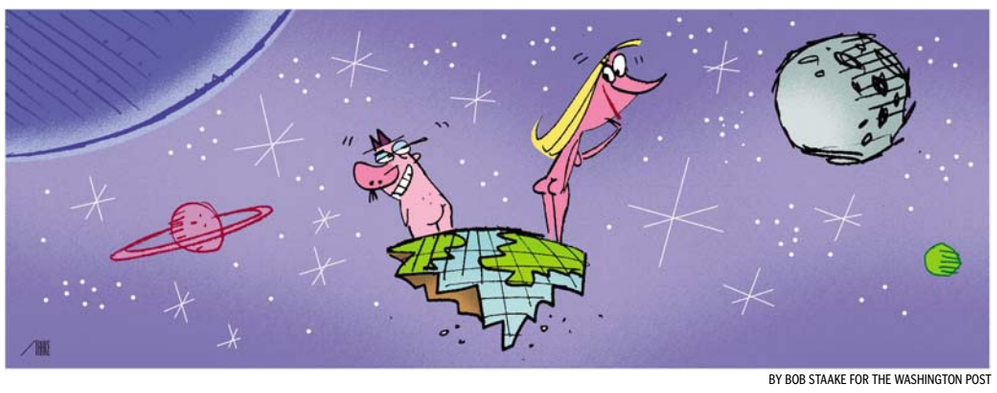
The Style Invitational

Week 621: Questionable Journalism



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

A. In fact, I don't think it's actually as hard to do as you indicate.
Q: You think I'd bring myself to kiss you if you were the last person on Earth?

This week's contest is of a type the Empress loves: one in which contestants cannot steal their entries off the Internet, and one that requires readers to peruse The Washington Post, the fine publication that gives her real cash money as long as she does not use the word ■■■■ or ■■■■ or, of course, ■■■■■■■■ (except as an adjective): **Take any sentence that appears in The Post or in an article on *washingtonpost.com* anytime through Aug. 8 and supply a question that it could answer.** Please cite the date and page number of the article you're using (or if you're online, include that section of the article). The example above is from today's Ask Amy column.

Winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up receives a real treasure: One-time (and we mean one-time, not onetime) Loser Helen Ward is a movie storyboard artist: She makes innumerable ink drawings detailing, shot by shot, five to a page, a planned film. She has sent us the original 26 storyboards for Scene 83, "Van Crash," for "Book of Shadows: Blair Witch 2," which she calls "probably the worst movie I've worked on."

Other runners-up win a 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 by e-mail to *losers@washpost.com* or, if you really have to, by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Aug. 8. Put "Week 621" 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.

Entries 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 Aug. 28. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. This contest was originally suggested in 1998 by Jacob Weinstein.

Report from Week 617, in which we asked you to write something about a well-known person, using only the letters in that person's name. Many impressive entries this week, too many (given the length of some) to fit in this space — so be sure to check out more of the same in a supplement on *washingtonpost.com*. Obviously, it was easier in this contest to use a very long name than a very short one: The person who sent in a single moderately amusing sentence constructed from letters appearing in "Charles Philip Arthur George Mountbatten-Windsor, Prince of Wales" receives only the Empress's haughty derision.

♦ **Third Runner-up: Rick Santorum:** It's a crisis! Am I crass? I'm not. Man 'n' man is tantamount to man 'n' mutt. To man 'n' cat. To man 'n' rat. To man 'n' trout! TO MAN 'N' STORK!!! ICK! (Daniel Mauer, Silver Spring)

♦ **Second Runner-up: William Rehnquist:** He's a tease, this Law Master. We learn he's ill. He weathers the treatment. Then he swears in the new ruler.

Alas, the Master seems a shell. All winter, he marshals his mettle. He startles us; he retains his health. The law still warms this esquire's heart. His qualities shine: wise, serene, quiet, a little ruthless, a little quaint as well (at merest whim, it seems, he wears the silliest hats). We are in his thrall. When will he quit?

