

# THE MYSTERIOUS PLUS



CASBAH, ALGIERS



WILLIAM L. TARVIN

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William L. Tarvin

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2009908975

ISBN:	Hardcover	978-1-4415-7080-2
	Softcover	978-1-4415-7079-6

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To the real-life Mohammed Ahmed Belmazoir  
(1972 – 1991)

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EVERYTHING CONNECTS:

Many persons have seemed to think that these blended or, as Prof. Huxley calls them, 'generic' images are equivalent to concepts. But, in itself, a blurred thing is just as particular as a sharp thing; and the generic character of either sharp image or blurred image depends on its being felt *with its representative function*. This function is THE MYSTERIOUS PLUS, the understood meaning.

[My capitalization.]

—William James, *The Principles of Psychology*. Vol. 1, Chap. 12, "Conceptions," Subsection, "Universals." New York: Henry Holt, 1890. Fn. 17, p. 478.

NOTHING DISCONNECTS:

. . . Set you down this;  
And say besides that in Aleppo once,  
Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk  
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,  
I took by th' throat the circumcised dog  
And smote him, thus.

[*Othello stabs himself.*]

*Othello*, 5.2.361-366

EVERYTHING DISCONNECTS:

"All events seem entirely loose and separate. One event follows another, but we never can observe any tie between them. They seem *conjoined*, but never *connected*."

—David Hume, the first paragraph of "Of the Idea of Necessary Connection: Part II," of his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.

NOTHING CONNECTS:

I can connect  
Nothing with nothing.

—T. S. Eliot, "Section III: The Fire Sermon,"  
*The Waste Land* (301-02)

# PREFACE

*The Mysterious Plus* is a philosophical murder mystery in the same sense that *Oedipus Rex*, *Hamlet*, and *Crime and Punishment* are. In them, more important than the solution to the crime are the ideas which arise during the pursuit of the murderer and the psychological and social changes which the individual, the family structure, and society undergo as a result of the murder.

While clues connect the usual murder mystery, ideas provide the connections in the philosophical murder mystery. My novel is structured by four philosophical viewpoints: Everything Connects (the Great Chain of Being), Nothing Disconnects (a weaker affirmation of this concept through the negations), Everything Disconnects (an assumption that there was or might have been a connection, but it has been severed), and Nothing Connects (that all was, is, and will forever be chaos). These points of view are suggested by the epigraphs on the preceding page.

Since my novel incorporates ideas from around one thousand philosophical, religious, literary, social, psychological, and political works, I have provided footnotes.

I advise the reader to avoid these since annotations break the flow of any work. However, if you come across an ideological point (such as one by the twentieth-century philosopher Karl Popper) or a lexical term (such as “philomicron”) and happen to be a lover of such small things, I have provided some nonaddictive commentary and definitions.

**At the bottom on each page of the text is a blue, underlined link which will take you to the entry in the notes section. In the notes section, there is a similar underlined link at the bottom of page which will whisk you back to the page of the text that you are reading. I hope these prove helpful.**

Expressions from seven, non-English languages (principally French and Arabic, since the novel is mainly set in Algeria, a former French colony) are used in the novel, but I have typically defined them in the text, or their meaning is evident from the context. Further commentary on them is found in the footnotes section.

I worked on this novel off and on from 1989 to 2013. Thus I have had the time to read and study far more than the c. 1,000 sources quoted in the footnotes. Four deserve to be singled out: the unabridged *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language* (abbreviated as *Webster’s Third* in the notes), whose definitions are frequently cited for recondite or exotic words; *Wikipedia*, the online scholar’s “handyman”; Alistair

Horne's seminal and classic *A Savage War of Peace*, the 1977 account of the Algerian war of independence, which is mentioned in the text and in the notes; and Valerie and Jon Stevens's 1977 *Algeria and the Sahara*, the only travelers' book on Algeria which I could find in Abha, Saudi Arabia, where I was teaching in 1989 when I began work on my novel—and what a serendipitous find it proved to be!

Many friends and colleagues in the Middle East and North Africa (Jews, Christians, and Muslims, to list them in the chronological order of the founding of their religions) provided invaluable help—far too many to mention with the exception of a special Moroccan friend Mohammed Ahmed Belmazoir, to whom this book is dedicated.

Here's hoping you have a good read!

# Chapter One

## NOTHING DISCONNECTS

The azan, beginning with the strained, protracted “*Allahu Akbar!*” (“God is Great!”) can be heard about midway down Zaracova, a narrow strip of a beach just north of Algiers. Beyond that, the prayer call’s anthem is blown back by the wind or throttled in the hustling of the waves.

Aware of how far from the bluff mosque it would carry, Paul Ballard, on leaving the public changing room at 3:45, had not cast about for a spot nearer the sea. “To indulge in a swim”—possible, given the Mediterranean city’s mild winters—had required some additional trudging across the cool February sand, but his twenty-two years of service abroad had ingrained him with the need to build sureness on precaution.

Had those merged qualities induced Claude to take him up in ’61? “They serve me well,” he professed on occasion, referring characteristically to the service, not the server. “Leroy’s tag-along,” at every embassy they had been assigned to, Ballard was styled, mostly *derrière son dos* and certainly not in the vicinity of Claude, who, having embarked on his stately rise, compelled a courtesy even prior to his marriage to Gertie.

And now His Excellency Claude Sebastian Leroy, not yet ten months into his Algerian ambassadorship, was being summoned to Washington—to “Boggy Fathom,” he dubbed it openly, not obliged to exhibit the courtesy he himself commanded.

The ambassador had imparted the news about the Under Secretaryship of State for Political Affairs de *première main*. “Washington ho!” he had halloped from the living room of Ballard’s apartment, having let himself in. “Where’ve you been? It’s 11:30.”

When Leroy forged ahead with the details of the president’s call, Ballard was relieved. He had been with Leila and would have had the presence to dissemble, having done so regularly during the last five months. All the same, lying to his best friend always dismayed him since, he told himself, *never previously have I kept anything from Claude*.

A second “Washington ho!” precluded that necessity. As Ballard walked from the door to the fauteuil opposite the suede chesterfield, Leroy brought Bush and Baker into “the White House three-way, our ‘bosses’”—the word was neighed as *bawlses*—“starting next week.”

Reagan’s call had focused on Claude’s handling of the Palestinian negotiations, recently concluded in a “sort of secrecy” in Algiers. The account was delivered with mordant understatement and much punning, even to its end. ““And convey my warmest regards to Mrs. Leroy . . . Gertie,” the soon-to-be-passé President closed.”

Claude halted, doubtless sensing it time to gauge more than a facial reaction. “Well?” From the first, however, Ballard had been mulling over how this appointment would affect

Leila and himself.

The silence too drawn out, once more Leroy's impatience overtook it. "No joy at the D.C. bar mitzvahs tonight." He laughed, barely severing his lips.

