

## ***Eyewash* no. 1126** February 18, 2005

When Jonathan Miller was asked on *Desert Island Discs* why *Private Eye* had it in for him, he said they were like a bunch of public school prefects who liked to cane with (he'd seen it) one hand in a pocket.

So the *Eye* caned him again. Under the heading "Old Men Forget", it called him "the Great Doctor" and said that, although he'd "described precisely" to Joanna Lumley how he'd heard *The Harry Lime Theme* from *The Third Man* in 1947, "everyone else in post-war Britain had to wait until 1949 for the film to come out." The Head Prefect then returned to the dorm to change his underpants and wash one hand. (*Have you pinched this story from that episode of The Office in which the computer geek sticks it to Gareth for confusing Enter the Dragon with The Way of the Dragon?* Ed.)

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### **HP Sauce**

Included the first of two pieces that referred to education—this one about dodgy PFIs again. It contained things worth knowing but they didn't have anything to do with education. As in the similar piece in the issue before, the contributor kept to the side of things the *Eye* is happiest with, not schooling but the financing of schoolbuildings.

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### **High Principals**

The second piece did have something to do with education, and so was predictably, and feebly, conventional. It was about cuts in the library staff at the University of Wales, Bangor. It was a mild-shock-horror piece which any hack might have written, in *Any Newspaper*, gratefully reproducing the viewpoint of the self-interested sources who had provided his copy. As is always the case with the *Eye* when it runs an educational story that requires the writer to be something more than Any Moron's lazy hack—to know and to think as well as be able to stitch a few quotations together—it missed any satirical point the story might have had.

A satirical magazine—especially one with the word *Eye* in its title—ought to know a butt when it sees one, and its idea of a butt oughtn't be *quite* the same as everyone else's. This story gave the *Eye* the choice of two: cost-cutting managers saving £300,000 a year by dumping vital library staff, or the vital but dumped library staff. Being the *Eye*—a satirical magazine with a story supplied by the librarians—it knew a butt when it saw one ... the managers.

The librarians were just victims. And such librarians too—professional librarians, qualified subject librarians, real librarians (doing the vital work of providing face-to-face support and a properly cared for library service), librarians without whom Bangor students will be left (to struggle through a quagmire of crap information and internet porn) with nothing better to help them (to use both written and electronic records in a properly critical manner) than ... a lower paid admin worker. The pity of it.

A soft old thing the *Eyehack* must be, but not someone with much recent acquaintance with libraries or librarians, I should think.

He might be sentimental about them, and they might be sentimental about keeping their jobs, but they gave up being sentimental about books years ago—round about the same time literacy ceased to have anything to do with literature, and education became the same thing as acquiring skills. Just as the stock-in-trade of English teachers is no longer literature but texts, so that of librarians is no longer books but information. A book, to modern librarians, is a machine-for-information-storage/retrieval, different from a computer hard-drive only in that it has a much smaller capacity and takes up much more room. The idea of a “great book” makes as much, or little, sense to them as that of a “great hard-drive” does. And their idea of using written “records” in a properly critical manner is to count the number of times the “records” on their shelves have been consulted in a given period and to dump those that haven’t been consulted often enough.

Their own dumping isn’t mere poetic justice, it’s the working of strict historical necessity, and if they only had the courage of their own professional convictions they’d admire the logic of it.

It’s a pity the *Eyesoftie* who wrote this piece hadn’t read “Library News” in *Eye* no.1127 before doing so. What was that about? Brighton town library dumping books by the skipload. (Why man, they made love to this employment.)

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## TV Eye

Couch Potato, on the Brit Awards, in this issue must be Remote Controller of issue 1123 (well, he *is* the same, even if there’s two of them). He has the same divided or self-contradictory standard of judgement. On the one hand, he’s scornful of the whole thing: “the mouthpiece of the British record industry”, “a non-event attended by celebrities in skimpy dresses, plus Gazza”, “an exercise in marketing and little else”, Chris Evans “happy to say any old guff the music industry wanted ... followed the corporate line”, “a terrible void at the heart of the event”, “this emphasis on cash over culture fits very neatly on Charles Allen’s exciting new ITV, where this year’s programme was sponsored by MasterCard”. But then, on the other hand, he can’t also help seeing things in exactly the same light the industry does. He uses the word “music” (not “records”, say) of what the British record industry produces, without irony, qualification or discomfort. When he says, “And they wonder why ‘the kids’ don’t buy music any more,” he thinks “the kids” needs scare quotes but not that “music” does. Slick shit, everyone knows, isn’t less shit for being slick but more. It’s one of those cases where “better” of its kind means absolutely “worse”. But for Couch Potato slick guff, a slick non-event, slick marketing, a slick emphasis on cash over culture, a slick void *are* all to be valued over their non-slick counterparts: “after many years of frightening amateurishness *The Brits* has become a glittering professional product, rather more finely tooled, in fact, than some of the acts it seeks to promote.” Shit. And “finely tooled” too, or not?

“Literary Review”, on John Updike’s *Villages* (“the most awful rubbish”), was very good. Why don’t they get whoever did that to do “TV Eye”?