

Ad Nauseam

Our first letter to them, 2/2/05

I have reached an age when few things surprise me, but I admit that today I have been surprised, and by *Private Eye*. On Monday 17 January I rang to arrange a small advertisement to run for thirteen issues beginning with the one that arrived this morning. It was to be the first in the “Eye Read” section, with the following wording: “What's wrong with Private Eye? See www.edgewaysbooks.com. Updated fortnightly.” This does not appear in the new issue, so I rang up to inquire why. Alice in the small ads office did not know but said she would find out and ring back, which she did, leaving a message on my answerphone. It was this message that surprised me. In fact I am still not sure that it is imaginable. The advertisement, she reported, was “not approved by *Private Eye*”. Now I have been racking my brains to imagine why not. The tall, stunning, complex girl of thirty-two who is trying to sell herself to a well-heeled suitor was approved, as were the beautiful Brazilian ladies, the Russian ladies, and the discreet, loving agency for adults, quality and service outstanding. The begging letters for “£5000 to get me and kids a mortgage” and for “serious money” for a “serious artist” and from the proud man humbled by circumstances who will accept any amount, were all approved. The advertisement for Valentine gifts that will drive pussy wild was approved. Even the ad saying 9/11 is a lie was approved. Not ours. I wonder whether you could do anything to solve this to me insoluble puzzle. It surely cannot be that *Private Eye* is afraid of *Words in Edgeways* or that the critical magazine par excellence will do what it can to make sure nobody reads criticism? Did anybody look at our website before deciding that our little ad could not be “approved by Private Eye”? I would love to be told.

The reply ...

Our second letter to them, 3/3/05

“What is Wrong with *Private Eye*?” we wanted to ask, in an advert in *Private Eye*, directing readers to our website, www.edgewaysbooks.com. And one, new thing we have learned is that the *Eye* doesn't like criticism as much as a reader might think it does. For you who are so ready to criticise others, and whose enterprise (as anything other than business) depends on the idea of criticism, refuse to advertise criticism of yourselves. That's what the Ad Nauseams who look after your advertising say, that *Private Eye* has stamped our advert “Not Approved”. Can it really be so? (Do you *approve*?) You can't, surely, be afraid of us? of what we might say? Or is the *Eye* just protecting its brand and market position, routinely, like any other business enterprise? (Perhaps there is a policy in place, or was the decision taken on a one-off basis?) Ratner might have been fool enough to rubbish his own wares, Hislop isn't fool enough to help someone else do the same to his. It's not business. (Can that really be it, and you so loftily censorious every other week?) We wrote an earlier letter asking you to justify this timid and humourless refusal but, like any corporate-hack who sees

silence as his best bet, you didn't reply. Come on, take a chance, give us an answer this time; and take our advert too. Or don't you care what people think of you?

The reply ...

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Having failed to get in openly, even by appealing to Comrade Mugabe himself, we tried what we thought was the soft underbelly, with a new ad, worded less provocatively and submitted online. But there seem to be guards everywhere. They took our money—which seemed promising—but still showed us the door.