

The Style Invitational

Week 563: Take Two



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

The difference between aromatherapy and Ivory Soap is that one of them is 99⁴⁴/₁₀₀ percent hooley.

John Kerry's smile

\$2.39

Aromatherapy

The next Harry Potter movie

The horse who beat Smarty Jones

Ivory Soap

The next Redskins season

The ranch in Crawford, Tex.

William Hung of "American Idol"

A pile of odd socks

Cicada Fricassee

Mackerel ice cream

The Eunuch of Abdera

The Stanley Cup playoffs

This week's contest is an Invitational perennial: Take any two of the items on this list and explain how they resemble or differ from each other. First-prize winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational Trophy. First runner-up wins "The Gas We Pass: The Story of Farts," a marvelously informative picture book translated from the Japanese, featuring many cartoons of animals and people passing gas in the bathtub, at the dinner table, at the zookeeper, etc. It is by far the finest children's book on farting that we have ever gotten wind of.

Other runners-up win the coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. One prize per entrant per week.

Send your entries via fax to 202-334-4312 or by e-mail to losers@washpost.com. Deadline is Monday, June 28. Put the week number in the subject line of your e-mail, or it risks being ignored as spam. Include your name, postal address and phone number with your entry. Contests are judged on the basis of humor and originality. All entries

become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published July 18. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The revised title for next week's contest is by Tom Witte of Montgomery Village.

Results of our Special Extra Added Bonus Contest to come up with a punch line to the Oldest Joke in the World, the one that appears only partially in an ancient Greek joke book: "Seeing a eunuch, an Abderite [ancient Greek code word for doofus] asked him how many children he had. The eunuch replied that he had none, since he lacked the means of reproduction. Retorted the Abderite . . ."

The most common responses (which were variously reported as the "actual" punch lines):

■ "You can have as many as you like—you just have to give them candy first."

■ "How sad! Did your parents have the same condition?"

■ "But I'm a eunuch, too—and my adoring wife has given me four lovely children!"

But there were some good original entries, too, mostly wildly anachronistic, including:

◆ Second runner-up: **"Do not give up hope. My brother is a eunuch, and yet wise people tell him every day that he can go reproduce himself."** (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

◆ First runner-up: **"So I guess that IS a banana in your pocket."** (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

◆ And the winner of the Extra Inker: **"Ah, you have the same condition, I hear, as my wife's dear friend Philanderus."** (Chris Doyle)

Report from Week 559, in which we asked you to write a sign or slogan for a business: But first, an embarrassing coincidence: Ross Patterson of Reston gleefully wrote in to inform The Empress that several jokes of this kind—including the one we used in the cartoon as an example—formed the theme of the May 16 crossword by Seth A. Abel in The Washington Post Magazine. Whose results, of course, ran May 23—the very day this contest was announced in the Invitational. The Empress is fairly sure, however, that Mr. Abel did not hack into her computer and steal the list of jokes, stolen off the Internet, that someone had sent her.

◆ Fourth runner-up: **Botox clinic: For That Frosty Mug Sensation!** (Elden Carnahan, Laurel)

◆ Third runner-up: **Reddi-Wip: From Our Can to Yours** (Jean Sorensen, Herndon)

◆ Second runner-up: **Outside a mousetrap factory: Line Forms on Beaten Path** (Russell Beland, Springfield)

◆ First runner-up, winner of the dead-minnow tie clip: **Anesthesiologist: We Conk to Stupor** (Sue Lin Chong, Washington)

◆ And the winner of the Inker: **Sunshine Veggie Burgers and Dogs: You'll Hardly Know You Aren't Eating a Dead Animal** (Eric Murphy, Chicago)

◆ Honorable Mentions:

Sperm bank: Procreation Without Representation (Joseph Romm, Washington)

Auto mechanic: If It Ain't Broke, We Fix It (Russell Beland)

Cicada Exterminators Inc.: 16-Year Guarantee! (Bill Clark, Kensington)

Plus-size boutique: Plenty of Parking in Rear (Russell Beland)

Credit card company: We Take an Interest in You Forever (Paul Kocak, Syracuse, N.Y.)

Department of Motor Vehicles: We're Not Happy Till You're Not Happy! (Lynn Dawson, Centerville)

Larry's Lumberjacks: We're Okay! (Peter Metrinko, Plymouth, Minn.)

U.S. Capitol Police: We Protect Your Volubles (Harold Mantle, Gaithersburg)

Keebler: For Every Carb You Cut, an Elf Loses His Job (Eric Murphy, Chicago)

NRA: Guns Don't Kill People. Sucking Chest Wounds Kill People. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

Anger management clinic: Biliious and Bilious Served (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

Discount Funerals Inc.: A Little Slab'll Do Ya (Allan Moore, Washington)

Dog walking service: We've Got a Leg Up on the Competition (Bill Clark)

Hard Hat Construction Co.: Your Fish Can Ride My Bicycle Anytime, Baby (Roy Ashley, Washington)

Egg farm: Visitors Welcome: We Won't Get in Your Face (Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

Cover Girl Cosmetics: Because You're Not as Pretty as You Think (Jean Sorensen)

Humane Society benefit: Race for the Cur (Peter Metrinko)

Brothel: There's No Satisfaction Like a Job Well Done (Scott Campisi, Wake Village, Tex.)

