

Discussing God, in Rumi's view, also has its limitations. As he writes in the Prologue to his *Masnavi* tales:

*"Can I explain 'The Friend' [God] to one to whom  
He is no friend? . . .  
. . . 'Tis best to veil the secrets of 'The Friend'.  
So give good heed to the morals of these stories.  
That is better than that the secrets of 'The Friend'  
Should be noised abroad in the talk of strangers."*

As for Sufism being "not concerned with the betterment of the human race", your contributor

claims that "Sufism is a deeply-rooted product of Islam"—one of the four main duties of which is charity and compassion for fellow human beings. Rumi's approving description of Daquqi shows the latter as a man,

*"Having compassion on mankind, and wholesome  
as water,  
A kind intercessor, and one whose prayers were  
heard.  
Benevolent to the good and the bad, and a firm ally,  
Better than a mother, and kinder than a father."*

### Words, Words, Words (III)\*



THE WRITING OF blurbs for book jackets or publishers' catalogues is a difficult art, and the results commonly please no one, and certainly not the author of the book. Here is a specimen which at least possesses the putative virtues of accuracy, informativeness and modesty:

*"We have little hesitation in claiming that this relatively new book by Mr X represents an advance on the author's previous one, which nonetheless received rather favourable mention in a leading provincial newspaper. The present book is well written, in a style which combines the gritty with the fluid. Not so much a novel as an extended documentary prose-poem, it is an account of good and evil in a contemporary setting and all of us, whether men or women. 'The Spenser of Trollopes' is how the Eriskay Reporter has described Mr X. . . ."*

And so forth. Mind you, there is one class of persons who appreciate blurbs: the reviewers. Many a brilliantly mordant review owes more to the blurb than to the book, or to the reviewer.

Not long ago I found myself having to shorten a number of blurbs, for an overcrowded list of forthcoming publications. From 250 words to 150, to 100, then to 50. Impossible though further cutting seemed each time, yet it proved not only possible but preferable as well: finally I arrived at an admirably economical description of the essence of the book. But then I had to go and put words back in. Readers aren't happy with essences, whether in blurbs or in books: it seems they need a generous emulsion of words in which their minds can float comfortably; they need a fair amount of verbal roughage, or of verbal smoothage. Many of the words don't get noticed at all, and if all that was offered were

essence, then the essence might go unobserved. I know we were taught that in great writing every word is strictly necessary, and cannot be replaced by any other, and there is not a superfluous syllable. I'm sure that is true. But I don't think I am talking about great writing—there is never very much of that on the scene at any one time. I don't think I am talking about great readers, either. Heaven help the poor publisher if he had to depend solely on great writers and great readers!

SOME WRITERS ARE NOT very good at reading their own writing, even. Recently I was studying a book by an academic, the theme of which was the symbolism of excretory processes in the works of Virginia Woolf: a new insight into this celebrated novelist, I should imagine, and one likely to show how highly "relevant" she is. The scholar had been discussing a story entitled "The Ladies' Lavatory", and went on in the next sentence to refer to a novel called *Flush*. As a matter of fact I did know that *Flush* was the name of a dog, but the associations evoked by the contiguity were such as to demolish that suspension of disbelief so often required when reading academic exegesis.

Mistakes or insensitivities incurred by people writing in a language not their own is a different matter, not open to contempt or reproach. Sometimes they have a splendour of their own. I remember in the late 1940s being impressed by an Egyptian student's reference to "this Age of Atomic Pomp": it evoked a romantic image of nuclear reactors in the shape of great pyramids, with the Sphinx brooding over them. A little later I realised that the confusion between "P" and "B" was at work, this being a distinction non-existent in Arabic—in fact we use the forms "Pasha" and "Basha" indifferently, since the original sound is somewhere in between. What the student actually had in mind was the atomic bomb.

BUT BACK TO OUR BLURBS. The dictionary tells us only that the word "blurb" originated in U.S. slang. My theory has it that the word is a skilful conflation of a number of other words, among them "blur", "bluff", "blub", "blush", "bluster", "burble", "babble", "burp" and "blunder." As I say, a difficult art.

**D. J. Enright**

\* Previous columns in this series appeared in ENCOUNTER, November and December.

There is, in other words, nothing surprising about a 20th-century Sufi who, far from confining himself to writing about God, actively involves himself in such human betterment projects as (to name only a few) the Royal Humane Society, the Royal Hospital and Home for Incurables (in both of which is he a Governor), the Club of Rome (concerned with saving world ecology), and the conducting of studies in inter-religious harmony in his capacity as Visiting Professor at Geneva University.

