



LATITUDE MEDIA

# JOHANNES

BASED ON THE LIFE OF  
JOHANNES GUTENBERG

OUTLINE BY  
BRIDGET LAWLESS





In a time when the Church controlled knowledge and voices were silenced, ever-questioning craftsman Johannes Gutenberg challenges the powers that be and creates the groundbreaking printing press that will empower the masses and forever alter the course of communication.



# OUTLINE



Born into a patrician family in Mainz, Germany in the early 15th Century, Johannes Gutenberg resents the fact that his father, a respected official at the mint, had married a commoner. Johannes knows this will prevent him from reaching the status and wealth he craves.

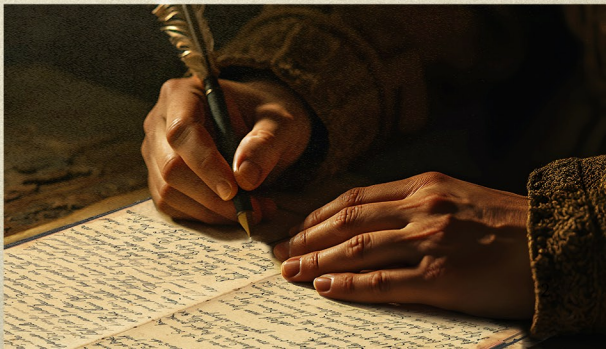






Expecting to follow a religious career, Johannes studies at the monastery school at St Viktor, South of Mainz. He is entranced by the haunting music of Hildegard of Bingen, an abbess who came to St Viktor centuries before, and inspired by the way she clashed intellectually with the Church. His own curious mind and clever hands land him in trouble when he invents automata and mechanical puzzles to amuse his fellow students. He is sent to make better use of his skills by working with the scribes.

Seeing his elders copying the bible by hand, the absurd inefficiency strikes him. In talking to them, he realises just how cleverly knowledge and power are controlled and restricted by the powerful Christian church, and that books are accessible only to the elite. The injustice of this strikes him for the first time and he challenges the brothers who punish him for blatant disrespect.





Local uprisings from the Guilds against the patricians see Johannes' family flee the city for Eltville, where he attends university. When his father dies, Johannes and his brother Friele argue with their stepsister over their inheritance. Johannes represents himself, arguing hotly for his and his brother's rights. The family is split forever, but Johannes wins a small life annuity from the city of Mainz, which must suffice.



Johannes sinks into the start of a lifelong conflict angered by the unfairness of inequality, the cruelty of a supposedly loving God, and tortured by his own longing for fame, success and recognition. He argues philosophy with his elders but is uplifted when he meets Peter Schöffler, a scribe who studied in Paris and shares Johannes' frustrations. Johannes turns his skills to craftsmanship, moving from one hapless money-making project to another. Despite his doubts in God's kindness, he joins the lay brothers at the monastery, welcomed as an entertaining but aggravating personality who the brothers regard as a good man battling with his faith.



The challenge of making written works available to the masses still preoccupies Johannes and he starts to cast individual letters that work as moveable type. But what he needs now is a press that can repeatedly turn out whole pages.



He eventually persuades sceptical lawyer and money lender Johann Fust that his dream will work, and with Fust's backing, and Schöffer's help, starts building a wooden press. Fust's daughter Christina is secretly sweet on Schöffer and helps them when she can.



When Johannes chooses the bible as his first book, the brothers at the monastery warn him the Church will come down hard on him for tampering with sacred texts. Defiantly, Gutenberg produces the first printed bible to public acclaim. But funds have run out, and Fust, seeing a profitable opportunity, forecloses on the loan, seizes the press and takes Schöffer with him. Schöffer is plagued with guilt betraying his mentor, but by now, he and Christina are engaged to be married.



Under the company name Fust and Schöffer, the two men produce thousands of bibles and other works in Latin, maintaining the Church's control by limiting who can read it. They claim the invention of the press as their own and put their names and date on each edition. Too late Johannes realises that he should have done the same. Bitter and almost destitute, he sinks into despair.





