

Gutenberg! **THE MUSICAL!**

by Anthony King and Scott Brown

A Dramaturgical Casebook

Director: Sasha Brätt

Dramaturg: Liv Fassanella

PLAYHOUSE
ON PARK

**January 2-
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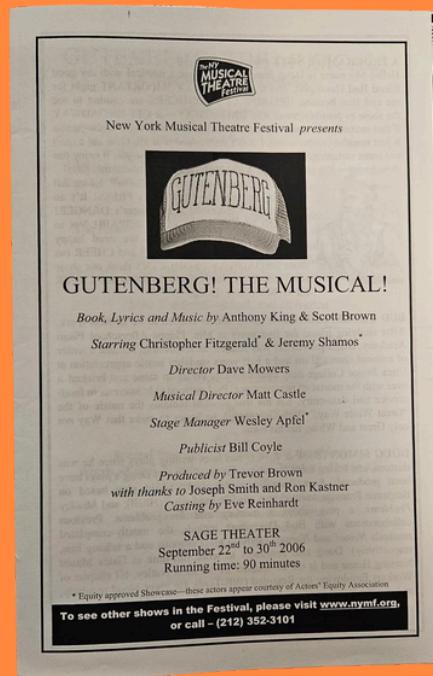
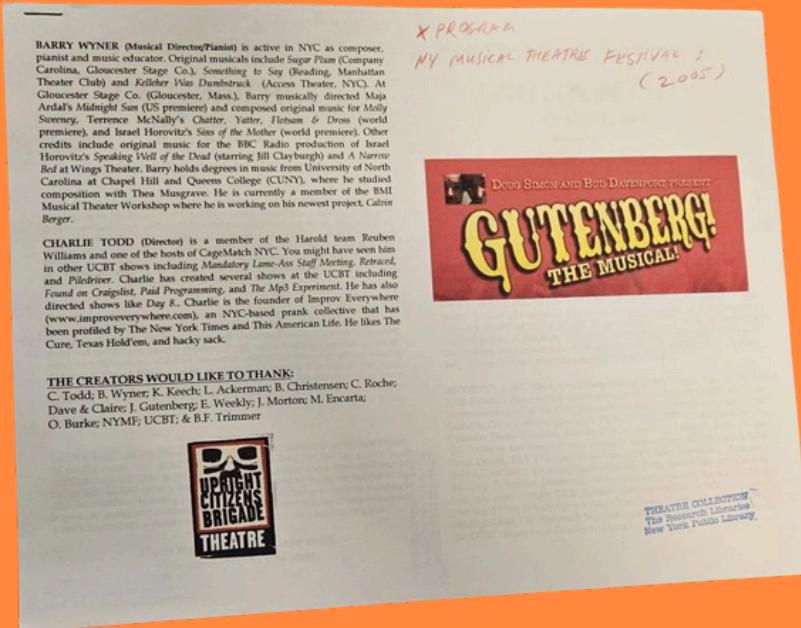
Index

The Long Road to Broadway: 'Gutenberg! The Musical!.....	3
About the Authors.....	6
Who was Gutenberg?.....	7
How a German City Changed How We Read.....	8
'Gutenberg!': A Guide to the Inventor Behind the Broadway Musical.....	13

The Long Road to Broadway: 'Gutenberg! The Musical!'

By Douglas Reside, Lewis and Dorothy Cullman Curator, Theatre Collection
from The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

It is a commonplace among musical theater creators that the usual gestation period of a musical from conception to Broadway is about seven to eight years. Some, though, take much longer and pass through many way stations before arriving at a Broadway theater. Along the journey, artifacts of earlier productions sometimes make it into theater archives even before a Broadway production occurs. This is especially true of several musicals in the 2023-2024 Broadway season. This blog post is part of a series that examines several of those musicals.