"Unorthodox" methods? Look twice at them, said Zahid of the Khajagan:

"When you see a Sufi studying or teaching something which seems to belong to a field other than spirituality, you should know that *there* is the spirituality of the age."

J. M. JUSTICE

Somerset West,  
South Africa

Is J. M. JUSTICE really under the impression that Rumi mentions the subjects of God and Love as rarely as does Idries Shah? Perhaps he should try reading some of his work—preferably in the original.

Ahmed Bullock (Letters, October) must, as a bookseller, be aware that J. D. Pearson's *Index Islamicus* is a bibliographical work, and as such solely concerned with the subject-matter of the entries included in it. It is no secret that Idries Shah is a prolific scribbler; but I have no reason to suppose that Jim Pearson's assessment of the quality of his work differs in any respect from my own.

L. P. ELWELL-SUTTON

Edinburgh

## Nabokov's "N"

IN HIS REVIEW of Nabokov's novel *Look At The Harlequins* [ENCOUNTER, June, p. 79] Jonathan Raban makes a familiar but irritating error, and in doing so misses an important point about the book. "Vadimovich" is not the surname of Nabokov's hero, but rather his middle name, or patronymic. All Russians have a name, middle name and surname—as in, for example, Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov. Thus the hero of LATH is Vadim Vadimovich Something or Other. What the something or other is we are never told, but a clear hint is offered on pp. 248–249 of the novel:

"I definitely felt my family name began with an N, and bore an odious resemblance to the surname or pseudonym of a presumably notorious . . . writer with whom scatterbrained émigrés from some other galaxy constantly confused me."

The distorted parallel with Nabokov himself is thus made even more explicit. But since we don't actually know the fictional hero's name, we must refer to him—politely—as "Vadim Vadimovich", or else simply as

"Vadim." The patronymic "Vadimovich" on its own has an inappropriate ring of undue familiarity to it. Perhaps Nabokov is best dealt with by specialists in Russian rather than American or European literature.

RICHARD OWEN

London

## Comrade Bukharin

AFTER ALL that has been written and said about "the Case of Comrade Bukharin" (Sidney Hook, ENCOUNTER, December 1974, and David S. Anin, April 1975) and the causes of his "strange" behaviour in the 1930s, may I briefly suggest the following hypotheses?

1. Bukharin returned to Russia because:
  - (a) Staying abroad would have classified him as an émigré, with all its implications for a Bolshevik which need hardly be elaborated.
  - (b) He could not emotionally and psychologically sever his ties with Russian politics, especially as he must have known that "Bukharinism" as such—unlike Trotskyism—would be quite *meaningless* as a movement outside Russia.
  - (c) In spite of what he told French and Russian associates he did not really believe that he was certain to kiss the Cross on the Mountain if he returned. He merely related a definite probability in dramatic terms.

2. He confessed to the crimes which he had not committed mainly because, in the end, he was not quite sure—at least in a futuristic sense—who was right! This, in my view, is a better interpretation of Arthur Koestler's theory than the popular "last-service-to-the-party."

It may be observed that in offering these hypotheses I merely make the likely assumption that Bukharin remained a Bolshevik in spirit until his death.

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*London*  
**SIC TRANSIT GLORIA NOVA:** Once upon a time, when our mothers were young, there was a phenomenon known as the *Woman's Magazine*. Traditionally it contained recipes, respectful articles about the Royal family, penny-saving hints and a problem page where girls who had Got Into Trouble were advised to consult their vicars.

Then, in 1965, a new star burst upon the scene called *Nova* and started to publish articles about orgasms, psychotherapy, the joys of living in sin and the scandal of housewives on drugs. It was a brilliant success and a great pointer to the times.

Now the publishers, the International Publishing Corporation have announced that after October *Nova* will cease to exist. That is another pointer to the times: economy, and the shrinking amount of glossy advertising in this market. No reflection on the content of *Nova*, say IPC, but the editor, Gillian Cooke, agrees that all the same it is symbolic of how everything has changed once more between 1965 and 1975.

*Nova*, in the sixties, stood for everything that was urbane, intelligent, ultra-sophisticated and trendy. It was the Hampstead graduate wife personified—smart but serious-minded, chic but with a social conscience. Articles poured off the *Nova* presses which will be rich source material for future social historians; they took on everything that seemed then revolutionary and has now become conventional wisdom: Holloway—and why it should be pulled down; race relations—what was the matter. The need for reform of the laws pertaining to homosexuality, abortion and divorce. Illiteracy. The squeezing of the middle class. Breast cancer. Adultery, and why the Other Woman isn't always in the wrong.