"Dangerous business this. Oh, not some Palestinian potshot hotshot." A flick of his hand brushed aside that threat. "But the *sédentaires*, those foreskinless-flints back at the Mansion," a circumcising agnomination Ballard had heard Claude sometimes use in alluding to the State Department Jews.

Leroy had long ago put from his mind—"or had he even heeded when I let it slip in '61, over pale lagers in our Ann Arbor dorm room?"—that "I was a Jew the first three years of my life," as Ballard himself had conveniently opted to extirpate, that is, until Leila. From her, nothing—"well-nigh"—could be suppressed, though "my natal faith," carelessly divulged to her brother, had added five hundred dollars to the dowry.

"Think'st thou we can play the game in 'merry-sport[ful]' Washington?" By extending the pause, Claude had decreed that there had to be an answer.

"Of course," Ballard lied, for he had already made the decision, positive of Leila's agreement, not to tag along.

The stroking of a late winter sun and the timid mist of Mediterranean sea spray, on a beach whose "nipping . . . air" had by then driven away most of its few Algerian bathers, Ballard knew, could entrance a person, especially one inertly prone after an hour of furious swimming.

He had slept. Still the prayer call for sunset had roused him on schedule. Contemplating the salmon pink horizon and the ocean ripening into a darker green, he felt the desire recur: not to wake, not to go to the rendezvous with Mohammed.

In the sudden incandescence, "Houda's horrid gaze," painfully evoked Ballard, who was rubbing the collar of the beer against his nether lip, "after she had turned it from her brother, mirrored my own. And Mohammed jerked as if serpent-stung, seeing the nakedness and recognizing it as his sister's, among Muslims a sin God cannot forgive or a man ever forget.

"Thereupon he too peered at me, his eyes, unlike Houda's, not widened—she had by then shrouded herself with the bedsheet—but half-open with a torpid realization and half-closed by the whiskey and hashish. They struggled to protest, yet they were sleepy, too dazed." Even as, at that moment, Ballard's were.

The burst of light had been preceded by a click. It resembled a phone receiver being cradled, a sound (so familiar to one who had spent his working life in embassies) which deliberately flaunted that an eavesdropper, having heard enough, chose to exit by depositing his or her blank calling card.

Before he fled—Houda had already rushed past him into the bathroom—he had fumbled a hand, not into the right pocket of his trousers with the once folded-over money designed for them, but into the inner pocket of his coat which held the bank-wrapped stack he was to deliver to Leila. It slid from his grip, rebounding from the floor with a thud that startled Mohammed as well as him.

His arms, dangling helplessly at his sides, he lifted shoulder-high, the movement causing the two pairs of night-vision goggles to ‘bungee,’ and molded them by turning up his palms into that French *c’est-la-vie* pose, a configuration, the drowsy Ballard apprehended, not unlike that of a Muslim at prayers confronting his God.

Then he had staggered to the same door, which he unsteadily drew back and brought to with a click, leaving brother and sister to reach their own accommodation.

“*Al-shrh Akbar!*”

A faulty wire in the loudspeaker predestined that the second exhortation of the muezzin was disrupted by a rasp approximating the gride of a man clearing his throat. There was no hurry. Mohammed would be late as always, “a trifle tardy.”

Tapping a cigarette from the Rothman box propped against the empty bottle of Tango beer, Ballard lit it, resituating the lighter on top of the pack, and wondered, “‘And in the lowest deep a lower deep / Still threat’ning to devour me opens wide.’ Have I the strength to seek forgiveness?”

## 2

Earlier a little after four, just prior to his swim, Ballard had protested *faiblement*, “I wasn’t privy to that, the lights being switched on.” The evasion caused him to pounce on himself. “Like Satan, before assuming the guise of the serpent, you stood by, the innocent?”

Anew there flashed before him how Houda had clenched the sheet so tightly over her face that the white muslin acquired the status of a cerecloth. “Yes, the innocent. Had I known all, I’d have spurned it. You, who are not ill-acquainted with me, must believe I would have.”

He shook the Rothman pack to be sure two remained. “I’ll swim now with Mohisen watching, whose sympathetic intuition will determine the moment I’m exhausted. He’ll immediately notify the waiter who will hasten to my spot with another pack and a Tango encircled by a cold dishrag.”

“And claim the two left in the old pack,” he said to himself, not able to let it go. “That day you swam two miles to Bab el Oued, you descried huge mire-spattered rats dancing along the rim of a corroded sewer pipe, their tiny pads splashing the taffy-colored water as their oversized nails shred globs of tissue. (You stared at both Belmazoirs with ‘pity’ and ‘abhor[rence],’ I maintain.) And here you would swim, merely to terminate our chat.”

As wavelets lapped at his ankles, Ballard, twisting, spied Mohisen. The attendant of the public changing room had raised its front wooden shutters to follow him. With his right hand elevated to hip level, Ballard returned his two-arm wave.

“Have not I conceded that had I comprehended all, I wouldn’t have participated?” Wading into the polluted surf, he discerned his would not be *le dernier mot*.

“Brother and sister, caught in the luminescent blaze, taking measure of each other—measure for measure. And you no more than an innocent stander-by? Swim!”

He dived into a breaker, its numbing foam full of bitter salt. Forty-five minutes later, his vigor sapped, peripherally he captured Mohisen, clad in a faded-orange T-shirt and loose

black knee-length trunks, pushing through the strands of beads which hung across the ingress to his *vestiaire*, headed toward the small café next door to “get the beauty of it [cold],” the beer he would crave after his swim.

### 3

Ballard jammed the quarter-finished Rothman into the gray sand. “That he’ll straggle in has never behooved that I shouldn’t more sprightly arrive,” he reasoned. Precaution is nourished by “punctuality,” and he had difficulty adjusting to the lack of either among the Arabs.

“The only thing on time in Algiers is the prayer call,” he had peevishly shouted to Leila, although through the ajar bathroom door of her apartment he could see only her mage in the vanity mirror.

“Sufficient for us! Only God deserves our punctuality.” As she spoke, she peeked round, appearing even lovelier than her reflection. “Trust me. The train won’t be on schedule, and knowing Ahmed, he probably overslept and missed the bus.”

According to the plan, her brother was to take the midnight coach from Zouabi to Constantine, board the 1:10 a.m. SNTF train from there to Algiers, be met at 8:30, and after a rest, chaperon them in Ballard’s Renault Quatrelle back to their village, where her father and he were to negotiate the marriage contract.

“It’s a lot of rigmarole. That is an, or the, English word, isn’t it?” she had grumbled the week before, when the arrangements were set.

*Why did she choose me?* Ballard often pondered. The one time he had asked, he reaped a flippant “You have a most attractive passport—and our children will concur with their mother on that.”

In the proposal, to his somberly fumbled, “When I’m seventy, you’ll be forty-nine,” she had parried, “Forty-eight, and getting lines. Promptly you’ll ditch me for a fresh wrinkleless thing.”

