

TODDLER BURN OUT SYNDROME

The little chap was looking all set to ask a question
you know them all off pat
like why are wheels round,
why do adults swear so much
and all that puerile crap
his little lips were puckering up
constructing the scaffolding that would
support the first syllable
of the interrogative
with which he was about to try to tie
my mental shoelaces together
I'd already activated the 'go ask your mother'
response sequence
when suddenly there came a strange crackle
and a pop like an elephant would make
were it to tap dance on several sheets of bubble wrap
you know the kind,
with a rather large cavity of captive air
the stuff which before bursting rolls between your fore-finger and thumb
For all the world like an erect nipple
Anyway, following the fireworks the little fella falls over
flat on his face, shudders slightly and then lies still
I decided to ignore what was obviously a ridiculously juvenile tantrum
and went back into the depth of the 'Sunday Times'
Indeed, the travel section
Read an absolutely riveting piece about a working holiday
In the Lenin shipyards at Gdansk
Divinia Treetmey-Ruffley and her companion had just published
A marvellously amusing book detailing their experiences
Amongst the freedom-loving Polish working class intelligentsia
Who import Swarfega from the West and use it as aftershave
Or as a kind of industrial frankincense, apparently.
Looking back to the floor for a moment I noticed the nipper
Still prostrate and, which was a trifle worrying, turning a rather
Sickly blue at the extremities
I called out to Beatrice to come down and take a look
But she was upstairs practising saying 'darling' in front of
The full-size mirror we have on the bedroom ceiling
I rustled the newspaper loudly and in a manner which I hoped
Would convey the magnitude of my displeasure
And flipped the child over with my right foot
I notice that his eyes were glazed over and that his tongue
Was hanging out of the corner of his mouth
And it was all looking pretty messy
Another call to Bea produced nothing more than a shrieked
Expletive between two rather long drawn out endearments
Neither of which I decided upon reflection could possibly
Have been addressed to me
And when the uppity young houseman pulled aside the curtain
And gangled his way across the brightly lit emergency ward
I knew that the news just had to be bad
It was bound to involve specialists and probably expensive Swiss-German quacks
Who run clinics up in the mountains

Accessible only by massive financial expenditure
And helicopter
The doctor, a chap by the name of Pottersham, who quite coincidentally
Had been up at Trinity with my brother Giles
Took me to the back of his poky little office and insisted that I join
Him in a prophylactic glass of rather pleasing malt whisky
Well it turns out you see that wee junior was suffering from a condition
That's apparently very a la mode at the moment among the younger set
A condition known as 'Toddler Burn-Out Syndrome'
Perfectly harmless in most cases and cured by getting nannie to crush
A Mogadon and sprinkle it all over the Farley's each morning
Alternatively one could send the little blighter off to a gulag-cum-crèche
where such syndromes as TBO are not exactly
Actively encouraged
In any event I shall probably leave the final decision to Beatrice
After all she is the child's mother
And mum's instinctively know what's best
Don't they, dar-l-i-n-g?