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# Overtures on Odeas, Fanfares for Fiction, Paeans to Plays: A Brief Guide to Unperplex the Unpublished

*by Bernard Werner*

Now as any author worthy of his ego does not doubt but that his sentences verily coruscate with unimagined brilliance like gemstones cut from the mines of Golconda, and veins of the purest literary gold bedizen even unto their punctuation, he must indeed recoil from the precipitous dispatch of his awkward, unsolicited progeny into the culturally exclusive reaches of the literary establishment without providing these with the protective raiment of a suitable letter of introduction. No mean task this, for not only need he cozen favor in the fewest possible words, but presume the latter capable of stanching the inevitable yawn of his jaded and chary reader, more than likely a young lady Phi Beta with a major in Comparative Literature, not a year into her first employment upon graduating from one of the Seven Sisters who already has found the romance of the job wilted, herself much overworked, much underpaid and no longer much given to the discovery of future Nobel laureates. What follows then, are some choice varieties garnered from the Dear Editor genus and meant to sustain by its sample, those legions of the great unpublished who anxiously descend upon the mailbox in search of every writer's golden grail, the letter of acceptance.

However, in the probable event that the bitch goddess Success should coyly continue to withhold her favor, it is to be hoped that the nectar of this garland may, like drops of laudanum, soothe the sting of disappointment, its fragrance dissipate the depressing despair of rejection with a vision of faith perseverant, but eventually vindicated, and of that triumphal entry at last, into the Promised Land of the standard contract.

Dear Galloping Galaxies Magazine:

A life-long passion for the genre of science fiction was finally rewarded this past June when, as I was exploring an abandoned shellac factory near home with my dog Krypton, we were set upon by a band of extra-terrestrials kidnapped and held captive aboard their mother ship in deep space and subjected to the most fiendish experiments imaginable in their effort to pry from us the location of the Ark of the Covenant, which you may rest assured, we did not reveal. It is this amazing account of our experience that I herewith enclose with no uncertain imperative, for unless the evil designs of these creatures are published forthwith and made known to all mankind, the earth faces an imminent annihilation at their hands, pardon me their antennae. If not for the discovery that our mail system is already compromised, these pages would have communicated via astral projection, but unfortunately my attention span has been severely wanting ever since my release from capture by those barbarous devils. It is quite apparent from recent events (for reasons I am unable to reveal) that I am still being invigilated and if this document fails to reach your office, please advise and I will undertake a less obvious, more secure means for its delivery. I remain nervously

Yours before it is too late,  
Vasco Bands

P.S.: I don't know what they did to Krypton, but he now barks in fluent Uranian.

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Editor, Hair Shirt Quarterly;

While attempting to extricate my muse from its spiritual doldrums during those dry spells which normally attend any manufacture of fiction, I spend many inspiration-seeking, diversionary hours at intellectual woolgathering, verbal whittling and story sketching trying to weave these sundry and often disparate threads into a finished garment, presently, the informal essay that herein I submit for your measure, but should you not be perfectly satisfied with its fit, I stand ready to make alterations.

Your bespoke literateur,  
Vasco Bands

Dear Culinary Contest Committee:

Enclosed please find my \$3,500 entry fee in the Aloysius X. Murphy Competition for a short story incorporating the best original recipe for corned beef in a narrative not to exceed ninety-nine words. If you will kindly allow the presumption of metaphor, may I observe that I seized upon this opportunity with the same alacrity as I imagine Cinderella did when informed she could attend the prince's ball, even if in my case, it has unfortunately resulted in the exhaustion of my savings and the need to apply for food stamps. Nevertheless, these vellum pages are forwarded with the belief that their presumed merit will endure long after the writer's clock has struck the hour of twelve and the coach delivering them has been returned to a pumpkin. My recent eviction notice notwithstanding, I still retain a faith in fairy godmothers, wishing upon stars and happy endings. Sure, but I can just feel my own sainted mother smiling down from her great, golden kitchen in the sky, beet red embarrassed over the notion that our family's venerable concoction, originally steamed to perfection in a humble Irish bog, might be eaten and praised by gourmet audiences with French accents. Awaiting your decision whether my foot fits the shoe, or ought I to say, my plate your palate, I remain

Penuriously yours,  
Vasco O'Bands

Dear Editor:

Every so often it behooves me to try the waters of the literary establishment with some small sample of my own lucubration, in this instance, Chapter Five Hundred Ten of my historical novel, *The Gift of the Algae – A Paleozoic Saga* that concludes the first volume, and incidentally, my use of a quill and inkpot owing to a severe case of carpal tunnel syndrome. However, I have been fortunate to recover an antique Remington from a neighbor's rubbish that has noticeably improved the legibility of the manuscript not to mention the numbness of my wrist. Should the preceding five hundred nine chapters warrant your curiosity, I should be more than happy to oblige, but with the caveat that these were necessarily composed in mirror writing with an obvious homage to Leonardo and do require some small skill in their deciphering. Oh yes, one other cautionary. Please inform me as to the lift capacity of your freight elevator lest their delivery buckle the building. Yours

Epically, if exhaustedly,

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Vasco Bands

My dear if anonymous lector:

Between bouts of writer's cramp and writer's block – not especially unusual in the composition of a palindromic work of serious fiction, I usually stimulate the dammed and/or parched streams of creative juices with a variety of vigorous meditative exercises that for reasons I am unable to fathom, have yielded such literary exotica as a Tibetan plainsong composed in the Lhasan dialect, three haiku clerihews, a compendium of recent Fulani neologisms, and a biological analysis (admittedly with its neo-Marxist leaning), of class warfare in E-coli society, which said divertissements along with several others of my careful choosing, I submit for your edification if not publication interrupting my current researches on the cloning of termites and its potential effect on the tree house industry while awaiting your reply, and, until such, have resumed the crafting of a work of environmental fiction, namely, Ingelnook The Harpooner – An Eskimo Saga or Life on The Floe's Edge.

Polymathically yours,  
Vasco H.I.Q. Bands

Dear Homeric Poetry Prize Competition Judges:

May I first express my appreciation for requiring of your applicants the submission of a brief biography, (even if some will no doubt be tempted to conflate the facts of their lives with those of their fancy) in the company of this application and to which I append my poem, Remembrance of Trains Passing – An Elegy Upon Death of The Third Avenue El.

It is most likely a portent of incipient dotage, but as I approach three score years of age, I am persuaded that I have been fortunate to know times more cultured, people more coherent and behavior more polite than the moral anarchy, the esthetic idiocies and the intellectual balderdash that has insinuated itself into the community of contemporary culture which I was once deluded into believing immune from such arrant nonsense but now must bear woeful witness while Western Civilization panders to the lowest inane and irrational denominator as surely an irregular observer of People Magazine must despairingly acknowledge.

With an obvious penchant for lost times irretrievably gone by, a pension sufficient for moderate needs, and the incontestable superiority of my computer, (for I am not such a mossback as to reject the creature comforts of technology) over a still serviceable Smith-Corona stored in the attic in the event of electricity-less days, (for I am also not such a fool as to put my faith in the perfectibility of man) to record my bilious observations and to communicate same in this the new e-universe of literature, preserves my sanity; a weekly rendezvous with a plate of linguine pescatore and two glasses of Chianti neutralizes, in some degree, a natural acerbity and an attraction to young women with good legs engages my passion and completes my otherwise undistinguished hours which is why I remain

Curmudgeonly yours,  
V. Bands

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Dear Shorty Pants Press:

Please consider for your Fall list my little book, *The Lizard of Ooze*, or *Slime In Three Quarter Time*, the adventures of Wilbur, the waltzing saurian who, I am confident, is destined to stand by the side of Mickey, Kermit and Barney in the mean-spirited, selfish and spoiled-rotten hearts of every obnoxious toddler screaming in the supermarket for blue bubble gum, not excluding my own four rakehells.