“*Ditch*,” he corrected, and her visage grew studious. On their first date, at the El Riadh, he had asked how “M. Thierry Devereaux” would react on finding out about it. “I accompany him to improve my French,” she rejoined, not at all embarrassed by the disclosure.

“So I’m nothing more than a Berlitz English cassette that picks up the tab?” She had not paused in her riposte. “What does ‘pick up the tab’ mean?”

On his feet, Ballard tied the cord drawstring of his hunter-green lycra Speedo, his beachwear since being posted in Algiers, and slapped at his back, thighs, and calves, ineffectually loosening few of the cinereous grains. He gathered the lighter, the box of Rothmans, and the empty cloth-wrapped bottle.

During the short walk to the changing room, he scourged himself. “Had some wretch executed the vile deception on Leila”—he finally accepted he must dispense with the excuse about the flicking on of the light—“by *me* conspired and inflicted on Houda (and Mohammed) would not I have Lear out-howled?”

## 4

The front shutters, which Mohisen had chain-hoisted to watch the American while he was swimming, had been rolled down at the first shrill of the azan for Maghrib. Through the thirty-three strands, each strung with thirty-three marble-size plastic beads, Ballard espied the youth, his body draped over the counter and with a face impatient to break into a beaming smile.

“M. John, you return alone? No girl picked up? Why do you come to the beach? You lie. You tell me you’re an American. No! No!” With such teasing vociferation, in French with a smattering of English, Mohisen usually greeted him, a brassy flourish apprising anyone in the room that he had “an *Amrekaanee* friend I can joke with.”

Yet that day, the attendant was silent, “perhaps having earlier sensed my worry,” Ballard, who missed the raillery, thought. Throwing himself from the *comptoir*, the stripling reappeared with the wire basket containing Ballard’s pants, shirt, wallet, shoes, briefs, car keys, watch, and comb, a bottle of shampoo, a bar of soap, and a folded towel. In spite of his open grin, he still seemed reluctant to speak.

Mohisen’s age could have been “anywhere from fifteen to nineteen.” Tall and scrawny—the one exacerbated the other—he had cheeks blemished by some childhood illness, and a nose bent to the left, “a ribbon from my father, well-deserved. Am not I the ugliest boy in all Algiers?” he had once gasconaded.

As if bewildered why an American would want to more than nod at him, Mohisen had displayed self-consciousness the first three times Ballard had used the beach and its *vestiaire*. At the fourth, in July, he had left paper in lieu of coins for the attendant’s perfunctory tip, having learned from Mohammed, snared quickly, that among Arabs a minimally above-anticipated baksheesh is a bonhomous signal.

“Be leery how you disburse gratuities in Algiers,” Mohammed had lectured. “Too generous and you’ll have a friend, not a waiter. Listen to me, M. John, and you won’t end up hard up, with nosy service to boot.” With that duty in prudence discharged, he raked into his palm most of the centimes Ballard had designed for their waiter at the off-street bistro in Bordj el Kiffan and stuffed them into a pocket of his jeans.

Ten dinars (one dollar) had made Mohisen his “*mon ami*,” one who could not help but question himself, modify his behavior, when he suspected his *sadeek* (“friend”) was troubled.

Having set the beer bottle on the counter, Ballard took the basket, dropping in it his lighter and the pack. “I swam much. Everything’s all right.”

To such a one, Ballard was aware, the word *bien* (“all right”) would be received as more than a perfunctory tip.

## 5

Before stepping under the stream of water, cold as the ocean, Ballard squirted dabs of shampoo on his legs and back to unstick the sand.

The changing room was roofless except for the shower area at the back, the three tiny stalls on its right, and the enclosure at the front, Mohisen’s station. Surveying the firmament

of thick puffed-up clouds, scarlet in the dying sun, yet primed to blear the in-the-wings three-quarters-full, waning-gibbous moon, Ballard realized that during his palm-grove rendezvous with Mohammed only intermittent glimpses of one another's features would be snatched.

His visible body lathered, pulling back the rim of his bikini, he squeezed a few drops of L'Oreal Vive to suds his crotch and gluteal cleft, careful not to expose either. Mohisen's other customer, an Algerian, was three nozzles from him. Still Ballard was cognizant of the rule of the public bathhouse in the Islamic world.

Their first night in the Toumi apartment, when he had asked to see Mohammed's penis, while unbelting his pants, he had giggled, "This doesn't count with God. I couldn't do this around Muslims." With a bravura twirl and wag of his stiffening cock, the youth, who like most Arabs attached some pre-Islamic import to its length and girth, scarcely disguised his exhibitionist glee. "But we are poor, and a poor man must take his pride wherever he can."

As the chilling water washed away the grit-dappled suds, Ballard assayed his last half year: "dungeon-like, since through my weakness I kept each a prisoner from the other." Leila did not know about Mohammed; he and his sister were ignorant of Claude and Leila; Houda had been kept from Mohammed "until that horrible Wednesday which—God granting!—tonight will bring me absolution"; and for far too long Leila had been masked from Claude.

It was she who, five weeks ago, had convinced him to reveal that he would be staying in Algiers. "You must free yourself of that." The next morning during their 7:30-to-eight coffee, an embassy ritual instituted in their Manila posting ("for me as needful as an a.m. BM," Claude quipped), Ballard had confessed.

"It's that translator who worked here." Placing his cup on the desk, Leroy tilted back in his leather chair. "What's her name?" His mouth had poised itself, magnifying the anxiety of whether a rictus or frown would issue. "Elbert reported you've set her up in a suite."

Ballard began to scrub his hair. "Medlin." He neighed at the trickle of soap bubbles on his lips. "Even as I shower, his Toyota may be parked in spying distance of mine." If so, "I provoked his snooping."

Last Tuesday, after the revised list of the three whom the ambassador had selected for Washington had circulated for a week, he was in the staff coffee room when Medlin strutted in. Dictating clamantly to his secretary, he ambled by Ballard without an acknowledgment.

Five paces on, in front of the coffee urn, the deputy chief of mission (DCM) marginally elevated his voice. "You have everything down, Amal? Such a good . . . girl. I wish I could take you to Washington with me."

Gloating toward a small round table where sat three other Algerian secretaries, he proclaimed in a still higher pitch, "Some are bound for Washington, and some are not!"

Into a styrofoam cup Medlin poured his coffee, added two cubes of sugar, and stirred it with a plastic knife, his unctuous flier aggrandizing itself at each stage.

"Let it slide," Ballard becalmed himself.

"Have I congratulated you, Elbert?" He advanced three steps toward the man who had been groveling in his office two weeks ago, pleading that he intercede and persuade Claude to append his name to the Washington team. Though Ballard's right hand was

readied to document his sincerity, the DCM manifested no intention of shifting the cup to his left.