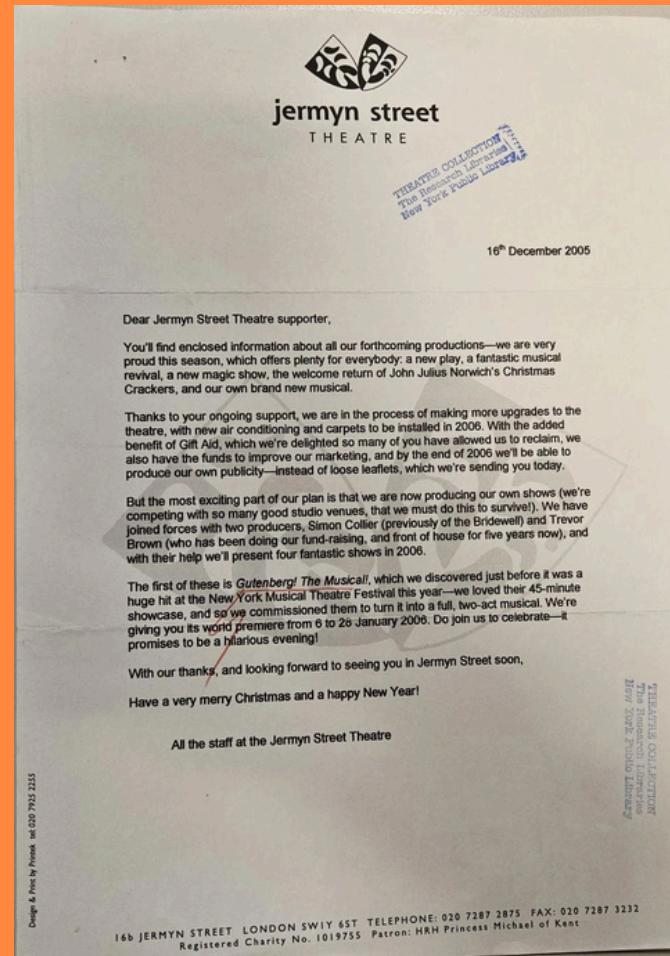
The New York Musical Theater Festival (NYMF) was one of the most successful launchpads for new musicals in the first decade of the 21st century. The festival provided a platform for *Altar Boyz*, *Next to Normal*, [title of show], *In Transit*, *Chaplin* and dozens of other musicals, many of which received professional cast recordings, Broadway productions, and contracts with major licensing houses. In 2023 another of the shows that appeared at the Festival, *Gutenberg! The Musical!*, opened on Broadway after nearly 20 years of development.

Gutenberg! was part of the second year of NYMF in 2005, the product of a series of collaborations between the festival and the Chicago-based improv group Upright Citizens Brigade (which workshopped the musical in 2004). The musical then had full productions in London and at NYMF, both in 2006. It ran off-Broadway from late 2006 through May 2007, first at 59E59 and then at the Actors' Playhouse. But although **Gutenberg!** was performed around the globe over the next 15 years, the show did not open on Broadway until 2023.

By that time, the Broadway productions of works like [title of show] (another NYMF favorite) and *A Strange Loop* had accustomed Broadway audiences to the potentially insiderish idea of a musical about musical theater writing. In 2019, the writers of **Gutenberg!** (Scott Brown and Anthony King) helped create a Broadway fan favorite with their book for

Beetlejuice: The Musical and proved their quirky humor would appeal to mainstream ticket buyers. **Gutenberg!**'s Broadway production also provided an opportunity to reunite the original leads of *The Book of Mormon*, Josh Gad and Andrew Rannells, in characters that shared the appealing earnestness of the Mormons they played over a decade prior.

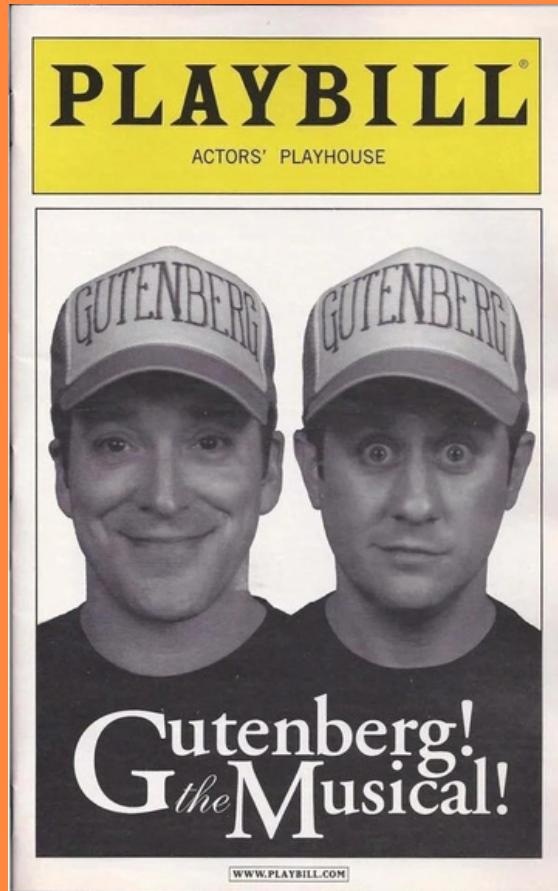
By the late 2010s, NYMF had fallen on hard times, and it collapsed altogether in 2019. However, it is unlikely that **Gutenberg!** will be the last NYMF show that lands on Broadway. The musical *Nerds://A Musical Software Satire*, for instance, played at the Festival in 2005 and has had numerous productions and several ultimately aborted announcements of a Broadway opening. It seems quite possible that, like **Gutenberg!**, *Nerds* will make its way to a Broadway theater in the end.