Yours in prematurely graying middle age,  
Vasco Bands

Founder and President of Vasectomies Anonymous

My not so dear, nameless antagonist:

What an unequal combat this mailing represents. All the power is in your hands; I however must content myself with stoical patience while you are gadding about attending literary luncheons sponsored by the steamfitters union. I can just see the fatigue and weariness creasing your face, no doubt following one of their emotional signings in Tiffany's, as you open this brown envelope, and arrogantly deign to peruse the first paragraph of my novel for surely you will not bother to finish the chapter let alone the book even though I literally had to wrench its pages from inside my guts for more than two years mostly at three in the morning, smoking countless packs of cigarettes, and drinking a pernicious quantity of coffee in order to release the creative rage that would have overwhelmed me with who knows what disastrous consequences were it not for the team of psychiatrists in the emergency room of Council Bluffs General Hospital. As if that means anything to you, living in New York City taking celebrity authors to dinner and, if you are lucky, maybe even sleeping with them. Yet what can I expect for my tortured efforts to create such poignant and unforgettable characters as a stilt walker suffering from Marfan's syndrome who over the objection of his Labrador retriever has become involved in a tragic love affair with a Parsi bookkeeper, I mean zookeeper, with whom he became entangled during a coital position at an ashram in Oxford, Mississippi – probably nothing more than one of those printed thank you, but no thank you, form rejections. "We", (not one of you is man enough, even if you are a woman, to say "I" but must always hide in the security of a plural subject), "regret that we do not find this work suitable for our limited list". O.K., so what else is knew, only just do me a one favor this time and omit all that hypocritical crap about wishing me "luck in placing it elsewhere". As for your God damned SASE, I am not sending any because it is kind of like you are telling me that my book already has failed even before it has been mailed. Whatever you happen to think, I know these pages are good, damn good, even my mother, who usually doesn't agree with anything I say, told me they were terrific after I finished reading her the whole roller derby dream sequence while she was out mowing the fields which she has had to do ever since my father took off with the John Deere salesman, but that's a whole other novel. So you may reject when ready, Ridley, one more won't make much difference to a serious artist pruning his prose in the vineyards of literary anonymity. I can take anything you have to give for I won't break but I will persevere in my effort unabated, for I know the day is coming when you are going to see my best seller in Barnes and Noble's window and me on Oprah and realize what a complete ass you were, which is why I choose to be

Not sincerely nor humbly, but adversarially and angrily yours,  
VB

P.S.: If you want to know what the initials stand for you'll find it on the title page,

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if you got that far.

Dear Science Editor awkwardly, if not uncomfortably athwart the cutting edge:

Given the current spate of popular interest in holes, black and worm, string theory, nano-robots, time travel and similar esoteric like as evidenced by the recent newspaper accounts regarding molecular computers and first hand television testimonials, concerning a string of UFO sightings usually in the deserts of southern California, the successful launch of two billionaires to investigate the commercial exploration of outer space among their presumed motives, nor wishing to exclude the box office wunderkinds of films such as The Planet of The Apes, Back To the Future, Jurassic Park and their sequela, I am persuaded, and I trust not erroneously, that the work enclosed may serve as a kind of scientific Baedeker to guide the laymen through a fascinating but difficult and arcane landscape. In the interest of both clarity no less than charity for the mal-mathematical for which this book has been designed, I have translated the relevant equations of Einstein, Bohr and De Broglie where these apply, into stick figures easily comprehensible to those unfortunately wanting ten years of residence at the Institute for Advanced Study. However, should you decide against publication, may I make mention of my latest opus with perhaps a wider commercial appeal, targeting, as it does, the mechanically minded, no less than the intellectually curious. I refer to a how-to manual for the construction of divers technological exotica as may be easily assembled in the garage of the average suburban split level and among whose chapters I have included such ever popular items as a perpetual motion machine, a rocket capable of approximating the speed of light and a thermonuclear device no larger than a matchbox. Along with detailed instructions and complete architectural renderings, I further offer a personal money-back guarantee should any of these projects exceed \$125 in parts and materials.

Exponentially yours,  
Vasco Isaac Newton Bands

Dear Director of the Globe Theatre:

Hail Britannia!

No prophet I despairing of honor on the natal strand  
But a homeless scrivener wanting audition in a philistine land,  
Who does now commend to your side of the ocean briny  
These pages of my play, like new coins shiny,  
Minted and strung in the rich and muscled tongue  
From whence our lingual patrimony does descend,  
Its burnished speeches, if I may so modestly declare,  
My small but savory literary fare  
And the high deeds of this drama would with you now share  
Whiles I upon your good opinion depend,  
Whose favored reply I anxiously attend.