“Let felicitations go to the deeds, not to the doer,” and Medlin’s transiting gaze swept by him to those seated. (*The service, not the server*, Ballard invoked, tardily confirming to himself his regret at being superseded by *one such as this*.) “After-hours of toil at my desk, not sneaking away to frolic in the surf with lads at Palace of the Nations or Zaracova.”

At this declaration, each woman darted a palm upward to veil a snicker.

“Stealing alone into the latter’s umbrageous grove, yet emerging with a beachcomber or two in tow.”

His smirk enlightened Ballard: “He feels he earned the Washington assignment through the gossip he had fed Claude.” Two further strides brought him level with his replacement, who, conscious that all were watching, held his ground.

Leaning over, Ballard positioned his mouth a handspan from Medlin’s right cheek. “For more years than you know I’ve poured words into Claude’s ears—I can call him Claude, can you? One syllable from me and perhaps you’ll not be ‘Washington ho!’”

With protest, rage, and supplication Medlin’s face shivered. At the door of the coffee room, Ballard looked back. The DCM’s visage, with its twitching lips, still ostended a dubious conflict of quicksilver emotions. Nevertheless, what momentarily arrested Ballard was the plastic knife: Removed from the cup, it was mechanically being jabbed into his left thenar.

## 6

In the changing stall, wiping the crystal of his Patek Philippe (“6:33”), Ballard articulated sotto voce, “Mohisen! Mohisen!” a murmur, not a mutter.

Without bothering to verify its contents, he put his billfold, which identified him as John Ridgemont, in the front pocket of his khaki cotton twills, having locked away his real embassy ID card in the glove compartment of his red Renault.

The watch, far too expensive for Ballard to have bought, had been a 1984 gift from Claude. It dated from their posting in Islamabad, where Leroy, now three times an ambassador, was principally embroiled in convincing Pakistani authorities not to siphon off more than three-fourths of U.S. military aid intended for the Afghani Mujahedeen in their fight against the Soviet invaders. Ballard could not remember his assignment.

“Ordered after that trifle in the Philippines, to rout your stubborn melancholia, but just received. These *Genève horlogers* have no regard for time.” The parroting of a popular ad induced mirroring, unforced smiles. “Above all, my friend, because . . .”

In ’82, Ballard recollected, strapping the watch to his slightly damp wrist, and that “trifle” had involved another brother and sister. On foot, he had been cruising Ermita, Manila’s “Sin City.” What prompted him to nod at the “obvious tyro, about sixteen and provincial,” was the pink hand-lettering across the front of his milk-white corduroy cutoffs: “Mor then youl evver no.”

During the three-block stretch to the rental, he did not peek over his shoulders, so confident the adolescent would be tailing. “Get ride, mister?” He stuck his head through

the window Ballard had rolled down.

“Sure.” On hearing both passenger-side doors open, he twisted around to discover a girl slinking into the backseat. “We do you good. Two one price better one two price.”

Ballard’s thick-tongued demand, “Not her,” was muffled by the stripling who, in splintered English, forthwith launched his well-rehearsed spiel of what they would execute for ten dollars. The prospect, boggling for one tipsy, of talking them out of his car, returning to scout up another trick, and being late forced him to decide. “I’ll find a way to ditch her,” he told himself, starting the Mazda.

For several minutes, the hobbledehoy jabbered nonstop, so exciting himself “he’s squirmed his right fingers under his zipper.” When a peep at the rearview mirror disclosed that the *joven*, affected by the sexual bill of fare being offered, had more deeply slumped, an idea took hold.

“Who’s the girl?” Ballard sought, the hawking completed. “She my chick. She fuck deluxe. You do first me . . . her?”

He seized on the query as his way out. “I want: she blow you same time I screw her. After, you slurping her pussy, I ram her ass.”

“What hey!” the princox cried out, yet Ballard scarcely heard him. The back door was being swung open, and, a moment later, the girl hurled herself onto the street.

“Braking, being instinctive, couldn’t be helped,” Claude informed him, having smoothed away everything. “However, the instant the *muchacho* jumped out—that he was screaming, ‘My sister! My sister!’ indicated you were off his radar—you should have sped away.”

Only once he had ascertained the girl was not hurt had that plan of action occurred to Ballard, but by then a crowd had gathered.

The following morning Leroy himself showed up at the police station and comforted him by dismissing what Ballard had spent the night in the cell brooding over: “I’m not damaged. No ‘*Mene, mene, tekeli, upharsin*’ for me. This is Marcosland. *Hermano y hermana* have been bundled off to their village, and the paperwork initiated, I ripped to pieces myself. It never happened, so who can be hurt?”

With the *porte battante* of the stall flapping behind him, Ballard strolled to the counter where Mohisen was perched on his stool. He handed over the wire basket and tucked a ten-dinar note into the attendant’s other palm.

“I sad . . . much . . . you no the . . . come soon,” the grievance of the *walad* stumbled out, as if disdainful of a French farewell for his “*Amrekaanee sadeek*.” And to Ballard, perusing Mohisen’s face, shrunken into a childlike seriousness, he seemed a “boy.”

“My friend, I’m not sure. Some nagging problems at my office,” he responded in French, to himself subjoining, *No lies for Mohisen*.

Pushing through the 1,089 plastic beads, Ballard glimpsed back at the scrunched countenance of the youth, *de novo* straining his torso over the gray plywood. His steps deliberately retraced, he withdrew a one-hundred-dinar bill from his wallet.

“No!” Mohisen said adamantly. “You Zaracova soon.” Despite the insistence, Ballard detected the furtive glance at the currency, “a week’s provision for his family.”

“Fast-forward remuneration, with one condition: The next time I slog in, I’ll be accosted by what I wasn’t today: ‘No girl? And you call yourself an American!’”

The Algerian from the shower area, just egressing from a stall, gaped at the theatrical flailing of his arms. “Before this gentleman,” Ballard pointed toward the customer, “you’ll not cheat me of that, my friend,” the emphasis on *tricherez*.

Inclining until his cheek brushed against Mohisen’s, he whispered, “Better take it, or yon esteemed patron will surmise you’re cozening me.”

His stupefaction surmounted, Mohisen, aware of the parting entertainment being improvised for him, burst into full-bodied laughter. Contagious, it spread first to Ballard and then to the onlooker, their giddiness occasioning the youth to chuckle the harder.

The “Oho-the-old-earth-is-frolicsome-tonight” jollity crumbled all resistance: The one-hundred-dinar note, folded so the man could not see, was wedged into Mohisen’s right hand, accompanied by a squeeze.

When the verbal salvo overhauled him, Ballard was anew passing through the strands. Disjointed by the guffawing, it spangled with a mixture of French and English. “No girl? And you call yourself an American! You lie! No! No!”

## 7

Mohisen’s boisterous mirth, the rattling beads, and the squawking second prayer summons (the *iqama*, the charge to those assembled at the mosque to line up) trailed Ballard as he stepped onto the sidewalk and turned left. The pavement ceased about twenty paces from the *vestiaire*. An additional three hundred strides over the sand was a grove of pine and palm trees, which extended from the huge boulders abutting the sea to Abderahmane Mira Avenue, the beach highway.