Bra boutique: We Fix Flats (Dorothy W. Linowes, Chevy Chase)

Dermatology clinic: A Watched Boil Never Pops (Peter Metrinko)

Oncology clinic: We're a Large Growth Company (Cecil J. Clark, Arlington)

Urology clinic: Winning the Admiration of Our Peers (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

Sperm bank: The Future Is in Your Hands (Dave Prevar)

Magic shop: Now You See It, Now You (Dave Prevar)

Mortuary Coiffures Inc.: Hairdo Eternity (Chris Doyle)

Eye, ear, nose and throat clinic: See No Evil, Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil? We Can Help! (Dot Yufer, Newton, W.Va.)

Tie shop: 10 Percent Off Your Neck's Order (John O'Byrne, Dublin)

Pooper Scoopers Inc.: Celebrating 35 Years in Business (Russell Beland)

Carmen's Coconut Bras for Men: Apparel of Laughs (Chris Doyle)

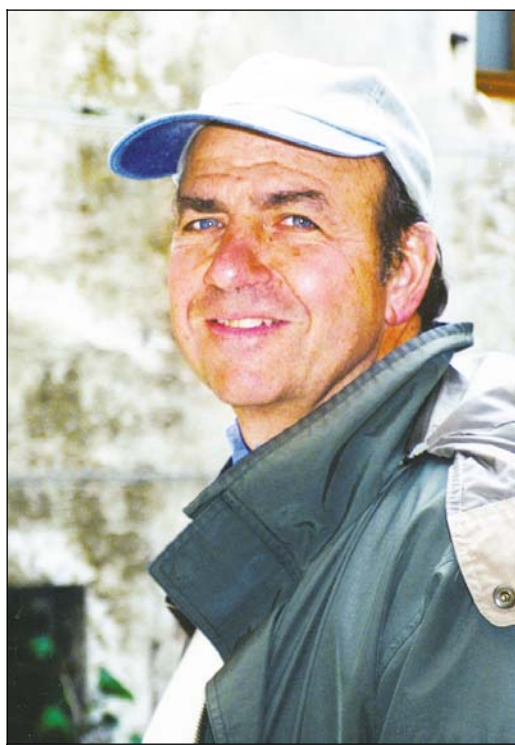
Egyptian Tourism Board: Hey, we stopped forcing people to make pyramids 4,000 years ago. (Bob Sorensen, Herndon)

Credit improvement service: We Repair Collateral Damage (Jon Reiser, Hilton, N.Y.)

Endocrinology clinic: Gland Opening! (Brendan Beary)

Group therapy clinic: Esteem Cleaning (Tom Witte)

Oldies station: Good to the Last Doowop (Dave Komornik, Danville, Va.)



BY JOSI KOWELL; BOOK COVER BY RANDOM HOUSE



COURTESY WILLIAM H. VON DREELE

Calvin Trillin, left, has a new book of poems, below, that point out the foibles of the Bush administration. Trillin's conservative counterpart is William H. von Dreele, right, a longtime poet for the National Review.

Political Poets Profit From a Life of Rhyme

POETS, From D1

yet genial, often funny, sometimes godawful, and says much that, if published in any other form but verse, would be purely scurrilous.

"I find that you can say a lot, so long as it rhymes," says Trillin, from New York. For instance: Looking to rhyme the last name of former New York Sen. Alfonse D'Amato, Trillin came up with "sleaze-bag obligato."

"You can't say that in prose," says Trillin. Nor can you breezily call Elliott Abrams (the National Security Council member who pleaded guilty to two misdemeanor counts of misleading Congress during the Iran-contra scandal, and was later pardoned by George H.W. Bush) "a felon," or imply that the return to grace of John Poindexter (whose conviction on five felony charges after the same scandal was overturned) is a sign of the current administration's preference for criminals among its top ranks (High-level appointments now favor the guys / With rap sheets instead of CVs).

Trillin calls himself the country's only deadline poet. When confronted with evidence that William H. von Dreele, who has contributed politically themed verse to the conservative National Review for decades, might also be considered a deadline poet (he, too, soaks in the Sunday talk shows before putting pen to paper for a weekly deadline), Trillin responds cheerfully: "Well then I'd say my claim to be the only deadline poet is a simple lie, a boast and a lie."

Von Dreele's style, like his politics, contrasts sharply with Trillin's. Von Dreele, who is just shy of 80, belongs to the old guard of the National Review. He's a gracious relic of the magazine's good old days, when being conservative had less to do with attack-dog politics and religious fundamentalism, and was more about a wry pessimism when it came to the frailties of Man.

When you talk to von Dreele, and read his verse, you imagine a world of blue blazers and crisply pressed khakis, a world where the sun hangs low over the golf course and darts of orange light glint on the surface of your glacially chilled martini.

