

Times Body & Soul 2 July 2005

Hilly Janes edits the Times Saturday supplement they call Body&Soul (removing the spaces is thought by these shallow minds to make the title snappier). On 2 July Hilly gave us an editorial setting out all the goodies she has planned for eager readers. She asks for what she fashionably calls 'feedback' so I sent in the following.

Hilly may be a good editor but she strikes me as a very poor writer. What she is editing is ephemeral journalism: tomorrow's chip wrapping. Her exaggerated style makes it appear she rates it slightly above the level of the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*.

Fear not, she says about the absence of a regular writer. Fear is a serious matter, and doesn't enter into that sort of thing. Her bit of the paper "is now one of the best-loved sections". Best-loved? Hilly reminds me of those silly advertisements which talk about loving your car. Again Hilly, love is a serious matter. We don't bestow it on things like tomorrow's chip wrapping.

Then we have what she calls "food coverage". I cover my food with things like butter and jam, but not so Hilly. The one who does the covering for her, Jane Clarke, is "brilliant". This puts Clarke in the same league as Brillat-Savarin, the noted gourmet chef. Well I wonder about that.

Hilly can't quite master the grammar. She writes-

"If you'd like a greener lifestyle [covered with mould perhaps?] but can't quite get your act together, our new Eco-Worrier column, by Body&Soul writer Anna Shepard, will point the way."

The fact is that Anna Shepard will point the way anyway, whether or not I'd like a greener lifestyle. The stated condition preceded by "if" simply doesn't apply. That's grammar Hilly.

Finally, I feel a little bit captious about the idea that a mere newspaper column will accomplish the considerable feat of "helping me to get out more". If dire threats from my GP won't do it I doubt if Hilly's newspaper feature Breathing Space will impart the necessary propulsion. Over-stated again. Bad writing.

To sum up, I think, Hilly, that a little more realism is called for. Let's come down to earth, shall we? Then your precious section might become a bit more worthy of spending a little bit of our precious time on.