



# A Correspondence

by Larry Gaffney

FLYMF May 2007, The Beginning Of The End Issue, Volume 4 Issue 5

Dear Slater Manning,

Please be advised that you and your shitty magazine can rot in hell. Subscribe? Even if I were given a free copy I would tear the pages out and use them to housebreak my puppy. I think that would greatly improve the quality of the writing, don't you?

Re. your claim that *Overbite* will be remembered as the greatest literary magazine of the age: Dream on, asshole. The only thing your rag will be remembered for is its failure to publish the greatest *writer* of the age—me.

By all means continue wasting your postage on these pathetic appeals for money. My friends and I—*real* writers—are tickled to imagine you on all fours, licking the boots of your sponsors. And what a pleasure it is to send you this letter of loathing in your own postage-paid envelope!

I fart on your masthead,

Jerry Fiebleman

Dear Mr. Fiebleman,

Now *that's* funny! What a way to respond to a letter congratulating you on your first acceptance at *Overbite*! But why didn't you send the entire manuscript? It's been a while since we've published a good epistolary satire, and even though we usually don't run the work of an author in back to back issues, how can we resist this one? You're such a tease!

Anyway, send us the manuscript and please return a signed copy of the contract we included with your acceptance letter. If you want to be paid, that is. It's not *New Yorker* money, but it's better than a poke in the eye with a stick, as they say.

One more thing: it occurs to us that perhaps the ending of your story is too abrupt. Maybe the protagonist could muse for a sentence or two on the ramifications of what has happened. Also, might there be one adverb too many in a few of your longer paragraphs? It's your call, but we think these small changes will improve the story. In any case, there's quite a buzz here over your work. We enjoy showcasing new talent.

Send the contract!

Warm regards,

Slater Manning

Dear Mr. Manning,

I'm very pleased that you enjoyed a taste of the epistolary satire I am currently devising. I'll send it off to you as soon as I can.

Say, are you quite sure that the contract was sent with the letter of acceptance? I may have misplaced it, but I don't think so. Perhaps your factotum neglected to put it in the envelope. How about another copy? Better yet, maybe you could send it to me as an attachment to an e-mail. That would be a lot quicker, and frankly I'm eager to see how much you intend to pay me. It's been rather a lean year, heh heh.

I think your suggested changes have merit, and I will definitely consider implementing them. However—and this is a little embarrassing—I seem to have unintentionally deleted my original copy of the story. Would you be kind enough to send *that* to me in an attachment, as well? It would certainly expedite matters.

Well, back to the satire. Send me the attachments and I shall respond forthwith!

All the best,

JF

Dear Jerry,

I'm awfully sorry to tell you this, but we're a bunch of Luddites here at *Overbite*, so attachments are out. Yes, we have computers, but we lack the expertise to convert hard copies into Word documents. I understand there's something called a "scanner" which might be able to perform this operation, but frankly we grow faint at the thought of thrashing through the instruction manual that inevitably accompanies such a gizmo.

Are you quite certain that you don't have a carbon copy of the original lying around somewhere? If you will re-read our writer's guidelines, you will see that we strongly advise against sending the only copy of a manuscript, which it seems you may have done. I hope that's not the case.

About the contract. I'm afraid that our legal advisor forbids us to send out additional copies of a contract that has supposedly been lost. I'm not sure why, but you know how lawyers are. They have their persnickety reasons, and all we can do is shake our heads and sigh. But here's the good news! My "factotum," as you refer to him (and to be honest, Jerry, he was not altogether pleased by this designation), is practically OCD with regard to procedures and has assured me that he *never* puts a letter of acceptance into an envelope without also inserting the contract.

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He even uses a checklist and just now showed me the one he filled out for you and your story. Indeed, the checkmarks are there, in bold, fluid strokes executed with vigor and confidence. So all is well! The contract is certainly among your papers, mingled, perhaps, with the junk mail and dunning letters obscured beneath the latest issue of *Barely Legal*. Find it, send it along, and we're in business.

Have you thought about the changes? We'll be putting the next issue to bed within a fortnight and would like to include your excellent story in a folio with a new piece by Anthea Bumpers, since both works are antithetical renderings of the same post-post modernist perspective. As a reader of *Overbite* you are no doubt well acquainted with Anthea's work and know exactly what I mean.

How's the satire coming?

Best,

Slater

Dear Slater,

Carbon copy? Is carbon paper still available? I suppose if one were to nose around in the basements of old schoolhouses...but never mind.