Yet what happened to *Nova*—whose top circulation was around 150,000, and whose present circulation is around the 40,000 mark—was that to a certain extent its thunder was stolen by the ruthless march onwards of the permissive society. When *Nova* started it seemed incredibly daring: since then other magazines have little by little moved in on its natural market, and proved even more daring.

EVENING STANDARD

*Quebec*  
**THE OTHER LANGUAGE:** The Quebec provincial government proposed rules yesterday to implement the controversial Official Language Act in such a way that not even a demonstrator could carry a placard printed only in English.

The signs would have to be in French or in both French "and another language."

Although the regulations are aimed at curtailing the use of English, they consistently refer to "another language" as the alternative to French.

INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE

*Tripoli*  
**LINGUA FRANCA:** Travellers to Libyan airports are being returned to their point of departure because their passports do not suit Col. Gaddafi, President of Libyan Revolutionary Council.

Hundreds have been sent back despite valid entry

visas, because their passports and vaccination certificates were not printed in Arabic. Of six British passengers aboard a Caledonian Airways plane, which arrived in Tripoli from Britain on Tuesday, five were sent back. The sixth was an oil company executive on business with the Libyan Government.

The same rule has been applied to Germans, Hungarians, Yugoslavs and even Algerians. An Algerian diplomat said the Algerian consul in Tripoli was sent back to Algiers on Tuesday when he returned from leave with a diplomatic passport printed in French.

Others had vaccination certificates printed on behalf of the World Health Organisation in English and French.

DAILY TELEGRAPH

*London*  
**GOOD NEIGHBOURS:** It has come to our attention that in the Original Editions gallery of the British Museum (East Wing, entrance floor) the curator has chosen to juxtapose "Mein Kampf" and "Interpretations of Dreams"—Hitler and Freud share too cosily the right half of a display case.

We understand the curator's problem: where to place "Mein Kampf" so it will not offend the admirers of a companion volume, or do violence to the latter?

May we be constructive and suggest that you remove the Freud volume for placement elsewhere, and substitute the good Dean Swift's "Gulliver's Travels", opened at the pages describing the Yahoos? Hitler was the prime Yahoo of his time, and Dean Swift would not mind the curator thus commenting editorially and silently.

THE TIMES

*London*  
**WHEN IN ROMANY:** At Tuesday's High Court hearing gypsies in the public gallery protested when Emma Holland was referred to as "Diddly." Counsel said he understood the name was an "insulting term in Romany language" and went on to refer to her as Emma.

But yesterday "Diddly" was used scores of times and neither gypsies nor counsel could explain outside the court why there had been an overnight change of heart.

Although no standard dictionary gives a meaning to the word some gypsies said they thought it was a term used for a gypsy believed not to be a true Romany.

DAILY TELEGRAPH

*London*  
**SPELLINGG BEE:** PHS told us of his visit to Brittany (and subsequently suggested that he had been rapped over the knuckles for saying so). Imagine my concern, therefore, when I read Reuter's report that a priest had been fined for bathing in the nude on a beach in Britany. I fled to more literate pastures and opened V. S. Pritchett's "Midnight Oil", to find him referring (p. 58, Penguin edition) to a holiday in Brittany. My confidence is shaken. Sir, where is this place?