THEATRE COLLECTION
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Christopher Fitzgerald and Jeremy Shamos in the 2007 Off-Broadway production of 'Gutenberg!' (*T-Vim 2018-003)



Playbill from Actors' Playhouse run



Josh Gad and Andrew Rannells in the 2023 Broadway production of 'Gutenberg! The Musical!'

Photo: Matt Murphy

About the Authors



Scott Brown

has made theatreish things with Anthony King since their teenage years in Durham, NC. Off-Broadway, their *Gutenberg! The Musical!* (dir. Alex Timbers) earned Drama Desk, Lortel, and Outer Critics Circle noms. On Broadway, they were Tony-nominated for *Beetlejuice*. Scott also writes TV ("Sharp Objects," "Castle Rock," "Manhattan," "Utopia") and novels (xL, Knopf). He won the George Jean Nathan Award for his theatre criticism at New York and spent a happy decade at EW.



Anthony King

is an Emmy-nominated writer, director and producer who was nominated for a Tony Award for his work on *Beetlejuice* (Best Book of a Musical, which he also wrote with Scott Brown). For TV, Anthony has written and produced for shows including "The Afterparty" (Apple TV+), "Silicon Valley" (HBO), "Dead to Me" (Netflix), "Search Party" (HBO Max), "Broad City" (Comedy Central), "Robbie" (Paramount +) and more. He also spent many years as the artistic director of the Upright Citizens Brigade in NYC.

Click the box to listen to an interview with Brown and Scott



Listen Now: New Ep. with Scott Brown & Anthony King of *Gutenberg! The Musical*

In our latest episode of Stage Door Sessions, we're speaking with Scott Brown and Anthony King, the writers behind *Gutenberg! The Musical*, starring Josh Gad and Andrew Rannells, now playing at the James Earl Jones Theatre.