Alas, I no longer have a copy of the story. Might you send your factotum—sorry, *assistant*—down to Kinko's where they can make a Xerox copy of the thing? Better yet, send him to Staples or Office Max, where, while a copy is being made, a cheerful salesperson will explain to him the wondrous, and easily learned, functions of the "scanner" you mentioned in your previous letter. With a scanner on the premises, you can ascend from your medieval darkness and will no longer have to placate contributors with mewling confessions of ineptitude. Meanwhile, send me the Xerox copy and I will make the changes, if so warranted.

Okay, I understand about the contract and the damn lawyer, but the original copy is nowhere to be found. Rather than ruffle any more feathers, I will simply take responsibility for its strange disappearance. Perhaps my dog ate it. Oh, wait. I don't have a dog.

Do we really need a contract for this transaction? Why not just send a check? You've indicated that my payment will not be a princely sum (I remain curious to know how much it *is*, exactly, but no matter), so I don't understand the need for such formality.

I will watch for the check and a copy of the story. The satire is coming along nicely, thanks.

Yours,

JF

Dear Jerry,

How peculiar that you should say you don't have a dog. What about the puppy mentioned in your first letter? Or was that merely part of the satire?

To be candid, I must tell you that we are starting to wonder about certain inconsistencies in your letters...but let's move on.

We are unable to pay you without a contract. Please find it and send it to us.

We are still waiting for your decision about the changes. Um, you *do* know which story you sent us, right? But of course you do. You've read our writer's guidelines, in which we admonish would-be contributors not to bombard us with multiple submissions, the mark of a rank amateur. You didn't send us multiple submissions, did you? If that were the case, you wouldn't know which story we took if you trashed the letter of acceptance—and the contract—before investigating it more carefully. But what a preposterous notion! Forgive us, Jerry. Sometimes we're as fanciful as the writers we publish.

To business, then. Please send the contract along with the changes. Otherwise we will have to consign your story to limbo, which means say goodbye to your name up there in lights next to Anthea Bumpers.

What's up with the satire?

--SM

Slater:

Look, I can't find the contract, okay? What are you, The Conde Nast Empire? You're a litmag. Nobody cares about your pissant monetary maneuvers. Just send the check.

Without a copy of the story there's not much I can do except say go ahead and make the changes. The piece is strong enough to withstand editorial fumbings. Do your worst.

The lights illuminating a folio devoted to the vapid yowls of Anthea Bumpers must be very bright indeed. I imagine they could even bring the furnishings of a mousehole into vivid relief.

I look forward to receiving the check and my six contributor's copies of *Overbite*.

--JF

Dear Jerry, you wretched little man,

You cannot imagine the delight that your groveling and mendacity have brought to all of us here at *Overbite*! Every once in a while we receive hate mail from a bitter failure such as yourself, but *your* letter was so ripe for play that we rescued it from the shredder, where it was queued behind a diatribe from a lady librarian in Toledo who doesn't like profanity. We just *had* to string you along, and what fun it has been!

Dopes like you are the reason we strive to stay afloat—so that we can rub your noses in the splendid literature we publish, works of art you and your ilk must weep to see in the pages of fine literary magazines, even as you gnash your teeth over the steady stream of rejection slips that set your postmen to sneering and your hopes spiraling into the void.

Send us more of your work, Jerry. We don't have a puppy to train, but we'll happily take your manuscripts to a local pet shop, where not only puppies, but also kittens, ferrets, gerbils, and parrots can make editorial comments.

Through tears of laughter,

Slater and the gang at *Overbite*

Slater dude,

I knew you'd take the bait! Was working on the epistolary satire and couldn't think how to proceed, and then I got your hilarious cry for money and everything fell into place. What better fish than some hapless minnow buried under heaps of unreadable submissions? With no life, you were certain to pour your energies into a lame attempt at humiliating a disgruntled rejectee. Well done!

You've given me plenty of rich material, and I have tweaked it into a finished manuscript, sans your name or the ridiculous name of your litmag. Nothing would please me more than to expose your idiocy to the world of letters, but I wouldn't want to arouse your slumbering "legal advisor." My agent has assured me that *Harper's*, *Esquire*, and *The Atlantic Monthly* (you know, magazines that people actually *read*) will be fighting over the piece, and the financial remuneration should be most gratifying.

Having said this, I find myself weakening. I know it was cruel to make sport of you. Hell, if I were mired in drudgery I too might have lashed out at so harsh a critic, even while secretly admiring the accuracy of his gibes.

Consequently—and against the furious objections of my agent—I have decided to be a nice guy about all this. Tell you what. You can have the first look at the MS you helped inspire. I am enclosing it here, and will wait one week—not a moment longer—before sending it off to the slicks.

Awaiting your check,  
Jerry