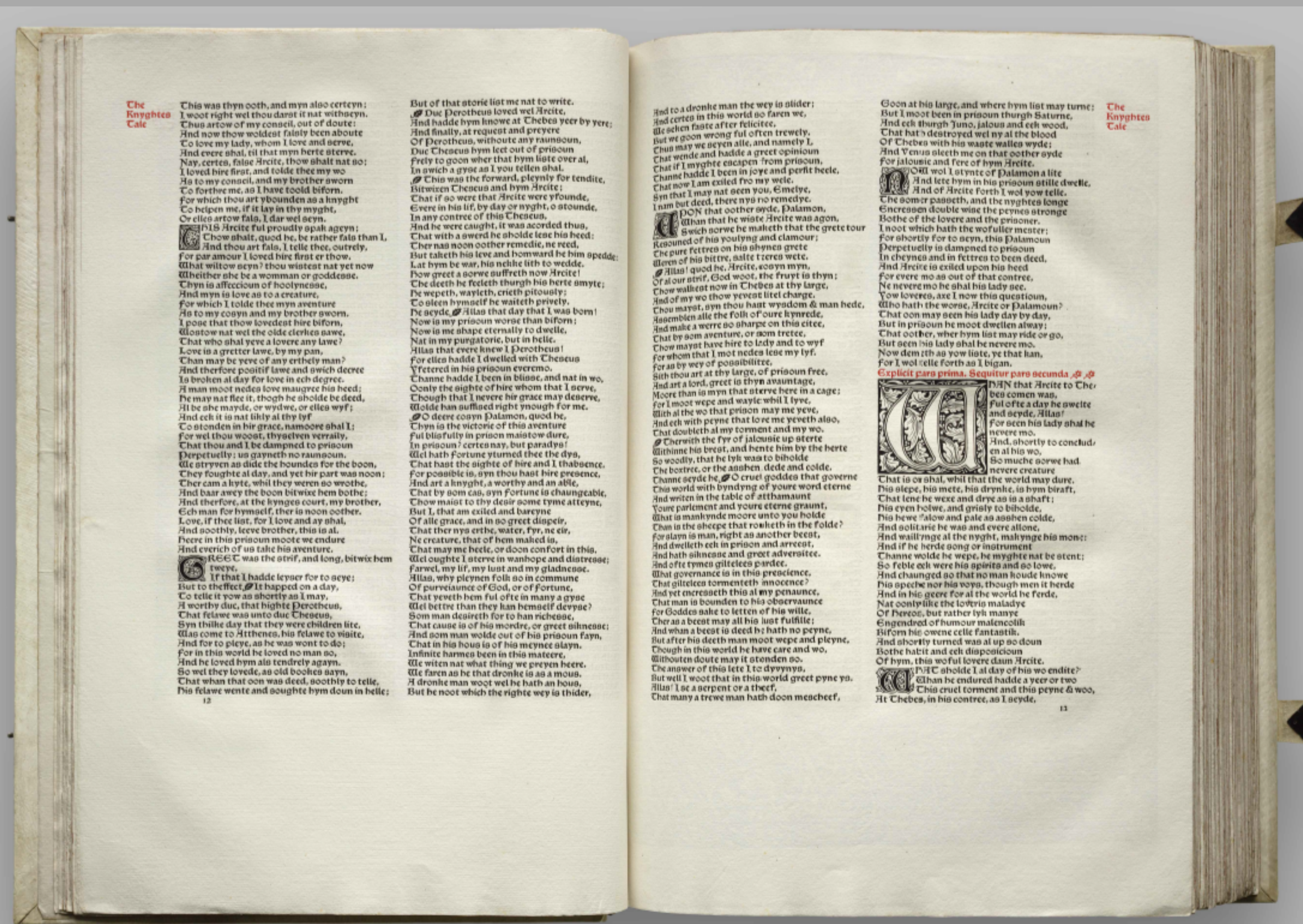


William Morris: The Works of Chaucer



Kelmscott Press, 1896

Chris Jennings 2017

With groping arms he heaved that boulder from his door,
 Then sat him down in the entry, with hands spread wide before,
 Hoping to catch any straggler that stole out with his sheep.
 So simple he seemed to think me. But now I pondered deep
 What were the wisest counsel, for my men and me to find
 Escape from death ; long I sat there, weaving in my mind
 All my wiles and cunning, as one with life at stake.
 For grim the risk. At last, this plan seemed best to take :
 There were rams in his flocks, well-nurtured, with thick fleece on
 their back,
 Stalwart beasts and splendid, with wool of deepest black ;
 Now noiselessly together I lashed them, three by three,
 Using the supple withies where slept in his savagery
 That monster ; so each man beneath three sheep would ride
 And while the midmost bore him, another on each side
 Defended him from peril. But I myself took hold
 Of one young ram, the finest—face upwards there I rolled
 And deep within his noble fleece both hands I pressed
 And clung, with all my endurance, beneath his shaggy breast.
 Thus then we waited, groaning, the rise of glorious Dawn.
 “ But when appeared the early light of rosy-fingered Morn,
 Eager to reach their pasture, out rushed his rams again,
 While the unmilked ewes stood bleating about their pens in pain,
 With udders swelled to bursting. Their master, though still deep
 His anguish, as before him there paused each passing sheep,
 Felt their backs with his fingers ; yet his folly never found
 Underneath their bellies my comrades lying bound.
 So last there came to the entrance my own ram, moving slow
 With the weight of his wool and me, that slyly lay below ;
 And I heard great Polyphemus, when he had felt it, say—
 ‘ Dear ram, why art thou coming out of the cave to-day
 Hindmost of all ? Aforetime, ’twas not like *thee* to pass
 After the sheep—nay, foremost, to crop the flowery grass
 With great, long strides thou ledst them, and first to the riverside,
 First wast thou to remember the fold at eventide ;
 Yet now thou comest rearmost ! Is sorrow in thy mind

