The Kelmscott *Chaucer* and the Golden Cockerel *Canterbury Tales*

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The recent production by the Folio Society of fine facsimile editions of the Kelmscott *Chaucer* of 1896, and Eric Gill's Golden Cockerel Press *Canterbury Tales* of 1929–31, provides an opportunity for those of us without easy access to the originals to compare two great pieces of book design. As a person with a twentieth-century sensibility, my immediate response is to find the Gill work the more attractive of the two, but I would like in this article to try to see what it is about the two books that leads me to this conclusion. The task is aided by the inclusion by the Folio Society with the Gill facsimile of a reprint of Peter Holliday's article 'The Golden Cockerel Press, *The Canterbury Tales* and Eric Gill: Decoration and the *Mise en Page*',[1] originally published in 2003. Holliday is a distinguished scholar of typography and book design, and his essay, besides giving an accurate and helpful description of Gill's book, also sheds a good deal of light on the relationship between the two books here considered.

THE KELMSCOTT CHAUCER

Because Morris and Burne-Jones had loved Chaucer since their Oxford days, his works were an obvious choice for publication by the Kelmscott Press. Cockerell recorded that Morris was already thinking of printing a Chaucer in June 1891, and in May 1892 a proof of the first list of books to be issued by the Press included 'THE POEMS OF CHAUCER . Black Letter. Large 4to'.[2] In December 1892 the definite announcement was made: 'Chaucer's Works. With about 60 designs by E. Burne-Jones'.[3] I do not think the change of title was significant; it would

seem that Chaucer meant so much to Morris and Burne-Jones that it did not occur to them to print less than all of Chaucer's works. The volume eventually produced began with the 'Canterbury Tales', and then went on to the twenty-one short poems by Chaucer, from 'An ABC of Geoffrey Chaucer' to 'The Balade of Compleynte', followed by 'The Book of the Duchesse', 'A Treatise on the Astrolabe', The Legend of Good Wimmen', 'The Hous of Fame' and 'Troilus and Cressida'. This bulk necessarily caused problems.

Morris's first type-design had been for Golden, a Roman face deriving largely from that created by Nicolaus Jenson in Venice in 1476,[4] which Morris used for the Press's first publication, *The Story of the Glittering Plain,* in May 1891. Later that year, Morris began work on what he called 'a semi-Gothic type designed ... with special regard to legibility'.[5] This was to be Troy, the face which Morris wanted to use for his *Chaucer*, and when, in January 1892, the type was delivered to the Press, Morris set two trial pages; but, Peterson states, 'it was immediately obvious that a smaller type was needed'.[6] Thus in a letter of 14 March 1892, F.S. Ellis, who had taken on the role of editor of the text, wrote to a friend:

> I enclose a specimen of the new type in which as you see Caxton's "Recuyel" is to be & Chaucer is to follow but in a size smaller type but same pattern – and in double cols. To print Chaucer in this size would be delightful but I fear buyers would turn resentful [?] at the size which the book would necessarily make.[7]

Morris decided to use a reduced form of Troy; and so the Chaucer typeface was created.[8] In July 1892, therefore, another trial page was printed, in the new type reduced to 12-point from the 18-point Troy. This style of page was adopted as the basis for the book: it featured two columns of sixty-three lines each in Chaucer type,[9] with the titles of the longer poems in Troy. Into this tight format, Morris was to insert two borders, eighteen frames, twenty-six large wood-engraved initial words, and the eighty seven wood-engraved illustrations designed by Burne-Jones.[10] These designs were translated into wood-engravings through the skill of Robert Catterson-Smith, in an 'elaborate procedure'[11] described by Peterson in his Introduction.[12] Morris was characteristically enthusiastic about Burne-Jones's work; a letter of 22 February 1894 tells Ellis, 'Chaucer getting on well: such lovely designs'.[13] The book was to amount to 556 pages, which Morris decided could be published in a single volume. On 30 July 1894 he told Cockerell: 'Having gone over the number of lines with Ellis, I find it will not make more than 600 p.p. which will go into one vol.'[14] In all, the reader encounters a great visual feast, but perhaps to modern taste an overly rich one.

Although the *Chaucer* was conceived by Morris as primarily 'a work of art' or, as he put it in a letter of 1 December 1892, 'an *illustrated* work by Burne-Jones',[15] he and Ellis were admirably keen to use the best text available. At this very time

such a text was appearing in Oxford. The University Press published an edition by the distinguished scholar Professor Walter Skeat in 1894, of which it is, as Ethan Knapp tells us in his contribution to *The Yale Companion to Chaucer*, 'hard to exaggerate' the importance in beginning the modern era of Chaucer scholarship;[16] Skeat removed several works previously attributed to Chaucer, and chose the reliable Ellesmere Manuscript as his base text for the *Canterbury Tales.* As Peterson tells us in his *Bibliography*, Morris and his editor Ellis encountered difficulty in obtaining permission to use Skeat's work, being refused by the delegates of the Oxford University Press in November 1892 and May 1894.[17] But eventually permission was granted to use 'a limited number of readings from Prof. Skeat's Text of "Chaucer" '– although Peterson tells us that in fact the text was adopted 'almost verbatim'.[18] In the course of his discussion with the Delegates, Morris argued that his edition would not compete with the text being produced by the University Press, as 'only 325 copies will be issued, at a high price (£20) & without notes or commentary. It is intended to be essentially a work of art.' [19]

