Carol Sandberg
A Talk on William Caxton's 'Cordyal of the four last and final thinges'
Early Modern Bibliophilia: A Celebration of the Chrzanowski Collection
November 15, 2019

My name is Carol Sandberg. I am the owner of Michael R. Thompson Rare Books, a firm in which I was a partner with Michael and Kathleen Thompson for years. Both are now deceased. Our firm has enjoyed a long relationship with the Clark Library, and I have enjoyed an even longer relationship with UCLA, which is my alma mater. In our relationship with the Clark, I have worn two hats, one that of a seller of rare books, and the other that of a rare book appraiser. Though we have sold the occasional rare book to Paul Chrzanowski, with respect to the wonderful collection that he donated to the Clark, I mainly wear the appraiser's hat. Michael and I appraised his initial gift to UCLA in 2009, and I have appraised groups of material that he has donated subsequently. The only book that I have not appraised in this collection is Foxe's Book of Martyrs, which we did in fact sell to Paul. To have appraised it could have been considered a conflict of interest, so my colleague, Ken Karmiole, did it instead. And I'll say as an aside that I am happy someone chose to talk about it here, as it remains one of my favorite books that Paul has gifted to the Clark. Several of my other favorites are being discussed here today, as well.

But that being said, when I was asked to talk about a favorite book, I knew immediately that I had to talk about the earliest book in the collection and the one we deemed to be the second most valuable, coming in right behind Shakespeare's Fourth Folio. I am speaking of the 'Cordyal of the four last and final thinges,' printed by England's first printer, William Caxton, in 1479.

I must first say a few words about William Caxton. His dates are ca. 1422 to 1491. Though his exact birthplace is unknown, it is thought to be around Kent. He was apprenticed to the London silk mercer Robert Large as a teenager. Shortly after Large's death, he moved to Bruges, where he

was a successful businessman, becoming governor of the Company of Merchant Adventurers of London. He traveled to Cologne on business, where he got to witness the new printing industry. This led to his setting up a printing press in Bruges, and there he printed his first book, *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, in 1473. The *Recuyell* is an English translation by Caxton himself from the French courtly romance based largely on Homer and written by Raoul Lefèvre, chaplain to Philip III, Duke of Burgundy. The finished books were sent to England to be sold. By 1475 or 1476, Caxton returned to England and set up the first English printing press. The first book he printed on English soil was *The Canterbury Tales*, certainly the jewel of English literature in those pre-Shakespearean times, which came out in 1476.

Parenthetically, Caxton's *Canterbury Tales* in the first edition is one of the legendary rarities in book collecting. The Incunabula Short Title Catalog lists thirty-nine institutions owning it in some form, but if you look closer at the entries, most of those copies are only one leaf from the book, or fragments of several leaves, or in some cases over 100 leaves. Even amongst the few institutions that have good copies, most are imperfect in some way. This is true of the Huntington Library copy, which belonged to legendary collector Robert Hoe, even though it is far better than most. The last copy that came up at auction sold at Christie's in 1998, for $7.57 million, including the buyer's premium. It would be a real surprise if another came on the market in my lifetime. It is a rarer book than the Gutenberg Bible and the Shakespeare First Folio, and handling one would be a bigger honor as far as I'm concerned than either of these.

I find it so interesting that in an era when most printers were publishing Bibles and Latin classical and theological texts, William Caxton immediately set out to print books in the vernacular. Eighty per cent of his works were printed in English. Many of his books were translations into English, largely from the French, and a great many of those translations were by Caxton himself. Though he was not really a scholar, he did have an honest desire to provide the most linguistically exact replication of foreign language texts into English. Caxton is credited with standardizing the English language through his printing, that is, in homogenising regional

dialects and largely adopting the London dialect. This resulted in the expansion of the English language and a regularization of inflection and syntax. It has been remarked by more than one person that the greatest cultural achievement of the English nation was its language, and I think that is correct. (It's part of the reason I was an English major.) Caxton played a very important role in the development of that language.