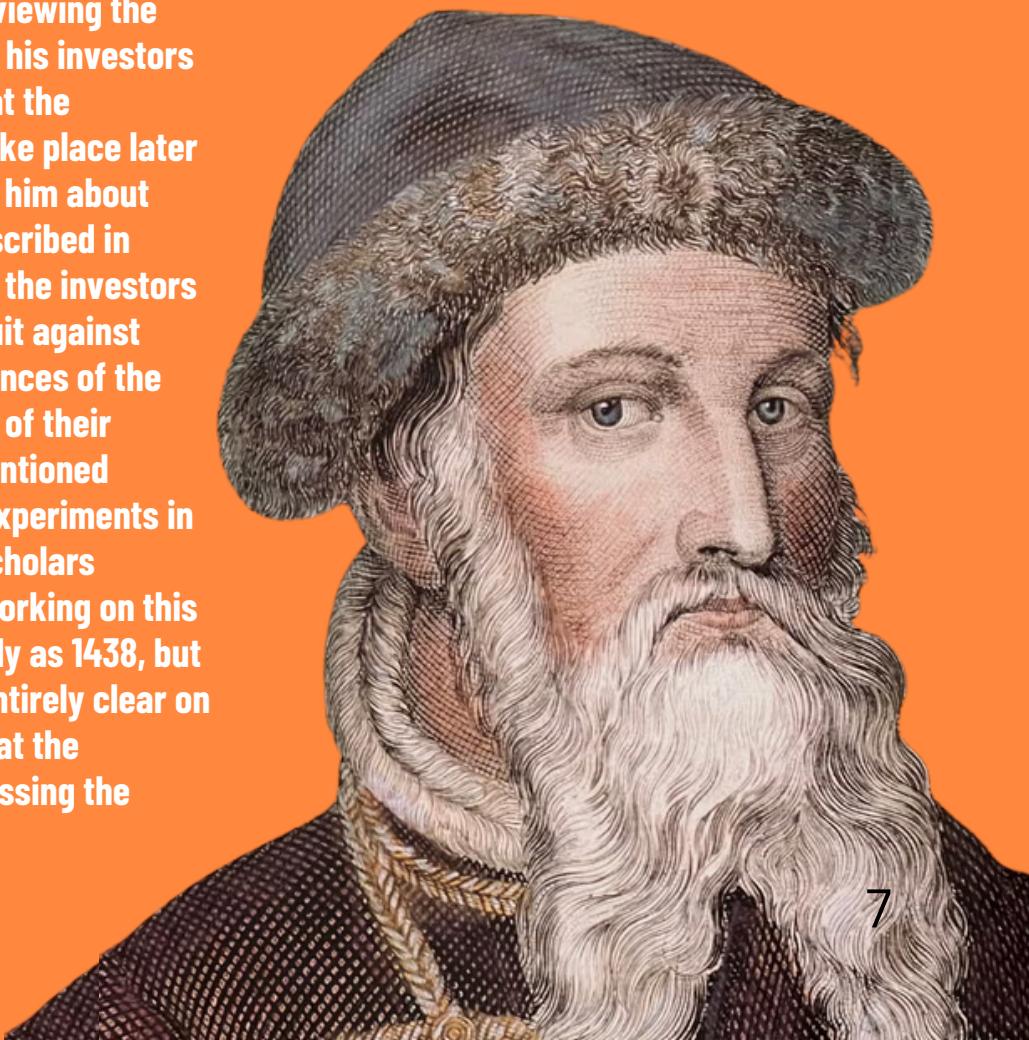
Broadway Direct | Nov 14, 2023

Who was Gutenberg?

From The Morgan Library & Museum

Biographical information about Johann Gutenberg is scarce and hard to interpret, but archival sources contain detailed accounts of some of his business ventures. He was born in Mainz, Germany, around 1400 in a patrician family involved in goldsmithing and associated with the local mint. His family name was Gensfleisch, but contemporary documents refer to him as "Johann Gutenberg" or "Johann Gensfleisch, commonly called Gutenberg" because his parents owned a townhouse known as Gutenberg. His full name could be rendered as Johann Gensfleisch zur Laden zum Gutenberg.

Nothing is known about his upbringing and education. If he was to follow in the family business he might have learned metalworking skills that would have helped him to devise methods of cutting and casting printing types, but there is no supporting evidence for this supposition. Nonetheless, it is clear that he was mechanically inclined. During a period of civic disturbances, he quit Mainz and went to live in Strassburg where he engaged in commercial speculations based on his inventions. He proposed to make mirrors for sale to pilgrims, who could use them as devotional accessories while viewing the holy relics at Aachen. Some of his investors were disappointed to learn that the pilgrimage to Aachen would take place later than they expected and asked him about other inventions, which he described in strictest secrecy. After one of the investors died, his brothers brought a suit against Gutenberg concerning the finances of the partnership, and in the course of their testimony some witnesses mentioned technical details suggesting experiments in printing. On this basis some scholars claimed that Gutenberg was working on this invention in Strassburg as early as 1438, but the legal documents are not entirely clear on this point, and it is possible that the witnesses were actually discussing the manufacture of mirrors.



Legal documents of a later date contain a convincing account of Gutenberg's attempts to establish a printing business. He returned to Mainz sometime between 1444 and 1448 when he borrowed a sum of money for unspecified purposes. In November 1455 a Mainz notary named Ulrich Helmasperger drew up an account of litigation concerning loans Gutenberg obtained to set up a printing shop, hire workers, and purchase supplies such as paper and parchment. Helmasperger registered the complaints of an advocate and moneylender Johann Fust, who said that he had loaned Gutenberg eight hundred gulden at six percent and invested another eight hundred gulden in a partnership to undertake "the work of the books." Fust demanded repayment of the loans plus accumulated interest, an amount indicating that Gutenberg began to borrow money from him in the middle of 1450. The exact outcome of these proceedings is not known, but it seems that Fust took over the printing business, which Gutenberg had put up as collateral to secure his debts.