Johannes eventually finds solace in the fact that books are now being printed all across Europe and dreams of a time when they can be printed not solely in Latin, but in mother tongues, so that all can have access to knowledge. But there is a shift in progressive thinking and educated lay people gather to share and disseminate information. Johannes returns to making automata and mechanical puzzles to entertain children, while reading to them by translating the Latin as he speaks and encouraging them to think and imagine. Those who stood by him remind him of his achievement, and that he has changed the world for the better - and he finally finds acceptance and contentment as the first German bible is placed into his hands.



# TREATMENT



# Act One

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## Introduction of the World and the Dream

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## I. OPENING SCENE

- The year is 1440. We open in Mainz, Germany, where the Church holds immense power. Books are rare, handwritten, and only accessible to the elite.
- At St. Viktor, young Johannes is inspired by the writings and musical compositions of his predecessor Hildegard of Bingen. Johannes witnesses a Church scribe painstakingly copying a manuscript by hand. He is fascinated by the intricacy and inefficiency of the process.



## 2. JOHANNES' WORKSHOP

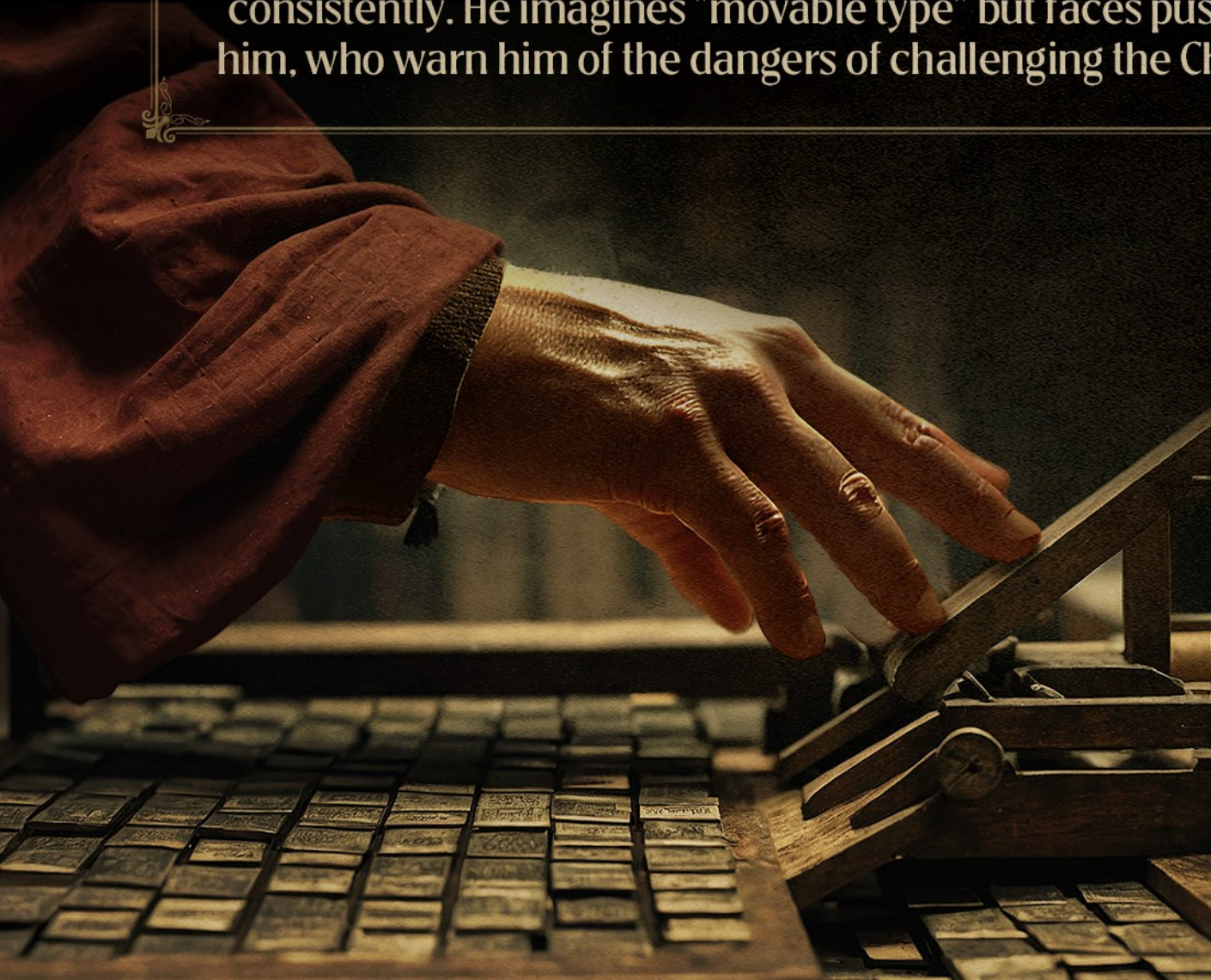
- Years later, we see Gutenberg as a craftsman with a restless spirit and a workshop full of metalworks.
- He experiments with tools and discusses the power of knowledge with his apprentices. Johannes believes knowledge should be accessible to everyone, not just the elite.





