# Language

Word of the month Typo

Typo was originally a short form of *typographer* – that is, a printer. Its first known use is 1816, but by the end of the century it had come to have its present-day meaning: a typographical error. Of course it leaves open the question of whether an error is inadvertent or deliberate.

I choose this word because the liturgy at this time of year reminds me of several famous typos in the history of Bible printing. On Tuesday July 28 we had Matthew 13.43, which ends with (in one translation): "Who has ears to hear, let him hear" – except that an 1810 edition left out the *h* on the first *hear*. And coming up shortly, Wednesday August 19, is the parable of the vineyard – or the *Parable of the Vinegar*, as the heading appeared in a 1717 edition.

Neither of these, though, is as serious as the most famous typo of all – *Thou shalt commit adultery* – in the so-called "Wicked" Bible that was printed in 1631. An accident? Who knows!

I've kept my eye open for enjoyable typos over the years – though not to the extent of the American radio producer Kermit Schafer, who published an entire book of "typo-bloopers" in 1977.
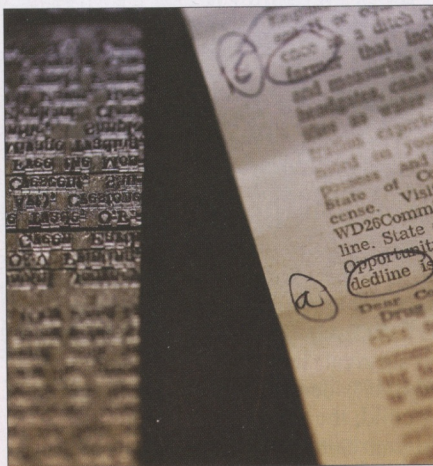
Freudian slips?

Some in my collection are sheer genius, and cry out for new definitions. *Disagreenments* – disputes over environmental policy? *Nagazines* – periodicals aimed at people whose relationships are breaking down? *Mewdicine* – training for vets who specialise in cats? And when I was editing encyclopedias, years ago, I remember the relief when I caught the entry on modern art just before the book went to press: it contained the

sentence *Such works are intended to appal in their own right*. There was also *Carolingian rat*. My typesetter must have been having an off-day.

There are four kinds of typo, evidently: additional letters, omitted letters, substituted letters, and reversed letters. It's the first kind especially that has often been called Freudian, as these errors require an extra keystroke. So, to take some of my own typos, what was going on in my subconscious when I wrote *curstomers*, *peerformers*, *geoilogy*, and the *trypology of language*? And when I was illustrating English word order, why did I switch from *the cat chased the dog* to *the god chased the cat*?

Religion is not immune. My favourite is the *Index of Prohibited Boos*, which is somehow rather appropriate. I also have a description of the Vatican as a *scared city*, which might easily have headed some press reports in recent months. And in a grammar book I once came across *proper and common nuns*. Saint Augustine of Hippo, the patron saint of printers, must have been sleeping on those occasions. Or maybe he wasn't.

DAVID CRYSTAL