But that was not the end of Gutenberg's typographical career. While winding down his partnership with Fust, he may have been running a second press in Mainz which issued cheap schoolbooks and job printing such as indulgences and calendars. He was probably involved in the printing of Johann Balbus's *Catholicon*, an early encyclopedia, first printed in 1460 and reprinted from the same setting of type in around 1469 and again around 1472. The type was cast in two-line units, which could be easily retained for future use. Other books were reprinted in the same fashion. If Gutenberg had a hand in the production of these books, he deserves special mention in the history of printing not just for the original invention but also for his experiments with publishing steady sellers on demand, a logical outcome of the invention.

Gutenberg appears to have lived in some comfort during his last years, having received a pension and other perquisites from the archbishop of Mainz in recognition of his faithful service. The archbishop promised to give him food and wine for the maintenance of his household, as well as apparel befitting his position as a member of the archbishop's retinue. Although living in retirement, he had types and other printing equipment in his possession when he died in 1468.

How a German City Changed How We Read

by Madhvi Ramani
From bbc.com

Despite the far-reaching consequences of Johannes Gutenberg's printing press, much about the man remains a mystery, buried deep beneath layers of Mainz history.

The German city of Mainz lies on the banks of the River Rhine. It is most notable for its wine, its cathedral and for being the home of Johannes Gutenberg, who introduced the printing press to Europe. Although these things may seem unconnected at first, here they overlap, merging and influencing one another.

The three elements converge on market days, when local producers and winemakers sell their goods in the main square surrounding the sprawling St Martin's Cathedral. Diagonally opposite is the Gutenberg Museum, named after the city's most famous inhabitant, who was born in Mainz around 1399 and died here 550 years ago in 1468.

(Credit: Madhvi Ramani)

(Credit: Madhvi Ramani)



It was Gutenberg who invented Europe's first movable metal type printing press, which started the printing revolution and marks the turning point from medieval times to modernity in the Western world. Although the Chinese were using woodblock printing many centuries earlier, with a complete printed book, made in 868, found in a cave in north-west China, movable type printing never became very popular in the East due to the importance of calligraphy, the complexity of hand-written Chinese and the large number of characters. Gutenberg's press, however, was well suited to the European writing system, and its development was heavily influenced by the area from which it came.

In the Middle Ages, Mainz was one of the most important cathedral cities in the Holy Roman Empire, in which the Church and the archbishop of Mainz were the centre of influence and political power. Gutenberg, as an educated and entrepreneurial patrician, would have recognised the Church's need to update the method of replicating manuscripts, which were hand-copied by monks. This was an incredibly slow and laborious process; one that could not keep up with the growing demand for books at the time. In his book, *Revolutions in Communication: Media History from Gutenberg to the Digital Age*, Dr Bill Kovarik, professor of communication at Radford University in the US state of Virginia, describes this capacity in terms of 'monk power', where 'one monk' equals a day's work - about one page - for a manuscript copier. Gutenberg's press amplified the power of a monk by 200 times.

At the Gutenberg Museum, I watched a demonstration of a page being printed on a replica of the press. First, a metal alloy was heated and poured into a matrix (a mould used to cast a letter). Once the alloy cooled, the small metal letters were arranged into words and sentences in a form and inked. Finally, paper was placed on top of the form and a heavy plate was pressed upon it, similar to how a wine press works. This is no coincidence: Gutenberg's printing press is thought to be a modification of the wine press. Since the Romans introduced winemaking to the region, the area around Mainz has been one of Germany's main wine-producing areas, with famous grape varieties such as riesling, dornfelder and silvaner.

The page that is always printed at the Gutenberg Museum replicates the original style and font (Gothic Textura) of the 42-line Gutenberg Bible, the first major book ever to be printed using movable type in the Western world. It is the first page of St John's Gospel, in the Bible, which begins: "In the beginning was the word..."

Writing is often considered the first communication revolution, while Gutenberg's printing press brought with it the revolution of mass communication. After about 15 years of development - and huge capital investment - Gutenberg printed his first Bible in 1455.