### 3. THE INITIAL IDEA – MOVABLE TYPE

Johannes conceives a vision for a machine that could replicate text quickly and consistently. He imagines "movable type" but faces pushback from the people around him, who warn him of the dangers of challenging the Church's control over knowledge.





## 4. INTRODUCING ALLIES AND RIVALS

### ALLIES:

A sympathetic local merchant, Peter Schöffler, who shares Johannes' vision, and a young woman, Elsa, who sees the potential of his idea and is intrigued by his passion.



### RIVAL:

Johann Fust, a wealthy but skeptical investor who reluctantly finances Johannes' initial experiments but doubts the viability and profitability of the printing press.



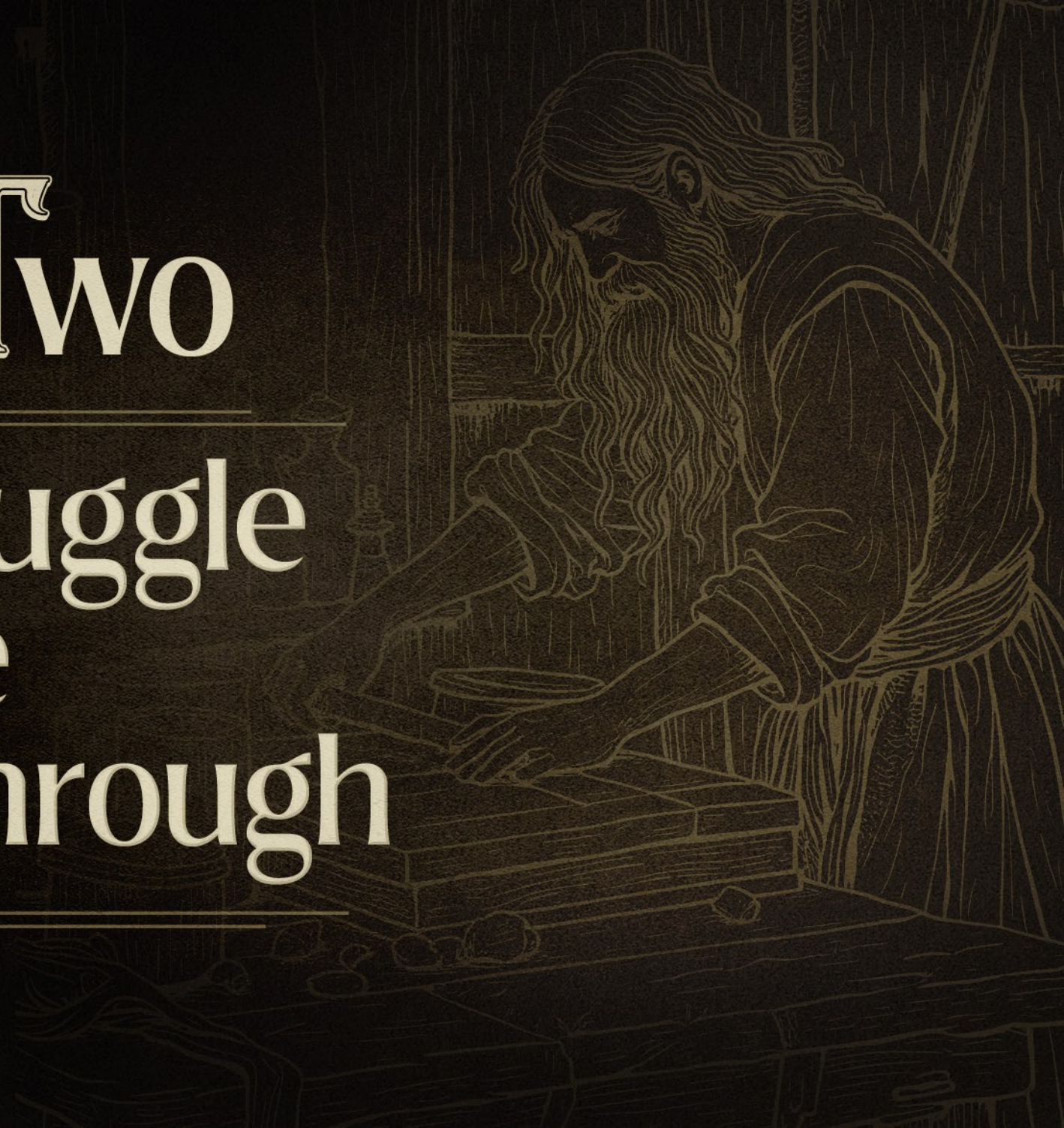


# Act Two

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## The Struggle and the Breakthrough

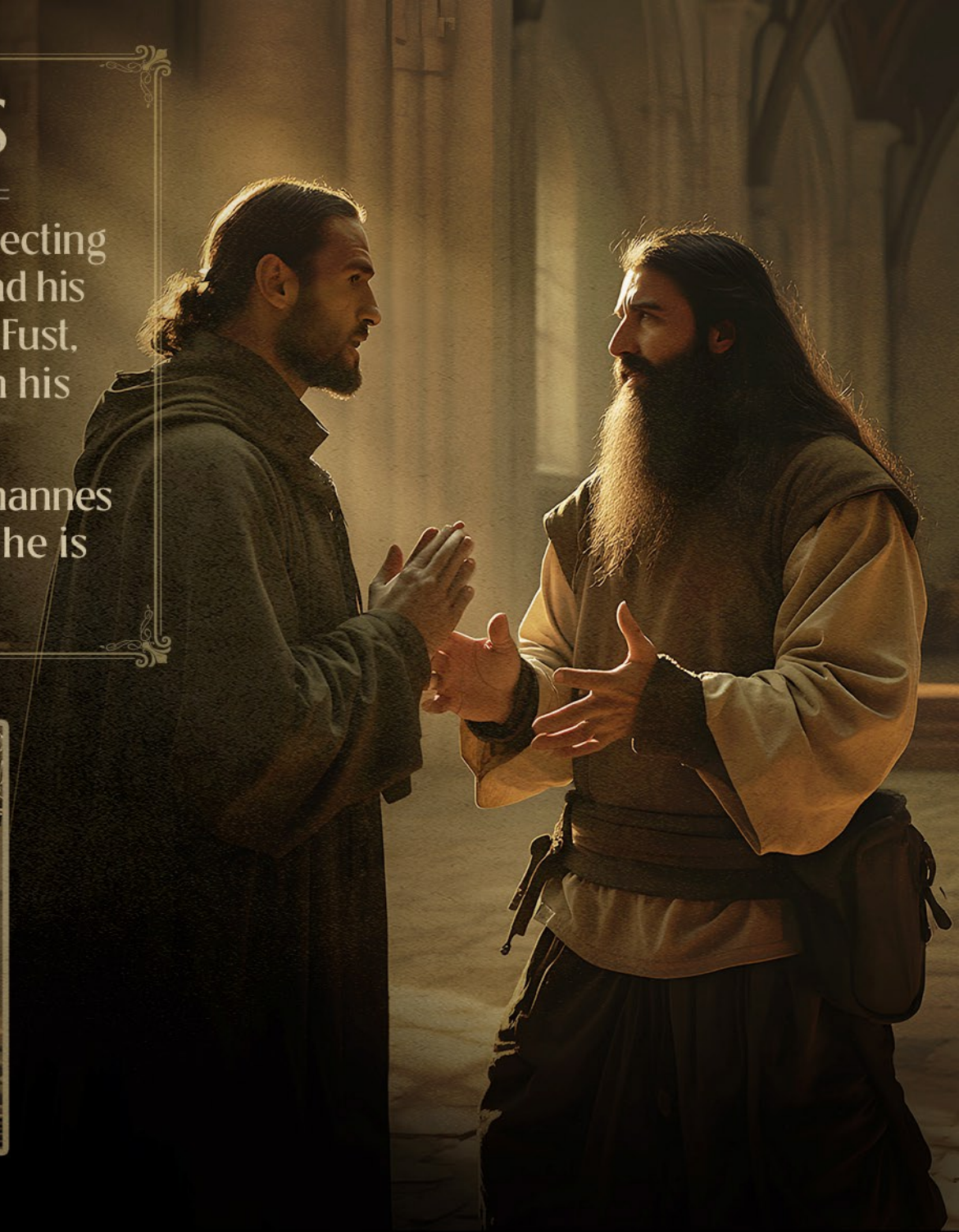
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# 1. OBSTACLES TO SUCCESS

