Style Invitational Week 1080: The dactyls and the terror

By Pat Myers, Style Invitational editor
July 10, 2014

(Click here to skip down to the results of our double-dactyl contest from Week 1076.)

New contest for Week 1080: McGonagall with the wind

To the Zoo, on a Cowardly, Profit-Driven Decision
Alas, the zoo is closing the exhibit of invertebrates
(Little animals that live on plankton and frankfurter bits).
Now where can we go to see coral and octopuses?
Fie on thee, zookeepers. You are spineless wusses. — Gene
Weingarten, inspired by the “poetry” of W.T. McGonagall

The Empress was recently alerted to the oeuvre — emphasis on the oeuvres — of William Topaz McGonagall, a 19th-century Scotsman whose mawkish, clumsey odes on various tragic subjects prompted audiences to throw rotten fish at him, and today earns him such superlatives as “writer of the worst poetry in the English language,” in the words of a Web site devoted to his life and, uh, creations (see bit.ly/mcgonagall). Such as this stanza from “The Execution of James Graham, Marquis of Montrose”:

After partaking of a hearty breakfast, he commenced his toilet,
Which, in his greatest trouble, he seldom did forget.
And while in the act of combing his hair,
He was visited by the Clerk Register, who made him stare.

Not surprisingly, such wordcraft inspired Washington Post Doggerel Laureate Gene Weingarten to pen the tragic ode above, on the occasion of
This week: Memorialize a modern “tragedy” in a poem burdened with hilariously overwrought verse; lame, forced rhymes; and painfully uneven meter. While the work of the real McG typically drones on for a dozen verses, we think you can get the badness across in one verse of no more than eight lines.

Winner gets the Inkin’ Memorial, the Lincoln statue bobblehead that is the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives, in keeping with the quality of the verse that will earn it, a miniature key fob of an ity-bity rubber gorilla: You squeeze it and a little brown bubble of “poop” emerges from the mini-butt; let it relax and the poop-bubble returns inside the ape. A National Zoo souvenir donated by Loser Andrea Kelly.

Other runners-up win their choice of a yeamed-for Loser Mug or the ardently desired “Whole Fools” Grocercy Bag. Honorable mentions get a hustled-after Loser magnet, either the Po’ Wit Laureate or Puns of Steel. First Offenders receive a smelly tree-shaped air “freshener” (FirStink for their first ink). E-mail entries to losers@washpost.com or, if you were born in the 19th century, fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, July 21; results published Aug. 10 (online Aug. 7). No more than 25 entries per entrant per contest. Include “Week 1080,” in your e-mail subject line or it might be ignored as spam. Include your real name, postal address and phone number with your entry. See contest rules and guidelines at wapo.st/InvRules. This week’s honorable-mentions subhead is by Danielle Nowlin; the alternative headline for the “next week’s contest” line is by Jeff Contompasis; “Six-Hooters” is by Nan Reiner. Join the lively Style Invitational Devotees group on Facebook at on.fb.me/invdev, and click “like” on Style Invitational Ink of the Day at bit.ly/inkofday.

The Style Conversational: The Empress’s weekly online column discusses each new contest and set of results. Especially if you plan to enter, check it out at wapo.st/styleconv.

And from The Style Invitational four weeks ago . . .

SIX-HOOTERS: WEEK 1076’s WINNING DOUBLE DACTYLS

The double dactyl, a verse form invented just a few decades ago, has all sorts of rules: It has to be eight short lines; one of the lines has to be a six-sylable word; one has to include someone’s name; and most important, it has to be in dactylic (DUM-da-da) meter. As in today’s inking entries, the best of a stampede of a thousand or so galloping submissions.

The winner of the Inkin’ Memorial:

Higgledy piggledy,
Ken Cuccinelli, the
Gubernatorial
Aspirant found
Preoccupation with
Transvaginalia
Wasn’t, as strategies
Go, ultra sound. (Jeremy Horowitz, Washington, a First Offender)

2nd place

and the “Manneken Pis” snow dome from Brussels:

Abraca dabraca,
Poor Lois Lerner has
Lost all her e-mails — oh,
Where could they be?

Why does the IRS
Incomprehensibly
Never lose track of what’s
Owed them from me? (Beverley Sharp, Montgomery, Ala.)

3rd place

Higgledy piggledy,
Philippa Middleton
("Pippe," Kate’s sister): it’s
Clear to deduce

How you upstaged royal
Connubiality:
She had the train, but you
Had the caboose.
(Brendan Beary, Great Mills, Md.)

4th place

Hairily scarily
Donald the Trump thinks we
Don’t get enough of a
View of his fame.

On all his buildings is
Egocentricity.
Vandals should tear down the
“T” from his name.
(Rick Haynes, Boynton Beach, Fla.)

LOSERY BLUESERY: HONORABLE MENTIONS

Honkywaw Broncoway
Orenthal Simpson, who
Bungled a burglary,
Wound up in jail.

There, from inside of his
Impenitentiary,
Sits right on top of the
Real killer’s tail.
(Mark Raffman, Reston, Va.)

Upcoming Anniversaries
Crashily splashity,
Edward M. Kennedy
Drove off a bridge span in
Mid-'69.

(Armstrong and Aldrin were
Coincidentally
Manning the Eagle and
Landed just fine).
(Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn, Va.)

Dandily, scandally
**Lerner's** computer is
Suddenly missing some
E-mails, Boo-hoo!

