

# ELF EYRIE

JAN ANDERSON  
New York, New York

From the irrelevant heights of his little cliffside nest, Scarfin' Fat-back (my elf) and I thought that the puckishness of editorial replies to authors might be an interesting theme to eyriely explore. Would you believe that just a single trip to the local library's archives unearthed the following correspondence? I don't know whether these letters will dis- or hearten other aspiring writers, but I understand most of the recipients here survived their early discouragement. Each letter has been authentically authenticated, as each makes use of a different type of wordplay. What types? See Answers and Solutions.

writing left to right, in concert with the way most of us read...  
ruoy etaicerppa dluow ew erutuf eht nI .su fo gnikniht rof uoy knahT

abhor the gruesome end of the boy's pet bird (?).  
ylralucitrap tsom ew dna ,syaW rednoW fo yhposolihp lairotide eht tcelf  
our unanimous decision that the violence of the straying son fails to re-  
saw ti ,etelosbo dna emit-dlo sa ytilarom fo tnemnodnaba eht ,.e.i ,eceip  
the lovable old father figure, Calhoun, exemplifies the message of the  
taht gnirevocsid fo tniop eht ot dellevarnu dah ew ecno, etar yna tA

cannot enclose copies, but you should consider getting both.  
ew terger eW ?elytS fo kooB semiT kroY weN eht dna yranoitcid doog a  
alerted us to the strange fact that it's written backwards. Do you have  
retupmoc ruo retfa neve , "ykcowrebbaJ" ni sgnillepssim tsuj spahrep ro  
recent submission. There seem to be a number of typographical errors  
tsom ruoy fo gninaem eht tuo gnirugif emit a etiuq dah yllaer eW  
Dear Mr. Dodgson:

scitsiceloS lanoitaerceR fo lanruoJ ehT  
WONDER WAYS

RANDOM DOUBLETALK PUBLISHING CO.  
Li'l Abner Doubletalk Division

Dear Mr. Orwell:

One error many beginning authors make is failure to recognize that children's fiction is adult work. This is said not to discourage you from further efforts, but to point you to the vast store of acceptable juvenile literature which can serve as your guide during your "disciplinary period" as a writer.

"Animal Farm" has some fine moments, and its subtle humor did not escape us. However, all nine readers and editors on the Acquisitions Board noted the following:

A) The talking pig has been done, so to speak (ha ha), to death, and is now a rather ambiguous figure, what with the Home-building Little fatties still timelessly representing the effects of economic crunch on middle-class children, their vulnerability today made more poignant by the uncertainty that their parents' commitment to them and to each other can provide an adequate bulwark against the wolf at the door ... on to the insouciant Porky, daring his inimitable imitation of President Dwight D. Eisenhower. From Piglet's humility to Miss Piggy's me-first selfism to Babe's innocent country courtesy, children no longer know what to make of pigs. Adding to the ambiguity are the savaging, trampling swine of Matthew's Gospel. You'd be surprised how many teens (and even a few younger) are now literate enough to read Today's English Version of the Bible such as the Good News edition, with all its adorable line drawings. Talking animals are good, especially if you can latch on to a quality illustrator like that, but perhaps something less hackneyed ... we have far too many alligators, possums, cats, dogs and rodents, and there are at least eight talking pigs. You might consider something of the piscine persuasion.

B) This week alone I have cautioned four other young writers as I do you: be careful that none of your own (if any) possibly controversial political, social or religious views slips in. We know you didn't intend to use a children's novel as an ideological platform, but that is exactly the sort of thing that can make a fresh, original story as obsolete as "Huckleberry Finn" (a work of middle-America somewhat lengthier than yours, but also, interestingly, an odyssey ...

U-HAUL-IT LITERARY AGENCY & HACK SERVICE  
Low Reading Fee

Dear Miss Hemans:

Your poetry is a delight! It was with much enjoyment that I read "The Boy Stood On The Burning Deck," and all in one night!

However, you might not be aware that the climate of our society has changed since you were fifteen and published your earlier volume of rhymes. In particular, I find a few minor lapses of sexual-orientation sensitivity, which readers might not so easily forgive in today's times.

"The boy" is effete and dependent (and let's face it--masochistic and stupid!) to a degree where readers will suspect an author bias or covert anti-gay agenda, I fear. Having spoken to you once or twice, I know you well enough to be sure that's not the problem, but that still leaves "the problem" of whether he's queer. After much pondering, I have concluded that the solution does not lie in making him a girl (which

would only invite the ire of feminists!), at least not a girl with as helplessly moribund a personality as here!

