



The Wasted Vigil

Week Two



This is among the few things that can be said about love with any confidence. It is small enough to be contained within the heart, but, pulled thin, it would drape the entire world. (352)

Book Two



The year 1798 was a disaster for Islam. Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion that year of Egypt—the very centre of the Muslim world—was the symbolic moment when the standard of leadership passed to the West. From that point on, Western armies and Western capital overran the lands of the Muslims. (177)

What is Napoleon's invasion of Egypt doing in this novel?

- ✓ References Napoleon's claim that «nous sommes les vrais musulmans»
- ✓ References Said use of this historical moment—and the associated project of collecting knowledge about the 'East' in the *Description de l'Égypte*—at the opening of *Orientalism*
- ✓ 'The bullet that has hit us Muslims today left the gun centuries ago, when we let the clergy decide that knowledge and education were not important.' (244): Dunia's defence of education
- ✓ Frames 9/11 as an analogous 'seizure' of discourse
- ✓ Inserts Casa, by way of Hemans's poem, into a trans-historical, geopolitical narrative about the production of knowledge about Afghanistan and Islam
- ✓ Later Marcus refers the reader to this geopolitical narrative by referencing William Blake: 'Look at the three of us here. Like a William Blake prophecy.' (183)
- ✓ And again: 'In sura 27, Solomon laughs on hearing the conversation of two ants—a rare example of humour in the Koran—and there is a third-century Buddhist version of that tale with two butterflies instead of ants. It's no point sharing with the boy the delightful essential idea that tales can travel, or that two sets of people oceans apart can dream up similar sacred myths.' (196)
- ✓ Also contests a narrative where history and culture need to conform to a particular, politicized version of Islamic history undergirded by a notion of 'the primacy and supremacy of Muslims above all' (178)

John Ledyard

...David wonders if he should name the canoe after John Ledyard, the first citizen of the independent United States to explore the lands of Islam, visiting the Middle East in 1773.. In a letter written from Egypt, days before his death, John Ledyard asked his friend Thomas Jefferson to take all those wondrous descriptions of the East—Homer, Thucydides, Savary—and burn them, advising him against every visiting Egypt. (293)

Fathers Absent and Present; The Place of Poetry in the Text

He called aloud – “Say, **father**, say,
If yet my task is done!”
He knew not that the chieftain lay
Unconscious of his **son**.

“Speak, **father!**” once again he cried,
“If I may yet be gone!”
And but the booming shots replied,
And fast the flames rolled on.

And shouted but once more aloud,
“My **father!** must I stay?”
While o'er him fast, through sail and
shroud,
The wreathing fires made way.

There came a burst of thunder sound
- The boy - oh! where was he?
Ask of the winds that far around
With fragments strewed the sea!

With mast, and helm, and pennon fair,
That well had borne their part –
**But the noblest thing that perished there
Was that young, faithful heart.**

A Muslim Poem (Morning Verses)

*Allah I ask You for whatever good this day may hold
And I take refuge in You from whatever evil it may hold
And ask you to grant me victory over me.
Allah watch over me with Your eye that never sleeps
And accept my repentance, that I may not perish.
You are my hope. My Master, Lord of bounty and majesty,
To You I direct my face, so bring Your noble face close to me
And wash away my sins, answer my supplications, and guide
my heart,
And receive me with Your deepest forgiveness and generosity,
Smiling on me and content with me in Your infinite mercy.*

The Adhan (Call to Prayer)



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Compared to an American view of Islam: James Palatine

‘We have a new kind of enemy, David. They are allowed to read the Koran at Guantanamo Bay, as their religious and human right. But have you read it? They don’t need jihadi literature—they’ve got the Koran. Almost every other page is a call to arms, a call to slaughter us infidels.’

Versus Dunia’s rather different interpretation:

‘Muslims love Islam. But Muslims hate fundamentalism. *That* can be destroyed.’ She touches the corner of his mouth. ‘What happened here? This small scar. What we have to make sure is that Muslims don’t fall in love with the ways of fundamentalists—then we’d be in trouble.’ (269-70).

