

Arts and Entertainment

Style Conversational Week 1406: We’re going down!

The Empress of The Style Invitational on this week's acrostic-poem contest and 14-Scrabble-point neologisms



There aren't any Whole Foods stores to prank in West Plains, Mo., so 97-time Loser J. Larry Schott decided to display the good part of our current Grossary Bag, one of our prizes for runners-up, on his wall. That's Bob Staake's design with the jester's hat in place of the stylized leaf. If you'd like to buy an actual Staake Invite drawing to hang on your wall, see his special page at bobstaake.com/si. (J. Larry Schott)

By Pat Myers

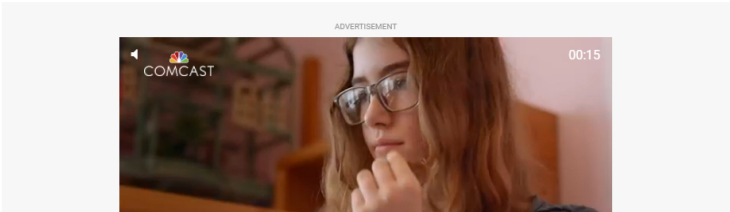
Oct. 15, 2020 at 5:18 p.m. EDT

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As I mention this weekend in the introduction to [Style Invitational Week 1406](#), this week’s contest might not be the best for an acrostic poem about, say, who’s ahead in the polls right now. Because the results will be published Nov. 12. I mean, suppose I had to put in brackets “[written when the candidate hadn’t lost yet].” I don’t know about y’all, but in these next 20 days or so, I’m going to be listening even less to anxiety-producing polls and predictions and voter interviews — my ballot is in — and more to other news, or even “news.”

This isn’t to say that you can’t write about ongoing topics in the world right now. But do try to think about how it would read two weekends after Election Day.

We did a contest a while back for acrostic limericks, a challenge that many found absurdly daunting. This week’s, however, has no requirements other than that the poem’s lines begin with letters that spell out something relevant — and of course that it be readable and entertaining. And, okay, humorous. And clever. Those qualities don’t *require* that the poem have well-crafted meter and/or rhyme, but meter and rhyme undeniably are elements of cleverness.



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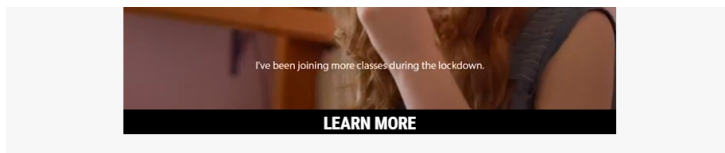
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Perspective



Here are three of the inking limericks from Week 1332; [see them all here](#).

There now is a man (you know who)

Who pours out his heart on the loo

Each grudge he has held — Emphatic, misspelled

— The musings of Whiny the Pooh. (*Gary Crockett*)

Come and join me for dinner today!

Have a lobster, foie gras, a filet!

Even though it's a date —

And it's gonna be great! —

Perhaps you could offer to pay? (*Beverley Sharp*)

No-nonsense Pelosi is known

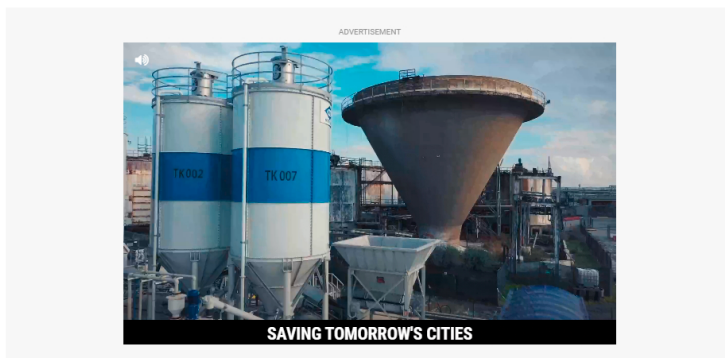
As the one who makes Trump look half-grown.

Nancy sets him down hard,

Catching Donnie off guard.

