

BOOKS

[*Londonistan*, Melanie Phillips,
Encounter Books, 200 pages]

Speak the Queen's Urdu

By Theodore Dalrymple

HERE ARE A FEW STRAWS in the wind. The edition of the *British Medical Journal* for the week in which I write this carried a debate as to whether Muslims in Britain should have their own separate medical services. A couple of weeks ago, the BBC had a radio program devoted to legal affairs in which the pros and cons of recognizing *sharia* law in Britain were aired. On a visit to the English city in which I lived for years but live no longer, I went to the central library, one of the largest in the country, and found a table and chairs marked for the use of women (that is to say, Muslim women) only. The same day I received through the front door of the house in which I was staying a flyer from a Muslim city councilor who said he was opposed to the deletion of all official reference to Christmas in council publications because the culture of the whites was entitled to respect as well as others. On this very day, the newspapers carry reports of a young male Somali bomb plotter, resident in the city in which the library provides a table for Muslim women, who temporarily evaded the police by dressing in a burka, that female costume the prime minister's wife claimed in court that every British schoolgirl has the inalienable right to wear.

Of course, it isn't always easy to assess the significance of such facts: one has to steer a course between the Scylla of panic on the one hand and the Charybdis of complacency on the other. We are constantly told, for example, that the majority of Muslims is moderate, law-abiding, peaceful, and so forth. But is this any consolation when a substan-

tial minority is not, at least in their views? We need vigilance without vigilantism, which is not easy to achieve.

In this book, the British journalist Melanie Phillips documents not only the establishment and growth of Muslim extremist groups in London but the administrative incompetence and cultural weakness that permitted it to happen. Some of the pusillanimity that she records would be funny if it were not so deeply disturbing.

Phillips used to write for the great liberal newspapers in Britain, the *Guardian* and the *Observer*, but she became aware that liberal nostrums were not helping the very people they were supposed to help: those at the bottom end of the social scale. She wrote a famous book about the failings of the British educational system, and it is a sign of the rather peculiar and contorted ideological outlook of the British intelligentsia that her outrage at the evident failings of the system, and her firm belief that the children of the poor should be given as good an education as they are capable of benefiting from, should now be taken as a sign of ultramontane reaction that puts her in the camp of Joseph de Maistre.

Similarly, the sniggering response of the intelligentsia in Britain to this book is diagnostic of the very failings it exposes. None of the mainstream publishers had the guts to publish it. Their decision not to do so could not possibly have been based upon purely commercial reasoning, as the book has now gone through several reprints even without the assistance of any significant publicity.

Criticism of the author has been directed at her tone—hysterically earnest, too serious by half—but no one has pointed to any errors it contains or has argued that the facts she cites do not lead to her conclusions. The fact is that the British intelligentsia (I speak in generalities) is unable to distinguish seriousness from earnestness and light-heartedness from frivolity. Decadence is no doubt an overused term, but this is decadence if anything is: earnestness about the trivial and frivolity about the serious.

As Phillips demonstrates in chapter and verse, Britain has long allowed the most radical extremists to preach and recruit within its shores and has done so for a combination of reasons: a sense of superior but bogus sophistication, which believes that it is best to allow the hotheads (usually in receipt of generous social security payments) their little catharsis, their ideas being so obviously absurd and nugatory that it is impossible that they would believe in them deeply enough to act upon them; a loss of cultural confidence brought about by the long march through the institutions of intellectuals bent upon the destruction of all that existed before their own glorious advent; and straightforward moral, and even physical, cowardice. (In connection to this, I should cite my experience as a doctor working in an area with a large Muslim population, that the school inspectors never held Muslim parents to account for failing to send their daughters to school, though they would hold parents of any other religion to account for precisely the same thing.)

For more than 40 years, both British officials and intellectuals have been deeply evasive about the problems of mass immigration into the country. They have pretended that it makes no difference where the immigrants come from, why they come, or what culture and expectations they bring with them. More recently, they have praised cultural diversity as a good in itself, and so the more of it the better.

London is now the most cosmopolitan city in the world, and it is not uncommon to find schools where the children are not only unable to speak English but are unable to communicate with each other in any common language.

The image the multiculturalists have in mind is that of those middle-class areas of London in whose shopping areas there are now restaurants from many different parts of the world, existing perfectly happily side by side. There is no difficulty in eating Lebanese one day and Mexican the next, so why should there be any other cultural or political difficulties as a result of immigration?

