

FUMBLING AND STALLING: MORE EDITORIAL LAPSES

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A few decades ago, IBM and several other high-tech companies invested millions in an attempt to develop a high-speed semiconductor that would operate at low temperatures. The circuit, called a *Josephson junction*, was ultimately abandoned as impractical. But not before a management consultant referred to the device in a speech. His secretary, transcribing a recording of the talk, rendered the name as *Joseph's injunction*.

This serendipitous coinage might be of value to Biblical scholars. Joseph's injunction: "Keepeth thy hands off the coat!" At any rate, this incident demonstrates once again the charm of unintended puns and the often amusing consequences of typographical errors, ambiguities and anomalies.

Among the most common solecisms are malapropisms and misspellings: "The state has a duty to all its awful residents." "That would be paramount to saying one corrupt doctor makes all doctors corrupt." "It would be disconcerting to find a really viscous review." "Due to incremental weather...."

My favorite form, the spoonerism or chiasmus or metathesis or transposition error (see title above) is always in fashion. Two recent examples: A newspaper printed the name "Penny Bassett Hackett" as "Penny Backett Hassett." And on a TV newscast here in New York City, the announcer reported a minor arrest thus: "He was charged with operating a license without a business."

Below, a choice selection of bloopers, along with my derisive and caustic ripostes:

The New York Times, December 19, 2001:

"If your child is doing well, with this legislation, they will do better," said Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts. "If your child is failing, with this legislation they will get the help they need. Help is on its way."

Are senators eligible?

The New York Times, Corrections, April 10, 2003:

A picture caption in some copies on Sunday with an article about the unveiling of a statue of Abraham Lincoln and his son in Richmond, Va., misstated the son's name. He was Tad, not Tab.

Tab Lincoln, star of *Gettysburg Surf Party*.

Classified ad, *New York Press*, January 26, 1990:
Trompe L'Oeil Classes

But are they real?

The New York Times, November 6, 2002:

Manchester, England — The first couple of earthquakes were, understandably, upsetting. "I was in a sandwich shop buying lunch and a lady started screaming, 'It's the end of the world as we know it!'"

Do not panic. The cliché you save may be your own.

The Wall Street Journal, column, March 7, 2001:

"Hamlet would have been a great play even if it had be typed by a monkey."

Check the staff.

The New York Times, National Briefing, July 7, 2001:

Florida: Aliens Found at Space Center

Isn't that the objective?

Teaser for news feature, WNBC TV, NYC, November 14, 1986:

"Sexual harassment on the job. Starts Tuesday at 6 and 11."

Thanks for the warning.

The New York Times, January 14, 1984:

A new shop called Top Service ... promises shoe-repair service in under 20 minutes at competitive prices.... It is owned by Pierre Gallean, founder of a nationwide chain of 27 similar stores called Servix in France.

The original name might give them a marketing edge.

The New York Times, Sunday Styles section, August 10, 2003:

A picture caption last Sunday with an article about the rock group Fountains of Wayne misstated the given name of a band member. He is Jody Porter, not Judy.

Alice Cooper and Marilyn Manson: Call your offices.

Announcement of Sunday sermon, Marble Collegiate Church, NYC, July 20, 2002:

"Wind Not at Your Back? Turn Around."

But then you're going the wrong way!

For the final word on the subject, I will quote famed science-fiction author Poul Anderson, who once exclaimed in frustration: "Thud and blunder!"