NAMES IN THE NEWS . . . AND NEWS IN THE NAMES
More Original Spoonerisms and Transposition Puns

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In 2006, Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie announced that they had chosen Shiloh as their new daughter’s name. Shiloh Pitt? As wags inquired at the time: What were they thinking? The celebrity couple hastily attempted to correct their mistake by giving the child both a middle name and a hyphenated surname. Earlier this year, according to news reports, the nine-year-old girl decided that she prefers to be called “John.” What? Well, at least that solves the problem.

Thanks to spoonerisms, proper names can easily become improper. An Internet search suggests that similar parental misjudgments have victimized numerous individuals, of both genders, who are unfathomably named Cass Miller. And on Facebook alone, one finds ten women, most no doubt quite pleasant, named Betty Pickering. Were all of the above mercilessly teased and bullied in school?

In my spoonerism book, Cruel and Unusual Puns (Dell, 1991), I introduced readers to famous names, both real and fictional, that neatly transpose into new meanings, creating such amusing results as Custer Beaten and Whip Van Wrinkle.

Back then, lacking the Internet, I couldn’t anticipate that I would one day encounter online more than one Mike Bessinger, though none are identified as velocipedral couriers.

Hypothetically, Yanik Sooth might be a Jewish fortuneteller. A World War II British codebreaker (many at Bletchley Park were female) would have been appropriately yclept Sadie O. Rylance. And imagine a memoir by Merlie Emory titled Early Memory.

Decades ago, a disgruntled Republican voter in New Orleans could have exclaimed, “Ray Nagin? Nay, Reagan!” The much-touted publication of Harper Lee’s long-hidden novel is presumably a decision she won’t Rue Badly. An unknown Florida clubhopper, well aware of the spoonerism, created Dory Glaze, a fictitious persona.

To conclude this onomastic roundup: Though his name has faded into desuetude, a once well-known ventriloquist went by Señor Wences (1896-1999). The illusion fooled audiences so effectively that he could have billed his act with the provocative title, “When Your Senses . . .”

Now on to the more, um, normal examples of spoonerisms, transpositions, and chiasmus.

Per my policy, I searched online to confirm originality, discovering that a bunch I had conceived had been anticipated by others. Among them: Choosers can be beggars. He doesn’t chance a stand. Moving the poll ghosts. Nate of the Station. Oh Guy Mod! Third charm’s the time.
With such duplications excluded, here’s the roster of (I hope) entirely new and original specimens:

- Crass riposte of jaded teenagers to reprimands for misbehavior: “Wouldn’t it be old if we were nicer?”

- A performing-arts company launched an ambitious stage project that blended dervishes with traditional Japanese theater. Alas, the effort failed dismally. Now officials are bemoaning “The end of the Noh as we whirled it.”

- Professional hazard experienced by lawyers: Docket piling.

- Big Bad Wolf’s lament: “I should’a bayed instead.”

- In a new horror musical, an Iowa farmer is terrified by the discovery of zombies in his wheat field. The show’s hit song: “I feel the feet move under my earth.”

- Chinese merchants tend to be friendly competitors, hence the expression, “A Han after my own mart.”

- Entitlement crisis in the Channel Islands: Sark Night of the Dole.

- Peter Pan’s testy complaint: “I can tolerate only that much of Tink.”

- Election-season optimism: Run for the White House? One for the right house.

- Motto of Nautical Woodworkers’ Union: “Making the Burled a Wetter Place.”

- Marcel Marceau: Mime Prover.

- Office workers complained about noise created by a nearby drug lab operating during business hours. The scandal became known as Meth and the Day Din.

- Resolution of legal dispute ensnarling Babe films: Hog the credit. Credit the hog.

- Epitaph for curmudgeons: “You’ll mourn yourself in the hating.”

Last but not ceased, my libertarian friends approvingly quote the cynical aphorism coined by political essayist Randolph Bourne (1886-1918): “War is the health of the state.” Suppose that prostitution were legalized and taxed, as some policy wonks propose. The similarly snarky dictum would likely be, “Whore is the wealth of the state.”

So if, unlike intuitive sailors, you don’t regard spoonerisms as a hunch of buoy, I encourage you to master the techniques displayed here . . . and sue the dame.