See how you like this (just a thought). Change the setting to the America's Cup Race ... the all-female entry's yacht! They are within a hundred yards of victory--when their closest competitor (all-male) capsizes! (I don't know why; you don't need reasons, just disastrous surprises.) Now the women are caught in the perilous "winds" of dilemma! Do they go to the rescue (the men have forgotten their life-preservers and will drown without the--note!--women's aid!!) or do they choose the victory as boldly as would Jane Austen's Emma? Let there be an argument between the captain and her first mate (the heroine) over this, and leave the reader wondering until the last word. But do resolve it (ambiguity is passé!) in your very last line: your "finish," both literally and symbolically, should represent their "finish," as well as that the men's "finish" is appropriately absurd.

I know you can do this! Thank you so much for letting me be the first to see this beautiful work of art, Miss ...

MERRY E KING JAMES I PUBLISHING EMPIRE

Dear Mr. Shakespeare:

All told, We thought "MacBeth" was a pretty fair attempt at a form that has lain nearly dormant since the majestic tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripedes. Bless My soul, you even worked in witches in the form of Harpies (or was it the Medusa girls?) just to please Me. Credibly done, Mr. Shakespeare, credibly done. Did you know We happen to be something of an expert on witchcraft? ("Eye of Newt"--you need to capitalize that.) Flaws, however, abound: it seems to Us the dramatic flaw here is the lack of a tragic hero, although you've done a fine job portraying his tragic flaw. Greatly enhancing the emotional involvement would be for the observer to identify with the action on stage, and to eventually reach a point of emotional purgation. He must be thinking "There but for the grace of God go I." (It is all expressed so well by Aristotle in his "Poetics." Just re-published! King James I Publishing Empire has expanded! Let Me enclose a copy as it addresses itself to My point.)

Mr. and Mrs. MacBeth are both unsympathetic characters. Nor do Mrs. M's distressing symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder rend the hearts of the audience, as you fail to capitalize on her malady. (Obviously, you haven't read Freud's "General Introduction to Psycho-analysis"--enclosed.) Psychological knowledge has now become a must for writers, helping to provide characters with depth and motivation.

Queerly, We were rooting for the fall of the MacBeths from the opening page, not at all the way We felt when We read either "Billy Budd" or "Death of a Salesman." Remember that both heroes there are essentially "everyman" enlarged; you should note that very few readers or observers these days will identify with lords or squires, still less

with kings and emperors. (Say, have you read either Miller or Melville? Tragedians of the first water--copies enclosed.)

Unusual and laudable as it is to write metric scansion so meticulous, We find that sometimes the fewer words the better, even if you do lose your pulse for a few beats. Very effective examples of this are Haiku (samples enclosed).

We are getting together a small group of writers and whatnot to work on a Scripture project the damn Puritan anti-ecclesiasts have been agitating for. Xenophobic fundamentalists! You are still, of course, some distance away from the professionalism being assembled (and, We assume, illiterate in Greek and Hebrew?), but you might benefit from sitting in on a work session or two. Zounds, a thought: we may make a similar offer to Francis Bacon as you two would enjoy each other, working to update the Bible, putting out a today's English version, perhaps even replacing some of the expensive gilded icon four-colors with adorable line drawings ...

#### A REVISED AND UPDATED TOPICAL SLANG DICTIONARY

The August 1990 Word Ways reviewed Paul Dickson's *Slang!*, a paperback collection of 5000 slang terms in 24 categories from "Advertising and Public Relations" to "Yuppies, Dinks and Other Moderns". This hardcover update, published for \$25 by Pocket Books (ISBN 0-671-54920-0), contains at least 8000 terms, with four new categories (Computerese Downloaded, The Great Outdoors, Media Slang, University and College Slang).

This book is meant for browsing; delights await on every page. Who can resist entries like rabbit dunk, put more lipstick on the pig, or Smilin' Mighty Jesus? What's a tooth to tail ratio? a dwelly belly? Satan's secret? the thirteenth generation? a fuzzy taco? porcupine provisions? a fart knocker? There are eight different slang terms for dog, boot and bag. Dickson even includes a glossary of emoticons (those sidewise smiley-faces).