- Johannes pours all his resources into perfecting the printing press, but the process is slow, and his funds run dry. The work causes friction with Fust, who is increasingly demanding returns on his investment.
- The Church, growing suspicious, warns Johannes against his efforts to print, implying that he is tampering with sacred texts.





## 2. THE FIRST BOOK - THE FIRST BIBLE

- Despite the challenges, Johannes decides that the Bible, the most important text of the time, should be his first printed work.
- He and Peter work day and night on creating the first-ever printed Bible, experiencing both breakthroughs and setbacks, from ink challenges to mechanical failures. Fust's daughter Christina helps when she can, and she and Peter start to fall in love.







### 3. GROWING TENSIONS WITH FUST

- Fust, furious over delays and lack of profit, confronts Johannes and threatens to repossess the printing press if Johannes doesn't produce a finished book soon.
- In a climactic moment, Johannes presents Fust with a completed page from the printed Bible. For the first time, Fust sees the potential but insists on taking more control of the operation.



## 4. BETRAYAL

- As Gutenberg's press nears completion, Fust betrays him by seizing control of the press and the remaining funds, taking Peter Schöffer with him. Peter is now engaged to Christina and has torn loyalties. Fust and Peter produce the first printed Bibles and claim the invention as their own, leaving Johannes without credit or income.





# Act Three

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## Redemption and Legacy

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*“The priests reacted at first with astonishment, then disbelief and finally doubt, before scoffing at my audacity to print Gods word. They saw their control of the people was waining.”*

Johannes Gutenberg 1460





# I. DESPAIR AND ISOLATION

- Gutenberg, now destitute and alone, watches as the world marvels at the printed Bible, unaware of the inventor behind it.
- Though he struggles with bitterness and regret, Elsa and a few loyal friends encourage him, reminding him of the impact of his work.





## 2. THE SPREAD OF KNOWLEDGE

- As Johannes' invention spreads across Europe, more printing presses are established, and books begin to circulate far beyond the walls of monasteries. However, nearly all books, including the Bible, are still printed in Latin—a language accessible only to scholars, clergy, and the elite. Despite this limitation, the presence of printed books becomes an undeniable shift in society. The potential for greater knowledge becomes visible, sparking curiosity and discussion even among those who cannot read Latin.