Georgiana Burne-Jones provided some vivid memories of Morris and her husband working together on their great project:

> The friends sat down dutifully to read Chaucer over again before beginning their work, and infinitely funny it was when Morris occasionally professed to be taken prosaic and not to understand what the poet meant.[20]

She had recorded earlier in the biography that at Oxford, 'when they were alone together, the friends read Chaucer …'[21] She refers to some of Edward's 'heart-searchings' as they worked on the book together; he was occasionally frustrated by the lack of detail provided by Chaucer, as he wrote about some parts of the *Romaunt of the Rose*:

> I wish Chaucer would once for all make up his unrivalled and precious mind whether he is talking of a picture or a statue – I do wish it, for in the book I am putting myself wholly aside, and trying to see things from his point of view; not once have I invaded his kingdom with one hostile thought.[22]

She finds proof of his dedication to detail in the extraordinary illustration he produced for *The House of Fame,* described by Chaucer as 'made of twigges', which she found to be a strange and yet convincing 'whirligig home of whisperings'.[23] She then quotes a letter in which Burne-Jones reflects that he has worked on the designs on his Sundays for the last two and a half years: 'Now to think of that! And yet I know quite well not ten people in the land will care twopence about it. Yet it will be a very nice book.[24] There can be no doubt at all as to the seriousness with which both men applied themselves to the task.

Several excellent accounts of the Kelmscott *Chaucer* exist in addition to that provided by Peterson. The earliest is H. Halliday Sparling's *The Kelmscott Press and William Morris Master Craftsman* of 1924, which embodies the insights arising from Sparling's having served, as he claims, as 'proof-reader, secretary and general handyman of the Kelmscott Press from its foundation until 1894', as well as 'an adoring and eager disciple throughout'.[25] Sparling refers to it as Morris's 'greatest achievement, the glorious *Chaucer*',[26] and quotes from A.L. Cotton's encomiastic article in the *Contemporary Review* – 'undoubtedly the noblest book as yet achieved by any English printer' – and the editorial in the *Academy*, 'a great landmark in the history of printing'.[27] He also reproduces in his finely printed book the illuminated word 'In' from the *Legenda Ypermis,* and an engraving of Burne-Jones's drawing for the first page of the *Chaucer,* here entitled 'Chaucer and the Birds'. Sparling later makes the very important point that the books of the Kelmscott Press, however impressive, should not be thought of as 'archetypes of perfection to reproduce or approach which all future books are to endeavour or be condemned'; rather, in the Gothic spirit 'as untiringly taught by Morris', they should be seen as a stimulus to the 'free spirit of man' to plan and work towards 'a nobler world in the future'.[28] Morris's thought, Sparling eloquently insists, was for the future of humanity, and for him 'the discipline of a living tradition ... has nothing and can have nothing in common with the tyranny or the reign of the dead hand'.[29]

More down-to-earth in its aims is the Dover *William Morris. Ornamentation & Illustrations from The Kelmscott Chaucer* of 1973. The book reproduces one hundred pages of the *Chaucer* at 72% of their original size – still quite large. All Burne-Jones's eighty-seven woodcut illustrations appear, together with Morris's large borders and decorated initial words, and three double-page spreads. In his Introduction, Fridolf Johnson tells us tells us that in seven years Morris designed no fewer than 664 engraved initials, borders, title-pages, inscriptions, frames and printers' marks, including 384 initials of various sizes.[30] He makes an important point about the impression many people have formed of the works of the Kelmscott Press, which ironically this book could serve to perpetuate:

> In a Kelmscott book, the decorative borders and large initials are reserved for the opening spread or beginning of a new chapter. The remainder of the pages are quite simple, consisting of text, compactly arranged, perhaps a small initial or two, surrounded by ample, carefully considered white margins. Unhappily, the frequent reproduction of only opening pages gave rise to the misconception that every single page was heavily decorated. This misconception spawned a plethora of overwhelmingly decorated Kelmscott imitations, books stupefying in their monotonous repetition, page after page, of ill-conceived 'designs'.[31]

Elbert Hubbard's Roycroft Press in East Aurora, New York, is fittingly cited as producing 'atrocious specimens of spurious craftsmanship' which had 'a ready sale at the time'.[32] Johnson argues that the Press showed Morris's contemporaries 'what a fine thing fine printing can be', and that the 'unity of effect in books that Morris insisted on became a gospel for printers ever since'.[33]

Finally we have the distinguished scholarship of Duncan Robinson's *William Morris, Burne-Jones and the Kelmscott Chaucer*, finely produced by Gordon Fraser in 1982; this had originally been published as the *Companion Volume to the Kelmscott Chaucer* when the *Chaucer* was reprinted in facsimile by the Basilisk Press in 1975. In a section entitled 'Structural Work', Robinson comments on the choice of material from the *Canterbury Tales*:

> In deciding what to illustrate Burne-Jones showed a clear preference for the more chivalric and courtly elements in Chaucer's work. His early sketches contain marginal notes such as 'no picture to Miller/no picture to Reeve/no picture to Cook's Tale'. All of these, with their bawdy, native humour characteristic of at least half of *The Canterbury Tales,* proved too strong for the delicate feelings of the artist.[34]

This is largely the case: the tales of the Knight (six illustrations) and the Clerk of Oxenford (also six) receive most attention; but they are followed by the Franklin (five) and the Wife of Bath (four), with the Prioress appearing twice, and the Squire once. Of the other works by Chaucer illustrated, the *Romaunt of the Rose* and the *Tales of Good Wimmen* each receive no fewer than seventeen, and *Troilus and Criseyde* eleven. Robinson provides a detailed account of how carefully Burne-Jones follows his source in the accurate representation of the three different temples in 'The Knight's Tale'[35] and illustrates the influence on the designer of early Renaissance painters, especially those of the Siennese school, and of Botticelli and Mantegna.

He also discusses the 'series of formulae' which he believes Burne-Jones employed 'consciously or unconsciously'.[36] These particularly concern the treatment of space both indoors and outside, with a flat backdrop and side walls;[37] he also uses a kind of 'three-layer composition', with a wall or battlement dividing horizontally.[38] But this does not lead to crudity; on the contrary, Burne-Jones uses his formulae with 'subtlety'.[39] Finally, the painter is shown to possess a strong attraction to the medieval *hortus inclusus,* as in the Frontispiece, with the figure of Chaucer standing by a well.[40] Robinson concludes fittingly with Burne-Jones's statement in a letter to C.E. Norton: '… when the book is done … it will be a little like a pocket cathedral'.[41] Finally Robinson quotes from another Burne-Jones letter: 'my share in it is that of the carver of the images in Amiens, and Morris' that of the Architect and Magister Lapicida …'[42] The architectural metaphor may well be appropriate, but is the cathedral one that a modern reader would

care to enter?

The opening spread, of title page and first page of text, showing a figure with a book by a well beside a tree, is probably the best-known part of the Kelmscott *Chaucer*. It establishes the grand scale of the work, with the 425 x 292 mm page, which allows for sixty-three lines of verse or prose in two columns. The opening spread is undoubtedly impressive, with Morris's vigorously flowing borderwork and fine design-backed lettering on the left-hand page, with his border design continuing onto the right-hand page as the frame for Burne-Jones's illustration, with the two columns of text below it, the opening capital W masterly in itself but part of an overall design. Like all the illustrations, this one repays the careful reader with its suggestive qualities: the garden enclosed by trellis, the plants crowded within, the poet looking at his book, his left hand holding a tendril, the tree full of birds, the road leading away into hills beyond, and the water-filled well itself.

These images go well with Chaucer's famous invocation of spring and the beginning of pilgrimages so much part of medieval life, especially in the region of Canterbury, and one cannot fail to be impressed by the skill of all those involved. But does it convey the energetic good humour of the poetry? In her Kelmscott Lecture *The Witch in the Wood*, Amanda Hodgson argued that in the often-repeated frontispiece to *The Wood Beyond the World*, the Maid is an attractive presence, but that 'the illustration as a whole is not about freedom, it is about enclosure'.

She related this to the technique of the woodcut which 'causes her to be on the same plane as the background ... she is placed, flattened, controlled by the representation'.[43] Hodgson's argument was advanced in the context of a feminist approach, but perhaps it may be extended: can the little birds and the plant in the foreground break the viewer free from the constrictions of the composition of which they form part? And is there not something slightly disappointing about the text because of the small size of the font? I believe many readers would agree that freedom is not the strongest feeling aroused by these pages.

However, it can well be argued that these are not to be given too much emphasis in an account of a book of 566 pages. As one looks at other illustrations, the deftness of Burne-Jones's art is a continuous source of pleasure. Many of the woodcuts are highly successful, and yield more to the viewer the more they are scrutinised. I respond particularly to the scene opening 'The Knight's Tale', with the two young knights looking sorrowfully out through the bars of their prison cell at the lady whom they both love, as she stands in freedom among plants and birds; by foregrounding the idea of imprisonment, this succeeds in a way that perhaps the opening page discussed above fails to do. I am impressed by the rider admiring the modest young woman on the opening page of 'The Clerk's Tale', and the elegant young women at the beginning of the second part; by the

mounted horseman entering the chamber at the opening of 'The Squire's Tale'; by the forlorn maiden by the sea at the beginning of 'The Man of Law's Tale', standing dangerously in the small boat amid the mighty waves and decorative but somehow menacing gulls. But for all one's admiration, it is still possible to wonder whether the type size is too small to work successfully as text in this context. Many of the pages are of course devoid of illustrations, and these can be very impressive. In this context, it seems to me, the double columns achieve a fine balance, and Morris's capital letters can give particular pleasure.