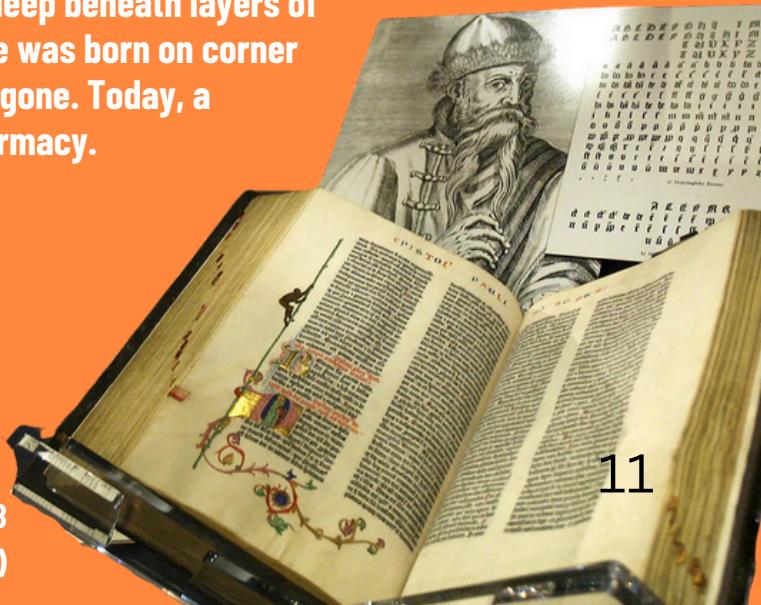
"Gutenberg's Bible is an extraordinary work of craftsmanship," said Dr Kovarik, who suggests we can read a strong religious motivation into the perfection of his work. "This wasn't unusual at the time - for example, a stonemason would try to achieve a perfect sculpture in a remote corner of one of the great cathedrals, not really for the people who would be worshipping there, but rather as an expression of personal faith."

Of his original print run of about 150 to 180 Bibles, only 48 remain in the world today. The Gutenberg Museum has two on display. Both are slightly different, because after printing, the pages would be taken to a rubricator (specialised scribe) who would paint in certain letters according to the tastes of their customers. Gutenberg's Bibles turned out to be bestsellers.

At first, the Church welcomed the new availability of printed bibles and other religious texts. Printing enabled the Church to spread the Christian message and raise cash in the form of 'indulgences' - printed documents that forgave people's sins. However, the disruptive power of the printed word soon became apparent. With the rapid spread of printing technology - by the 1470s, every European city had printing companies, and by the 1500s, an estimated four million books had been printed and sold - came the spread of new and often contradictory ideas, such as Martin Luther's 95 Theses, in which he criticised the Church's sale of indulgences. Luther is said to have nailed his text to a Wittenberg church door on 31 October 1517. Within a few years 300,000 copies of it had been printed and circulated, leading to the Reformation and a permanent split in the Church.

But despite the far-reaching consequences of Gutenberg's press, much about the man remains a mystery, buried deep beneath layers of Mainz history. A plaque marks the place where he was born on corner of Christofsstraße, but the original house is long gone. Today, a modern building stands there, occupied by a pharmacy.

Another plaque outside the nearby St Christoph's Church marks the place where he was likely baptised. The church was bombed during World War II and remains in ruins as a



Of the 150 to 180 Bibles Gutenberg originally printed, only 48 remain in the world today (Credit: Ann Johansson/Getty Images)



Although the traces of Gutenberg have all but disappeared from the city, his influence can still be seen everywhere (Credit: Lebrecht Music and Arts Photo Library/Alamy)

war memorial, although the original baptismal font from Gutenberg's time is still intact.

The graveyard where Gutenberg was buried has been paved over, and even though there are statues of him are everywhere in the city, we don't know what he looked like. He is commonly depicted with a beard, but it is unlikely that he had one. Gutenberg was a patrician and during his time, according to my tour guide Johanna Hein, only pilgrims and Jews wore beards. In fact, the man we all know as Johannes Gutenberg was actually born Johannes Gensfleisch (which translates to 'goose meat'). If it weren't for the 14th-Century trend of people renaming themselves after their houses, we would perhaps be referring to his invention as the Gensfleisch Press today.

