

The Style Invitational

WEEK 167: CRAPSEY

*How frail
Above the bulk
Of crashing
water hangs,
Autumnal, evanescent,
wan,
The moon.*

*Listen ...
With faint dry sound,
Like steps of passing
ghosts,
The leaves, frost-crisp'd,
break from the trees
And fall.*

*These be
Three silent things:
The falling snow,
the hour
Before the dawn,
the mouth of one
Just dead.*



"HEY! I NEED AN EIGHT SYLLABLE LINE FOR MY LATEST CINQUAIN!"



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

This week's contest was proposed by Jean Sorensen of Herndon, who wins a box of Berenstain Bear cookies. Jean did not know what she was getting us into when she suggested we resurrect the "cinquain," a long-deceased poetic form she described vaguely as "the Western version of a haiku." We did some research and discovered the cinquain was invented around the turn of the century by one Adelaide Crapsey, a humongously sensitive Vassar grad who died young of consumption and general weepiness. We have here in front of us several books of cinquains by Miss Crapsey, a hugely tragic figure, and we must say these are the most effete and vomitacious versifications, poems so ickily precious and pretentious they make haiku look like Kipling.

The examples above were written by Miss Crapsey between 1911 and 1913. The rules of the cinquain are simple. There are five lines, the first containing two syllables, the second containing four syllables, the third six, the fourth eight and the last, with grave finality and thunderous drama, only two. Your subject matter must be suitable for the 1990s but must adhere to the literary standards set by Miss Crapsey. First-prize winner gets a pink-fringed 1950s U.S. Army Air Forces silk pillow inscribed thusly: "To one who bears the sweetest name,/ And adds a luster to the same./ Who shares my joys, who cheers when sad,/ The greatest friend I ever had./ Long life to her, for there's no other/ Could take the place of my dear Mother."

Runners-up, as always, receive the coveted Style Invitational Loser's T-shirt. Honorable Mentions get the mildly sought-after Style Invitational bumper sticker. Winners will be selected on the basis of humor. Mail your entries to The Style Invitational, Week 167, c/o The Washington Post, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071, fax them to 202-334-4312 or submit them via Internet to this address: losers@access.digex.net. Internet users: Please indicate the week number in the "subject" field. Entries must be received on or before Monday, June 3. Please include your address and phone number. Winners will be announced in three weeks. Editors reserve the right to alter entries for taste, humor or appropriateness. No purchase necessary. The Faerie of the Fine Print & the Ear No One Reads wishes to thank Russ Beland of Springfield for today's Ear No One Reads. Washington Post employees and their families are not eligible for prizes.

REPORT FROM WEEK 164,

in which you were asked to contrast what politicians say with what they really mean:

- ◆ Fourth Runner-Up— *What they say: Public service runs in my family.*
What they mean: Nepotism runs in my family. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)
- ◆ Third Runner-Up— *What they say: Bob Dole is not too old.*
What they mean: I'm awake! I'm awake! (Kevin Mellema, Falls Church)
- ◆ Second Runner-Up— *What they say: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Rule 17, I ask unanimous consent to invoke cloture on the Senate rider to the amendment to the continuing resolution ...*
What they mean: I don't know what the hell I'm talking about but this is going to look great on C-Span. (David Genser, Vienna)
- ◆ First Runner-Up— *What they say: I don't believe in polls.*
What they mean: My polls tell me to say I don't believe in polls. (Frank Bruno, Alexandria)
- ◆ *And the Winner of the pillow filled with shredded U.S. currency—*
What they say: I do solemnly swear ...
What they mean: Whatever ... (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)

◆ Honorable Mentions:

- This is just blatant grandstanding by my opponent. — I wish I had thought of that.* (Susan Reese, Arlington)
- P-O-T-A-T-O-E — P-O-T-A-T-O-E** (Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park)
- It's about jobs, jobs, jobs. — It's about my job, my job, my job.* (David Genser, Vienna)
- I am glad you asked that question. — Who let HIM in here?* (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)
- Bitch set me up. — I feel at this point it would be most beneficial to me and to the American people if I, due to personal growth issues, proudly and prestigiously step down from office.* (Erik Hadden, Frederick)
- I will not be intimidated — ... sir.* (John Kammer, Herndon)
- How much more are we going to bleed the poor? — How much more can we bleed the poor?* (John Kammer, Herndon)
- Trust me. — Bite me.* (Kevin Cuddihy, Fairfax)
- I favor the Job Corps. — My son is a philosophy major.* (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)
- The American people are a bunch of lazy self-indulgent crybabies who bilk the system for entitlements they don't deserve and then whine about wasteful government spending. — Whee. It is fun being a lame duck.* (Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park)
- I respect women. — My wife spans me.* (Philip Delduke, Bethesda)
- That quote was taken out of context. — ... And I would appreciate your letting me know of any context in which it would not sound offensive.* (Paul Kondis, Alexandria)
- I will have all the city's snow removed in 72 hours. — ... If those 72 hours are in June.* (Tommy Litz, Bowie)
- Let me introduce a great humanitarian ... — Let me introduce someone with a whole lot of money ...* (Joseph Romm, Washington)
- There will be a certain fine-tuning of the economy. — ... Like Mrs. O'Leary's cow fine-tuned Chicago.* (Elden Carnahan, Laurel)
- I am happy for the opportunity to speak to the grand jury. — And I enjoyed Don Imus's little jokes, too.* (Gary Mason, Herndon)
- The only poll I look at is the one on Election Day. — Gallup never canvasses the cemeteries.* (Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park)
- My opponent has resorted to negative campaigning ... — ... And my spies haven't dug up jack on him. He must be a eunuch.* (Philip Delduke, Bethesda)
- The people have a right to know. — The people have a wish to be entertained.* (Elden Carnahan, Laurel)
- I don't recall. — ... But I do know the penalty for perjury.* (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)
- Poland is not a communist country. — Poland is a vegetable.* (Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park)