So far the discussion has concerned only the illustrations to *The Canterbury Tales.* But, as we have seen, Burne-Jones's interest extended far beyond these; Chaucer's more romantic poems, the translation of *The Romaunt of the Rose* and the *Tales of Good Wimmen,* clearly appealed strongly to the illustrator. He was particularly successful in capturing the spirit of *The Romaunt of the Rose*: the scenes with young women standing or dancing on tufty lawn by a flowery trellis are delightful, and the final mysterious vision of The Rose within its enclosure is finely managed. In the *Good Wimmen* series, Thisbe and Dido are treated with particular sympathy. *The Hous of Fame* provoked some unusually dramatic work from Burne-Jones, as in the scene with the giant bird carrying the poet away. The tragic narrative *Troilus and Criseyde,* with which the volume ends, received eleven illustrations, most effectively the one which opens the second book, showing the handsome hero riding past while Criseyde turns her head towards him in an elegantly admiring posture, and the unusually passionate moment when the two lovers first embrace. In these ways Burne-Jones sustained the great work right through to the end, as did Morris with the supportive designs and arrangement of type.

It is also important to recognise the quality of the many spreads which are devoid of illustration and often therefore receive less attention than they deserve in accounts of the book; and there are many such pages. The two sixty-three-line columns of Chaucer type, with Morris's endlessly inventive capital letters, and occasional use of red in the margins as hanging titles, give thoroughly dignified effect. In my eyes, the typography is at its most effective in the pages of prose; here the columns are indeed solid, and the beauty of the letter forms, together with the generosity of the margins, is easier to appreciate. I hope it is evident from this that I admire the Kelmscott *Chaucer,* but whether this is the best form in which to read that author remains disputable. My experience is that when I come to Gill's *Canterbury Tales,* I find myself in an altogether more readily enjoyable visual world, and it is this fact that I should like to go on to explore.

THE GOLDEN COCKEREL CANTERBURY TALES

There were only thirty or so years between the two books under discussion, but they were years of great moment. They cover both the appalling suffering of the Great War, and the beginnings of the new cultural movement which was to become known as Modernism, to which the young Gill contributed. When Holliday, in the article cited earlier, explains the social and aesthetic context of Gill's work, Morris is shown to have played a major role. For Morris realised the vital relationship between wood engraving and letterpress printing in which 'the block is printed in the same operation with the text',[44] which is not the case with intaglio printing (such as etching) or planar printing (such as lithography).[45] As we are told, Gill started out in the best days of the English Arts & Crafts movement, and shared its enthusiasm for the responsible artist-craftsman working outside the limitations of commerce.[46] Holliday goes on to show the importance for Gill of the group of artist/craftsmen in Hammersmith at this time, Edward Johnston, Sydney Cockerell, T. J. Cobden Sanderson and Emery Walker: all, like Morris, believed that the maker of books should 'regard the double page of text and illustrations as a whole', preferably using wood-engravings in the process.[47] Johnston praised Morris's recognition of the congruity between engraving and printing: 'Of all the 'processes' wood engraving agrees best with printing. The splendid effect of Title and Initial pages engraved in wood may be seen in the books of the Kelmscott Press'.[48] It is from this background that Gill's art grew. But it grew beyond its sources and in new ways.

Gill left Hammersmith for Ditchling in Sussex in 1907; here he developed rapidly from someone mainly concerned with lettering in its various forms, from tombstones to typography, to an adventurous sculptor in the new direct-carving mode. He was supported in this by prominent figures in the art world such as Roger Fry and William Rothenstein.[49] But he retained his enthusiasm for lettering, and this led him in 1924 to Robert Gibbings, who had recently taken over the Golden Cockerel Press at Waltham St Lawrence near Twyford in Berkshire with ambitious plans for the Press. Gibbings was, in MacCarthy's words, 'an artist as well as an entrepreneur',[50] who contacted a number of engravers whose work he admired to produce work for the Press. Gill, an enthusiastic convert to Roman Catholicism, was the only one to turn him down – on the grounds that Gibbings was not a Roman Catholic. But he changed his mind when Gibbings agreed to publish a small book of poems by Gill's sister Enid, and after this Gill went on to become Gibbings's chief collaborator during the decade, producing engravings for *The Song of Songs* in 1925, *Troilus and Criseyde* in 1927, *The Canterbury Tales* between 1929 and 1931, and *The Four Gospels* in 1931. (The last mentioned has also been produced recently in facsimile by the Folio Society). MacCarthy remarks that, although other prominent designers worked for the Press, including John

Farleigh, Blair Hughes-Stanton, John Nash, Eric Ravilious and David Jones, 'it was the books and later on the typeface designed ... by Gill which made the reputation of the Golden Cockerel. They have a forcefulness and clarity that still excites one'.[51]

It was Gibbings who chose the texts for publication, with a necessary eye to a likely market. Chaucer was a sound choice, but it will be noted that, unlike Morris, Gibbings did not think it appropriate to place Chaucer's two greatest works in the same book. He did not have the allegiance of Morris and Burne-Jones to the medieval poet and all his works, and nor did Gill. Indeed, MacCarthy's biography contains no reference at all to Chaucer's poetry; and Holliday remarks that 'he regarded his work on this project as a jobbing commission'.[52]