### 3. REALISATION

- But Johannes realizes that while his invention is transformative, its impact is still limited. The people he originally wanted to empower—the commoners—remain largely unable to understand these texts. He witnesses their frustration, as some attempt to read or gain insight but are held back by language barriers. It becomes clear that, while his invention has paved the way for change, true accessibility to knowledge has not yet been achieved. This limitation weighs on him, and he wonders if the Church and nobility will always control learning.





## 4. THE BEGINNING OF A SHIFT IN POWER

- Despite this barrier, some clergy and scholars with access to Latin begin using the press to spread progressive ideas within their circles. Small pockets of educated laypeople emerge, and the mere existence of books challenges the Church's monopoly over knowledge. Some sympathetic scholars even begin to translate and discuss certain texts in vernacular languages, sharing ideas verbally with common folk, creating an underground exchange of knowledge. In whispers and small gatherings, ideas begin to filter down, planting the seeds of future movements.







## 5. JOHANNES' REFLECTION

- Although Johannes feels a bittersweet frustration over the limitations of his invention, he finds a small solace in the ripple effect it's creating. He begins to understand that true change is gradual, and that his press is only the beginning of a much larger societal shift. His invention, even if currently restrained, is a crack in the dam of restrictive power structures. The press sets the stage for greater transformations.



## 6. RECONCILIATION WITH PETER

- Peter, seeing the injustice done to Johannes, returns to make amends, admitting that the printing press would have never existed without him. He promises to ensure Gutenberg's legacy is preserved and credited.





## 7.LEGACY

- In a powerful closing scene, a final montage salutes the massive legacy Gutenberg created and how type/ print touched ALL aspects of human progress and how technology advanced acknowledging different printing mediums - from typewriters to laptops, from giant offset lithography printers to the modest home printers of today. This final scene acknowledges how Gutenberg's revolutionary invention shaped society in general and establishes a fast paced, visually inspired "time travel" through the ages that showcase human communications and the significant shifts in human progress that are attributable to Johannes' work.