A decade ago, an Algerian entrepreneur, with some government funds, had built a nightclub there, clearing an anterior picnic area for family use during the day. Opened with a flourish—the *Directeur* of the *Société Nationale Algérienne de Tourisme et d’Hôtellerie* had cut the ribbon—it failed within a year.

Over time every fixture in the building not removed by the owner was scavenged: doors, shutters, windowpanes, electrical wiring, and tiles from the floor, even the roof.

Sea mist and leeward wind, both laden with salt—the probable agents of the disco’s collapse since they subverted the most tenacious hair spray, and who could dance while fretting about her, or his, coiffure?—had stripped the building of its whitewash, exposing pimply and pockmarked cement blocks.

Inside when the night wind reached a crescendo, sand, pine needles, shreds of fronds, thorn-bush twigs, faded cellophane bags, and all sorts of paper whirled about over the more stationary rusted iron rods and chunks of wooden planks disdained by the scroungers. In front, three stone picnic tables still held their places, as rooted as the weeds about them.

After four years of litigation, the businessman and the government had agreed only on circling the area with a barbed-wire fence, to which at intervals were posted No Trespassing signs. Owing to its association with financial ruin, rarely did the locals, *djinn*-obsessed—“but then who isn’t afraid of ‘ghostly spirits’?” Ballard smiled—enter the grove after dark.

At Mohammed's suggestion, "but not this evening," a few times they had met there, the last five weeks back. It was a not inconvenient rendezvous spot: Ballard enjoyed the simple ambience of Zaracova, and Mohammed had some hashish customers whom he could corner before they performed their sunset prayers at the cliff mosque.

As well, the "coltish blade" delighted in the mystery of the grove, for even on full-moon nights, its dense pines and leafy palms so adumbrated its borders that with little chance of being observed each could sluice in, Mohammed from the road and Ballard from the beach, pass on in private what needed to be exchanged, chart the evening, and ebb out separately.

Ballard pressed down the sagging top strand of the *fil de fer barbelé* and stepped over into some crawling ivy, a briar of which snapped up to nip his sockless ankle. Some male cicadas, their passion disturbed, arrested their shrill serenades. Having anticipated the scanty moonlight within, he raised his watch belt-level. "6:45: High-principled early."

His memory returned to the morning coffee at the Islamabad embassy where Claude, having casually handed him the watch, had continued, ". . . because you saved my life in Vietnam, and daily keep me," he halted to grin, "in sanity. I don't imagine Patek Philippe fashioned that bronze-gilt heroism medal they pinned on you."

"Hero?" Ballard was gaping at the Swiss timepiece, more than a year's take-home salary for him. "When not a scrap's retained." What he did recollect, as he blurted out to Claude the day he had awakened, was how close he had come, during that Batangan Peninsula patrol, to getting his friend killed.

Unlike Claude, he was not scrub-concealed, and the Cong who sprang from the hedge of bamboo fifteen paces from them was undeniably in his sight.

While "How young he is, a boy!" streaked through Ballard's mind, Leroy shoved aside the bush obstructing him and fired a clip. The bullets tore into the VC's intestines, yet not before the grenade had been hurled. It sailed past them, landing behind a sodden teak tree.

Ballard sensed his body lunging forward to catch his soul.

What "above-and-beyond-the-call" he had accomplished—an extinguished sparklet buried in his subconscious—was to shoulder, tote, and drag Claude, whose legs pieces of metal, wood, and orange-red sand had rendered useless, away from the area prior to the advent of Cong reinforcements.

The marine patrol found an almost idyllic *tableau vivant*: Ballard's right arm lay athwart Leroy's chest and his cheek rested on his left. In his deposition, Claude had asserted he remembered being cradled, yet lost consciousness as his body was elevated.

"The painful we revive," a shellshock expert was intoning, for they had been airlifted to a Saigon hospital. "The heroic embarrasses us, so is submerged. Presumably you can evoke the initial time you fibbed to your parents, but not when you consciously avoided treading on an ant." The psychologist waited, granting his patient an opportunity to reflect.

"I was orphaned at three," Ballard had diffidently corrected.

His scars had well-nigh vanished, though that first night Leila massaged his legs, she had exclaimed, "You're a little 'pickley' here," kneading the heels of her hands up the backs of his calves and thighs.

That morning five weeks ago when he had revealed to Claude he would be staying in Algiers, in the wake of his unbosoming, "I feel like a traitor. Having kept

so much hidden, now I abandon you, to grapple with the Washington game alone,” Leroy had replied, “Not even in your thoughts could you betray me.”

## 8

“Being loyal to one, you betray another.” Ballard situated himself on the picnic table nearest the entrance to the skeletonized disco. From there, traveling across the rectangular tenebrosity of the dance floor, his eyes climbed to the dim light of the patio.

Adjacent to it were the enormous boulders onto which—Mohammed had passed on this legend—to awe their dates inebriated gallants had clambered, insouciantly discoing amid the lipper cast up by the sea.

This was the country where “my weary age” will strive to “find out the peaceful hermitage,” and through Leila’s guidance, God willing, I will “wither into the truth.” But one generation past a tithing of martyrs—“a downside estimate of the number who had perished” in Algeria’s struggle for independence—an “agnosticism of will” (the phrasing now was Claude’s) had set in.

With caustic wit he had continued, “The perfect birthing ground for a second coming of fanaticism, the Islamists. ‘High-day, freedom! Freedom, high-day!’ Force-feeding their rebellious youth’s empty bellies with lead didn’t succeed, five hundred unreasonable October corpses proved. So as a December present tender the people a showy couscous of choice. Tender the tinder.”

That night over dinner Ballard had informed Leila, “Claude told me today Chadli’s committed himself to a multiparty nation,” referring to the Algerian president’s edict to be made public the next week. The FLN, the Algerian alliance which, having prevailed in the insurrection against French colonialism, had imposed its dominion in ’62 and mismanaged its spoils since, would relinquish not its power, but its monopoly. “The riots unnerved him.”

She answered without seeming to. “It was wise to opt for the florist. Revolutions are won nowadays by sticking flowers in the barrels of guns. We’ll be a tiny cog in the new munitions cartel.”

What she had said was not entirely true. Still unsettled was the purchase price for the empty shop on a side street off Rue Docteur Frantz Fanon in downtown Algiers.

Ballard lit a Rothman, returning the pack to his burgundy-striped shirt. He never put a flame close to his watch, so was not tempted to confirm the time. “Probably ten or so till seven or alternately forty minutes till Mohammed . . . at least,” he speculated.

Last Monday, rushing to embrace him, Leila had exulted, “We will be tenders of flowers!” waving about the deed and flashing her raven eyes.

