

## *Reas'ning But To Err*

TEMPLE G. PORTER  
*Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

Americans are great hobbyists. For the unimaginative there are supermarket style hobby shops where they can get pretanned leather, premolded plaster, preselected and prepolished stones for jewelry-making, *ad infinitum*. Then there are shops for collectors of different kinds, such as philatelists and numismatists. But there are some hobbies for which there are no corner shops, and upon which no financial empires are likely to be built. I know a man who collects railroad locomotives, another who presses the leaves of Chinese trees (which are hard to come by these days), and yet another who collects spider webs and mounts them on black velvet. I, too, am a collector, species *logophilia*—I collect words.

Words, as everybody knows, come in virtually millions of sizes, shapes and combinations. To classify all the uses and abuses of words is a task beyond the ken of the ordinary grammarian. Any beginning of such an enormous project must include a class of words of special interest to me: typographical errors. I get my cue from Alexander Pope, who gave us "The proper study of mankind is man," and further on in the same essay states that man is ". . . Born but to die, and reas'ning but to err. . . ." Typos, as those in word biz calls them, come in many forms. Since I know of no other attempt to classify them, I will impose my own system of classification:

FIRST, there are incomprehensible blunders: ". . . xbl gvtrpjk lhjtrkeosixI . . ."

SECOND, some blunders, much like the first, place gibberish in a context wherein a certain sense emerges. Here, for instance, is a movie review culled from the Washington (D.C.) *Daily News*:

Sitting in the middle of the bed,  
being wheeled across London by  
three attentive young men, Nancy  
falls in love with the conveyance.  
Need I say what the outcome is?  
Kfln. Shrd cmfw cmfw cm.

THIRD, there are changes in the form of a word which results in the complete reversal of the writer's intention, as witness this sentence from the FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin:

We would hope that a record-breaking  
summer of strife and lawfulness can  
be averted.

FOURTH, the linotypist, we presume, gets the lines from two or more stories mixed up, as in this article, quoted in full, from the Davenport (Iowa) *Times-Democrat*:

DRINKING NOTE: For a mild and tasty appetizer, try three dog, put a drop of castor oil in each eye to protect them from soap-parts of tomato juice with one part sherry.

FIFTH, there are those messages that execute an about-face for the want of one intended letter, as we can see in this headline from the Little Rock (Ark.) *Democrat*:

DECLINE IN MORALITY  
SAID TREAT TO U. S.

SIXTH, there are errors that carry a self-fulfilling message, like this headline from the Toronto (Ont.) *Financial Post*:

DEFECIT BUDGETS LIKE LIQOUR  
TOO MANY AND YOU GET STUPID

SEVENTH, we have writing from which a single letter has been dropped, as in our fifth category, only this time the effect is not to reverse the intended meaning, but rather to transform it into a wildly hilarious statement. As evidence, I give you the following article, quoted *in toto*, from the Milwaukee *Journal*:

Southern Michigan's peasant population, now in the midst of its nesting season, is up about 25% over the spring of 1964.

EIGHTH, we have what is either an inspired solecism or an intentional twist from a bored reporter. Whatever the cause, the effect is a Spoonerism that makes sense, as in this UPI wire lead, which must go down in reportorial annals as the gayest of all attributions:

According to informed  
White Horse souses, . . .

NINTH, there is the situation where, because of a linotypist's peccadillo with just one letter, a crucial word shuffles off its mortal coil and the whole sense of the article reverses itself and, not content with this alone, permits the entrance of an otherwise unuttered truth. This sample is from a Reuters article, dateline Harrogate, England, May 29, 1967. The article begins by stating that the overwhelming majority of 500 headmasters at the National Association of Head Teachers meeting voted to continue the caning of their captive students. One headmaster justified his use of the cane, and with help from the linotypist it came out this way:

But we are not living in Utopia.  
Creating, lying, stealing and  
pornographic scribbling still  
distresses us, and what are the  
remedies to be when kindness fails?

We must agree with this headmaster; if there is any certain remedy for creating, it must be a sound thrashing with a cane.

Of the same sort must be this headline from the Nyack (N.Y.) *Rockland County Journal-News*:

GLUE FACTORIES HAVE STOPPED  
USING OLD HAGS FOR ADHESIVES

TENTH, there is writing that is not incorrect in any literal sense, but is ambiguous to the point of being ludicrous. These we cannot call typos, since, presumably, the linotypist rendered it precisely as it was given to him. For instance, an Iowa newspaper recently headlined a story about the marriage of a boy from Manly, Iowa, to a girl from a town named Fertile, in this way:

MANLY BOY MARRIES FERTILE GIRL

Isn't it wonderful? More of these abound than you would suspect. An Illinois newspaper couldn't resist this headline about nuptials between a boy from Oblong, Illinois and a girl from Normal, Illinois:

OBLONG BOY MARRIES NORMAL GIRL

We cannot suppose that these ten categories exhaust the classification needs of typographical errors. This is a mere beginning. In conclusion, let me invite all who are interested to join the adventure of the hunt, the challenge of classifying, and the joy of beholding the many trophies of logophilia.

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## *Letter to the Editor*

February 4, 1969

### WORD CHESS

To the Editor:

Here are some words to add to the list (the formidable, impressive list) of those discovered by Dr. Jean Sabine in the "word chess" problem printed in *WORD WAYS* (Vol. 1, No. 4, page 236):

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|-----------------------|-------------|
| 1. CHOMP              | 7. LANKEST  |
| 2. CHOPS (jaw, mouth) | 8. LIGATE   |
| 3. DANKEST            | 9. PYRITE   |
| 4. FRANKEST           | 10. PYRITES |
| 5. HOSEN              | 11. RANKEST |
| 6. HOSTAL             |             |

D. A. Drury  
*Long Beach, California*