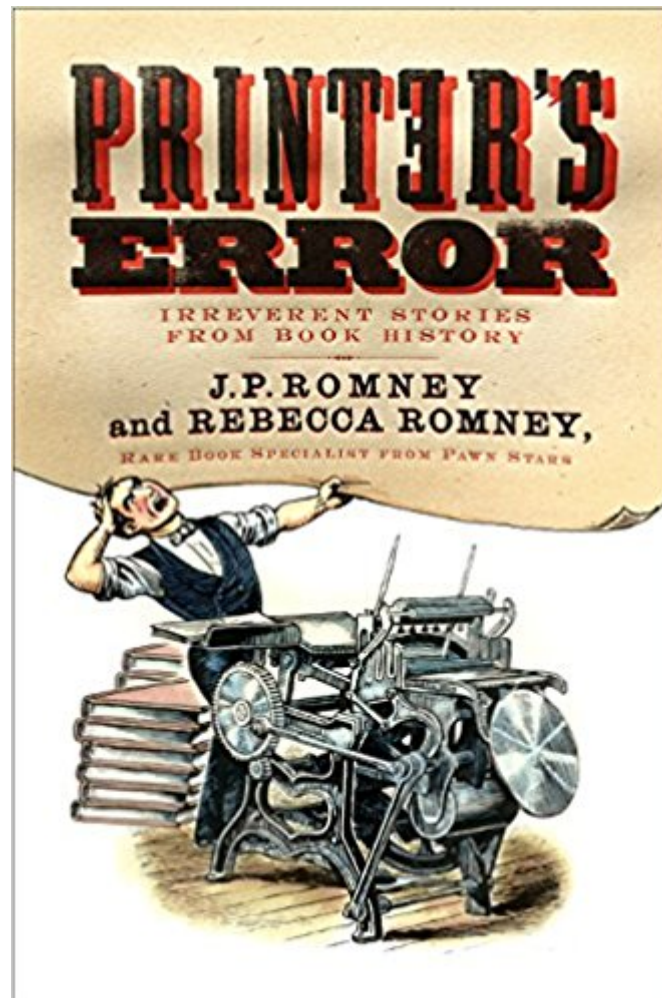




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# Printer's Error: Irreverent Stories From Book History



## Synopsis

A funny and entertaining history of printed books as told through absurd moments in the lives of authors and printers, collected by television's favorite rare-book expert from HISTORY's hit series *Pawn Stars*. Since the Gutenberg Bible first went on sale in 1455, printing has been viewed as one of the highest achievements of human innovation. But the march of progress hasn't been smooth; downright bizarre is more like it. *Printer's Error* chronicles some of the strangest and most humorous episodes in the history of Western printing, and makes clear that we've succeeded despite ourselves. Rare-book expert Rebecca Romney and author J. P. Romney take us from monasteries and museums to auction houses and libraries to introduce curious episodes in the history of print that have had a profound impact on our world. Take, for example, the Gutenberg Bible. While the book is regarded as the first printed work in the Western world, Gutenberg's name doesn't appear anywhere on it. Today, Johannes Gutenberg is recognized as the father of Western printing. But for the first few hundred years after the invention of the printing press, no one knew who printed the first book. This long-standing mystery took researchers down a labyrinth of ancient archives and libraries, and unearthed surprising details, such as the fact that Gutenberg's financier sued him, repossessed his printing equipment, and started his own printing business afterward. Eventually the first printed book was tracked to the library of Cardinal Mazarin in France, and Gutenberg's forty-two-line Bible was finally credited to him, thus ensuring Gutenberg's name would be remembered by middle-school students worldwide. Like the works of Sarah Vowell, John Hodgman, and Ken Jennings, *Printer's Error* is a rollicking ride through the annals of time and the printed word.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Printer’s Error is an entertaining entry in the always fascinating books-about-books genre. The Romneys make good on the irreverent premise that the printed word is glorious, but it’s also nuts. How, they ask, can that be so? Because we are gloriously nuts. It’s a keeper.” (Nicholas A. Basbanes, author of *A Gentle Madness: Bibliophiles, Bibliomanes, and the Eternal Passion for Books* and *On Paper: The Everything of its Two Thousand Year History by a Self-Confessed Bibliophiliac*) “Who knew the printed book could be so fun? J. P. and Rebecca have written a real page turner. Printer’s Error is truly a rare treasure.” (Rick Harrison, author of *License to Pawn* and star of *Pawn Stars*) “Captivating. It’s like standing in line and overhearing an animated conversation just ahead of you about the secret world of rare books—and hoping you hear it all before they get to the front of the line and wander off someplace else!” (John Simpson, author of *The Word Detective*) Written in an engaging, accessible style, these accounts will appeal to fans of *Pawn Stars*, as well as scholars of literature and printing history. (Library Journal)