Casa and Free Indirect Speech

When the rumours reached Ali about the virtue of Ayesha—the wife of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him—Ali had had Ayesha's maidservant tortured to learn if the gossip had any basis in fact. Muhammad, peace be upon him, was aware of this. (179)

Allah—in His wisdom—has planted these compassionate impulses in the hearts of non-believers, for Muslims to exploit and benefit from. (180-1)

First the Americans exterminate the Indians, then name their weapons and warplanes after them. What did those Indians do to make the white Americans respect them? (182)

Casa and Women: Entering into a Mindset Alien to Most of Aslam's Readers

- ‘...though of course being female it must have been easy for her to fall into madness, Muhammad, peace be upon him, saying, “Women have less reason than men.”’ (184)
- ‘The madrassa teachers had told the children that women’s guile was immense, their mischief noxious, that they were evil and mean-spirited, that all the trials and misfortunes and woes that befell men came from women, that Muhammad, peace be upon him, had said when a woman steps out of a house Satan is delighted. (186)
- ‘Casa and others would sometimes watch Hollywood action movies at the training camps, searching for ideas and inspiration. The burning, exploding American cities were their dreams made real on the screen, though later when he was alone the unearthly beauty of some of the actresses and actors would fill him with a disturbing and shameful pain.’ (239)
- [James: Earlier, he had seen them riveted by the DVD of a Hollywood thriller—every scene was full of sleek cars or shiny women or blasting guns—making him understand why the rest of the world thought Americans were crazy. Only minutes later, however, he wasn’t too sure. When you learn that the rest of the world thinks this is what life in America is like, that this isn’t just throwaway entertainment, isn’t *understood* by sane Americans as fantasy or momentary diversion, you realise just how crazy the rest of the world is (277)]

He himself had been touched by a woman only five times in his entire life, mostly the nurses handling him at hospitals. Certainly there has never been anything of his own volition. The state of affairs is similar among those who intend to carry out Nabi Khan's imminent martyrdom attacks in Usha. And since Allah says that no one must die a virgin, Nabi Khan had arranged for them to know intimacy for the first and last time in this life. It was to have happened tomorrow night. (214)

(On Dunia's arrival)

To not know anything about women is a sign of decency in these lands. Muslim scholars to this day debate the permissibility of a second 'deliberate' glance as opposed to the first 'inadvertent' one.

David resists the temptation to say more.

The boy is serious and brisk, with his own sense of the maladroitness, but untested virtue is no virtue at all, and it seems clear to David that his ideas have never been put to the test.
(236)

Tempered by Sympathy for How Casa Has Come By These Views and Empathy for What He Has Suffered

She [Dunia] has encountered this kind of behaviour countless times before, from men with nothing but passion where knowledge should be. (271)

By the time he was about ten he had endured every kind of assault on his body by men or stronger boys, and—because the only way to feel any control was to distress or wound others—by the time he was fourteen he had done the same to younger or weaker boys. At the very core of him was the belief that human beings had little to offer beyond cruelty and danger. (187)

(from Marcus's perspective)

Who knows how the boy ended up with these opinions? What small thing could the others in the world have done differently for a happier outcome, what small mistake was made? Wolves exhibiting strange behaviour—caught in traps and thrashing around, injured by other creatures or by bullets, pups suffering from epilepsy—are attacked and killed by their pack members. But here everyone is human and must try to understand each other's mystery. Each other's pain.

Note the invocation of COLLECTIVE responsibility.

‘They are the children of the devil. They have no choice but to spread destruction in the world.’

‘He is the child of a human, which means he has a choice and can change.’ (351)

(from David's perspective)

Here in this room the three of them are, the old ones. Four, if Zameen's ghost is included. And out there are the children. Dunia. Casa. James. The planet's future. (312)

Clips from Samira Makhmalbaf

At Five in the Afternoon (2003)

Michael Winterbottom Documentary

In This World (2002)