

The New Criterion

Notebook

October 2008

I.M. Shusha Guppy, 1935-2008

by [Ben Downing](#)

Remembering the Persian expatriate and London editor of the *Paris Review*.

Persian: that's the word I'll always associate with Shusha Guppy. Uttered with a luxurious protraction of the first syllable— *Purrrrzhén*, as if a ... well, Persian cat were being stroked—it conjured up all those Oriental refinements rudely swept aside by the ayatollahs, a lost world of Hafez recitations and elaborate compliments (*taarof*, as she taught me to call them) paid in jewel-like gardens. Though she'd occasionally employ the bare geopolitical term "Iran," the adjective was always "Persian," and so was the name, in English, of her mother tongue—Allah help anyone who referred to it in her hearing as "Farsi," which, she would witheringly point out, was like saying "Deutsch" or "français."

Yet Shusha was no exile. While she abominated the revolution of 1979 as roundly as anyone, she had v ...

Ben Downing is the author of *Calligraphy Shop* (Zoo Press), a book of poems.

[more from this author](#)

This article originally appeared in The New Criterion, Volume 27 October 2008, on page 76

Copyright © 2009 The New Criterion | www.newcriterion.com

<http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/I-M--Shusha-Guppy--1935-2008-3929>