But although the traces of the man have all but disappeared from the city, his influence can still be seen everywhere: a poster advertising cosmetics; a woman reading a newspaper in a cafe; the menu on a restaurant table. Furthermore, our current communications revolution, made possible by the internet, digital technology and social media, is a progression of what started with Gutenberg.

"Every time the cost of media declines rapidly, you enable more people to speak out, and you have a greater diversity of voices," said Dr Kovarik, explaining that this impacts the distribution of power in society, and sparks social change.

Paradoxically, however, our digital revolution can also be seen as a return to the pre-print era, according to a theory called The Gutenberg Parenthesis by Dr Thomas Pettitt, affiliate research professor at the University of Southern Denmark, who argues that there are parallels between the pre-print age and our own internet age.

"Print conferred stability on discourse; works in books were authorities; news in print was true. In the absence of print, news has lost its authenticity, and, as in the Middle Ages, is synonymous with rumour. We are now in a post-news phase, where purveyors of fake news can accuse the legitimate press of purveying fake news and get away with it," Dr Pettitt said.

Whatever the impact of the 21st-Century digital revolution, just like the printing revolution before it, the effects will reverberate for hundreds of years to come.

Selections from 'Gutenberg!': A Guide to the Inventor Behind the Broadway Musical

By Jennifer Schuessler

Here is a primer for those who, even after seeing the show, might be left wondering: "Guten-Who?"

What do we actually know about Johannes Gutenberg?

Born the son of a patrician in the early 15th century, in Mainz, Germany, Gutenberg was originally trained as a goldsmith and metallurgist. A few surviving documents suggest that in the 1430s he began secretly developing what would become his famous printing press. His early efforts included some papal indulgences and a grammar book. Then, in late 1454 or early 1455, seemingly out of nowhere, came his monumental two-volume, nearly 1,300-page Bible, with its two columns of 42 lines per page.

Today, specialists describe Gutenberg's accomplishment precisely. His Bible "was the first substantial book printed in the West from movable type," George Fletcher, the author of "Gutenberg and the Genesis of Printing," said during a recent interview at the Grolier Club in Manhattan, where I visited recently for an up-close look at some of Gutenberg's printing, including loose leaves from his Bible.



So did Gutenberg really "invent" the printing press?

Not exactly — though bringing this up over a pint of mead at the Rusty German, the seedy tavern in the show, might get you in trouble. As far back as the late eighth century, Japanese artisans were mass-printing Buddhist sutras using carved woodblocks. And a form of movable type appeared in China as early as the 11th century, though it's unclear whether Gutenberg would have known of it, Fletcher said.

A later engraving showing Johannes Gutenberg in his workshop in Mainz around 1455. No contemporary images of him are known to exist. Credit...Kean Collection/Getty Images

Yet the world-altering nature of Gutenberg's invention lay not in the press, Fletcher said, but in his whole system, starting with the type sorts (as specialists call the individual characters). "What is important is this ability to reuse and reuse and reuse the type sorts, in any combination conceivable," he said. "You have 26 letters, but you can get millions of combinations out of them. And he figured out how you could do this."

