

## DAY ONE? WAY DONE!

### More Transposition Puns and Spoonerisms, Original and Otherwise

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Each morning, two daily newspapers are delivered to my apartment door. Usually, this routine is performed efficiently. But on one occasion, they didn't arrive. I called the service and, in late afternoon, both papers were redelivered. Then my doorman handed me the *original* missing papers—four days later! Most likely, they were left in the wrong place and subsequently discovered and turned in. I hate waste, but I immediately discarded the now-useless duplicates. I reported the matter to the delivery service, wryly concluding: “Better never than late!”

Soon afterward, I told the story to my pal Mardy Grothe, the authority on literary and historical quotations (see [www.drmary.com](http://www.drmary.com)). He responded: “I'm afraid George Bernard Shaw beat you to the punch.”

Mardy appended this passage from *Never Let a Fool Kiss You or a Kiss Fool You*, his 1999 book of chiasmic wordplay:

“Early in his career, the struggling young writer George Bernard Shaw submitted a play to a well-known London producer, who flatly rejected it. Several years later, the same producer sent a telegram to Shaw—now a successful playwright—saying he was, after all, interested in producing the work. Shaw cabled his reply: ‘Better never than late.’”

The quip has since become popular. An Internet search generates tens of thousands of matches in, among other contexts, sports reporting, titles of movies and TV shows, and admonitions deployed by business coaches.

Here are more punny reversals. As usual, where I was anticipated, I have appended notes at the end of this article.

- Favorite cocktail of Arctic explorers: *Polar Sour*.
- Advice for beachwear marketers: *Hawk to the tanned*.
- Dinner theater: *Food with your play*.
- Maxim of crony politicians: *It is better to court the PACs than to pack the courts*.
- Appropriate name for instant polenta: *Soft-Pour Corn*.
- Murder mystery set in a wildlife preserve: *The Last Scoundrel of the Refuge*.

- Welcoming exclamation of card players: *All decks on hand!*
- Slogan, landscaping service for duck hunters: *This will really mow your blind.*
- Line of packaged meals for geeks: *Nerd's Best.*
- Distress call for oil-drilling catastrophes: *Eek! Frackcident!*
- Old Testament commandment: *Layeth the sword, sayeth the Lord.*

Following are a few real-life instances of transpositional humor, drawn from recent personal experiences and news events:

- A friend requested my assistance with a wire transfer. I was charged \$50 for the transaction, but the bank officer promised to credit my account as a courtesy. I was tempted to exclaim: "Fee waiver? We favor!"
- At a restaurant in Washington, D.C., the check arrived with a card reading "The Breakfast of Champions." I proposed to the manager that it would be more persuasive to tweak the classic cereal slogan, touting the eatery's chefs as "The Champions of Breakfast."
- A movie playing in theaters as I write is titled *The Leisure Seeker*. One wonders if it will inspire a sequel about a hospital whistleblower: *The Seizure Leaker*.
- In an e-mail exchange with an economist about the controversial Obama-era monetary policy of "quantitative easing," I quipped that the Age of Reason had been replaced by the Rage of Easin'.
- Last year's widely reported kerfuffle involving an assault on Senator Rand Paul by a neighbor, following a bizarre dispute about their lawns, suggested this possible headline: "Blowing Leaves and Leaving Blows."

Finally, a longstanding debate in the spoonerism community (if such exists) concerns the question of whether coined reversals must make sense. Of course, it's preferable when they are meaningful. Still, for ages, people have been saying things like "One swell foop" and "Why don't you go where you're watching?" Such expressions are nonsensical, but that doesn't diminish—and may even enhance—their amusement value.

While pondering this conundrum, I wondered why T-shirts and coffee mugs displaying the words "As Tarp as a Shack" abound for sale online. The phrase is meaningless, except perhaps to hillbilly architects! Then I realized that the objects thus festooned are intended as gag gifts for older people, communicating a message that humorously refutes itself.

*Credit Edit: Googling generated no matches for many of the above specimens. Re the following, I was anticipated, though the contexts usually differed. Corn: breweries. Refuge: interestingly, all from U.K. Decks: multiple previous uses, for skateboard auctions and other purposes. Champions: video games, rock groups, others. Earlier citations also found for: Play, Nerds, Blind.*