The Hill waits. It seethes. The time is here — ere an ass rules the realm, the Master must retire! The militants swarm, hassle him: "We want that seat!" Rather than wilt in the heat, the Master issues a statement: "Retire? Hah! Let the Law Mistress retire. I'll retain this seat whilst air remains in me. Am I timeless, eternal?" He smiles. "We'll see, eh?" (Patricia Casey, McLean)

♦ **First runner-up, winner of the seven-volume Style Invitational Toilet-Top Reference Set: Kelly Ripa:** Early, perky, really irky. (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

♦ **And the winner of the Inker: Scarlett O'Hara:** [A character's short tale.] A careless lass, a tease, has a secret hero. Alas, her heart aches: He shoos her. Cross, she chooses Charles, a loser (later, a carcass). The rascal Rhett chases her: He's crass, hot to trot. Chaos! Terror! Shells scorch the earth. Her clothes tatter. She eats a root, retches. She shoots a looter. Later, Rhett catches her. She has a tot a horse tosses. (A carcass here, too.) The horror shatters Rhett (alcohol has a role), so he scoots. At last, she settles at Tara. [A close shot. Tears roll. The orchestra soars.] (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

♦ **Honorable Mentions:**

Henry David Thoreau: Dear Dunderhead: Overdue rent? Don't threaten me. Your untrue ad read, "Dandy Retreat! Divine Hideout! Adventure Nirvana!" Hah. The truth: a dreary, unheated hut and no oven, no TV, no Internet. Not even a radio! I hate it in toto: the dirt, the odor, the radon. . . . The "river trout"? They're nutria! I haven't eaten other than dried horny toad. And outdoor urination? Not dandy. At nadir: I have heavy ennui, and no vino. I need to hit a tavern in a hurry, dude. — Your Irate, Annoyed Tenant (Mark Eckenwiler, Washington)

Peter Angelos: Legal eagle, Napoleon-poser, poor sport: As pleasant as a serpent, as gallant as a rat. (Brendan Beary)

Julius Caesar: A crisis arises. Cassius carries a slicer. A classic ruse assures success. Cruel rascals lure, assail a careless ruler. Alas, Caesar is a carcass. (Chris Doyle)

Ann H. Coulter: Launch ultra-cruel nuclear terror. Cut a tree. Hunt a crane, turtle, tern or toucan. Accelerate a hot car at a nun on a crutch. Return to coal heat. Halt the taco run to the north; neuter the nacho race here. Honor Colonel North — a true hero. Halt the nocturnal oral, rectal act. Torch central L.A.! Lunch not at Nora! Tell a tall tale, ulcerate a heart, call truth untrue, act out, rant. Touché! (Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)

Fidel Castro: (Classified ad, Ocala Star) Elder dictator desires to sell, lease, or trade aircraft carrier for coastal Florida flat. (Chris Doyle)

Howard Dean: We ran hard. Wandered down a dead-end road. No wonder we were rear-ended. And where are we headed now? Down a new road! NH! And OH. And DE. And OR and WA. And NE! And ND! ONWARD! AAAAAAAAAH!! . . . Oh no. Darn. (Danny Bravman, St. Louis; Jeff Covel, Arlington)

Ron Ely: Only one role: Eyeyeyeyeyeyeyeyeyeyeeeeeeeeeeeeee-eeeeeeeeeeyeyeyeyeyeyeyeyeo! (Elwood Fitzner, Valley City, N.D.)