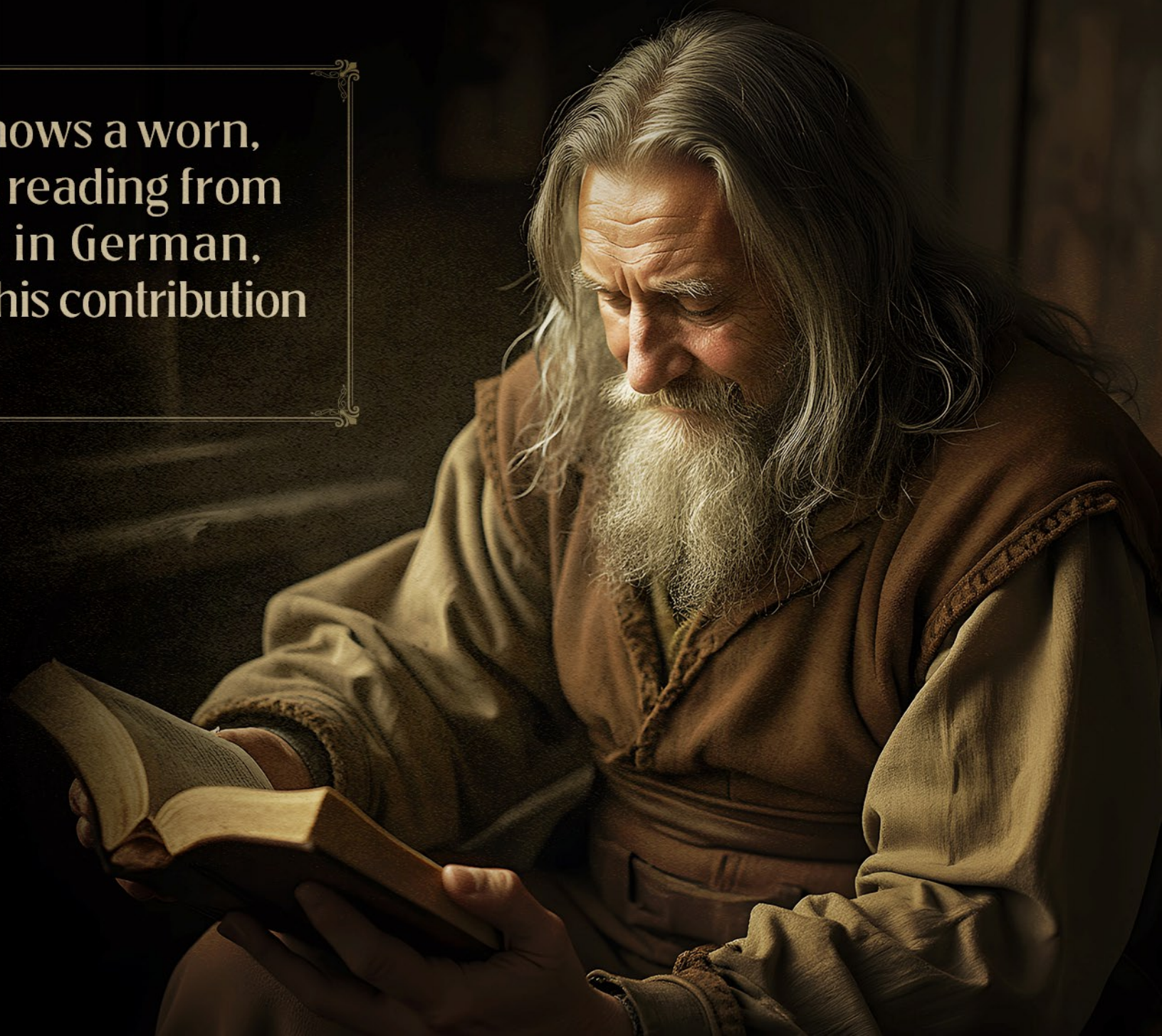
● Johannes seeks and is sought by philosophers who are fearful of what might happen if common people have more access to knowledge. One argues that without the guidance and teaching of the church, men may interpret theology to suit their own ends, resulting in chaos. Another that the press may become the tool of the devil and fall into the wrong hands. A third fears his invention may tempt men to believe that wisdom lies in the accumulation and hoarding of knowledge, while divine truth is subtle, hidden, and elusive and needs the interpretation of the highly educated . Will the press truly guide men toward understanding or merely fill their minds with vanity and false certainties?

● Unfazed, Gutenberg argues back that the more a man learns, the closer he comes to the truth. He is convinced that his invention will bring the liberation of the human mind.

● Johannes realises that his press is a polarising creation, and that those who want power to rest with the church have vested interest in keeping the population ignorant and malleable. It spurs him to greater effort, imagining the farmer reading at his hearth, the noblewoman discussing philosophy with her maid. He sees his friend Elsa is more than capable of clever argument, casting her influence over Christina in fiery debates that keep Johannes and Peter enthralled and the women exhilarated. Already, it is clear that the press sparks ideas and excitement even when it is not producing printed pages.



The final shot shows a worn, older Johannes reading from a Bible printed in German, quietly proud of his contribution to humanity.







# THEMES

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- **Knowledge and Power:** The film explores the tension between knowledge as a source of empowerment for the masses and as a tool for control by those in power.
- **Innovation and Sacrifice:** Gutenberg's story illustrates the sacrifices inventors make to bring transformative ideas to life.
- **Legacy and Recognition:** The story contemplates the bittersweet reality that some of history's greatest minds were unrecognized in their time.



# TONE AND STYLE

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- **Historical Authenticity:** Rich in period detail, costumes, and architecture to immerse viewers in the 15th century.
- **Inspirational Yet Tragic:** While the invention changes history, the narrative does not shy away from the personal and professional costs inventors make to bring transformative ideas to life.
- **Character-Driven Drama:** Focus on the inner lives of Johannes and those around him, with complex relationships reflecting the human cost of revolutionary ideas.





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