

IN TIME OF NEED, ONE HAS NEED OF TIME More Spoonerisms and Transposition Puns, Original and Otherwise

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This past summer, all Americans in possession of teeth were flabbergasted by the news reports. Having been repeatedly castigated by dentists and hygienists, we were now informed that flossing serves no purpose. Though skeptics doubt the existence of flying saucers, overnight we became a nation of *sighing flossers*.

I thought I had invented the quip, but Googling turned up more than 800 matches, all apparently predating the recent depressing dental details.

As the author of a book and dozens of articles on spoonerisms, I occasionally introduce myself as the world's leading authority on the subject—hastily adding: “After all, who else would want the title?”

Here are more instances of spoonerisms and transposition puns where I was anticipated. Some are Googlewhacks, meaning that a search generated exactly one match: *age-free kegs*, *chaining my Yank*, *cursed hassle*, *dig beta*, *failed mist*, *Greatest Earth on Show*, *honor without profit*, *Hoot-Smalley Act*, *How I Mothered Your Met* (a baseball allusion), *link a drone*, *mind like a teal strap*, *Natural Corn Billers*, *the past has been torched* (possibly coined by David Foster Wallace), *whinge botching*.

Alas, I was also beaten to the punch regarding two hypothetical but promising book titles. I had envisioned the perfect title for Hugh Laurie's autobiography: *The Jack that “House” Built*. It's a 1980s U.K. rock song. In addition, I can't claim to have named the Cockney cannibals' cookbook: “*Don't Braise Me Toe!*”

Now here are the originals, confirmed as such, more or less, via search results:

- Storm-season report: *There wasn't a dry house in the eye*.
- Off-campus dive bar: *A Pit Without Townie*.
- Belated closing notice: “*The show must—oh, gone!*”
- Postmodernist secretary of state: *Kerry Pomo*.
- Suppose a hotel chain were to diversify into crematoria. Name? *Mort Yard by Carry It*.
- The famous soap-opera actress compensates her staff so generously that Gucci loafers are worn by all her *Lucci gofers*.
- Picklers' prayer: “*Thy dill be won.*”
- Umbrella-industry challenges: *The weight of the furlled*.

- T-shirt for celebrity stalkers: “*Mere fan? Fear man!*”
- Barbershop quartet: *It’s Tonely at the Lop.*
- A small Vermont town might attract new residents and businesses with the slogan, “*Do Your Best Work in West Burke.*”
- When it’s unseasonably warm, one can feel like the overweight German who was caught *mopping his beavered frau.*
- B.S. Pully (1910-1972) was a bearish comedian and character actor sometimes cast in gangster roles. Too bad he didn’t live long enough to host a talk show: *Pully Bull Pit.*
- In a related vein, how about a nostalgic radio hour? *Journey Back with Bernie Jack.*
- Fortunate brewer’s expression of gratitude: “*The ales have fallen from my skies!*”
- Jim Siegel was the star coxswain on the 1910 Yale crew team. To this day, recruits invoke his spirit with the inspirational chant: “*Oar like a Siegel!*”
- Symptom of urban blight: *street-porner creature.*
- Candid showbiz memoir by actor Bruce Dern, or daughter Laura: *Dern, on a Time.*
- Bad political options: trounced by polls or *pounced by trolls.*

As I write, the news is full of stories about creepy clowns harassing people and a protracted scandal involving the governor of New Jersey. An enterprising filmmaker might combine these two controversial topics in a riveting documentary: *Mimes and Christie-meanors.*

In August, NBC unexpectedly canceled Larry Wilmore’s late-night show. Had a legendary Los Angeles venue not closed in 1971, the star could have staged a benefit: *Wilmore Fest at Fillmore West.*

A *tronie* is a 16th- or 17th-century Dutch genre portrait. Some are by masters such as Rembrandt and Vermeer. If museum curators were asked to choose their single top favorites, the resulting exhibition would likely be titled *One Pick Tronie.*

Reality Check: The preceding jocular and fictitious notions aside, consider a couple of recent genuine book titles: *No Lands Man* and *Selp-Helf*. Also totally true: Veteran Broadway performers Penny Fuller and Anita Gillette archly call their cabaret act *Sin Twisters.*

Finally, *unintentional* spoonerisms and transpositions are still commonplace. Earlier this year, a podcaster importuned her listeners to “*seize the oral my ground.*” And on a local TV news program here in New York City, viewers were awkwardly told that “*Men make more women than money.*” Both individuals promptly realized their gaffes, displayed appropriate embarrassment, and corrected themselves.