It is perfectly true, of course, that immigrants often “fertilize” the country to which they move. They bring skills and often a willingness to work very hard to improve their lot. The latter virtue can, of course, be sapped by a too-generous provision of welfare benefits, and this is precisely what has happened in Europe with the disastrous consequence that a large class of disaffected and resentful first-generation youth has been created with a propensity to crime and, in the case of Muslims, to listen to the siren-call of extremism. Nevertheless, cultural differences are very important: recently, for example, Britain has absorbed between 500,000 and 1,000,000 immigrants from Poland without, so far as I am aware, any serious difficulty. Immigrants are not created equal.

Multiculturalists talk in generalities, but they would be hard put to name any specific cultural or economic benefits to Britain that the mass immigration of Somali nationals, for example, has brought. In fact, they have no interest whatsoever in Somali culture. (At least I have been to the country, and one of my treasured possessions is a Somali-English phrasebook from the period of Soviet influence there, with such useful phrases as “Hand me the opera glasses, please” and “What is the total annual output of your collective farm?”) They wouldn’t be able to name a single Somali dish, let alone a book, and only the very best-informed would know that immigrant Somali nationals have introduced a new stimulant, khat, whose leaves they often chew for hours on end. As Phillips shows, multiculturalism is the latest form of nihilism: it is not love of other cultures for their own sake, it is hatred of one’s own.

Whatever else may be said of fierce Muslims, they are definitely not nihilists. They are not relativists either. They believe that they are in possession of the truth, one and indivisible. For them, compromise is at best a mere tactic or a temporary truce until the balance of forces changes, as they now believe it will—entirely in their favor. Putting up Church of England clerics against them is like sending a 70-year-old into the ring to fight

Mike Tyson in his prime. Phillips’s most hilarious quotations come from the C. of E. clerics, most of whom probably wouldn’t be able to give a straight answer to the question of whether or not there was a God. But the unctuousness of British politicians is no better.

One of the dangers of all this is that multiculturalists are actually playing a game; they have no more intention of studying Sufi poetry in Farsi or Buddhist scriptures in Pali than Marie Antoinette had any intentions of taking up shepherding as a career. When, as a result of their game-playing, their societies come under real threat, they are likely to react with the self-righteous viciousness of the spurned lover. Their tolerance of everything will thus have led directly to pogroms and perhaps even to genocide, without ever having passed through good sense or intellectual honesty.

Phillips shows that weakness, vacillation, exhibitionist self-doubt and pusillanimity go to the very top of British society, up to and including the prime minister, who finds it possible to take action on a problem in proportion to the square of the distance of the problem from his own front door. Bombing foreign countries is absolutely no problem for him, but finding a way to prevent city councils from bowing to the demands of Muslim political entrepreneurs is quite beyond him. To do so would take deep moral courage, precisely the quality that the long march through the institutions has so disastrously sapped in the members of the elite such as he, which is precisely as Gramsci, that unwitting ally of Muslim fundamentalism, predicted and wanted.

This book makes uncomfortable reading, relieved only by the unintentional humor of the churchmen whom the author quotes as the leading appeasers. The spirit of Neville Chamberlain lives on, but without the extenuating circumstances that made Chamberlain a weak and misguided, rather than a bad, man. ■

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[*A Bee in the Mouth: Anger in America Now*, Peter Wood, Encounter Books, 303 pages]

Angri-cultural Revolution

By Florence King

WE DON’T HAVE TO READ very far into Peter Wood’s book before discovering that we are in for some deftly served-up fun. The author’s detached tone and understated approach to his subject of meltdown chic are deliciously evident in his story of Harvard administrator Norah Burch, who announced on her blog (AnnoyYourFriends.com) that she was ready to bomb the entire campus and hunt down with a shotgun everyone who dared to cross her. Later, after she was fired, she explained that she had merely been “calming my nerves” in what she described as “an electronic primal scream.” Wood writes,

Ms. Burch’s tone of wounded innocence—the death threats were, after all, a service to her employer, since they helped her return to productivity—is the crucial thing ... because she lives in a world where expressing anger—even in the hyperbolic terms of bombs and shotguns—is a legitimate form of self-expression. How can self-expression that doesn’t involve actual dynamite or bullets be taken amiss?

America has come a long way since George Washington made worried entries in his diary about his efforts to control his hot temper. In his time, displays of anger were regarded as evidence of lack of character, justifiable only by offenses against the code of male honor, an attitude that lasted two centuries and provided the plot for countless cowboy movies. In “Shane” and “High Noon,” anger is what the hero tries to avoid, maintaining a stance of quiet strength until, at last, he is forced