

The Style Invitational

WEEK 312: BOOKS AND BOOKS

"Huckleberry Faust": This book brings together, for the first time in publishing history, Twain's beloved "civilized" boy and Goethe's spirit of eternal negation. Together, Huck, Jim and Mephistopheles make an unbeatable team, as they pull off some of the most outrageous pranks, such as the transformation of Aunt Sally into a poodle . . .

"Moby Richard": This book combines Melville's great novel about man against nature with Ben Franklin's famous compilations of witty, homespun sayings: "Early to bed / wake to harpoon / makes a man / a legless loon."

"Curious George's Naked Lunch":

H.A. Rey's delightful tale of an inquisitive chimp as only Wm. S. Burroughs could interpret it: The story of a monkey with a monkey on its back.



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

This Week's Contest was inspired by Amherst professors Lawrence Douglas and Alexander George, who have written a splendid article in this week's Chronicle of Higher Education, proposing literary mergers (including the "Huckleberry Faust" example above). Your challenge: Combine any two works of literature—no movies or TV—into one, give its title and describe it in a brief, appealing blurb that might appear in Publishers Weekly. First-prize winner gets the fabulous Dancing Critter, a foot-high windup toy that looks like a spastic daddy

longlegs; it was donated to The Style Invitational by Jennifer Hart of Arlington, who wins NunZilla, a walking, angry, ruler-toting windup nun donated to The Style Invitational by Tamara Jones of Reston, who wins a package of squirting gum donated to The Style Invitational by Jennifer Hart of Arlington, who wins a second published mention of her name, which is good for an extra credit in the Style Invitational yearly rankings, which are compiled not by us but by Elden Carnahan of Laurel, who also wins a mention of his name, and no, believe us, you don't want any further details.

First runner-up gets the tacky but estimable Style Invitational Loser Pen. Other runners-up receive the coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable Mentions get the mildly sought-after Style Invitational bumper sticker. Winners will be selected on the basis of humor and originality. Mail your entries to the Style Invitational, Week 312, c/o The Washington Post, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071; fax them to 202-334-4312; or submit them via e-mail to this address: losers@washpost.com. E-mail users: Please indicate the week number in the "subject" field. Also, please do not append "attachments," which tend not to be read. Entries must be received on or before Monday, March 15. Important: Please include your postal address and phone number. Winners will be announced three weeks from today. Editors reserve the right to alter entries for taste, humor or appropriateness. No purchase necessary. Today's Correction No One Reads was written by Don Cooper of Fairfax. Employees of The Washington Post and members of their immediate families are not eligible for prizes.

REPORT FROM WEEK 309,

in which you were asked to come up with the first line of a doctoral thesis guaranteed to make the scholars' committee sit up and pay attention. Many people had the requisite adjectival obscurantism down pat: "iconic," "totemic," "heuristic," "teleological," "ontological," "archetypal," "chthonic," "hermeneutic," etc. However, only a dozen or so found a way to elevate the truly boring into the truly unignorable:

- ◆ Third Runner-Up: **My thesis is an exploration of the most effective way to deploy the \$2 billion trust fund my father left me to distribute to institutions of higher learning.** (Bob Griffin, Arlington)
- ◆ Second Runner-Up: **Here¹ is² my³ dissertation⁴. You⁵ may⁶ wish⁷ to⁸ award⁹ it¹⁰ now¹¹ without¹² having¹³ to¹⁴ read¹⁵ all¹⁶ these¹⁷ footnotes¹⁸.** (Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park)
- ◆ First Runner-Up: **In the interests of the Republic, my research on the shocking ease with which anyone, using common office products and ordinary household tools, can counterfeit American currency undetectably has compelled me to request that after the awarding of my doctoral degree I and the members of this committee agree to destroy all copies of my work and never refer to it again.** (Kevin Cuddihy, Fairfax)
- ◆ **And the winner of the genuine hot pink Princess rotary telephone: In order to purge all traces of misogyny and phallogentrism from this project, I have castrated myself** (David Genser, Arlington)

◆ Honorable Mentions:

The bedrock beneath all academic institutions is the glorious system of professorial tenure. Our university has, to its great credit, used this to build a faculty made up exclusively of scholars of the very highest order, from which it may, judiciously, skim the cream into its doctoral committees. But I digress

(Brian Broadus, Charlottesville)

Can a mathematical model predict stock prices so accurately that one would never have to work again? You bet it can, you pasty-faced academic weenies.

(David Genser, Arlington)

Let me first note that, because of the increasing incidence of illicit copying of "canned" dissertation material from the Internet, I want to assure you that the following thesis on the comparison of [enter famous person here] Milton with [enter second famous person here] Faust is entirely authentic, original and solely the product of my research at [enter library or research facility] Oxford from [enter years of study] 1996 to 1998.

(Robin D. Grove, Arlington)

Granted, "My Father, The Mafia Don" doesn't sound like a thesis title, but I feel if you read these lines carefully—backwards and forwards, even *between* them—you will see the wisdom of (Kevin Cuddihy, Fairfax)

The ideas in this paper are so complex and involved that any attempt to express them in a traditional language is doomed to failure. Accordingly, I have created my own special language that will greatly facilitate discourse and I shall henceforth use it exclusively. Krkk orfgh mn ieep kkrit! Tqr sii

(Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

I would have finished this thesis earlier, but my chemotherapy slowed my fieldwork.

(David Genser, Arlington)

E is not equal to MC², so

(Hari Suryanarayanan, Silver Spring;

Sandra Hull, Arlington)

Like eunuchs without lutes, mere words, standing alone, are freeloaders in the court of scholarship. But in the same way that luteless eunuchs can link their arms and dance, thereby giving meaningful expression to an aggregate idea, or theme, words can be linked together to form sentences, and those sentences, paragraphs. It is in just such paragraphs that the salient arguments of this dissertation may, in time, be discovered.

(David Ronka, Charlottesville)

The thesis of this work can be summarized by noting that whatever that really smart dead German guy said goes double for me.

(Russell Beland, Springfield)

I propose to answer the question asked by many, considered by few, and answered by none: What does God look like?

(Kevin Cuddihy, Fairfax)

◆ And last:

The Industrial Revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race. They have greatly increased the life expectancy of those of us who live in "advanced" countries, but they have destabilized society, have made life unfulfilling, have subjected human beings to indignities, have led to widespread psychological suffering and have inflicted severe damage on the natural world. The continued development of technology will probably lead to greater social disruption and psychological suffering.¹

(Dave Zarrow, Herndon)

¹Prof. Theodore Kaczynski, *The Washington Post*, 9/19/95

Next Week: It's Like This