However, a jobbing commission undertaken by Gill with Gibbings was likely to produce a fine book. Gibbings made the decisions about type face and margins, no doubt in co-operation with Gill. For type, he chose Caslon Old Face, a font popular with Arts and Crafts typographers, in 18 point, a large size. In his *Essay on Typography* in 1931, Gill discussed type sizes in relation to page sizes. He claimed that there were usually four sizes of book, each of which should be accompanied by an appropriate size of type: the pocket book, the book to be held in the hand, the table book and the lectern book: 'Table books and lectern books, normally read further from the eye, demand types of still larger sizes, say 14 or 18 point or over.'[53] *The Canterbury Tales* clearly falls into one of these larger categories – the page size was to be 12.2 by 7.2 inches (309 mm x 183 mm). With top margins of 1.5 inches (38 mm) and bottom margins of 3.5 (89 mm), this allowed the printing of thirty lines to the page. To complement the poetry, Gill provide one full-page wood engraving, that for the title page, followed by twenty-six half-page engravings (one for each of the title pages of the Tales and three others), numerous border decorations, tailpieces and line fillings, and over sixty initial letters, some printed in red and blue, while the prose sections are left without illustrations.[54]

But Gill's procedure was, according to Holliday, more revolutionary than this description may seem to imply. For the scenes he designed – and here the contrast with Burne-Jones is evident – 'have more to do with decoration than with illustration'.[55] This was not an accidental effect; it was one of which Gill was well aware, and which he vigorously defended on several occasions. In the Preface to a book of his engravings published in 1934 he wrote:

> As to my lack of emotional display I think the business of wood engraving is very much like the business of typography. I think tenderness and warmth in such things are not to be looked at except in the workman ship. You do not want the designer of printing types to wear his heart on his sleeve – my engravings are, I admit, only a kind of printer's flowers.[56]

He put the same point in a letter to Herbert Furst in February 1939: 'the engraving is part of the typography'.[57] Holliday's case is that Gill was 'concerned exclusively with the *mise en page*'. All the elements of the page must work together, with no single element allowed to assume prominence. In the present case, Gill's intention was 'to rejoice in the Tales rather than to retell them'.[58] All in all, Holliday claims, this amounts to the birth of a new typographical style, 'a particular variety of English Modernism'.[59] Later, in an appreciative Appraisal of Gill's work, he develops the argument, pointing out that many of the border engravings were recycled from the Golden Cockerel *Troilus and Criseyde* and that Gill used each of the engravings he made for the Tales more than once: this is seen as evidence that 'Gill conceived them to be decorative ... The imagery is not determined by Chaucer's poem. Rather, its function is to frame the text areas on the page.'[60] This is an interesting claim. Is it the case that wood-engravings may be related to text in two different ways – as illustration and as decoration – that are usually not distinguished from each other? The argument can of course be extended to all forms of visual material placed in association with texts, as in medieval manuscripts as well as modern novels. As far as the latter are concerned, the illustrated form has never been popular, presumably because readers prefer to 'see' the characters in their own way; I may not like an illustrator's version of Heathcliff's Cathy or of Heathcliff himself. The same problem arises in connection with films based on well-liked novels. Although the distinction may not be absolute, there is clearly a range of visual material from the illustrative to the decorative, and Gill's work falls into the second category.

This does not necessarily imply success, however. The question remains as to how well Gill decorates his pages and supplements his texts. Holliday has no doubt as to the skill with which Gill carries out his task: 'Gill's organising principle is masterful', he tells us, with, as its norm, a leafy stem growing up each page, in which a great variety of leaves and fruits[61] and human figures[62] appear. This is convincing: the stems on all the pages of poetry bring the eye inward from either side of side of the page: integration is beautifully achieved. The decorative stems lead the eye to focus on the text, and are seldom so emphatic as to distract from it. Thus they generally contribute to an agreeable and relaxed mood. Holliday remarks on the variety of what is shown: 'Gill depicts a *comédie humaine* of figures which are historical and mythological, religious and fanciful, and which are presented in a range of poses and combinations.' But he insists that Gill always maintains 'the typographical integrity of the double-page spread of printed text'.[63] This seems to me to be the case; the reader may linger briefly and pleasurably over the doleful male at the bottom of page 42, who is balanced by the doleful female on the opposite page, or over the pointing fairy figure on page 564 and the male writer with quill and book on the opposite page, but the text remains neatly within both stems on all occasions.

The more elaborate engravings might be expected to come nearer to the category of 'illustration', but are effectively sketchy rather than detailed. They often contain an erotic element characteristic of Gill, as on the title page where figures of Cupid and Venus beside an upstanding cockerel. Gill seldom neglects an opportunity to depict female breasts, but these create as much a decorative as an erotic effect. He opens the 'Prologue' with a picture of the knights about to attack 'the holy blisful martir', Thomas à Beckett, a scene not in Chaucer but which is appropriate to the pilgrimage about to be undertaken. The engraving celebrates the sanctity of the martyr, but the drama of the scene is played down: the three prominent knights form a decorative pattern, if a threatening one, behind the kneeling Thomas. The opening of 'The Knight's Tale' shows two lovers looking out from their cell at the lady, who is smelling a flower from the right-hand stem. Integrity of the page is beautifully achieved. Gill clearly enjoyed the opportunity to depict the less chivalric behaviour shown in 'The Miller's Tale' – introduced with a depiction of an old man asleep while young lovers celebrate with wine – and 'The Reeve's Tale' – young lovers embracing on a bed, with a baby in a manger at its foot. 'The Man of Law's Tale' produced Gill's most poignant scene, showing Constance, the heroine, with her baby in the boat in which they were sent off to meet their fate. Holliday praises it as 'perhaps the crowning achievement of his designs for *The Canterbury Tales.*'[63] He goes on:

> Like Burne-Jones in the Kelmscott *Chaucer,* Gill shows her in the boat, but instead of carrying a crucifix, she cradles her child in her arms. The child appears only later in the Tale, so again Gill has taken licence in his rendition by giving his illustration a Catholic – in truth, a Marian – over-tone.[64]

It may be significant that Holliday uses the term 'illustration'; the reader does feel as if he is somehow entering into the narrative. But Holliday insists, convincingly, that the illustration is 'emblematic rather than realistic' and that the 'integrity of the page is maintained'.[65] Other highly effective title-pieces include that for 'The Pardoner's Tale', with the three wealth-seekers looking down, not realising that they are on the a way to meet the figure of Death; the splendid figure of the Squire on horseback at the start of his Tale and the fine Pegasus at its close; the weird alchemical experiments of 'The Canon Yeoman's Tale'; and the scene of penitence and forgiveness which introduces 'The Parson's Tale'.

However, perhaps the main reason for the reader's pleasure in this book is simply the splendid quality of the typeface in its 18-point form. The thirty-line page of this type is comfortable to read. Thus the pages of the prose *Tales*, which remain unillustrated, look splendid, enlivened as they are here and there with splendid red capital letters. The final page contains the last part of Chaucer's

'retraccions' of the works he had come to consider sinful, and reaches an impressive end with the final statement in splendid red capitals in lines of reducing length culminating in AMEN on a line of its own – a fine example of the power of simple typography.

CONCLUSION

I began with my sense of aesthetic preference for *The Canterbury Tales* over the Kelmscott *Chaucer*. In trying to account for this, I have found myself largely in agreement with the arguments put forward by Peter Holliday, a twentieth-century scholar of typography of a generation not far from my own. Holliday compared the two books, remarking first on what they share: 'In common with its magisterial predecessor, it reveals a unity of design across the page openings. Text, image and margins harmonise flawlessly to serve the printed text.'[66] But in Gill's book, he argues, the atmosphere has changed dramatically: 'But now, in contrast to the Kelmscott tome, light, space and arabesques prevail. A distinct *joie de vivre* has entered in.'[67] To support his case, Holliday argues that the 'decorative embellishments' with 'trailing leafy stems' often intertwined with figures, do not 'create a tendrilled moody languor'[68] but rather express a form of classical detachment. Terms like 'tome' and 'moody languor' may be slightly tendentious with reference to the Kelmscott *Chaucer*, but there can be no doubt in my mind about the *joie de vivre* embodied in the later book, and its stronger appeal to readers of my generation. It would be interesting to know the responses of readers younger than myself.

What is it that makes a page of the Kelmscott *Chaucer* a challenge rather than a delight? It has to do with the overall weight of the page. If there is an illustration, the amount of detail in Burne-Jones's wonderfully conscientious work calls the reader in to the task of interpretation rather than encouraging continuous reading. Morris's inventive borders contain but also slightly darken the text in a way that Gill's, with their airy simplicity, do not. And where there is no illustration, the two sixty-three-line columns of 12-point type on the large page do not make for easy reading. We may recall Gill's views about size of type in relation to size of page. The crucial decision made by Morris was to move from Troy to Chaucer as the typeface for the book. It is pointless but not unpleasing to muse on the question of what might have happened if Morris had been prepared to see his *Chaucer* go into more than one volume. By contrast, what particularly encourages the reader of the *Canterbury Tales* to move on with pleasure and sustained interest is the generous size of the splendid type. We have moved from a Gothic Revival work to a modern one, more likely to appeal today, although Morris must be given his due respect, in this sphere as in others, of having been a courageous

and successful pioneer. Gill's success may be seen, in Sparling's terms, as the 'free spirit of man' working towards 'a nobler world in the future'. [69]

This article has been based on a comparison between two facsimiles. Would a comparison between the originals lead to different conclusions? I do not think so. It would of course be a great pleasure to encounter these books in their true forms, to enjoy the superb quality of the paper and the ink on the page, which cannot be approached in a facsimile. But I do not believe that the overall experiences of the reader would be so different as to disprove the argument that I have been putting forward.

NOTES

1. Peter Holliday, *The Golden Cockerel Press,* The Canterbury Tales *and Eric Gill: Decoration and the Mise en Page*, London: The Folio Society, 2010, 50 pp. Originally published in *Chaucer Illustrated: Five Hundred years of* The Canterbury Tales, edited by William Finley and Joseph Rosenblum, London: Oak Knoll Press and The British Library, 2003, Folio edition, 253 pp. Subsequently Holliday.
2. William S. Peterson, *A Bibliography of the Kelmscott Press.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, p.106. Subsequently Peterson.
3. Peterson, p. 106.
4. Peterson, p. xxi.
5. Peterson, p. xxi.
6. Peterson, p. 106.
7. Peterson, p. 106.
8. Peterson, p. xxii.
9. Peterson, p. 106.
10. Peterson, p. 104.
11. Peterson, p. 104.
12. Peterson, pp. xxix–xxx.
13. Norman Kelvin, ed, *The Collected Letters of William Morris.* 4 vols. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1984–96, Vol. IV, p. 132. Subsequently Kelvin.
14. Kelvin, Vol. IV, p. 181.
15. Kelvin, Vol. III, p. 476; a note quotes the *Athenaeum* for 22 October 1892 as telling its readers that 'the artist has made very great progress with a series of designs, fifty or sixty in all, which are to be cut in wood under his own superintendence ... These designs promise to be charmingly graceful and beautiful in execution'.