I have remarked about the scarcity of the Caxton *Canterbury Tales*. But Caxtons in general are disappearing from the market. Checking American Book Prices Current, I found that they list twenty-three Caxtons that have come up at auction since 1975. Most of them had problems of one sort or another, but a few were quite excellent. But the last Caxton I could find at auction came up in 2010, and I certainly don't see any Caxton's on the market today, aside from individual leaves.

Acquiring the *Cordyale* was a real milestone for Paul, and a real milestone for the Clark. It is the first Caxton to be owned by any library in the University of California system. And the University of California was not unique amongst great libraries in not owning a Caxton. The University of Toronto Library, for example, which houses the Centre for Medieval Studies and is one of the most prestigious places to study medieval literature, just acquired their first Caxton in 2018, the Caxton Cicero, printed in 1481. I have a bookseller friend in Toronto, who was very excited to be able to tell me about this purchase. I hope I didn't deflate her enthusiasm too much when I told her that "we" had acquired our first Caxton in 2009, with the Chrzanowski collection. I am really quite happy for both institutions!

Here's another interesting fact about the Clark Caxton and the University of Toronto Caxton. They both at one time came through the hands of a Los Angeles book dealer, Heritage Book Shop, owned by Ben and Lou Weinstein, whose archives and legendary reference collection were donated to the Clark Library. Don't let anyone tell you that Los Angeles is not a cultural powerhouse!

The *Cordyale* was purchased in 2001 at the Abel Berland sale at Christie's by Heritage on behalf of Paul. The Cicero was once offered by Heritage, but I don't believe Toronto acquired it directly from them. Perhaps Ben, who is here today, can clarify this.

This is a long preface to a discussion of Paul's copy of the Caxton *Cordyale,* but one that I think is necessary for understanding the significance of this acquisition for the Clark. But now it's time to get back to the book at hand.

The *Cordyale* is the most popular escatological work of the late Middle Ages. It is a treatise on the four last things: death, judgement, hell, and heaven. It has been attributed to Gerard van Vlierderhoven, ca. 1340-1402, a monastic official in Utrecht, who would have written in the 1380s or 1390s. It appeared in some seventy-five incunable editions and was translated into German, Dutch, French, English, Spanish, and Catalan. The first French edition, translated by Jean Miélot in 1455, was printed by William Caxton in Bruges in late 1475 or early 1476. This translation was the basis for the first English translation, made by Anthony Woodville, the second Earl Rivers, in 1469.