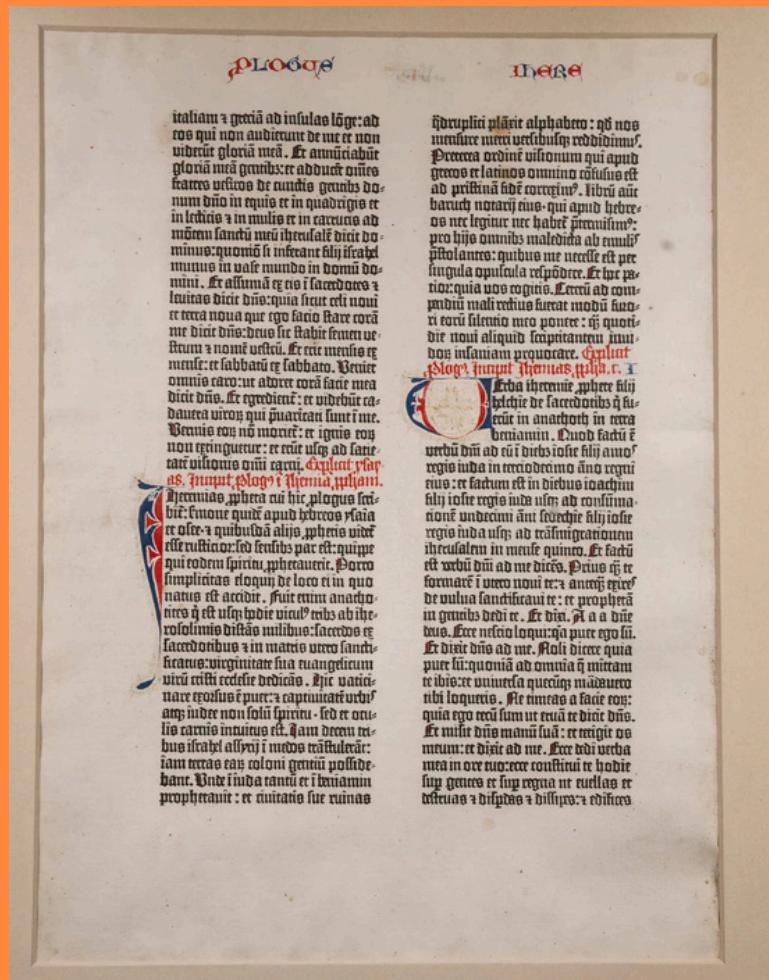
Did the Gutenberg Bible really help teach Europe's illiterate masses to read, as the show's character's claim?

"There's a great deal to that," said Fletcher, a former curator at the New York Public Library (which owns one Gutenberg Bible) and the Morgan Library & Museum in Manhattan (which has three). Between about 1455 and the end of 1500, roughly 30,000 different editions of printed books appeared, amounting to millions of copies, all over western Europe, and as far as Constantinople. "And by the 1490s, there was all sorts of stuff being cranked out," he said. "So there was much more material for people who could read or could learn to read and better themselves."

Did Gutenberg battle the religious authorities?

The musical depicts Gutenberg as locked in a battle with an evil monk, who fears the printing press will loosen the church's power over the masses.

In reality, some religious readers were highly impressed with Gutenberg's wares, including the future Pope Pius II, who saw a sample at the Frankfurt Book Fair in early 1455. He wrote excitedly to a cardinal in Rome, praising Gutenberg and his pages, which he declared "exceedingly clean and correct in their script, and without error, such as Your Excellency could read effortlessly without glasses."



One of the loose leaves from the Gutenberg Bible at the Grolier Club in Manhattan, which owns a number of single pages and fragments, on both paper and vellum. Credit...James Estrin/The New York Times

Unfortunately, the future pope noted, the run of roughly 180 copies had already sold out.

Was Gutenberg really in love with a wench named Helvetica, like in the show?

Unlikely. Helvetica is the name of a now-ubiquitous clean-lined typeface created in 1957, which shot to world domination after being selected as a core font in the earliest Macintosh computers. The typeface Gutenberg used, which mimicked the look of calligraphic handwriting, is known as blackletter.

What happened to Gutenberg after his Bible?

Shortly after the book was announced for sale, he had a dispute with one of his funders and lost his press. "He got thrown out of the business, just at the point of success," Fletcher said. Gutenberg died in 1468, at around the age of 70. His gravesite is unknown. A history of the world published in 1482 by William Caxton, the first printer in Britain, omitted his name but noted the revolutionary technology born in Mainz, saying, "the craft is multiplied throughout the world, and books be had cheap, and in great number."

Where can I buy a Gutenberg Bible?

Sorry, you're out of luck! The last one to come up for auction, in 1978, fetched \$2.2 million, roughly \$10 million in today's dollars. Today, all 49 of the substantially complete Gutenberg Bibles known to survive are in institutional collections.

Single leaves, known in the trade as Noble Fragments, do come up for sale and cost roughly \$70,000 to \$100,000, a bit higher if on vellum rather than paper, said Selby Kiffer, a senior vice president at Sotheby's. (The Grolier owns several Gutenberg leaves and other fragments.) If a whole Bible should come to market, Kiffer estimated, the price would be a record-obliterating \$60 million to \$80 million.

Yet the remarkable thing about Gutenberg's work may not be its rarity, but its enduring familiarity. "We may be in a digital world now, but from 1455 to today, the book as a technology hasn't changed that much," he said. "And certainly, the craftsmanship hasn't improved since Gutenberg."