

THE SPECTATOR

THE
SPECTATOR

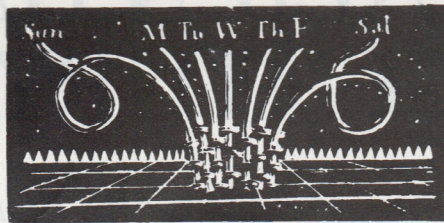
7 June 1997

Est. 1828

£2.20

An Australian periodical, *G'day*, is at present being sued for vast sums by my client, Dame Edna Everage, because it recently published the confessions of Dame Edna's estranged mother, the Hon. Gladys Beazley-Kydd. Dame Edna is seeking exemplary damages from the publishers of *G'day* because she claims her mother has made 'uncalled for' disclosures about the megastar's gross eating disorders. A recent dinner with Michael Winner (or was it Jeremy Isaacs?) is cited as an example. It is exceedingly stressful to be Dame Edna's manager in a situation like this, and readers must forgive me for letting off steam in this column. The megastar's mother (whose honorific is perhaps *soi-disant*) has been residing for some years in a maximum security retirement village for the bewildered and has only recently, according to a close family friend, 'come good'. For the record, since the death of her husband Dame Edna has always supported her mother financially, even making her a shareholder in Ednacare (Switzerland) and a governor (emeritus) of the World Prostate Olympics, a prostate-oriented sporting event conceived by Dame Edna in memory of her late husband. This event will be non-elitist; open not merely to members of the prostate community and their families and friends but to everyone at the sharp end of prostate research. Dame Edna has, incidentally, no intention of auctioning any of her famous gowns. Some of the more glittering numbers of Diana, Princess of Wales are coming up for sale in New York soon, and Dame Edna was appalled to learn that an eager queue of members of the 'drag queen community' is already forming. The Dame would do anything for charity, but the thought of a member of the opposite sex community in one of her frocks understandably sickens her.

If there are eating disorders, there are also culinary aberrations. The fashionable habit of cooking fish *al dente* is one of the most repellent. The other day I had lunch at a smart place and noticed that the monkfish was chewy in the middle. A close look revealed that it was raw. I sent it back for a good blast under the grill or in the pan, and got a very old-fashioned look from the senior hospitality executive (head waiter). I felt like someone in a latter-day Bateman cartoon committing an unspeakable solecism, as those within earshot dropped their napkins, regurgitated their soup and ejected their monocles. Rather inconsistently, the new potatoes were cooked right through, unlike the other vegetables which, though glazed with warm oil, were still crunchy from the deep-freeze.



BARRY HUMPHRIES

On the subject of potatoes, Mr Blair has now more or less apologised for the great potato famine (of 1845-50) which killed many and obliged still more to flee Ireland and rebuild their lives near the remote potato fields of North America and Australia. Instead of apologising, Mr Blair should surely have taken full credit on behalf of England, for if it were not for the potato famine the United States would never have had Bing Crosby, the New York police force, the Kennedy family, the Roman Catholic clergy or Alcoholics Anonymous. As for Australia, under our former prime minister Mr Keating, schoolchildren were taught to be grateful for the potato famine, for had it not been for this catastrophe no one could have been found to man the taxation department or join the republican movement

It was only when I tripped over one the other night and nearly came a terrible cropper that I really noticed it — and *them*. It was one of those chubby cairns of black plastic rubbish bags that sit on almost every pavement in the West End and cluster like glossy haemorrhoids around the rear entrances of restaurants. I am told that these bursting black bladders of putrefaction, when ultimately incinerated, diffuse a gas which poisons crops and causes children to be born with gills. I am not surprised or especially shocked that the government has not put a stop to them. All bin-liners are made of polyurethane, manufactured by British Petroleum and its petrochemical colleagues — untouchable.



'They say Paula Jones is by no means the First Lady.'

Last Tuesday, 3 June, was Soamesday, when Max Beerbohm's immortal Enoch returned to the Reading Room of the British Museum to consult his critical heritage. Lovers of Max's great story will know what the poet found there. Enoch Soames, the pathetic author of 'Fungoids' — and Max Beerbohm's portrait of a dim 'decadent' poet of the Beardsley period — was based on Theodore Wratislaw — or so Max told Siegfried Sassoon, who wrote it on the flyleaf of my copy of Wratislaw's 'Caprices' (Pseuds Corner, please note). I think there is also more than a hint of the English symbolist and friend of Yeats, Arthur Symons, in Beerbohm's creation: Soames and Symons certainly chime nicely and the physical description fits. A few years ago Max's nephew, the screenwriter Ivan Moffat, showed me an accomplished television adaptation he had made of this tale. Ideally, he felt, it ought to be done on 3 June 1997. Wishing to play the role of Satan, I mentioned the existence of this script to some senior functionaries at the BBC who pretended to have heard of Max Beerbohm and said they'd get back to me. Perhaps they even said 'bear with us', since the silence which followed has yet to be broken. Channel 4 were more up-front. 'Max who?' they said. 'Fax us the story.' Obligingly, I squashed my first edition under the lid of my machine and after about half an hour transmitted the extruded text. Another silence. If Enoch Soames in some ghostly form ever did revisit the Reading Room in his infernal quest for immortality, perhaps his creator, the incomparable Max Beerbohm, may also be spotted flitting around the executive levels of the BBC and Channel 4 on a similar sleeveless errand.

At the Rebecca Hossack gallery in Windmill Street (off Charlotte Street) Clifford Possum is showing his latest remarkable work. Mr Possum is a one-eyed Aboriginal painter — Australia's most famous and accomplished — and Dr Germaine Greer opened this important show on Wednesday. Rebecca Hossack is also the present Australian cultural attaché, a bright and attractive girl, in striking contrast to her predecessor, Dr Sir Leslie Colin Patterson. A programme of events called 'New Images' concerned with the cultural relationship between Britain and Australia is now well under way, and Sir Les is not getting much of a look-in. It seems that his inimitable hands-on style is an embarrassment to the Armani-clad, 'new look' Australian diplomatic community, who keep getting asked what Les is like to work for. Poor bastards.