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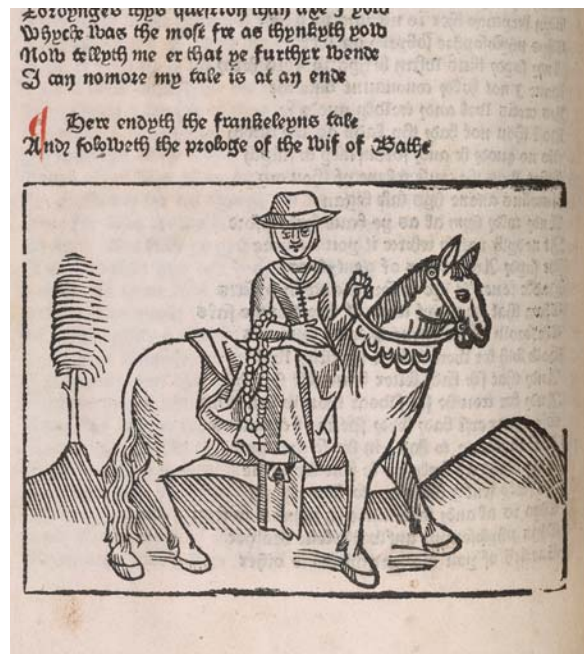
THE MORGAN EXPLORES THE ORIGINS OF THE FIRST ENGLISH PRINTED BOOKS IN A NEW EXHIBITION OPENING MAY 29

William Caxton and the Birth of English Printing
May 29 through September 20, 2015

New York, NY, May 7, 2015 — Around 1474 in Belgium something never seen in print before rolled off the press—the English language. William Caxton (ca. 1422–1491/1492), an English merchant and diplomat, had recently learned of the new technology of print invented by Johannes Gutenberg twenty years before, and he capitalized on the commercial opportunity offered by this revolutionary invention.

William Caxton and the Birth of English Printing, on view at the Morgan Library & Museum from May 29 through September 20, celebrates this foundational moment in the history of the English language and literature. Caxton would go on to publish such notable early works as Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, thereby stabilizing the English language for future generations.

“Johannes Gutenberg is the name most associated with the advent of the printed book, but William Caxton's contributions are essential as well,” said Peggy Fogelman, acting director of the Morgan Library & Museum. “Prior to Caxton, English was a bewildering mix of dialects and styles. By making the key decision to print in a single dialect he helped regularize the language and



Geoffrey Chaucer (d. 1400), *The Canterbury Tales* (Westminster: William Caxton, about 1483). Purchased with the Bennett Collection, 1902, PML 693, f. q6v, The Morgan Library & Museum.



Portrait of William Caxton painted by H. Siddons Mowbray on a ceiling roundel in Mr. Morgan's Library, © The Morgan Library & Museum, Photography by Graham S. Haber, 2012.

began the process of standardization. The Morgan is fortunate to have a premier collection of Caxton material that brings to life his important story.”

William Caxton spent more than thirty years in northern Europe representing English mercantile interests in the Burgundian Netherlands. He also served as a diplomat and translator and was an active author as well. In his role as publisher, he oversaw the production of more than 100 titles. These included short religious and reference books as well as major works of English literature.

At the time of his death, Caxton was one of only two printers active in England, but printing spread rapidly thereafter. His successor, Wynkyn de Worde, published approximately 750 works over the course of his career and by the 1550s, nearly 100 printers were working in London alone. As early as the mid-1700s, interest in England's literary past developed. Scholars worked to reconstruct the history of English printing, especially Caxton's role as its founder. His books became monuments to English literature and national pride, and book collectors began counting Caxtons in their collections as a mark of prowess and prestige. Through an entrepreneurial venture to introduce the new technology of printing to Britain, Caxton helped set English literature

on the trajectory of increasing consumption, circulation, and influence that has continued to develop over the last five centuries.

Pierpont Morgan, the Morgan's founder, saw Caxton and Gutenberg in the same light as he built his collection of the earliest printed books. Indeed, Morgan memorialized Caxton—not Gutenberg—in the celebrated ceiling mural adorning his landmark 1906 library. Today, the Morgan's Caxton collection is considered among the top three in the world...and the museum is the only institution to hold three Gutenberg Bibles.



William Caxton's printer's mark, from Gossuin de Metz, *Myrroure of the Worlde* (Westminster: Caxton, about 1489–90), Purchased with the Bennett Collection, 1902, PML 703, leaf 18v, The Morgan Library & Museum.

Public Programs

GALLERY TALK

William Caxton and the Birth of English Printing

John McQuillen, Assistant Curator, Printed Books and Bindings

Friday, June 5, 6:30 pm

All gallery talks and tours are free with museum admission; no tickets or reservations necessary. They are one hour in length and meet at the Benefactors Wall across from the coat check area.

FILM

A Knight's Tale

Director: Brian Helgeland
(2001, 132 minutes)

Inspired by Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the film follows a peasant squire who pretends to be a knight, along with his companions, in the world of medieval jousting. William competes in tournaments, winning accolades and acquiring friendships and romance along the way. Starring Heath Ledger (William Thatcher), Rufus Sewell (Count Adhemar), and Paul Bettany (Geoffrey Chaucer).

Friday, June 19, 7 pm

Exhibition-related films are free with museum admission. Advance reservations for Members only. Tickets are available at the Admission Desk on the day of the screening.

Organization and Sponsorship

This exhibition is generously made possible by the Acriel Foundation, the Sherman Fairchild Fund for Exhibitions, and the Zachs-Adam Family Fund.



The programs of the Morgan Library & Museum are made possible with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

The Morgan Library & Museum

The Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today, more than a century after its founding in 1906, the Morgan serves as a museum, independent research library, music venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. In October 2010, the Morgan completed the first-ever restoration of its original McKim building, Pierpont Morgan's private library, and the core of the institution. In tandem with the 2006 expansion project by architect Renzo Piano, the Morgan now provides visitors unprecedented access to its world-renowned collections of drawings, literary and historical manuscripts, musical scores, medieval and Renaissance manuscripts, printed books, photography, and ancient Near Eastern seals and tablets.

General Information

The Morgan Library & Museum
225 Madison Avenue, at 36th Street, New York, NY 10016-3405
212.685.0008
www.themorgan.org

Just a short walk from Grand Central and Penn Station

Hours

Tuesday–Thursday, 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; extended Friday hours, 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; closed Mondays, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day. The Morgan closes at 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve.

Admission

\$18 for adults; \$12 for students, seniors (65 and over), and children (under 16); free to Members and children 12 and under accompanied by an adult. Admission is free on Fridays from 7 to 9 p.m. Admission is not required to visit the Morgan Shop, Café, or Dining Room.