Paris Hilton: Spoilt trollop — nasal, tartish trash. As an A-list harlot, I stroll on patios as snoops shoot porn photos. I thirst to sin. Ah, lotharios, sailors, pianists! I strip polo shirt, pantaloons; I sport Titian lips, nail polish, a pair o' ta-tas, a tan torso, Saran shorts on loins. (No halo!) Lanolin lotion, palpation, oral passion, positions — lots! trillions! An irritation, I appall pastors, parsons, papal historians, trinitarians, philanthropists, hoi polloi. (Spoilsports!) Titillation? Nonstop! (Mark Eckenwiler)

Paris Hilton: "That's so hot," or "That's so not hot." This, alas, is all I no. (Brendan Beary)

Karl Rove: A looker? No. A lover? No. A leaker? A real leaker. — Val (Fred S. Souk, Herndon; John O'Byrne, Dublin)

Michael Jackson: Monomaniacal chameleon's nose has a mechanical cheesiness; his skin is like melamine. His one ace-in-hole comes as a shock: innocence. (Brendan Beary)

Rush Limbaugh: I'm all bull. (Michelle Stupak, Ellicott City)

John Edwards: Who? (Frank Mullen III, Aledo, Ill.)

Ernest Hemingway: I swagger. I rage. I marinate in gin. I write. This way. (Brendan Beary)

Bill O'Reilly: Ol' yeller. (Mark Eckenwiler)

Donald Trump: A mutant pompadour on a mammon adulator. (Chris Doyle)

Marcel Proust: A proposal occurs to me: Emote a tome! A colossal, spectacular, sumptuous, atemporal tome! A preposterous, almost-complete-career tome! Crap to popular appeal — let's compose as our soul pleases! Mortals are poor, Art's ample! So let's use lots o' paper, create a tale to torture amateurs, to oppress lecturers, to perpetuate classroom terror; a tome to tear apart secrets, to corrupt Scoutmasters, to relate our cares or scream our pleasure, to compass all Europe, all cultures, all space, all else. (Me? Presumptuous?) (Mike Keith, Richmond)

Saddam Hussein: Madman has Sunni enemies, sadism issues and damn sad undies. (Brendan Beary)

Liza Minnelli: I mine nellie men. (Michelle Stupak)

Katie Holmes: [She meets Tom.] Sheesh! He has me at "hello." Ooh, he's a total hottie! That smile. Those teeth. He's so smooooth. Hmmm. Almost too smooth. I see he likes to steal looks at males — a lot. That makes me a little skittish. Is he a sham? Is this all a mammoth mistake? I'll talk to Mimi. She'll tell me. [Tom takes a hike.] (Chris Doyle)

And Last: Leopold Ritter von Sacher-Masoch: He craves the approval of the SI Empress. "Please, oh, please, print this," he pleads. Print this and he shall remain, as ever: slave. (Bruce W. Alter, Fairfax Station)

More Honorable Mentions appear on the Style Invitational page on *washingtonpost.com*.

Next Week: Of D.C. I Sing, or **Wards & Music**

MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

A Question of Couples

Does a same-gender couple ruin the seating arrangement at a formal dinner party?

Miss Manners imagines she hears a deep sigh coming from across the generations. Her dear grandmamma felt persecuted by exactly such situations.

Not that this lady would have given a fig (figs being what exasperated ladies of those days didn't give, in place of something worse) who cared to mate with whom. All she asked was that they not tell her about it. This ban firmly applied to the proudly respectable, as well as to everyone else who hadn't yet been caught, and it no doubt saved the lady a great deal of tedium.

Her brothers obliged her by refraining from explaining why they were showing up with this lady or that. However, there was a sister who showed a shocking lack of interest in hypocrisy. Furthermore, that lady was inclined to take more than her fair share. Her idea of a basic social unit was herself, her husband and the gentleman who was the third member of their permanent menage, occasionally to be supplemented by one of her passing interests.

And that is the way she insisted on showing up for Grandmother's dinner parties, making havoc of the seating arrangements. And you may be sure that Miss Manners's grandmother did care about seating arrangements.

Apparently even now, she is not alone.

"When my partner and I host formal dinners," writes a Gentle Reader, "we each sit at an end of the table and try to seat the guests so the sexes alternate and no one sits next to his or her partner. We are happy to receive same-sex couples, but I wonder if you might clarify matters.