Ryan has dared to say
"Impossibility!"
Next year will Ryan get
Audited, too? (Claire Keeler, Manassas, Va., a First Offender)

Voter dotery
**Eric L. Cantor** was
Beaten by Tea Party
Favorite Brat,

Proving that primaries
Representational
Often exclude from the
Ring the wrong hat.
(Sam Gwynn, Beaumont, Tex., a First Offender)

Fiddledy, Diddledy,
**Cantor** said smugly, "Oh,
he's just a nothing. I'll
Trounce him — no fears."

Then oh so startlingly,
incomprehensibly,
Folks on his home grounds had
Other ideas. (Bill Willcox, Washington, whose only other previous Invite
Ink was a poem in Week 393, 2001)

Paleo, naileo
**Ogg the Neanderthal**
Mated with humans, our
DNA states.

Given the evident
Heterospeciety,
Stone Agers must have been
Hard up for dates.
(Gary Crockett, Chevy Chase, Md.)

Nearical spherical
**Buckminster Fuller**, he
Never had need for a
Brush or a comb.

Egg-headed wizard who
Rectangle-phobically
Touted to all that there's
No place like dome.
(Kevin Donsart, Washington)
Hilton wiltony,
Shooting the president,
John Hinckley Jr. thought,
"Jodie will beam!"

Warped and debased, the
Heterosexual
Gunman had missed she was
Not on his team.
(Christopher Lamora, Los Angeles)

Ruefully; truely?
Eleanor Roosevelt,
Asked by her spouse, when their
Coupling turned sham,

To be discreet in her
“Extracurriculars”:
“Franklin, my dear, I just
Don’t give a damn.”
(Nan Reiner, Alexandria, Va.)

Jerkily, tweekily,
Hannah Montana, her
Old alter ego, must
Be all aghast:

Miley, who’s older now,
Nymphomanically
Gyrates and strips off this
Part of her past.
(David Franks, Greenland, Ark.)

Miracle-pyrical,
Jesus of Nazareth
Feeding five thousand: two
Fish and some bread.

“Such a proceeding is
Uneconomical.”
Bakers and fishermen
Hastily said.
(Hugh Thirlway, The Hague)

Slimmery-fimmery,
Mehmet C. Oz, MD,
Flogs coffee extract as
Fat-burning fuel,

Senators recommend,
Hyper-emphatically,
That he be labeled a
Great Weight Loss Tool.
(Frank Osen, Pasadena, Calif.)

Holtily-tohtily,
Benedict Cumberbatch
(Cherished by fans as an
Arrogant sleuth)

Mines the attractions of
Sociopathically
Keeping his coolness while
Ditching his count.
(Susan McLean, Iowa City, Iowa, a First Offender)

Jumpy bumpy,
**George Herbert Walker Bush**
Strapped on a parachute,
Took a big leap;

Nobody told him most
Nonagenarians
Celebrate 90 by
Falling asleep. (Beverley Sharp)

Iggy wiggly,
**Pallas Athena**, the
Goddess of wisdom, and
Also the arts,

Shows up in sculpture with
Impeccability.
(Not so with Venus, who's
Missing some parts.) (Mae Scanlan, Washington)

Rahmical cahnical
**Mayor Emanuel,**
Running Chicago, does
Not like disputes.

Talks to his enemies
Dactylogically,
Flashing his famous four-finger salutes. (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

Hippity hoppy,
**Nouri al-Maliki**
Heads up a country that's
Ready to crack.

Islamists carving up
Mesopotamia.
Nouri is stuck in a
Hard place, Iraq. (Beryl Benderly, Washington)

Haqueri Raqueri
**Nouri al-Maliki**
Baghdadi chieftain who
Said, “I'm the man.”

Lost in a battle that's
Hyper-sectarian,
We'll ask, “Where is he?” and
He'll say: “I ran.” (Mark Raffman)

Monstery bonstery
**Bolaji Badejo,**
Creature in “Alien,”
Scared us a lot;

Who'd want to mess with that
Extraterrestrial?
Which thought should Ripley’s be?
Leave it, or not? (Brendan Beary)

Higgelon piggelton
Pastor Jim Jones was an
Egomanical,
Sick puppeteer.
Mass suicide, though, is
No laughing matter. So
Don’t get your hopes up — there’s
No punch line here.
(Niels Hoven, San Francisco)

Humpery bumpery
Kim West/Kardashian
First got attention for
Exploits in bed
Still her big ass brings her
Marketability
(No, not her tushus! The
one that she wed). (Danielle Nowlin, Woodbridge, Va.)

Fly-mama, my-mama,
Your Mama’s uglier
Than a baboon or a
Dirty dead rat,
Plus she resembles an
Even-toed ungulate
(Artiodactyla).
Also, she’s fat. (Robert Schechter, Dix Hills, N.Y.)

Higgledy piggledy,
Andriy Deshchytsein,
Pol from Ukraine, isn’t
One to stand mute;
Calls Putin “d---head,” and
Undiplomatically,
We laugh along and say,
“Odessa hoot.” (Brendan Beary)

And Last:
Pattily-scattily,
Empress of Washington
(Like Queen Victoria)
Wasn’t amused.
Spurning my humor, she
Unjustifiably
Binned all my entries — why
Wasn’t I choosed?
(Brian Allgar, Paris)

Still running — deadline Monday night: Our contest for questions that have rhyming answers. See bit.ly/invitewk1079.

Next week’s results: Time Marches Swiftly, or Adverbal Abuse, our contest for “Tom Swiftly” jokes. See bit.ly/invite1077.
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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 ❤️

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