WHAT NOW? NOT “WOW!”: NEW SPOONERISMS

DON HAUPTMAN
New York, New York
donhauptman@nyc.rr.com

Each August, cartoonist Jim Siergey and I collaborate on a collection of illustrated spoonerisms for *Word Ways*. Invariably, however, I have more specimens than space allows. And some don’t readily lend themselves to visualization, requiring instead a verbal setup or a narrative or shaggy-dog-story form. Here then is a fresh batch, along with a few examples that, to be strictly accurate, are not spoonerisms but word reversals.

- Homer Simpson heard about Chamberlain’s appeasement of Hitler in 1938. His reaction: “Better the Neville you . . . d’oh!”

- The staff of a high-tech company assembled to discuss a proposed new venture. One executive promptly unleashed a barrage of obscenities, cowing the young engineer who presented the idea. After an awkward pause, he hesitantly responded, “Gosh, you sure don’t wince merdes!”

- Nowadays, teenage girls know so much that it’s tough for their beleaguered dads to keep up. This phenomenon is known as “the well-aware daughter gap.”

- To the best of our knowledge, scholar Gordon Lish and his wife never co-authored a book about a primitivist art movement. But had they done so, the work might have been titled *The Tale of the Fauves and Lishes*.

- Restaurateurs are accustomed to Mr. Brooks’ frequent complaints and some decline to serve him. But because such refusal is discriminatory, they fear arrest. The crime? Endangering the Mel fare of a whiner.

- In 17th-century France, a family of middle-class merchants quietly achieved wealth by designing elaborate bracelets adorned with trinkets. This little-known historical incident will be dramatized in the forthcoming film, *The Discreet Bourgeoisie of the Charm*.

- At the rehab center for disabled basketball players, sympathetic attendants commiserate with each other, sadly confiding, “If these talls could walk!”

- Should military recruitment rates continue to decline, the situation might inspire a feature film. Suggested title: *No Men for Old Country*.
• It’s conceivable that, while in college, Connecticut governor Jodi Rell was subjected to a crude sorority initiation ritual. If so, the chief instigator might have sported a boastful tattoo: “Born to haze Rell.”

• Orthodox Jews who want a divorce must ask religious authorities for a get, a special document that’s extremely difficult to obtain. Hence the expression, “Nice get if you can work it!”

• According to news reports, the problem of obesity in children is becoming worse. But the cause is not difficult to understand. After all, every parent wants to experience “the fatter of little Pete.”

• When Sen. Claiborne Pell proposed his program of college tuition grants, some observers regarded it as a daring move. In the halls of Congress, staffers remarked, “Pell’s ballsy!”

• In a newly discovered composition by composer John Cage, the soloist is directed to utter the mantra “Ummm...” for three hours. This characteristically minimalist work is called The Umming of Cage.

• A celibate Valley Girl began to worry that if she didn’t take action soon, she might never have children. Thus reminded of her biological clock, she placed an online Personals ad with the headline: “Chaste. Like, tickin’!”

• Anticipating a critical battle, Ulysses M. Grant couldn’t predict if the rebel army would attack from an Atlantic Ocean redoubt—or if the assault would instead be from the opposite direction and led by the Confederate general himself. So a simple coded alert system was devised: “One if by sand, two if by Lee.”

• Former presidential aspirant Mitt Romney earned his fortune at the prestigious consulting firm Bain & Company. According to rumor, the founder retired abruptly and mysteriously. To this day, people wonder, “Whatever happened to J.B. Bain?”

• A recently unearthed lost book of the Old Testament reveals that those plagued with troubles were commanded to assuage their depression by baking delicious chocolate treats for every member of the community. This explains the meaning of God’s heretofore cryptic remark: “Job, you’re doing a heck of a brownie.”

• The Caucasian hip-hop musicians realized that they would never equal the talent or success of their Black counterparts. Bemoaning their fate, they lamented, “Fie! We white!”

• Movies are boring because screenwriters no longer understand how to tell stories, create a plot structure, or build a dramatic arc. Thus, what Hollywood desperately needs is not an Ark of the Covenant . . . but rather a covenant of the arc.