"We normally seat an invited individual in accordance with his sex and seat his or her guest in a seat that would ordinarily be used by the other sex. One hopes that the guest would not be subject to ironic remarks, like 'You must be the wife (or husband)' based on the seating.

"Still, are we following the correct procedure?

"From the other direction, if one receives an invitation for self and guest to a formal dinner, should the invitee advise the hostess that a same-sex couple will be coming, to allow the possible invitation of two members of the other sex in order to balance the seating? I feel the hosts have to make everyone comfortable and that polite society has accepted same-sex couples. How do we succeed in a formal setting?"

By keeping up with change, a phrase Miss Manners does not often have occasion to use.

It is more than a quarter of a century since Miss Manners herself declared that the boy-girl seating method, desirable as it may be when feasible, should yield to such considerations as inviting interesting people and seating potentially compatible people together. It is not only Miss Manners's grandmother who was being driven crazy by this, but unattached ladies who were being ignored and unattached gentlemen who were being spoiled.

Hosts should always be advised of the identity of their guests, and they need to know who is part of an established couple, so they can separate them at the table. That rule is still in effect, no matter how many fond couples tell Miss Manners that they cannot bear to eat apart.

Dear Miss Manners:

I am dating a gentleman who has been divorced for approximately two years. We have been dating longer than two years.

He continues to have a social life with his ex-spouse that I feel is inappropriate and very hurtful to myself. For instance, he takes his daughter every week to his ex-wife's house at the end of his parental visitation. He stays sometimes for three to four hours. He also invites her to things such as a New Year's party at his house, etc.

I have confronted him about this and let him know how hurtful it is to me. He backs off doing such things and then will slowly start them again. For instance, his ex-wife is having surgery and he will be allowing her to stay at his home for two or three days (and, yes, nights). What's this about? What should I do?

It's about kindness and compassion for someone he has loved and who is the mother of his child.

As for what you could do, Miss Manners suggests remembering that you had no such objections about his seeing a third party when he was still married.

Feeling incorrect? E-mail your etiquette questions to Miss Manners (who is distraught that she cannot reply personally) at MissManners@unitedmedia.com or mail to United Media, 200 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016.

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ASK AMY

Dear Amy:

Every year my Irish Catholic family has a reunion picnic. The festivities are preceded by a Mass, as there are a few priests in the family.

The Mass is always scheduled to start at noon, but at that time, so few people have arrived that it is invariably postponed and starts much later.

Is there a diplomatic way to point out that not everyone wishes to sit through a Mass and that some of the late arrivals are deliberately trying to miss the service?

Speaking for myself, I am no longer a practicing Catholic, and I feel like a complete hypocrite going through the motions of a religious ceremony that has no meaning for me.

Because my grandparents, parents and aunts and uncles are all there, it's hard to just sit there and pretend to enjoy the service.

Busted Flat in Baton Rouge

Every Sunday I believe I see various people sitting in the pews, pretending to enjoy the service. Lord knows I've occasionally done it myself. In fact, I don't think it's actually as hard to do as you indicate.

I realize that lapsed Catholics can have a complicated relationship with their church, and I think I understand how difficult this matter could be for some people. However, at the risk of encouraging you and others to be hypocritical, I'm going to go ahead and do so.

Would it kill you to go to Mass once a year?

I don't think it would. I don't think it would do irreparable harm to your spiritual integrity to sit through a reunion Mass that you have little interest in, just for the sake of older members of your family for whom this is clearly an important part of their family fellowship.

If after my little sermon you are still looking for a diplomatic way to indicate that some family members are trying to miss it, you could say, "Don't wait on those of us who are running late, Father. Some people may not want to attend Mass that day, but we'll all be there to see the family afterward."

Dear Amy:

I'm 15, and in my group of friends I am the person they go to with love problems.

I have two friends, "Emily" and "Rory." I set them up, and they started to go out. Apparently she really likes him and he likes her. But then almost a week after I set them up, Emily slept with another guy and didn't tell Rory.