Cheery-bye

Vasco St. George Bands

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Dear Editor of Organic Computers:

I happened upon your magazine during my recent incarceration, need I add, as a result of a perverse miscarriage in the criminal justice system which would deprive innocent citizens of their liberty but not the crooks, scoundrels and sundry miscreants who continue to abuse the precious liberties guaranteed in our Constitution. My personal situation aside, the general inadequacy of historical language for the exigencies of society in the twenty-first millennium became rather obvious to me during the long hours I spent at the composition of my appeal. In the many months while awaiting my day in court, (resulting, you may be pleased to know, in a complete exoneration of all charges), I devoted much of that time in confinement addressing the need for an easily acquired vehicle of concise and unambiguous communication for what your own editorials have described as The Age of All Natural Information. The result of these labors has been my invention of Chipspeak, which, in the interest of brevity and the avoidance of technical jargon, I might here best describe, (to use an admittedly insufficient metaphor), as a kind digital Esperanto. In order to demonstrate not only its flexibility and subtlety but also its particular adaptability to esthetic expression, I am sending you my ode, Thirty Two Ways of Viewing One and Zero for your comments, criticisms and, dare I hope, publication, in which event, a CD ROM for its conversion into all of the Indo-European languages is available on request.

A free Vasco Bands  
Formerly inmate 51178

Dear Dramaturge of The Silo Playhouse:

Long an admirer of the profoundly abstruse vacuities of Samuel Becket for his having eschewed the verbal excrescences which sends your ordinary talent-less author currying to his thesaurus in search of some recondite adjective descended from Old Norse, or has your neophyte novelist lighting a votive candelabra upon the literary shrine of Henry James, I am grateful for this opportunity to submit my neo-classical comedy, OINK, a modern day retelling of the Oedipus myth which I have located on an industrial pig farm in the New Jersey pine barrens, a work, I might add, composed entirely of monosyllabic ejaculations most of which have managed to avoid any citation in the OED at least as of the writing of this letter. Chewing my chitlins until your answer, I remain, yours sincerely,

Vasco Bands  
Swineologist & Bard of Asbury Park

As any author worthy of his ego does not doubt but that his sentences verily coruscate with unimagined brilliance like gemstones cut from the mines of Golacunda, and veins of the purest literary gold bedizen even their punctuation, said would-be writer of the Great American you-know- what must recoil from the dispatch of his fragile, unspoiled yet unsolicited progeny into the crass purlieus of the literary establishment without the protective raiment of a suitable cover letter in which he hopes to the cozen the favor if not to stanch the yawn of a jaded and chary lector, most likely a young female with a recently awarded Bachelor of Arts in Comparative Literature a year into her first job after graduation and now six months after the romance has wilted, is much overworked, much underpaid, and no longer much given to the discovery of future Nobel laureates. What follows then is a nosegay of successful varieties gathered from the Dear Editor genus to sustain by their sample those legions of the great unpublished who eagerly search the day's mail for notification of a

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manuscript's acceptance, but were that success once more to elude their grasp, it is hoped that the nectar of this garland may, like drops of laudanum soothe the sting of disappointment , its bouquet dispel the black despair of rejection and summon a sun dappled vision of faith finally vindicated and the writer's triumphal entry into the Promised Land of the standard Contract.

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**Bernard Werner's** unusual bio: "It will date me to say that I retired from teaching at a time when students used the word 'like': as a verb or comparative, rather than the connective tissue of the inane utterances I cannot but help overhear during my eight daily laps around the athletic field near my house. In answer to your question, my only other previously published work was in an obscure neo-Marxist magazine, (presumably long ceased printing) that was an homage to my freshman English instructor in Brooklyn College – now you know that I am a native New Yorker - who besides being a superb inspiration, was the first black person that until then, I had encountered on the other side of the lectern, for which essay I received the sum of seventy five dollars and the self styled honorific that henceforth, I might claim to be a professional writer. Unfortunately, that success, despite repeated trying or should I say failing, was not repeated. until your generous offer. And, like so many closet scribes hoping for recognition however belated , my unpublished oeuvre consists of novels, plays, poems and short stories still awaiting their birth in the black of print. If I have managed to preserve enough of my anonymous cover to arouse your ire and/or curiosity, I will gladly furnish my income tax return, but I could not close without remarking that it is you who do me the honor of publishing this piece.

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