A gust from the sea rustled the pine and palm canopy, letting in slivers of *clair de lune* and briefly exposing patches of yellow asphodels and white rock lilies near the steps.

All the stipulations of the *katb el-kitb* (“marriage contract”) had been fulfilled since Claude’s prepaid wedding check had allowed him to satisfy Leila’s father with the crowning two thousand dollars. Except one.

While Ballard could have discharged it easily, given his contacts at the French embassy,

Leila had resisted. “Let my brother loose in France to destroy himself? *Jamais, au grand jamais!* ‘Never ever!’”

Ahmed had not grown sullen until the second week of their return from Zouabi. Initially, he restricted himself to oozing hints about his work visa. Ballard let Leila do the stalling as her burly sibling, two years her junior, proceeded to limn his case. “It’s the only place I’m provided for in the contract.”

A few days later, “It’s my right. I can have Father cancel the ceremony,” to which Leila countered, “And refund the seven thousand?”

It was not till “this morning” he had learned his brother-in-law was blaming him. “There’s an Ahmed Chabane who wishes to see you,” the receptionist at the embassy front desk telephoned.

Escorted to his office and “affably greeted and seated,” Ahmed began (“in French less native-sounding than my own”) his obviously memorized recitation: compliments, vows of affinal devotion, and the perorated entreaty, “M. Paul, help me, your brother. Please. I’m stifled by this God-drenched country. Please!”

When Ballard responded that it was preferable for him to vent this grievance to his sister, Chabane’s visage adopted a forced, artificial gloom.

“Perhaps I’ll broach another matter with her.” He paused importantly before commencing his auxiliary rehearsed speech. “I haven’t been idle the last weeks, M. My Brother. I’ve snagged a Palestinian chum, even been invited to their camp down south. One of their hashish runners is a Mohammed Ahmed Belmazoir.”

The precise enunciation of each syllable strung out the name. “I believe you’re acquainted with him. Certainly he is with you. A month ago, drunk, ‘flying,’ and without all his drug collection money, he reeled into the ‘Plo’ camp whining, ‘I’ll bring it next Wednesday. I’ve got this American friend who pays me on Mondays.’”

“This disclosure intrigued M. Tinfingers, their chief, who signaled for several to regale him with on-the-house hashish and whiskey. He blabbed enough. Six days of diligent prying by their skilled operatives divulged your twin identities, M. Paul . . . M. John.

“What my Palestinian buddy imparted to me would greatly interest my sister, I’m sure you realize. I crave solely what I’m due, what is prescribed.” Ahmed concluded with the same pathos-bound sequence of his former solicitation.

“Being loyal to one, you become a traitor to another,” Ballard mused at intervals during Chabane’s discourse. His enervated rejoinder at once ensued, “I’ll do what I can.”

Strutting to the door, Ahmed jerked it open. “You’ll double-quick the visa! I will not let this nation wreck my life. No idler, I’ve been to a lawyer here in Algiers.” Ballard, whose eyes had followed him, espied in the periphery beyond his shoulders an Arab typist who had stopped in the hallway and was staring curiously toward the room.

Not lowering his voice, Ahmed continued, “Inceptively he pronounced what I didn’t care to hear, that my sister’s legally married to you. Then as if to drive home his message to a stupid yokel, he offhandedly affixed, ‘Once the contract’s signed, should this fellow die today, according to the law, she’ll be entitled to her wifely share of all his goods.’ Does not that render you, thereupon, dispensable to my family?”

In a sidling peep Ahmed caught sight of the typist, her presence startling him. Although his tone softened, his glower intensified. “M. My Brother, I shall a rich man be and like you marry a beautiful woman, but in France.”

Gibbered snatches of the rant had eluded Ballard, still not the “sheer buffoonery of the second threat.” This more strikingly affected him than the insidiousness of the first. Leila, as usual, had been perceptive: The bear had to be lugged.

“On reconsideration,” he calmly replied, pacing his French, “I must withdraw my earlier promise. I can do nothing in this matter without my wife’s—your sister’s—approval.”

## 9

How rapidly had everything converged! Claude knew about Leila, Mohammed about Houda and him, and Leila would soon know about Mohammed, yet not through her brother.

“Tonight having revealed everything to Mohammed (and his dear sister), I will speed home, myself to tell her,” Ballard pledged. All bared, doubtless, “mirroring Claude, they will forgive me. There is strength in confessing our weakness,” and his reverie nourished a fanatical hope, an avowal that “desperation is agnostic.”

All would be at their wedding feast, surpassingly joyous because they would no longer be apart: “Not jealous or boastful, not arrogant or rude, love does not insist on its own way . . . does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right,” the six months with Leila had taught him this Pauline truth.

Above the prurient chirping of the cicadas, a tenuous cough issued from the doorway. Pushing himself from the concrete table, Ballard took a stride forward.

“Mohammed?”

His wistful salutation went unacknowledged. *Had the distressed lad, prematurely arrived, been in the building all this time watching me, trying to summon the will to speak?*

“Mohammed.”

*I'll beg him to shepherd me to Houda. Dropping to my knees, I'll woo her pardon. That he's here attests—El-Hamdulillah! “Praise God!”— he has forgiven me.*

Ballard stumbled at the first step to the veranda. From his stooped position, he called, “Mohammed, come to me. It's tricky maneuvering through the thick darkness.”

“*M. John, c'est meilleur ici. 'Here is better.'*”

High-pitched, almost girlish, the voice did not sound like his. *Is not he as emotionally wracked as I am, and when I see him and begin tutoyering my apologies, will not mine crack, becoming as Houda's or Leila's?*

“*Je viens, mon bon ami. 'I come.'*”

Traversing the veranda in six paces, Ballard scuffed blindly over the threshold. A rush of air heralded the explosion against the left side of his face. For the second time in his life he felt that his body had been deserted by his spirit.

*My soul seeks refuge in my shadow.*

The blow had knocked him through the entrance and midway across the porch, where he swayed prior to collapsing into a squat and toppling onto his back. With his right hand he grasped for the edge of the step, engrossed in dragging himself from the source of the blow.

Even though his left eye was veiled with blood and he could not force his right to open, he divined his assailant was drawing near.

The fronds and needles abruptly rustled, drowning out the words his lips, after much exertion, formed: “Mohammed, forgive me!” However, in the wisp of moonlight the breeze let in, through the smear of blood, an unrepentant countenance he beheld.

With his head dangling over the top step, instinctively he grabbed at the sleeve of the *djellaba*, but lacked the will to arrest the hand, *mécaniquement* advancing toward his throat. His left which had so feebly confronted the “robe” released its hold, sliding onto the forearm of the determined right that now was delicately turning his neck.

The bending rechanneled the stream of blood which had flowed into the socket of his eye, and he caught, since it gives off its own light, the glint of the dagger.

