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Printing Process Errors

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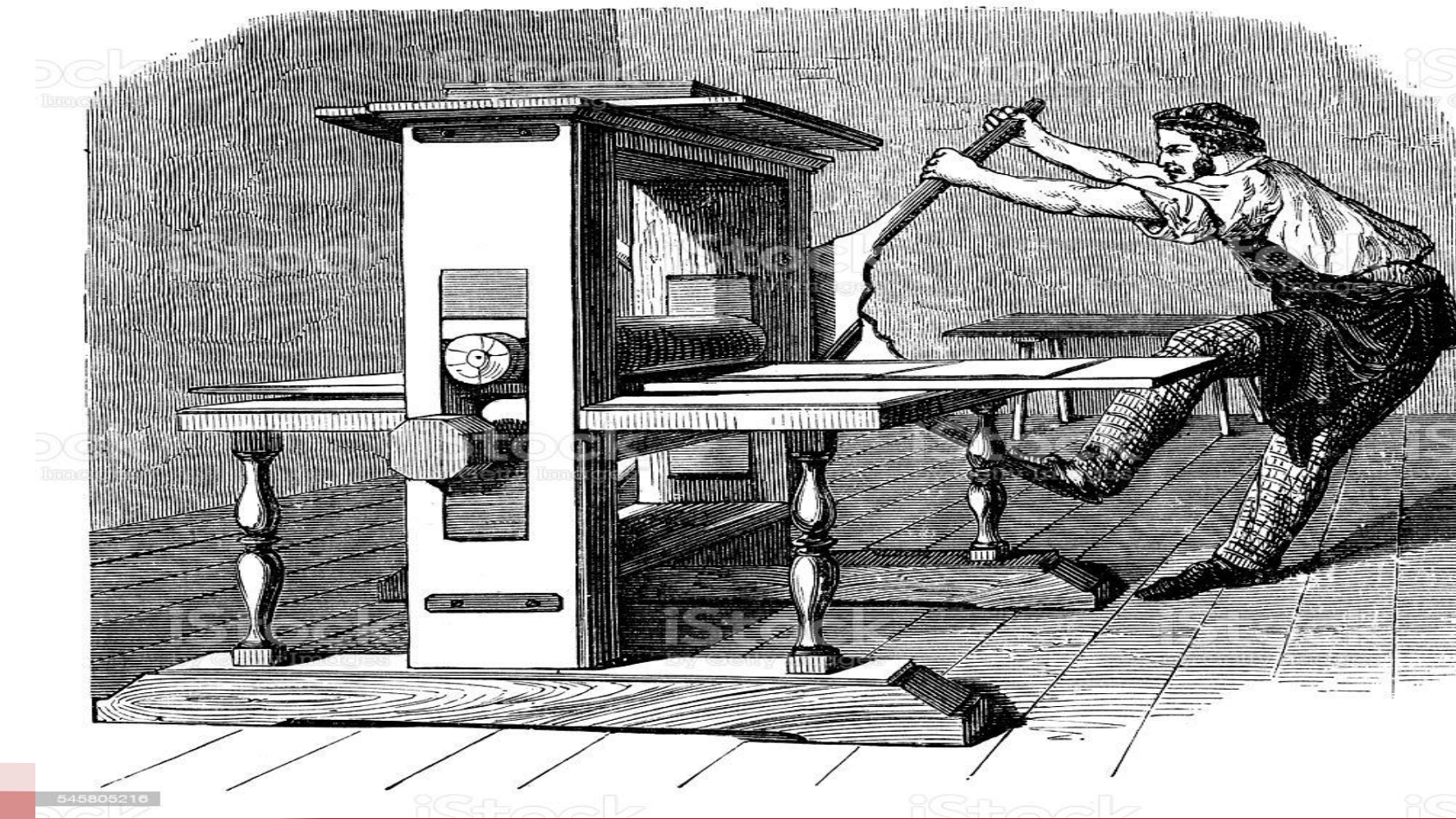
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Printing Process Errors