16. Seth Lerer, ed, *The Yale Companion to Chaucer.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006, p.334.

17. Peterson, pp. 108–9.

18. Peterson, p. 109.

19. Peterson, p. 109.

20. Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones,* Macmillan 1904; Lund Humphries Publishers, London, 1993, Vol. II, p. 217. Subsequently *Memorials.*

21. *Memorials*, Vol. I, p. 104.

22. *Memorials*, Vol. II, p. 217.

23. *Memorials,* Vol. II, p. 217

24. *Memorials*, Vol. II, p. 259.

25. H. Halliday Sparling, *The Kelmscott Press and William Morris Master Craftsman.* London: Macmillan 1924; reissued by Wm. Dawson & Sons, Folkestone, 1975, p.v. Sparling had married May Morris in June 1890, though the marriage was over by May 1894, and Sparling was divorced as the guilty party in 1898. Subsequently Sparling.

26. Sparling, p. 59.

27. Sparling, p. 88.

28. Sparling, p. 130.

29. Sparling, p. 131.

30. *William Morris. Ornamentation & Illustrations from 'The Kelmscott Chaucer.'* New York: Dover, 1973, p.xi. Subsequently Dover.

31. Dover, p. xiii.

32. Dover, p. xiii.

33. Dover, p. xiv.

34. Duncan Robinson, *William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones and the Kelmscott Chaucer,* London: Gordon Fraser, 1982, p. 24. Subsequently Robinson.

35. Robinson, p. 26.

36. Robinson, p. 28.

37. Robinson, pp. 28–9.

38. Robinson, p. 29.

39. Robinson, p. 28.

40. Robinson, p. 30.

41. Robinson, p. 36.

42. Robinson, p. 36. A fuller extract from the letter, as given in *Memorials* Vol. II, p. 278, shows Burne-Jones's gratified sense of shared achievement: 'When Morris and I were little chaps at Oxford, if such a book had come out then we should just have gone off our heads, but we have made at the end of our days the very thing we would have made then if we could. It does look Beautiful, and why should I deceive you? and I may say it, for my share in it is

that of the carver of the images in Amiens, and Morris's that of the Architect and Magister Lapicida.' Magister Lapicida means Master Mason.

43. Amanda Hodgson, *The Witch in the Wood. William Morris's Romance Heroines & the Late-Victorian 'New Woman'*, London: The William Morris Society, 2000, p. 25.

44. Holliday, p. 7

45. Holliday, p. 8.

46. Holliday, pp. 8–9.

47. Holliday, p. 15. In her biography of Gill, Fiona MacCarthy offers a lively account of this time and place, in the course of which she describes Walker and Cobden-Sanderson as 'a kind of Laurel and Hardy of fine printing' and Hammersmith as 'a place of history, activity and mild eccentricity'. Fiona MacCarthy, *Eric Gill.* London: Faber & Faber, 1989; 1990, p. 64. Subsequently MacCarthy.

48. Holliday, p. 15. The quotation is from Edward Johnston, *Writing & Illuminating, & Lettering,* London: Sir Isaac Pitman, 1932, p. 364.

49. MacCarthy, p. 97.

50. MacCarthy, p. 186.

51. MacCarthy, p. 187.

52. Holliday, p. 39.

53. Eric Gill, *An Essay on Typography,* 1931, 1936; London: Lund Humphreys, 1988, p. 106, p.107.

54. Holliday, p. 5.

55. Holliday, p. 7.

56. *Engravings 1928–1933 by Eric Gill,* London: Faber & Faber, 1934, Preface, p.v.

57. *Letters of Eric Gill,* London: Jonathan Cape, 1947, pp. 415–6.

58. Holliday, p. 7.

59. Holliday, p. 7.

60. Holliday, p. 31.

61. Holliday, p. 32

62. Holliday, p. 33.

63. Holliday, p. 33.

64. Holliday, p. 36. Morrisians will be delighted to read Holliday's note on this interpretation of the engraving: 'I am indebted to Mr Ray Watkinson, the William Morris scholar, for this insight and for many others, offered so imaginatively.' (Note 41, p. 47)