Then there was simply a downward pitmirk being drained of its meager glimmer. He remembered—for like all of us he died affirming, at that point of separation, that nothing disconnects—his first scuba dive: The deeper he sank, the heavier the water became till it assumed a darkness only his aphotic soul could sensate.

He thought of Leila and her black eyes.

## Notes and Commentary: Chapter 1: “Nothing Disconnects”

February 27, 1989 (Monday)

p. 1: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TITLE OF CHAPTER 1: This is the first of four chapters which incorporate the contrastive words “nothing” and “everything” and “connect” and “disconnect”: chapter 1: “Nothing Disconnects”; chapter 9: “Nothing Connects”; chapter 17: “Everything Disconnects,” and chapter 21: “Everything Connects.”

The combinations represent four contemporary philosophical or religious approaches or paradigms: Judaism; Christianity; Islam, and atheism, to list them in the order of their evolution. The contemporary theological divisions among the adherents of each of these, my novel argues, have frayed the ties that bind humanity:

- (1) Everything Connects: Christian God; Islam’s Allah; and the Jewish Yahweh. Philosophy: Theism.
- (2) Nothing Connects: Satan; Islam’s *Shaitan* (“the Deceiver”); and Judaism’s *ha-Satan* (the Adversary of both God and Man). Atheism. Nihilism.
- (3) Nothing Disconnects: The representatives or prophets of the three gods; they taught or still teach that “everything connects”: Jesus Christ; Islam’s Prophet Mohammed; and Judaism’s The Awaited Prophet. Optimistic agnosticism through a belief in the hope of salvation.
- (4) Everything Disconnects: The representatives of Satan, who steer humanity toward the Satanic principle: his minor devils and ultimately the Anti-Christ in Christianity; *Dajjul*, the Muslim term for the Anti-Christ; and the anti-Messiahs of Jewish history. Pessimistic agnosticism through a belief in the absence of the hope of salvation.

To achieve symmetry, I originally planned to place the combination of the key words in the titles of chaps. 1, 7, 14, and 21. However, such a strict symmetry (which works so well in Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter*) seemed in my novel to prejudge the answer to the philosophical dilemma of whether everything does or does not connect (that is, whether this is a random-driven or God-centered universe). My solution was that the four quaternary combinations would be used, but not in predictable positions.

The novel will open and close with the Muslim call to prayer, “God is Great!” an affirmation of the premise that “everything connects.” In the first chapter, one character will assert that “nothing disconnects” (14), the only use of a variant of “connect” in this chapter. “Nothing” is used four times (2, 4, 13, and 14).

However, much of the chapter is concerned with disconnection. The protagonist of

the chapter bemoans that the last half year for him has been “dungeon-like, since through my weakness I kept each [person dear to him] a prisoner from the other” (6). Toward the end of the chapter, he has “a fanatical hope” that all secrecy will be put aside, that “everyone will forgive me” for his machinations, and that there will be a joyous “wedding feast” where those he loves “would no longer be apart” (13).

pp. 1-14: CHRONOLOGY OF CHAPTER 1: February 27, 1989. From 3:30 p.m., when Paul Ballard, an economic officer at the American embassy in Algiers, arrives at Zaracova, just north of the city, to 6:55 p.m., when he has a meeting with someone in a palm grove next to the beach.

pp. 1-3: SECTION 1

p. 1: “azan”: In Islam the call to prayers by a muezzin (a prayer crier) from the minaret of a mosque at the five prescribed times.

As here, loudspeakers are typically used today to amplify the muezzin’s azan.

Most Muslim scholars prefer the Arabic word to be transcribed in English as *adhan*.

p. 1: “*Allahu Akbar!*”: These two words, called the *takbir*, begin the azan. Since *akbar* is the comparative of *kabeer* (“great”), the literal translation is “God is Greater [than anything else]!”

However, some Muslim scholars take exception to using the comparative since it implies that Allah can be compared to anything. Thus almost all Muslims, when they use the expression in English, translate it as “God is Great!”

This prayer call is for the afternoon prayers, called in Arabic *salaat al-asr* or simply *Asr*, a shortened form often used by Muslims in referring to the afternoon prayers. When it occurs by itself, it is capitalized in its English translation.

On this day in my novel, the call to *Asr* came at 3:52, with prayers beginning at 4:12 and lasting until 4:27.

In Arabic *salah* means “prayer”; its plural is *salaat*. Although frequently translated as “*Asr* prayer,” it is better rendered as “prayers” since *salaat* is plural. Additionally, each of the five obligatory daily prayers, of which *Asr* is one, consists of a series of prayers.

p. 1: “Zaracova Beach”: The name of the beach is fictional. Although there are beaches all along the coastal road just north of Algiers, there are three named beaches with cabanas and changing room facilities: Rmila, Padovani, and Bab el Oued. I combined aspects of all three (and even other North African Mediterranean beaches) in designing Zaracova.

On 6.82, it will be established that the beach must be in the vicinity of the Notre Dame d’Afrique cathedral, a major tourist site north of Algiers. Rmila, Padovani,

and Bab el Oued can all be seen from the cathedral's terrace.

All three beaches have parking lots, and Rmila is bordered by a jutting high point, Pointe El-Kherifali, which will be important on 18.302.

However, I must stress that I designed the beach I needed, and aspects of the three real-life beaches are modified.

p. 1: hustling: jostling; energetic activity.

p. 1: "to indulge in a swim": In his essay "Summer in Algiers," pp. 139-54 in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, Camus writes, "In Algiers no one says 'go for a swim,' but rather 'indulge in a swim.'"

p. 1: "his twenty-two years of service abroad": Ballard, as had Leroy, had served in the U. S. diplomatic corps since 1966.

p. 1: "*derrière son dos*": French for "behind his back." French words or expressions typically will not be translated in the text, as will Arabic ones. Uncommon ones, however, will be annotated.

The decision to sprinkle the text with French expressions meshes with the political philosophy of the novel. The French colonized Algeria for 133 years (1829 – 1962).

p. 1: "Gertie": Leroy's wife.

p. 1: "His Excellency Claude Sebastian Leroy": The character of the fictional Claude Leroy is in no way based on His Excellency Christopher Ross, the real-life U.S. Ambassador to Algeria from 1988 – 1991.

p. 1: "summoned to Washington": Leroy was to become Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, which is the third ranking position in the U.S. Department of State, after the Secretary and the Deputy Secretary. The Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs serves as the day-to-day manager of overall regional and bilateral policy issues.

At the time in my novel when Leroy received the phone call of his appointment for this post, Jan. 13, 1989, in real life the Under Secretary was Michael Armacost, who served until March 2, 1989. He was replaced by Robert Kimmitt, who served until Aug. 23, 1991. Neither man should be confused with my fictional Leroy.

The rank of ambassador diplomatically exceeds that of the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs and even that of his two bosses, the Secretary and the Deputy Secretary. There is an anecdote that the U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull (1933-44) refused to travel abroad because at formal dinners and ceremonies there he was outranked by the ambassador he had appointed.