THE TIMES



# The Chesterton Review

*The Journal of the Chesterton Society*

## CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE REVIEW INCLUDE:

- "Chesterton as an Edwardian Novelist"  
by John Batchelor, Ph.D. (Cantab.) of the University of Birmingham.
- "A Lawyer's View of Chesterton"  
by John R. Cartwright, the former Chief Justice of Canada.
- "The Formation of the Distributist Circle"  
by Jay P. Corrin, Ph.D. (University of Boston), American historian and student of Chesterton's social and political views and their impact on twentieth-century thought.
- "Patterns in Chesterton's Style"  
by David Darus, Ph.D. (Yale), Chesterton specialist and Chairman of the Department of English at the University of San Francisco.
- "Chesterton in the Soviet Union"  
by Moscow Critic, Elena Guseva.
- "Chesterton's Unpublished Teen-Age Writings"  
by Leo Hetzler, Ph.D. (Cornell), a specialist in Chesterton's early and unpublished works.
- "Chesterton in Poland"  
by Andrzej Jaroszyński, lecturer in Comparative Literature at the Catholic University in Lublin, Poland.
- "Chesterton and German Naturalism"  
by Christina Keck, Chairman of the Department of Germanic Studies, Purdue University, Indiana.
- "Chesterton and T.S. Eliot"  
by Russell Kirk, author of *The Conservative Mind*, *Eliot and His Age*, *The Roots of the American Order*, etc.
- "Chesterton in Canada"  
by Edmund McCorkell, C.S.B. former President of the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies in Toronto, Canada.
- "The Origins of Chesterton's Medievalism"  
by Marshall McLuhan, Director of the Centre for Culture and Technology at the University of Toronto.
- "Aspects of Chesterton's Humour"  
by George Purnell, Professor of English Literature at McMaster University in Hamilton, Canada.
- "An Everlasting Man"  
by Maurice B. Reckitt, author, Director of *G.K.'s Weekly*, former editor of *Christendom* and colleague of Chesterton and T.S. Eliot.
- "Chesterton in Japan"  
by Professor Kasumi Yamagata, editor of *G.K. Chesterton: Selected Essays* and Professor of English Literature at Ferris Women's College in Yokohama, Japan.

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- Professor Dennis Conlon, author, Chesterton scholar and lecturer at the University of Antwerp, Belgium.
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- Richard Ingrams, author and former editor of *Private Eye*.
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- Francois Rivière, French writer and radio critic, *France-Culture* (O.R.T.F.).
- Sir Henry Slessor, associate of Chesterton, and historian of the British Trade Union movement and the Liberal Party.
- Freda Spencer, Chesterton's secretary, 1914 - 1916.
- John Sullivan, Chesterton bibliographer and editor of *G.K. Chesterton: A Centenary Appraisal*.

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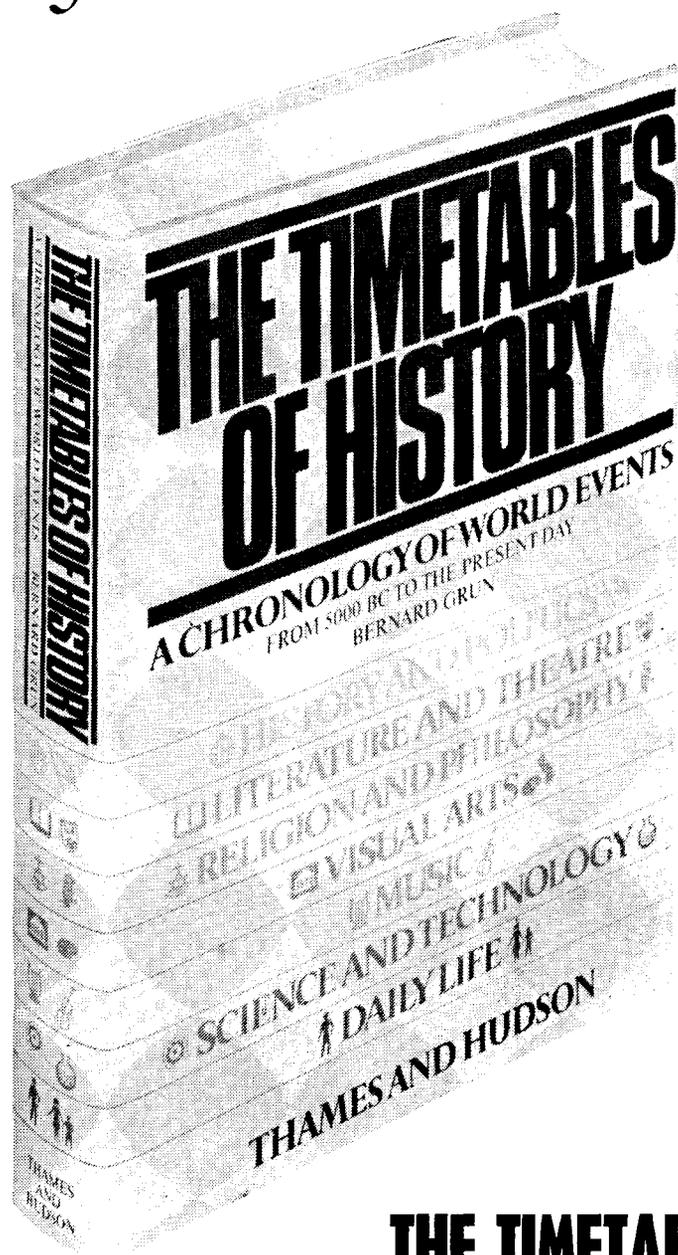
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