You can tell she's had kids of her own. (*Jonathan Jensen*)

This week's example is not from an earlier Invitational, but from the online poetry journal [Light](#), which is sort of Invite-adjacent, given that its editor is 168-time Loser Melissa Balmain (who took it over upon the death of founder John Mella) and it's featured the light verse of many Invitational regulars — or, as we call them, Loserbards. Like many journals in this age, Light used to be print-only and now is online-only. But in addition to the two voluminous issues that Light's all-volunteer staff releases each year, it also presents numerous Poems of the Week based on recent news items. See the [guidelines for submission here](#); like the Empress, Melissa and managing editor Kevin Durkin judge submissions without seeing the authors' names.



Mike Mesterson-Gibbons's acrostic sonnet "A Hard-to-Swat Fly" was one of the Poems of the Week from Sept. 14. And to prove he's no fluke, Mike — a professor emeritus of mathematics at Florida State, specializing in game theory — has another one featured in Light this very week:

"An angry elk gored a Colorado man finishing a round of golf over the weekend" — [CNN](#)

The golfer needs to understand the rut,

Especially when bulls are on the green.

Elks don't much care if you just want to putt,

If keen to steal their dames is how you're seen!

No golfer should be ignorant of how

Trump's America, through the lens of two Italian photographers

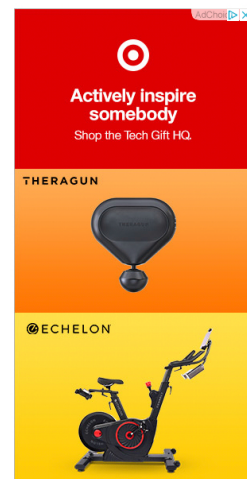


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Golf carts sound like a serenader's tune:

Once bulls believe you're coveting a cow,

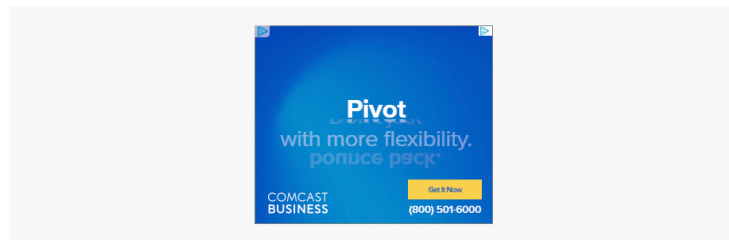
Forget about a quiet afternoon!

... For golfing irons poking from a bag,

Approaching in a golf cart on the grass,

Not only look like antlers to a stag,

Elks fear they're in the harem-stealing class!



... Lest you be gored by antlers hard as nails,

Keep golf bags out of sight of rutting males!

While we're at it, also featured in this week's Poems of the Week is this double dactyl by one of the legends of The Style Invitational, Brendan Beary, of the 1,084 blots of Invite ink and 39 outright wins, commemorating what might have been the most famous animal in the United States for a few days.

Oh, Bugger

"Pretty fly for a white guy: insect on Mike Pence's head upstages vice-president" — [The Guardian](#)

Higgledy piggledy

Musca domestica,

a.k.a. housefly, just

proved what we knew;

Entomological

Jargon aside, it's a

Knack flies possess: how to

Find Number 2.

By the way: Light and the Invitational have similar submission rules: neither of us wants to run work that's already been published. So *don't* send your poem to both places.



However, if you don't get Invite ink on Nov. 12, feel free to submit it to Light without even mentioning an Invite connection. As veteran Losers know, lots of eminently inkworthy poems get robbed by the Invitational, because we don't have enough space for all the good stuff, or perhaps I chose another poem on the same topic. (Obviously, the news in it can't seem dated by then — another reason to choose a less time-sensitive topic.)

KWIPS*: The 14-Scrabble-point neologisms of Week 1402

**Non-inking headline by Kevin Dopart, and yes, its letters total 14 points*

"God, how are people so creative with these?" was the immediate reaction of Alex Blackwood, my co-admin of the [Style Invitational Devotees](#) Facebook group, when I asked her to weigh in on my shortlist

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of neologisms from Week 1402. The Losers just always are, for the dozens upon dozens of new-word contests we've run in the Invite's almost 28-year history. And because neologism entries tend not to take up much space on the printed page, I was able to run 42 inking entries, each of whose letters added up to 14 Scrabble points.



