

## **“I WONDER IF THEY SERVE JOOKIES IN KALE” A Plethora of New Spoonerisms, Transpositions, and Chiasmus**

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

In May of last year, NBC’s *Saturday Night Live* parodied the “To Catch a Predator” series that ran on the same network for a decade. In the skit, Tina Fey plays an undercover investigator in an entrapment operation. Rummaging through the culprit’s bag, and finding a package of snacks, she sarcastically proclaims: “*I wonder if they serve jookies in kale!*”

The “mistake” is part of the script. The “director” calls for a retake, baffling the hapless offender, who is unaware that he’s participating in a reality show. It’s pretty darn funny. Search the punch line to find the video on YouTube. At this writing, 850 comments are posted, although I didn’t spot any that noted that the joke is a spoonerism.

Speaking of comedy troupes, you may be acquainted with the Capitol Steps.

Launched by a gang of congressional aides in 1981, the acclaimed group has been performing ever since. The Steps’ repertoire involves recasting popular songs for purposes of political satire. (Samples: “I’m So Indicted.” “Help Me Fake It to the Right.”) But every show also includes a spoken-word spoonerism routine. (Example: “He’s in trig bubble!”) Although the content changes to reflect current events, the monologues, lampooning Washington scandals and gossip, are always called “Lirty Dies.” Videos are online; Google that distinctive nonsensical locution.

When I researched my spoonerism book, *Cruel and Unusual Puns*, in the late ’80s, I recalled those routines from performances I had attended while in Washington on business. I interviewed William Strauss, one of the founders and original cast members. He granted me permission to reprint one of the skits, and supplied background details, recounted in the book.

Last June, the Capitol Steps made a rare appearance in New York City, my hometown, and I attended a performance. Toward the end of a packed evening of musical parodies, I thought the spoonerism segment might have been dropped. Fortunately, a performer emerged in the nick of time to deliver the trademark act.

The audience went wild! It was a long, rapid-fire, pyrotechnic spiel that must have had people wondering how anyone could possibly have memorized it all. My impression was that this part of the show generated more laughter and applause than anything that had preceded it.

But I soon encountered a lone dissenter. On exiting, I overheard two women of a certain age, one of whom was clearly irritated. “What was that last thing all about?” she grumbled to her companion. “I didn’t understand it.”

I couldn't resist breaking in: "Did you hear the audience?" They seemed interested, so I delivered a brief impromptu lecture on how spoonerisms work and who Dr. Spooner was, and even explained that speech errors provide a "window into the mind," generating valuable insights for psychologists, neurologists, and linguists.

Of course, I always carry reprints of my *Word Ways* articles, so I gave her a recent one on the subject under discussion. I hope she subsequently reconsidered her testy reaction.

With that morality tale concluded, let's proceed to the latest specimens. Originality disclaimer: With the three exceptions noted in the credit line below, my searches generated no matches. (Hmm. That suggests a fictional C&W singer named Mo Natchez.)

- Secret society for pirates and witches: *Skull and Boss Crones*.
- Esoteric landscaping practice: *The weeding of the rill*.
- In light of the frequent criticisms of people who game the system, an entrepreneur should create and market *System: The Game*.
- Sand Lakes is a recreational area in Michigan. The tourism authorities could adopt a somewhat retro slogan: "*Land Sakes! Sand Lakes!*"
- Lifestyle maxim: *Enjoy your retirement; don't retire your enjoyment*.
- Remember the children's verse about the journey of Wynken, Blynken, and Nod? Had the first two kids stayed behind, the poet could have exclaimed: *Nod only goes!*
- Advice for eulogists: *It is better to be dearly missed than merely dissed*.
- I am not so much worried about *the culture of scarcity . . .* as I am about *the scarcity of culture*.

Finally, a 2018 news roundup: Last July, a researcher discovered that in 1811, the future King George IV was a fan of Jane Austen—so he was both *a royal leader* and *a loyal reader*. In November, when F.A.O. Schwarz reopened after having been shuttered for three years, some longtime customers reportedly erupted in tears of joy—though my hunch is that disgruntled manufacturers uttered *jeers of toy*. And I learned that enthusiastic fans who visit the sites where their favorite movies have been filmed are called *set-jettlers*.

*Credits:* Re "boss crones," "retire enjoyment," and "Nod," online searches revealed that I was anticipated in each case by a few people, but the contexts above are my own creations.

*A postscript about William Strauss:* Bill and I kept in occasional touch. For many years, I received comp copies of the Capitol Steps' albums as they were released, thanks to his thoughtfulness and generosity. Bill also had a serious side: With Neil Howe, he wrote books on history, demographic trends, and generational theory. The team coined the now-ubiquitous term "Millennials." I was saddened to learn of his death in 2007.