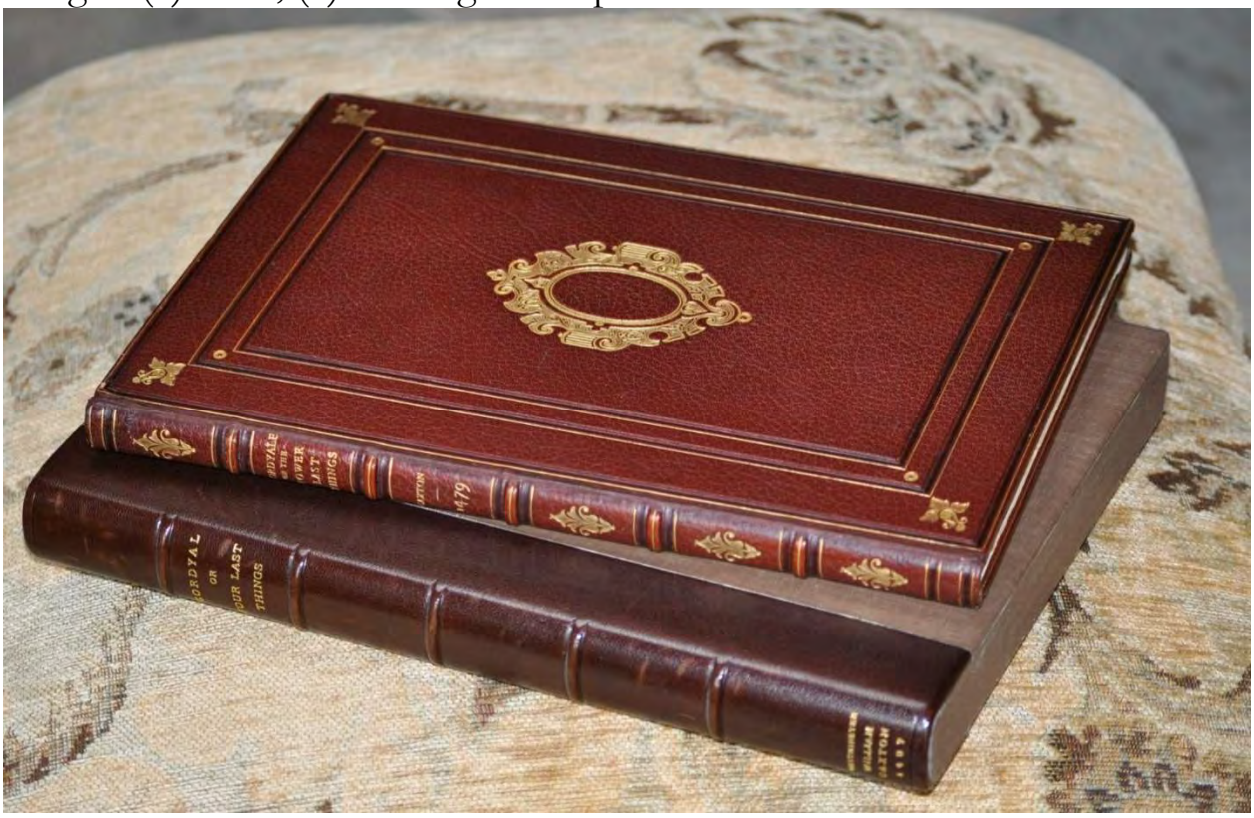
Caxton likely met Woodville in 1469. He ended up publishing three books which were commissioned by Woodville, the *History of Jason* which was translated by Caxton and printed by him in Westminster in 1477, and two books translated by Woodville himself, the *Dicts and Sayings of the Philosophers* (1477) and the *Cordyale* (1479).

The *Cordyale* is a rare book, known in only twelve copies, and not surprisingly, a number of these copies are incomplete. The Chrzanowski/Clark copy lacks the first blank, and the first leaf is likely from another copy. It also lacks eight leaves in the third quire, which are supplied in good facsimile. The missing quire was removed years ago to complete the Ashburnham copy, which is now at the Pierpont Morgan. So, if you visit the Pierpont Morgan copy, you can be aware that it contains some of what was originally in the Clark copy. Also, the Clark copy is rebound. It is in a beautiful full morocco binding, probably by Riviere,

from around the turn of the twentieth century. Nice indeed, but purist collectors would rather have a contemporary binding.

That being said, it is a still a gorgeous copy, uncut and with very wide margins, the sort of book that collectors covet. I must show you these wonderful images, which are the work of Paul, and not of me. I hope that those of you who are newer to the world of rare books can get a feeling as to why people like us go into ecstasies over books like this. I hope that the Morgan copy is as tall!

Images: (1) intro; (2) binding and slipcase:



(3) first page of text

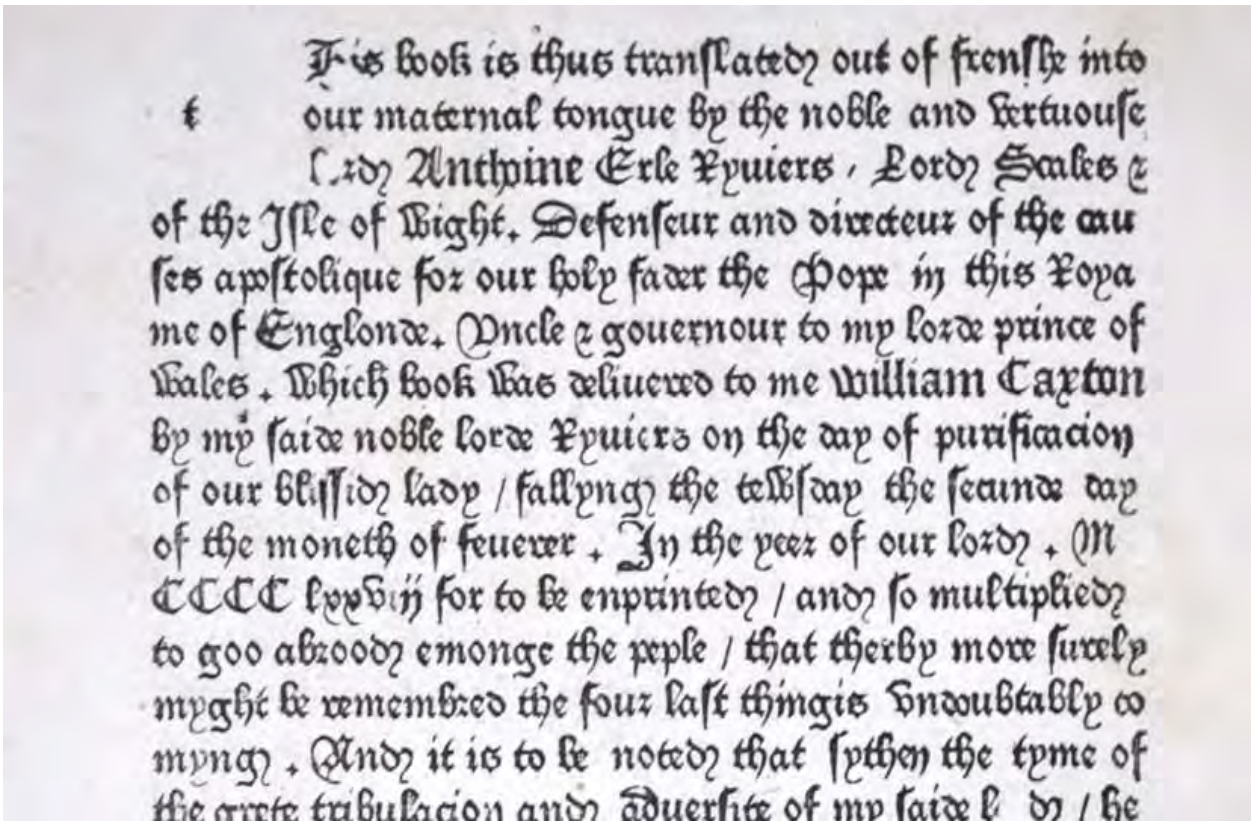
Ingratitude vterly setting apart / We olle
to calle to our mynde the many folde gyftes
of grace. With the benefaitis. that our lorde
of his moost pfitutuse bonte hath ymay vs
Werches in this present transitorie lif. Whiche remem
braunce of right breaky shulde induce vs to yue his godly
hde therfore continuale and Immortale louynge & thanc
kis. and in no wise to falle to thignorance or forgetefull
nesse therof. Emong Whiche benefaitis and gyftes so
granted vs for arbitrament. And therby with our good
deserres supported and holpen by his moost digne mercy
and grace We be enabled to be the children of euale styng sal
uacion / to possesse the Joyes of heuen. Whiche ar mannys
sensible and maruaylly blissful and good. And by muse
We be so frail and inconstante / prone to falle / feble and
insufficiente of our self to withstande the fraudulente malice &
temptacion of our aunciay ennemy the fiende. Therfore be
hath yuen vs his mercy to be our Relief. Raison to be in
structure. and Remembraunce to ordre our guyding. Thes
first of this precious gyfte of mercy We may to our grete
comforte truly truste to haue it at all tymes in this Worlde
Whyle We deuely sue & calle therfore. But We muse knowe
for certayne / that We can haue no warante nor power to re
ceiue hit after the saison of our bodyly lif here. Semably
be Raison We olle in the moost extreme loue and drede to
knowe and take hym as our creatour & Redemptour. and
alle our Willes to be subget vnto his playsir. Thirdly
We olle to remember how We may gyue vs for to stande in
his grace / Considering What We were / What We be / and