Rare book specialist Rebecca Romney and author J. P. Romney take us from monasteries and museums to auction houses and libraries to introduce curious episodes in the history of print. Print history, like any history, is full of strange people and goings-on. The road paved by our civilization’s best books is a long and noble one, but it is also lined with unexpected potholes and sharp turns into what-the-hell-is-going-on-here territory. Illustrators talking to ghosts, maps bringing countries to their knees, Shakespeare writing awful plays, and Charles Dickens branding America a nation of filthy literary thieves all serve as the back alleys into which the authors could descend. Correction: into which the authors did descend. Consider that today a Gutenberg Bible is the Holy Grail of book collecting. But that wasn’t always so. James Lennox, a New York millionaire, sent an agent to bid on his behalf at a London auction in 1847. At that point, no one had ever paid more than £215 for a Gutenberg Bible. His agent became embroiled in a bidding war and when the dust settled, Lennox was on the hook for an eye-popping £500. Lennox was so angry about the exorbitant sticker price that he flatly refused to pay it. Eventually he came

around, which was clearly the right choice, since a Gutenberg Bible would sell for tens of millions of dollars today. Among the many other tales told in *Printer's Error* are the story of the man who coined the term "atlas" who was also responsible for generations of Europeans believing that "Little People" inhabited the Arctic; the history of the "bad" versions of Shakespeare's plays, including a Hamlet who sounds more like a drunken pirate than a prince; and the fate of William Tyndale, who made the Holy Bible accessible to countless worshippers and was also burned at the stake for heresy. J. P. and Rebecca Romney scoured five hundred years of book history and collected some of its most absurd episodes. And then like so many humans before them, they wrote a book about it.

This is an extraordinarily worthwhile book that seeks to popularize the history of print. Today, we are immersed in the battle of "fake news" and lament some rather imaginary time when "truth" was more clearly presented to us. However, the canon of great works, which serve as the basis for our civilization and ideals, and which have advanced the human mind and spirit, often were the products of a messy process, fraught with error, mistakes, sabotage, and chicanery (not unlike today). Whether one views *Huckleberry Finn* as the source of American literature (as Hemingway did) or as a racist work that should be banned in schools, how refreshing and fun it is to focus on the "prank" of an erotic illustration of Uncle Silas that appeared in the first edition as a gateway to better understanding the literature and culture of 19th century America. And while many people seem to forget the history of science as being anything more than an apple falling on Newton's head or Steve Jobs inventing the iPhone, the authors take Galileo, and mixed with clues on the history of paper, weave a mini-thriller that could be the basis for a movie. Rebecca is often on television on *Pawn Stars*, and has an obvious talent for enthralling people with her insights and ability to distill history not into "sound bites" but into delectables. It is a pleasure to see that talent shine in print as well.

I really love this book. At first I was a little put off by the blurbs (and to some extent the subtitle) and was worried about it being billed a kind of "snarky, hipsters guide to the printed word". I set that aside and trusted what I know about Rebecca from her TV work and her work in the book world. I'm glad I didn't let the publisher's pitch get in my way because it's a wonderful and highly entertaining read. My favorite chapter so far is "Bad Shakespeare" (I haven't completely finished the book because, frankly, I don't want it to end). Rebecca and J.P. pack a ton of research into each chapter and bring so many strange little facts to light that every page seems to have an "ah ha" moment.

Their prose style is extremely easy to read and things keep moving at a rapid pace. Sometimes their style reminds me of the historian Giles Milton - kind of like reading you're reading history in the form of a good yarn or a detective novel. To be fair I do have a minor quibble: every once in awhile the snarky or modern day references feel a little wedged in. In one chapter they make a series of references to vaginas and penises but when the paragraph ends with the word "va-jay-jay" I found myself mentally screaming: "I get the point"! That said, I get the feeling that Rebecca and J.P. would find this reaction exactly the thing they were going for. As I said, this is a minor issue for me and it's worth pointing out that the snark never gets in the way of the story or the research. If you are looking to learn something new and looking to be entertained at the same time I can't recommend this book enough. It's a rare (book) find that can do both things so well. The best thing is that you don't need to be a book buff, a printing buff or any kind of buff to enjoy *Printer's Error*. I REALLY hope Rebecca and J.P. will do more like this. Bravo!

Although I take some pleasure in practical knowledge, I take an inordinate and probably unhealthy amount of pleasure in knowledge of the past, the esoteric, the impractical and the funny. If any of the above apply to you, then I suggest "*Printer's Error*" is for you. This is an anecdotal dance through the history of printing and those very odd people who championed it, despaired of it and even had an unhealthy lust for it. In here you will find fraud, torture, mystery, and the attempted murder of beauty over a bridge into the Thames. Need I say more? Nope.

A funny and irreverent look at the history of printing, highlighting all things that went wrong. History from a 21st Century guy. You'll probably learn about aspects of printing history that you didn't know. Recommended to all readers and bibliophiles.

*Printer's Error: Irreverent Stories from Book History* by bibliophile, Rebecca Romney. I loved her on *Pawn Stars* and really enjoyed her writing in this book. Written with her husband J.P. Romney, they share funny bits of printing information. I love it. I could tell JP's writing voice from Rebecca's. I asked her, "Did you work together on all the chapters?" From Rebecca, "Thank you. Yes, it was a challenge combining two strong voices (though in the end it made for a stronger book). We did work together on all the chapters; it is very much a joint creation. If you like JP's style, I would encourage you to seek out his novel *THE MONSTER ON THE ROAD IS ME*." They quote from Alice. . . "But you don't want to go among mad people," Alice remarked. "Oh, you can't help that . . . we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad." "How do you know

I am mad?" said Alice. "You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here." Then the authors state, "Welcome to the madness of printed books. Let us show you around." Lead on. . . the reader is in for an engaging time. Now that their book has been printed, naturally, they found a number of errors in it. Those will be corrected for the next printing.

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