McKenzie Gregg

University of Northern Colorado



The Problem

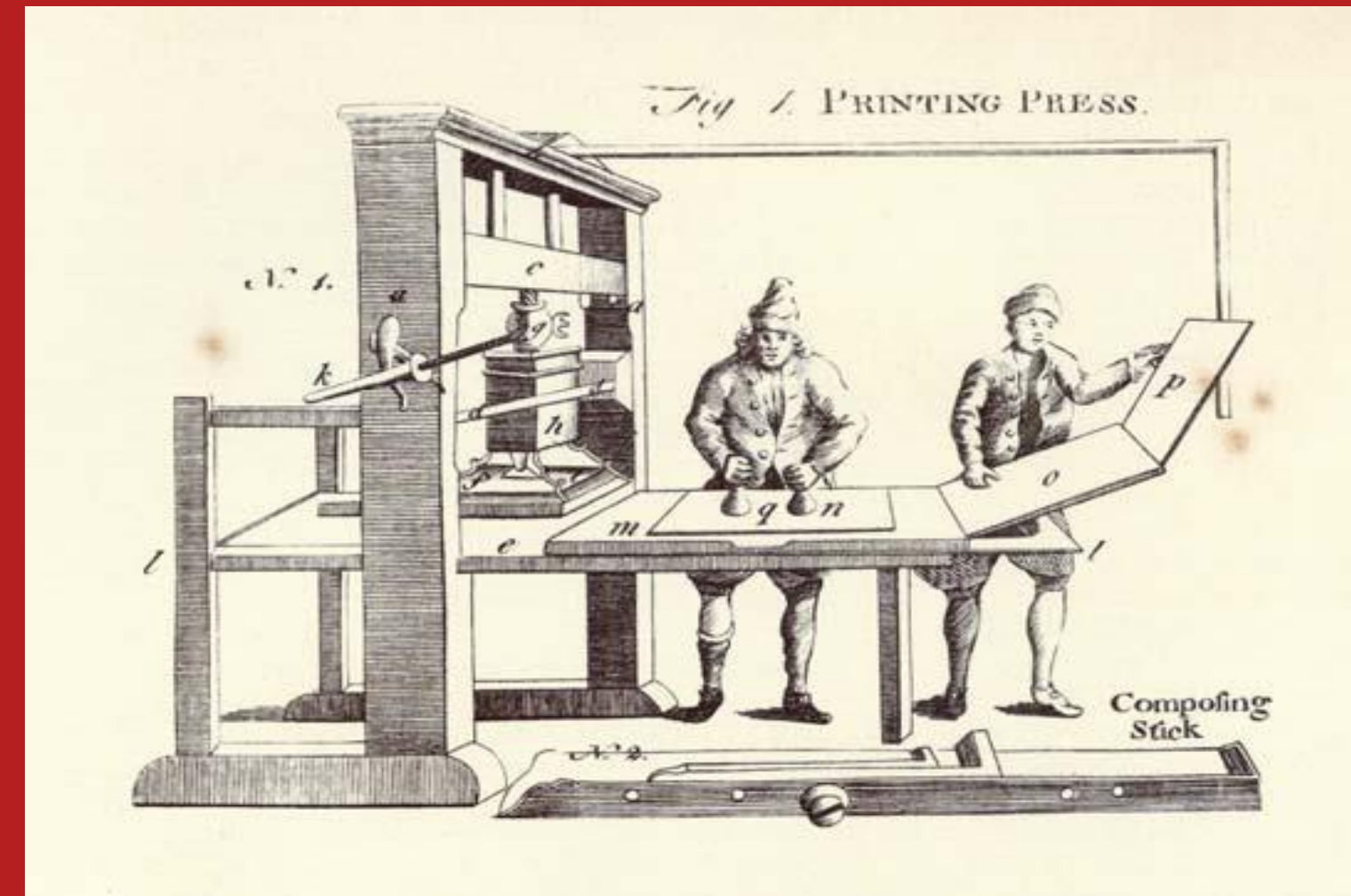
Since the dawn of the printing press, brought to England by William Caxton in 1476, there have been many types of errors that have changed text as we know it. Less errors occur in the printing process today, but in the early history of the machine many errors were prevalent. How and why did these errors occur?

Abstract

Focusing on the use of the printing press, brought to England by William Caxton in 1476; my central purpose of this project is to demonstrate the errors that can go wrong during the printing process. I would like to analyze excerpts from Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Nun's Priest's Tale* (from *The Canterbury Tales*)(18th Century edits) how these excerpts were edited, printed, in order to demonstrate all the errors that could happen from the editing, printing, to distribution process. I will go over definitions of different kinds of errors during the editing and printing process, such as: accidental versus substantive editing, foul case errors, cancels, errata, and corruptions. From examining these excerpts, I will demonstrate all the different editorial styles from Speght, Dryden, Urry, and Tyrwhitt, who comes closest to the original Chaucer, and who strays a little. I will also be comparing the original text to Dryden's modernization of the text to demonstrate substantive editing. Briefly will I go over authorial intention, as we will never know the true meaning of an author, but I will demonstrate how Dryden drastically changes Chaucer's text.

Definitions of Errors

- **Accidental Editing:** Editing in details that don't affect the meaning of the text, such as variant spellings.
- **Substantive Editing:** Editing that does affect the meaning of the text, such as variant words. Punctuation and capitalization may or may not be substantive, depending on whether they change the meaning of a text.
- **Cancel:** A part of a book that is substituted for an original part with the aim of modification.
- **Censorship:** Suppression of work that is deemed to be objectionable on political, religious, moral or other grounds.
- **Corruption:** The introduction of errors into the text in the process of transmission.
- **Errata:** List of typographical errors occurring in a book, along with corrections.
- **Foul Case Error:** Foul case refers to the accidental appearance of a set in the wrong compartment of a type case, usually the result of inaccurate distribution.



So How are Errors Introduced?

- The editing process can take its toll on what a scribe, editor, or compositor thinks a text should look like by either accidental or substantive editing.
- Extended amount of standing, poor light, fatigue, can cause the compositor to be fallible to errors.
- A cancel can be added to a text but not modified or modified in the wrong way.
- Texts can be edited or eradicated due to censorship of the time.
- Errata can be added to the text, aiming to fix a text, but could not be changed in time, or the errata leaf/page can be lost.
- Certain letters could be in the wrong section of a miniscule (lower case) or majuscule (upper case) case, causing the wrong letter to be printed.
- The compositor may forget a word, letter, punctuation mark, when setting the forme, causing a misprint.
- Moveable type could be worn down from extended use, causing mistype, or splotches.

What is Authorial Intention?

Typically, we think of Authorial Intention as thinking about what the author meant with their text. In this case of the printing process, is a "key concept for some methods of textual editing. Some editors want to identify the words that the author intended to write, and to distinguish them from errors that have crept into the text and/or modifications introduced by others without the author's consent" (Levy, Mole, 180) though authorial intention is not stable and is still a complicated topic today.