(4) first page of epilogue

in vnce sempiternally Wilch Wthoutey ende . AMEN

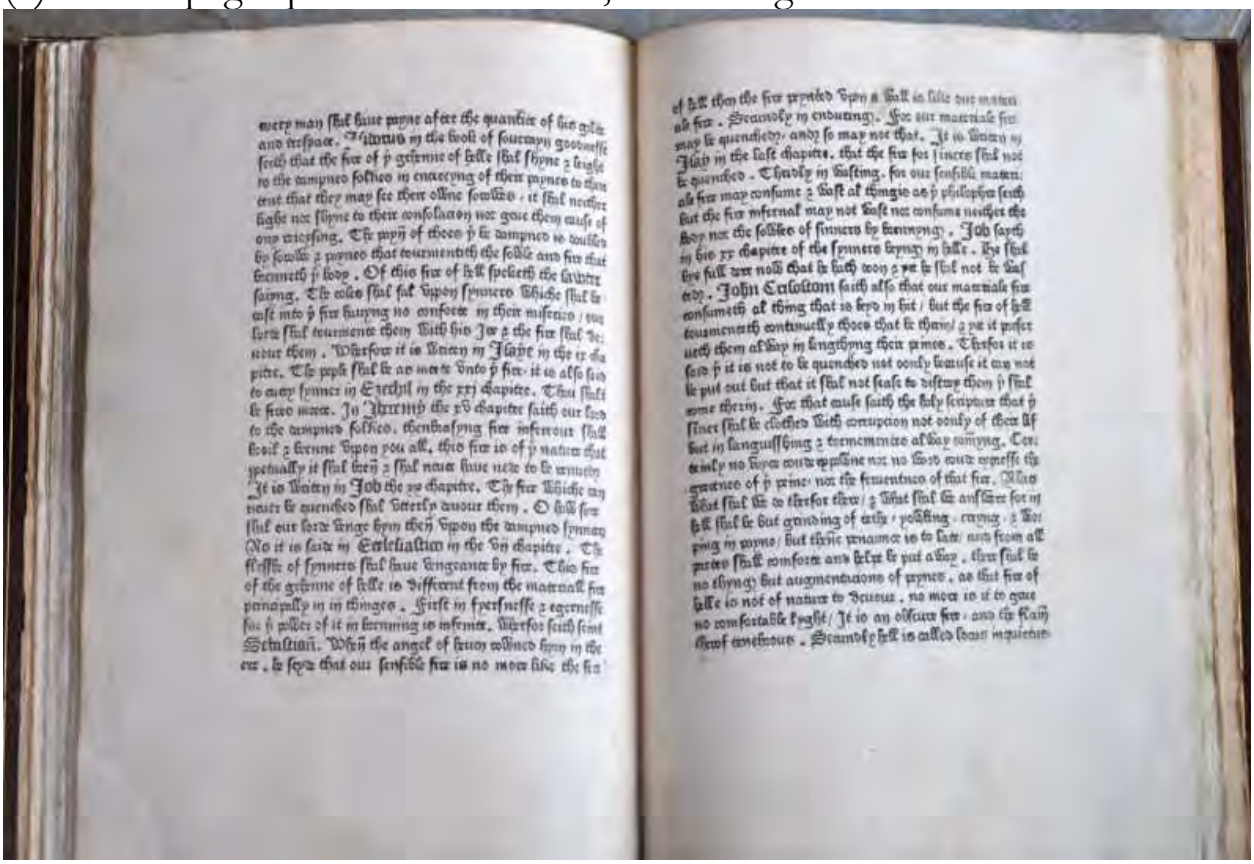
This book is thus translated out of frenshe into
our maternal tongue by the noble and vertuous
Lord Anthyne Erle Ryuiers . Lord Scales
of the Isle of Wyght. Defensour and directour of the au
sse apostolique for our holy fader the Pope in this Roya
me of Englonde. Vncle to gouernour to my lord prince of
Wales . Which book was allyened to me William Caxton
by my said noble lorde Ryuiers on the wy of pylgrimage
of our blyssyd lady / fallyng the wednesday the seuenth day
of the moneth of Nouembre . In the yere of our lorde . M
CCCC lxxvij for to be emprinted / and so multyplied
to goo abrode emonge the peple / that therby more surely
myght be remembred the foure last thinges vndoubtedly to
mynge . And it is to be noted that sythen the tyme of
the grete tribulacion and aduersite of my said lord / he
hath ben ful vertuously occupied / as in goyng on pylgry
mage to Seint James in Galice . to Rome . to
Seint Bartylmew . to Seint Andrew . to Seint
Mathew . in the Royalme of Naples . and to Seint
Nicholas de Bar in Puyle . and other diuerse holy pl
ces . Also hath pourcured and gotten of our holy fader the
Pope a grete and a large Indulgence and grace vnto the
chapel of our lady of the prelle by seint stephyns at Well
mestre for the wele & helpe of euery soule passed out of
this transitorie world . Whiche grace is of like vertue to
the indulgence of Scala celi . And not withstondyng the
grete labours & charges y he hath had in the seruice of the

