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# The Essayist and the Query Letter: Selective Speculations

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E. B. White

Geo. Orwell

Joan Didion

Virginia Woolf

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The Essayist and the Query Letter:  
Selective Speculations · *Evan Elliot*

23 Rural Route 4  
North Brooklin, Maine

August 9, 1941

Editor  
American Comet  
402 Front Street  
New York, New York

Dear Editor:

Not long ago, I took my son on a short holiday. We visited a Maine lake that I, many years ago, visited with my father. I pondered death.

Would you like to see an essay on the above topic?

Sincerely,

*E.B. White*

E. B. White

**American Comet**

14 October 1941

Dear Mr. White:

Your idea sounds nice, but we've received a large number of father-son articles lately. Due to a backlog, your article does not suit our editorial plans at this time. Thank you for thinking of *American Comet*.

23 Rural Route 4  
North Brooklin, Maine

September 20, 1947

Editor  
American Comet  
402 Front Street  
New York, New York

Dear Editor:

I write and farm in Maine. Last week, one of my pigs took sick and died. I spent a lot of time nursing it. Now I feel depressed. May I send you an essay on my experience? It's nearly three thousand words long.

Sincerely,

*E.B. White*

E. B. White

### **American Comet**

12 December 1947

Dear Mr. White:

Palestine is up for grabs. Stalin has his finger on the button. Do you think our readers care about you or your pig?

Oak House  
Trefethen Mews  
Kensington  
London NW1

12 February 1936

Editor  
Tea Times  
#16 Chiswick Square  
London NW3

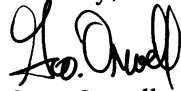
Dear Editor:

From 1922 to 1927, I served as an officer with the Indian Imperial Police, in Burma. One day, I shot an elephant that stood by the side of a dirt road, peacefully eating grass. An immense crowd of Burmese expected me to kill the beast. I had got to shoot it.

As I approached the elephant, I realized that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. I perceived that colonialism is by nature evil, that the oppressor is necessarily the oppressed, and that I was a coward.

I have written an essay about this incident. The essay is strongly narrated and written in prose as clear as a window pane. It is filled with provocative socio-political observations. I am sure that if you read it, you will agree with my literary friends that I am the conscience of my generation. Please reply soon.

Sincerely,



Geo. Orwell

## **Tea Times**

June 28, 1936

Dear Mr. Orwell:

We cannot abide violence to animals.

468 La Brea Highway  
Malibu, CA 94806

May 4, 1968

Editor  
Why?  
308 West Fourth Street  
New York, New York 10042

Dear Editor:

At least three times a month, I spend the day in bed with a migraine headache, insensitive to the world around me. My affliction is inherited: both my grandmothers had migraine, my father has migraine, and my mother has migraine.

Almost anything can trigger an attack: stress, allergy, fatigue. But I never suffer an attack when I'm under extreme pressure—a screenplay deadline, say. Instead, my migraines seem to be provoked by small troubles: unhappy help, a torn hem, lost laundry, a telephone that rings too much.

After years of suffering and failed remedies, I have established a sort of truce with migraine. In fact, in some vague sense I even welcome the attacks. They are, in their violent way, cleansing.

Would you consider publishing a personal essay on the above topic?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joan Didion". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Joan Didion

# WHY?

July 12, 1968

Dear Ms. Didion:

Thank you for your interest in **Why?**, the only glossy magazine published in Greenwich Village that is committed to lively, vital, in-depth discussion of literature, the arts, fashion, fitness, politics and food – with a dash of celebrity photos and nonstop action. In its third year of publication, **Why?** enjoys impressive ad revenues, sizzling newsstand sales and mind-boggling demographics.

We ran a headache article on our “Health-Modes” page two months ago. Upcoming topics include yoga, allergies and natural grains. If you have any expertise in these areas, you might try an article on one of them. Thanks again for your interest!!!!

16 Chatham Place  
Richmond, Surrey

September 26, 1923

Editor  
Tea Times  
#16 Chiswick Square  
London NW3

Dear Editor,

The other day, as I sat in my room, trying to write, I observed a hay-coloured moth which fluttered from side to side of a nearby window-pane. I could not help watching him. It seemed as if he embodied a fibre, very pure, of life's energy. After a time, he appeared to tire of his window-dance, and indeed could not resume his flight, though he tried quite hard to do so. He was dying, I soon realized, but his enormous efforts to live, against a power of such magnitude, moved me strangely.

The moth inspired me to write an essay, which I finished this morning. Would you be so kind as to consider it for publication? Please respond post-haste.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Virginia Woolf". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and characteristic of the author.

Virginia Woolf



## Tea Times

December 29, 1923

Dear Miss Woolf,

We regret to say that your essay idea does not suit our publication. May we suggest *Entomology Quarterly*?