65. Holiday, p. 37.

66. Holliday, p. 6

67. Holliday, p. 6

68. Holliday, p. 6.

69. Sparling, p. 130.

the golden cockerel canterbury tales. There were only thirty or so years between the two books under discussion, but they were years of great moment. They cover both the appalling suVering of the Great War, and the beginnings of the new cultural movement which was to become known as Modernism, to which the young Gill contributed.Â He was supported in this by prominent Wgures in the art world such as Roger Fry and William Rothenstein.49 But he retained his enthusiasm for letter-ing, and this led him in 1924 to Robert Gibbings, who had recently taken over the Golden Cockerel Press at Waltham St Lawrence near Twyford in Berkshire with ambitious plans for the Press. The Canterbury Tales (Middle English: The Tales of Caunterbury) is a 14th-century English work by Geoffrey Chaucer. It is a collection of twenty-four stories, some of which are incomplete. Some of the tales are in verse; others are in prose. Chaucer is believed to have begun work on the first story which would eventually become part of the collection in 1380 but it was unfinished when the author died in 1400. The Canterbury Tales study guide contains a biography of Geoffrey Chaucer, l...Â Thus ends the first fragment of the Canterbury Tales with a tale that breaks off before it has really gets anywhere - and the real question is whether the tale is deliberately left unfinished by Chaucer, whether he intended to return to it, or whether we have just lost some of the manuscript. There are no definite answers, unfortunately, and critics have argued for all three positions. That said, there are a few interesting things about the tale as we have it. Firstly, Roger of Ware seems to have been a real person who lived at the same time as Chaucer. The text of the 'Canterbury Tales,' as printed in the present volume, is an entirely new one, owing nothing to the numerous printed editions which have preceded it. The only exceptions to this statement are to be found in the case of such portions as have been formerly edited, for the Clarendon Press, by Dr. Morris and myself. The reasons for the necessity of a formation of an absolutely new text will appear on a perusal of the text itself, as compared with any of its predecessors.Â Apparently, of the B-type; but Group D and the Clerk's Tale follow Gamelyn. Some extracts from it are given in the Six-text, viz. B 2328-61, D 717-20 (no other Oxford MS. has these scarce lines), F 673-708.

the golden cockerel canterbury tales. There were only thirty or so years between the two books under discussion, but they were years of great moment. They cover both the appalling suVering of the Great War, and the beginnings of the new cultural movement which was to become known as Modernism, to which the young Gill contributed. He was supported in this by prominent Wgures in the art world such as Roger Fry and William Rothenstein.49 But he retained his enthusiasm for letter-ing, and this led him in 1924 to Robert Gibbings, who had recently taken over the Golden Cockerel Press at Waltham St Lawrence near Twyford in Berkshire with ambitious plans for the Press. Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales (Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations) Harold Bloom Chaucer and his English Contemporaries: Prologue and Tale in The Canterbury Tales. 255 Pages·1998·26.11 MB·1,642 Downloads·New! Chaucer and his English Contemporaries: Prologue and Tale in The Canterbury Tales W. A. Davenport English Fairy Tales and More English Fairy Tales: And, More English Fairy Tales (ABC-Clio Classic. 408 Pages·2002·7.55 MB·11,330 Downloads·New! , children's literature, and the eclectic scholarship of the Victorian era to create a storehouse of tales A Treasury of Fa Here beginneth the book of the Tales of Canterbury. WHEN April with his sweet showers hath pierced to the root the drought of March and bathed every vine in liquid the virtue of which maketh the flowers to start, & v. when eke Zephirus with his sweet breath hath quickened the tender shoots in every heath and holt, and the young sun hath sped his half course in the Ram, and the little birds make their melodies and all the night sleep with open eye, so nature pricketh them in their hearts, then folk long to go on pilgrimages and palmers to seek strange. shores to the far shrines of saints known The Canterbury Tales study guide contains a biography of Geoffrey Chaucer, l... Thus ends the first fragment of the Canterbury Tales with a tale that breaks off before it has really gets anywhere - and the real question is whether the tale is deliberately left unfinished by Chaucer, whether he intended to return to it, or whether we have just lost some of the manuscript. There are no definite answers, unfortunately, and critics have argued for all three positions. That said, there are a few interesting things about the tale as we have it. Firstly, Roger of Ware seems to have been a real person who lived at the same time as Chaucer.

The Canterbury Tales. 4 vols. With wood engravings by Eric Gill. Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire: Golden Cockerel Press, 1929-1931. Chaucer, Geoffrey. Troilus and Criseyde. A facsimile edition of the Kelmscott Chaucer was printed in 1958: The Works ofGeoffrey Chaucer: A Facsimile of the William Morris Kelmscott Chaucer with the Original Illustrations by Edward Burne-Jones. Together with an Introduction by John T. Winterich and a Glossary for the Modern Reader. Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1958. The Canterbury Tales study guide contains a biography of Geoffrey Chaucer, l... Chaucer, Petrarch, and the Wife of Bath â€" each have separate lines of interpretation for a single tale, and each of them are potentially justified in the text. Yet the Clerkâ€™s presentation does not invite the reading of the tale as simply a fable - there is little heightened or distanced in the presentation. In fact, the telling strives to arouse our displeasure at Walterâ€™s conduct, and our sympathy for Griselde - Chaucer, in fact, studs the narrative with deeply humanizing, sympathetic details (for example, the way Griselde, reunited with her children, cannot bear to release them from her embrace) which make an allegorical reading of the tale even more difficult. Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales IV. A new complete downloadable English modernisation. The devil makes a Reeve thatâ€™s fit to preach, As from a cobbler a mariner, or a leech! Speak out your tale, and waste no more the time. Lo, hereâ€™s Deptford, an hour or so itâ€™s nine! Lo, Greenwich too, a rascal in every inn!