(5) close-up of the first page of epilogue, showing that it was translated by Lord Rivers and delivered from him to be printed in 1478 and was finished on the 24th of March 1479

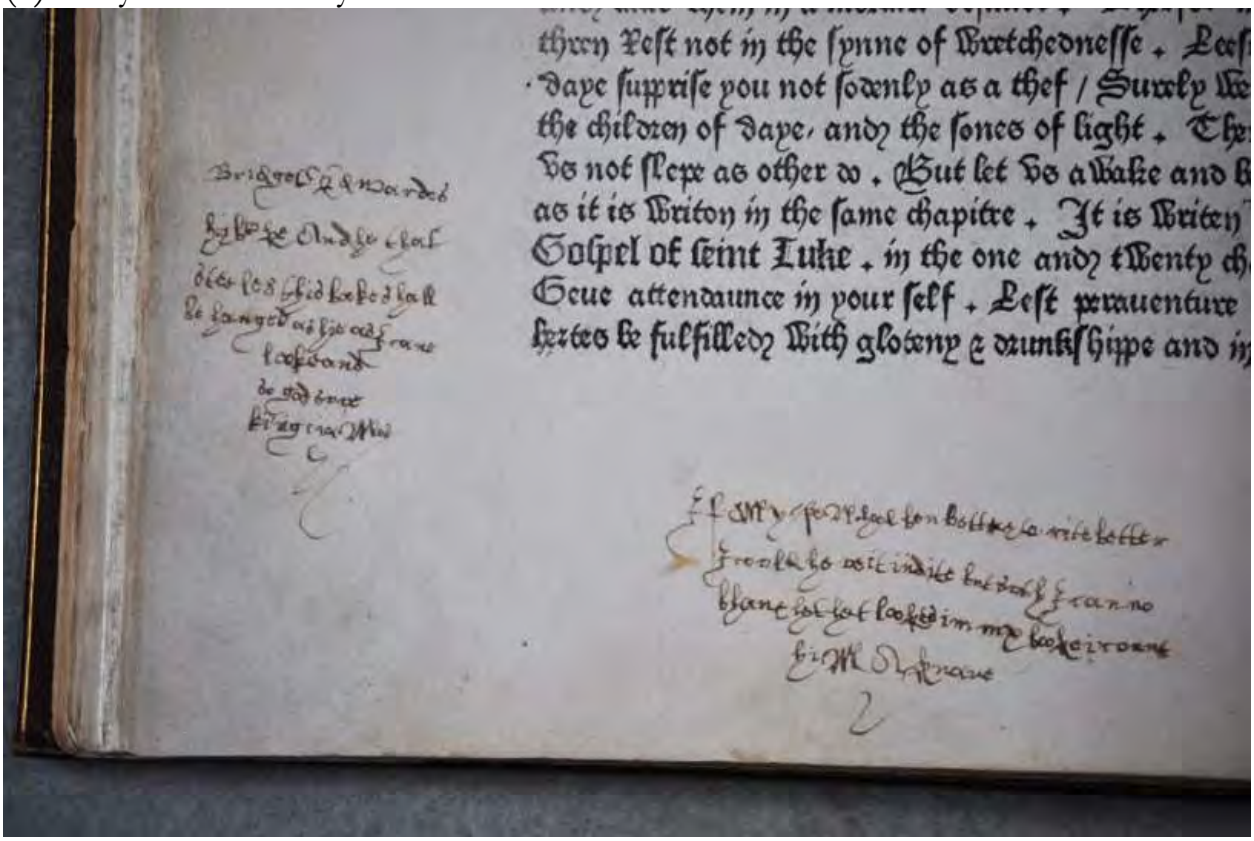


Thys book is thus translated out of frenshe into
our maternal tongue by the noble and vertuouse
lord Anthyne Erle Ryuiers / Lord Scales &
of the Isle of Wight. Defenseur and directeur of the cau
ses apostolique for our holy fader the Pope in this Roya
me of Englonde. Uncle & gouernour to my lorde prince of
Wales. Which book was deliuered to me William Caxton
by my saide noble lorde Ryuiers on the day of purificacion
of our blissid lady / fallyng the tewsday the seconde day
of the moneth of feuerer. In the yeer of our lord. M
CCCC lxxviij for to be emprinted / and so multiplied
to goo abrood emonge the peple / that therby more surely
myght be remembred the four last thingis Undoubtably to
mynd. And it is to be noted that sythen the tyme of
the grete tribulacion and aduersite of my saide lord / he

(6) double-page spread with the nice, wide margins



(7) early 17th century curse on book thieves



I want to make a few more comments about this book and about Caxton. First of all, once again we have an embarrassment of riches in Southern California. The Huntington Library specializes in early English books, and, scarce as Caxtons are. they have 32 of them, including a copy of the *Cordiale* which appears to be complete.

Also, I should say that though the Clark has no other Caxtons, they do have a single leaf from the first edition of *The Canterbury Tales*. I looked at it a few days ago, and it is a wonderful one, being part of the text of *The Friar's Tale,* the story of corrupt summoner and his interactions with the Devil. I was especially delighted to see this leaf because most of the leaves on the market in recent years have been the less interesting prose leaves from the Parson's tale, or from the tale of Melibee--and I don't mean to be derogatory here, as we are fortunate to have those.