Von Dreele, who also lives in New York, has spent his golden years (and much of his middle age, too) warning of the decline and fall of the American Empire. His allusions are classical and historical; his style is allusive, with less of Trillin's singsong meter, and a more self-conscious and sinuous sense of poetic form. But he can produce a dark ditty with the best of them:

*The Hutu hate the Tutsi,
The short detest the tall,
Rwanda hates Burundi,
Uganda hates them all.*

Published in December 1996, the poem paints Africa with a very broad brush, and ends with a warning:

*Zaire is decomposing,
Mobutu's being nursed.
If I were Mr. Clinton,
I'd save the District first.*

The last four lines of his poem (caveat: von Dreele modestly refuses to call what he does "poetry") demonstrate the distinctive traits of his style: "It's sardonic, it's mordant and it tries to be funny in the last line. That's the light verse tradition," he says. "You have to have a really sock 'em last line."

Von Dreele, whose career includes long years at IBM working on the company's house publication, cites Dorothy Parker as inspiration and distances himself from the more formless playfulness of Ogden Nash. Trillin, by contrast, sees himself as a prankster and distances himself from the entire tradition of art poetry. Von Dreele does a dressed-down version of Byron: knowing, snarky and clever. Trillin is a scrapper, close relative to all those too-clever high school students who got away with skewering the teacher with dirty limericks (because good teachers love a brat who can spin a funny line).

"Unlike somebody like Wordsworth, or Alexander Pope—those malingers—I actually have to write a poem every week," Trillin says. "They could

sit and wait for the sun to set, the sheep to come home."

But for all his irreverence, Trillin says he became more determined about using poetry to tar and feather public figures during the lead-up to the Iraq war, which he opposed. His new book, subtitled "The Bush Administration in Rhyme," has a more focused and tart political edge than an earlier book ("Deadline Poet") that dealt with a much wider variety of subjects. In his earlier book, the whole world was a target, including Democrats ("The man is known for quo pro quidness / In Texas, that's how folks do bidness," was written to skewer not the Bushes, but former Democratic vice-presidential nominee Lloyd Bentsen).

"I think I got more serious when it became apparent that they were intent on starting a war with Iraq," says Trillin. "I don't mean the poems got serious, they were still meant to be entertaining. I was sort of enraged about the whole thing. I was a bad person to have at dinner parties. I was outraged that people were letting them get away with it, including the Democrats, doves afraid to coo."

The self-deflating quality that von Dreele often employs in the "sock 'em" last line shows up in Trillin's verse as a title longer than the poem. "An Analysis of the Turkish-American Alliance, Its Diplomatic Significance, and Its Role in Establishing Democracy in the Middle East," is the heading of a March 17, 2003, poem that reads, in its entirety:

*Get allies? That's
not hard to do.
We'll simply go and
buy a few.*

Trillin says there's a simple reason for such compression. He gets paid \$100 for each poem no matter how long they are.

"When you want to get the buzz of working for top dollar in your field, write a two-line poem," he says.

Which is a self-deflating way of avoiding the provocative claims present in many of these short poems. Was the long and painful process of trying to coax Turkey into supporting the Iraq war a matter of bribery and blackmail? Checkbook diplomacy? Just business as usual in a venal world?

Like Trillin, von Dreele also gets paid \$100 per poem. And like Trillin, he uses his poetry to put words into the mouths of people, indulge in wanton Schadenfreude, and tease out all the small ironies in political life that are generally spoken only among likeminded people.

The essence of a partisan worldview—and we're all guilty—is confidence about things that can't be proved: the motivations of other people, their psychological makeup, the dark truths about their lives for which there is as yet no smoking gun. These speculations are supported with a mix of facts, fantasy and the guiding power of our most basic, operating truths about the world. To opponents of the war, of course our allies were bought off; to supporters, of course there were negotiations in the classic realpolitik tradition. Boil these thoughts down even further, and you have the archetypal worldviews that keep us divided: We play hardball and that's wrong; or, we play hardball because that's how the game is played.

It is the role of the Deadline Poet (and all the other denizens of the political middle-world) to articulate the simple thoughts widely held by half the polarized electorate—e.g. Bush is a moron, Kerry is a snob—yet can't be directly spoken in respectable journals. Coated with a sweet veneer of verbal virtuosity, these truths slip into the political bloodstream. The pleasure of the poet, and the reader, is seeing these mean little memes circulating freely, doing their damage, a leperous distillment poured into the porches of our ears.

Von Dreele, who was a conservative in the 1960s when it wasn't fashionable to be conservative, got to the heart of the matter in a little poem he wrote years ago:

*I swear, if on the Senate floor
The shades of orators of yore
Appeared—like, say, Diogenes—
The Press would push the Kennedys.
Indeed, if Jacob Javits spoke
Bereft of toga, shorn of cloak;
With nothing on but BVDs—
They'd focus on the Kennedys.*

Next Week: **The 97.5-Meter Dash, or The Po'lympics**