The toughest obstacle for some Losers, in fact, involved counting up to 14: *FOUR* of the entries I was about to give ink to (including one that slipped through the cracks and actually made it online before someone alerted me) totaled either more or fewer than 14 points, tallied from the list of letter values I'd included in the contest directions. Also not getting ink, however, were people who just tacked on extra letters to make the point value correct, like "Antifalalaa: a protest movement that employs choral groups singing Christmas music."

The Losers' Circle is full of Usual Suspects this week — three of the four are in the Invite Hall of Fame with more than 500 printed entries each — but it's the first Lose Cannon for Stephen Dudzik with "buphoo: an ill wind from Washington that blows nobody any good." Though Steve is one of the very few Losers to get ink in each of the Invite's 28 years, and has almost 600 blots of ink, and though it's his 13th win, it's his very first Lose Cannon; his last first prize was an Inker trophy back in 2011. (And probably his last, since we'll be replacing the cannons soon with a new design, one whose name doesn't quote this president.)

Tom Witte ("dumbrage": ignorant indignation) is another of those Ink Every Year people, having debuted in Week 7. Tom's 1,600-plus blots — many, many of them for neologisms — puts him only behind Chris Doyle on the all-time Loser Stats. And Jesse Frankovich ("shamnesia": "Michael Cohen? Who?") was the No. 1 Loser for the past three years, last year scoring a truly ridiculous 184 blots. Neither of them needs any more swag, I decree, at least until we make something new.

AD

Jonathan Jensen, who has more time on his hands these days since the Baltimore Symphony, for which he's a bassist, is — like so much else — in the midst of a giant fermata, scored five blots of ink this week, including his first second-place spot ("Nagivation": backseat driving), thus earning himself the fabulous Emergency Underpants and bottle of Pimp Oil car odor, perhaps the only thing that could overcome the Fir Stinks that we give First Offenders for their first inks. His windfall today boings Jonathan several places up the [Loser Stats](#) for a total of 66 blots of Ink since he started Inviting relatively recently in Week 1287.

What Doug Dug: Ace Copy Editor Doug Norwood agreed with my choices for the Losers' Circle and also singled out the honorable mentions bifecal (the glasses that Bill Dorner's now looking out instead of rose-colored ones), Hululemon (Duncan Stevens's store for shapeless sweatpants suitable for binge-watching from the couch) and Scotusball (the returning Mike Greene: "Political sporting event in which the rules change depending upon who has the whistle").

Last call for Gettysburg: All-outdoor Loser lunch/tour, Sunday, Oct. 18

Bring your mask for the first baby steps toward a physical Loser Community once again: A few of us are gathering in Gettysburg, Pa., this Sunday to have a spread-out outdoor lunch on the picnic tables of the Appalachian Brewing Company on Steinwehr Avenue, followed by a tour by Loser Roger Dalrymple of the battlefields. The weather is supposed to be perfect; lunch starts at noon. The Royal Consort and I hope to see your expressive eyebrows. As with all Loser events, anyone reading this is welcome; please RSVP to Roger at [rogerandpam\[at\]comcast\[dot\]net](mailto:rogerandpam[at]comcast[dot]net) and feel free to cc: me at pat.myers@washpost.com. This is *the* picture-perfect season for the Gettysburg countryside.

Ooh! Celebrity guest judge!

If you entered our [Week 1404 Ask Backwards](#) contest, I hope you submitted some good questions for

the “answers” “Ken Jennings and Kylie Jenner” or “Alex Tribeca.” Because Ken Jennings himself — the 74-time “Jeopardy” champ and now career know-it-all — has agreed to weigh in on my shortlist of entries in those two categories. If you follow his quick wit on Twitter or listen to his and John Roderick’s offbeat-history podcast “Omnibus,” you’ll know that he and the Invite should be on the same wavelength.

See some of you on Sunday!

1 Comments



Pat Myers

Pat Myers is editor and judge of The Style Invitational, The Washington Post’s page for clever, edgy humor and wordplay. In the role since December 2003, she has posted and judged more than 700 contests. She also writes the weekly Style Conversational column and runs the Style Invitational Devotees page on Facebook. Follow [Twitter](#)

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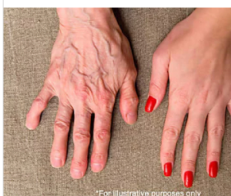
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