.

My analysis of the textual variants will preserve the three part division found in the signatures, to assess whether the text has been treated differently in each of these parts.