Emily said she was just getting things out of her system, but then she did it again two more times. Now she says she's going to stick with Rory, but I really don't believe her. Rory and I have been friends for seven years and I want to tell him what Emily did.

I also have another problem. About three weeks after I set these two up, I started to have feelings for Rory. Now I don't know what to do. I don't think Emily cares for him the way I do, and she hasn't ever been exactly faithful to any guy.

Now I have to give Emily and Rory advice to keep them together. What should I do?

Advice Goddess

Please leave the heavy lifting to the experts. It's time to put your advice-giving career on hold.

Don't even get me started on the horrifying prospect of 15-year-olds having sex. But I know that's not your question.

If you'll stop matchmaking, you'll have an opportunity to concentrate on your own life.

I'm going to recommend some summer reading on this very topic. Pick up Jane Austen's "Emma," which is a cautionary tale about matchmaking with similar elements to your story. If you can't manage reading a classic novel from the 19th century, rent the movie "Emma," starring Gwyneth Paltrow.

If you can't handle the English accents, rent the movie "Clueless," a wonderful California version of "Emma," which will convey the very message you need to hear.

Dear Amy:

In a recent column, you responded to a young woman whose boyfriend was "perfect in every way" except that he regularly looks at pictures of naked women.

You should have informed the young woman that most men enjoy looking at pictures of scantily clad, attractive women. Those who do not enjoy looking at pictures of scantily clad men. If the latter were true in her case, photographs would be the least of her problems.

Your comparison of smoking with heterosexuality was less than silly.

If this young woman feels inadequate because she does not look like a Victoria's Secret model, she has serious self-esteem problems and should get off her boyfriend's case.

Gilbert in Bethesda

In my response to this letter, I compared the boyfriend's porn habit to smoking — both are occupations that others in the household may find offensive.

I'm not sure that your equation of porn with healthy heterosexuality quite holds up, but I welcome hearing additional points of view.

Write to Amy Dickinson at askamy@tribune.com or Ask Amy, Chicago Tribune, TT500, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60611.

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BRIDGE | *Frank Stewart*

Both sides vulnerable

NORTH
♠ K 6 4 3 2
♥ K J
♦ 4
♣ 9 6 4 3 2

WEST
♠ Q 9 8
♥ A 6 4 2
♦ Q J 10 2
♣ K 5

EAST
♠ A J 10
♥ 5 3
♦ K 9 8 6
♣ J 10 8 7

SOUTH (D)
♠ 7 5
♥ Q 10 9 8 7
♦ A 7 5 3
♣ A Q

The bidding:

South	West	North	East
1 ♥	Pass	1 ♠	Pass
2 ♦	Pass	2 ♥	All Pass

Opening lead: ♦ Q

"I've heard that at duplicate bridge, declarer must take calculated risks to make overtricks," a club player remarked.

"True," I replied, "if you think the contract will be the same at all the other tables. But if you're at a game nobody else will reach, play safe for the contract."

"I tried for overtricks in one deal today," he said, "and partner was upset when my play failed."

"You can't judge a doctor's skill by what the undertaker says," I said, shrugging. "What happened?"

As South, my friend had opened a light hand and had landed at two hearts.

"I took the ace of diamonds, ruffed a diamond and tried a club finesse with the queen. When West won, he led a trump, and I couldn't ruff another diamond. I lost two diamonds, two spades, a club and a trump. If East had the king of clubs, I could ruff a second diamond and make an overtrick. Was my play wrong?"

What do you think of South's play?

South should have settled for eight tricks by leading a club to the ace and ruffing a second diamond. The trouble with risking the club finesse was that South was already ahead of the game: On the auction, a trump lead was indicated and might have beaten the contract for sure, but West had failed to lead a trump.

Moreover, the contract at some tables might be different. East-West might enter the auction and make, say, a diamond partial. If South made two hearts for plus 110 points, he'd be sure of a good score, especially if West had the king of clubs.

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