

Sailing Close to the Wind

by Fergus Downie



The congestion is back. My brother reported on a recent tailback in Ashington in Northumbria, an unimposing former pit town where the colliery closed in the 80s and its hinterland descended soon after into drug addled oblivion. The cause? ‘MaccyDees’ had reopened and the local Morlocks had set off like a horde of ponderous wildebeest. It’s difficult not to grimace when you hear about things like this – plague sequels are supposed to be edifying but God only knows what Pericles would have made of this. One shouldn’t overdo the disdain. Poor baiting is a staple industry in my class but when you see gormeless yuppies on your commuter train reading Harry Potter novels you develop a certain resistance to this kind of haughtiness. Neither is edifying and cheap fast food is probably a lesser evil.

Still, dignified it isn't, and it reminded me of one of my mother's childhood taboos. Brought up respectably poor she would never be caught eating in the street, especially God forbid, as a woman, and until recently the abomination of eating on public transport brought forth stern reprisals from those who would still step forward as the Last Roman. The late former editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*, Peregrine Worsthorne was once so disgusted by a passenger on the underground eating a Big Mac that he took resolute action. A brave officer in the Scots Guards during the war he knew what was required. Taking careful aim , he moved into position and promptly farted in his face.