

the books by theme as exhibited is the only possible exception. On visiting the exhibition, I was given an exhibition guide, a single sheet folded to create four panels. This included a brief introduction by Chris Loker and all of the items, listed according to theme.

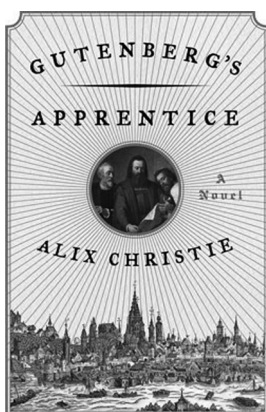
This catalogue should become a standard reference text for a survey of children's books. It also offers a starting point for your own game of which books would be in your personal 100. A different game might be to name a book that you think was wrongly excluded from this list. I noticed that John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) is not included but his *Book for Boys and Girls* (1686) is. Thomas Day's *History of Sandford and Merton* (1783) is another title not included, but I will spare you the arguments for its inclusion.

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone is the 100th book chronologically, but I understand that the final book to be selected came down to a choice between *Mary Poppins* and *Pippi Longstocking*. One was in, the other not. Unfortunately, it is too late for you to go and see the exhibition to discover the answer. I will let you take up the discussion with your friends and purchase the catalogue yourself when you wish to find out who is correct.

~ REVIEWED BY CHESTER GRYSKI

Gutenberg's Apprentice: A Novel

BY ALIX CHRISTIE
(HARPERCOLLINS, 2014, \$34.99)



THIS WORK IS A BRAVE ATTEMPT to fictionalize the emergence of the typographic book in 15th-century Mainz by following the travails and fortunes of one of the key figures of that time, the apprentice of the title and the story's protagonist,

Peter Schoeffer. The author, California-born Alix Christie, is a printer, journalist and now a first-time novelist who was immersed in the world of books from an early age.

Schoeffer's antagonist is Johann Gutenberg, a difficult subject for a historical novel since the record of his life is sparse. Essential facts such as his date of birth, what he looked like, the full extent of his education, his location and occupation at various times, and the nature of his affectionate relationships are all still opaque to us despite years of dedicated research.

To draw a picture of Gutenberg, Christie has, she tells us, "relied heavily on Guy Bechtel's... *Gutenberg [et l'invention de l'imprimerie]: Une enquête* and the art historical insights of Dr. Eberhard König."¹ She mined much, but by no means all, of the extensive historical literature regarding Gutenberg, and benefited from the advice of world experts on her topic.

Peter Schoeffer (or Schöffer), meanwhile, was born around 1425 in Gernsheim, near Mainz. The historical Schoeffer was foreman in the printing workshop that resulted from the partnership of Gutenberg and his main banker, Johann Fust. Documentation by and concerning Schoeffer starts from his days as a calligrapher and manuscript copyist at the Université de Paris. After the collapse of the Gutenberg/Fust partnership in 1455, Fust and Schoeffer continued with their own firm that produced more than 110 books, including the famous *Mainz Psalter*, certainly one of the top 10 books of all time. As a well-trained calligrapher, Schoeffer was the ideal person to help design some of the type sorts used by Gutenberg and Fust.

If you are knowledgeable about the life of Gutenberg, you will recognize the novel's deviations from the established timelines related to the printing of the 42-line Bible and accept that Christie employs literary licence to provide a more dramatic climax to her story.

Yet, the book sometimes fails to seize the potential for building dramatic tension that should have been available given the extraordinary and dramatic events that influenced the working life of Gutenberg and later Schoeffer. For example, we learn in passing about the Armagnac mercenaries that threatened Strasbourg, where

Gutenberg did much of his early work. However, we do not learn how they were formed, where they came from, that they were an ill-disciplined military formation and thus exceptionally dangerous, and why they likely forced Gutenberg to abandon the city and return to Mainz.

The portrayal of Gutenberg raises serious questions regarding how accurately historical figures should be treated within the narrative of such a novel. He is described as wild in appearance, profane, bad tempered, cruel in his conduct, a “rabid,” “wolfish” “madman” whose “canines gleamed.” Gutenberg’s extraordinary contributions to human progress make it difficult to accept the author’s conclusion that “the final disposition of the master’s soul is far from certain.” This exaggerated portrait is too much like a movie script with an overdrawn villain. A more subtle approach could have produced a more nuanced story.

Gutenberg was the prototypical inventor/entrepreneur, a kind of person we know well in our time. He needed to raise extraordinary amounts of capital, and it will come as no surprise that he needed to avoid repaying that capital for as long as he could. An analysis of his typefaces leads us to understand that he attempted, and succeeded, to reproduce hand lettering in metal.

In the latter part of the age of metal type, a normal type case had about 89 spaces for the various types (each a metal block with a raised glyph, “A shape used to represent a character or symbol within a writing system”).² Gutenberg’s 42-line Bible type had about 290 glyphs. In addition to 47 capital letters, there were 243 other characters that included lower case letters, abbreviations, punctuation marks, ligatures and abutting types that together allowed the superb spacing of his chosen text.³

Therefore, there is strong evidence that he was a single-minded perfectionist and a strong character. It is doubtful that he could have accomplished his aims without great persuasive powers and accomplished interpersonal skills. The wild appearance that Christie attributes to her Gutenberg character would be counter to the mores and manners of his social class. Gutenberg was of and from the city elite; he was well educated, well travelled, and could

not have exerted the influence he did without considerable credibility among his peers.

If the portrayal of Gutenberg is problematic, Schoeffer is a more compelling and successful figure. We learn the nature of apprenticeships and see the inner workings of a printing plant that is also a metallurgical and casting facility where colourful characters work long hours. Among its many virtues, this novel is particularly strong in integrating within the narrative the religious beliefs of the period. The knowledge of Scripture that Schoeffer would have possessed is beautifully used here in a recurring motif.

We also learn much about daily life, trade, transportation, issues related to manuscript production, the state of medical practice and herbal medicine, class relations, intra-church rivalries, the organization of commercial fairs, the exploitative use of political power, and corrupt financial practices of the Church and city elites. The real-life tensions between Fust and Gutenberg are well drawn. There is of course a romantic story involving the young apprentice, which adds a well-developed subplot—and a tragic note—to the tale. An upbeat ending as the world begins to absorb the wonder of printed books concludes the story.

Alix Christie’s well-researched novel illuminates the lives and times of the first printers in the Western world to work in metal type. Book lovers will find much to appreciate in this novel. Furthermore, the author’s website, www.alixchristie.com, is well constructed, and the novel’s website, www.gutenbergsapprentice.com, includes a bibliography where I was happy to find listed the Alcuin Society’s publication *In Praise of Scribes* (1977).

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1. Alix Christie, *Gutenberg’s Apprentice: A Novel* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2014), 403.
 2. Theodore Rosendorf, *The Typographic Desk Reference* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2008), 13.
 3. Albert Kapr, *Johann Gutenberg: The Man and His Invention*, 3rd ed. (Leicester, UK: Scolar Press, 1996), 159.

~ REVIEWED BY RALPH STANTON