I asked when the Clark acquired this, as fifteenth century printings are normally out of the library's collecting areas. The answer, which I halfway suspected, is that it came in the original gift. Mr. Clark bought quite a few out-of-scope items because he either liked them or found them important, and this was one of those. I would never expect the Clark to acquire the *Cordyale* or the Chaucer leaf on its own today. The Clark concentrates on the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and normally considers such earlier works the province of the Huntington. These days libraries generally have the very sound policy of not trying to acquire books in the specialties of well established libraries across town. You can't, after all, buy everything.

But still, there are and there should be exceptions, as is true with every rule, and often the exceptions come to a library in the form of gifts from generous donors. The Paul Chrzanowski collection is an excellent example of that. It includes so many wonderful pre-seventeenth century books that the Clark would never buy for itself, even if given some extra money. But still, they are foundation works, not only for Shakespeare scholarship, but for so many other areas in which the Clark specializes, and for English literature and history in general. Yes, of course we can go to the Huntington to look at their thirty-two Caxtons, but there is a complicated protocol to visit rare books in any library, including the Clark. So if one is doing research here, isn't it nice to have a couple of examples at the Clark to study and enjoy? And of course we can always ring up Steve Tabor at the Huntington to look at their Caxtons if we get more deeply into the subject.

As a friend of the Clark, I am very grateful to Paul, and am pleased to say that I have had the honor of examining each and every book in his collection. And coming back to visit one or several of them always puts me in a good mood. In particular, I love to see that Middle English text printed on a fifteenth century page. When I came to visit the *Cordyale* and the Chaucer leaf last week, I must admit that I couldn't stop smiling!