In reality, most career diplomats, including ambassadors, know that the seat of power is in Washington; therefore an American ambassador who has political

ambitions wants to be in a high-level State Department post there.

- p. 1: “Boggy Fathom”: Leroy puns on the name “Foggy Bottom,” a metonym for the U.S. Department of State. Its headquarters is located in this western section of D.C. abutting the Potomac, off of which fog frequently rolls and engulfs the Truman complex.  
In Leroy’s quibble, “boggy fathom” indicates his contempt for the department: It tries to conduct (“fathom”) foreign policy from a slippery ground of decaying mosses.  
“Boggy” will be used two other times in the novel: Melville’s “but the *might-have-been* is but boggy ground to build on” from chap. 4 of *Billy Budd* is quoted (13.208). And on 19.303, a French diplomat will also refer to the State Department as “Boggy Fathom.”  
Verbal motifs are used throughout the novel. If “everything is to connect” (or “nothing disconnect”), a word dropped early in the novel will resurface in the middle and at the end.
- p. 1: “*de premiere main*”: firsthand. The phrase is employed only one other time in the novel (20.329), at which point the symbolic balance will be apparent.
- p. 1: “Washington ho!”: In the phrase Leroy plays upon the interjection “Westward ho!” where “ho” indicates a destination or direction.
- p. 1: “the president’s call”: President Ronald Reagan. The real-like Reagan should not be confused with my fictional Reagan.
- p. 1: Leila: An Algerian woman’s name. In Arabic Leila means “night,” a word without any dark connotations among Muslims.  
The holiest celebration in Islam is based on this word, *Lailatul* [Night] *Qadr* [of Greatness or Power], the night of the 27<sup>th</sup> of Ramadan in which Islam’s Prophet Mohammed was first given the Holy Qur’an.  
Symbolically my novel will end as the prayer call to *Lailatul Qadr* is being sounded (21.368).  
The Arabic meaning of Leila’s name, “night,” will contrast with or compliment that of another major female character in the novel, Noura, which means “light” in Arabic. Noura will first appear in chap. 2.  
Many of the Arabic names in the novel were chosen for their symbolic potential.
- p. 1: fauteuil: “an upholstered chair with open arms” (*Webster’s Third*).
- p. 1: “Bush and Baker”: The time of the novel is partially established here. The phone call would have been made a week before George Bush’s inauguration (Jan. 20, 1989) because Leroy says that “our bosses . . . starting next week” will be Bush and Baker (James Baker, Bush’s Secretary of State).

My chronology placed the call on Jan. 13. Again, these two real-life men are different from my fictional characters.

- p. 1: “the Palestinian negotiations”: Leroy says that his promotion to Washington was brought about by his successful November 1988 negotiations with the Palestinian Liberation Organization, conducted in a “sort of secrecy” in Algiers. The comment is partially based on fact: On Nov. 15, 1988, the Palestinian National Council (PNC), meeting in Algiers, passed a declaration bolstered by an attachment which provided for what is known as the “two-state solution”:
- (1) It established a Palestinian state.
  - (2) For the first time, it implicitly recognized Israel’s right to exist within its pre-1967 boundaries.
- Within a month of the declaration, during which the Geneva clarification was given by PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat stating with no uncertainty Israel’s right to exist, the U.S. (which had until this time had no open negotiations with this organization) and ninety other countries recognized the PLO. Historians differ on the behind-the-scene role the U.S. played in promoting this two-state solution. While Arafat had sought unanimity in the PNC, there was a significant minority who opposed the resolution. I mention this rival faction because it becomes a thread of one of the subplots of my novel.
- p. 1: “the soon-to-be-passé President”: This use of “passé,” here to describe Reagan, reoccurs late in the novel (20.341) to describe another character.
- pp. 1-2: “No joy at the D.C. bar mitzvahs tonight”: Leroy attacks Jews in the State Department who, he feels, opposed his successful negotiations with the Palestinians.

- p. 2: “Palestinian potshot hotshot”: Leroy’s punning descriptions of those in the Palestinian community who opposed the accord imply that they would like to assassinate him. This idea will also become a thread of the plot of my novel.
- p. 2: “the *sédentaires*”: The French word, frequently used in diplomatic circles, translates as the “stay-at-homes.” It is used disdainfully by those American diplomats stationed abroad to delineate the State Department’s professional cadre who remain in Washington.
- p. 2: “foreskinless-flints”: A religious and ethnic slur against Jews in the State Department. Leroy’s portmanteau expression combines “without foreskin” (circumcised) and “skinflint” (a miser). I found “foreskinless,” defined as “without a foreskin; circumcised,” listed only in the online *Wiktionary*.
- p. 2: “the Mansion”: The Truman Building which houses the State Department.
- p. 2: agnomination: witty pun. More exactly, “the repetition of a word but in different senses often for the purpose of wit (as in punning) or for emphatic contrast” (*Webster’s Third*).
- p. 2: “Ann Arbor dorm room”: Ann Arbor, Michigan, is the site of the main campus of the University of Michigan. This passage establishes that Leroy’s and Ballard’s friendship goes back to 1961, a period of twenty-seven and one-half years (Sept. 1961 – February 1989). In my chronology both were eighteen at that time, having been born in 1947.
- p. 2: “‘I was a Jew the first three years of my life’ . . . ‘my natal faith’ had added five hundred dollars to the dowry”: On the previous page Ballard said that he had been out with an Algerian woman Leila, presumably on a date. However, here Ballard states that the revelation of his Jewish background to her brother “had added five hundred dollars to the dowry.” Among Muslims such a payment, called *mahr* in Arabic, signals that the marriage contract (*katb el-kitb* in Arabic) has been negotiated and signed. At this point the couple is married. In Islam a Muslim woman is forbidden to marry a non-Muslim, such as a Christian or a Jew. However, the marriage contract may stipulate that the non-Muslim man is in the process of converting to Islam. Such a stipulation would place the marriage, even though the dowry has been paid, in an intermediate, indeterminate state. Islam also requires that a marriage be publicized. Obviously, Ballard and Leila and her family have not done so since Leroy does not seem to know about it. Otherwise, he would not have assumed that Ballard was going to accompany him to Washington. To himself, Ballard admits that he had been “lying to his friend [Leroy]” (1) about Leila.

The apparently secret marriage of an embassy official to an Algerian also violates the employment contract which Ballard had signed. At the time of the novel (1989), State Department rules decreed that foreign service employees may not marry a native of the country in which they were posted without the department's permission if they wished to remain in its employment.

The notification of intent to marry had to be received by the chief of the mission of an embassy or consulate 120 days prior to the expected date of marriage in order for a thorough security clearance.

These religious and the diplomatic stipulations indicate that Ballard was in the process of becoming a Muslim and planned to resign his embassy position, or as he states, "he had already made the decision . . . not to tag along [to Washington with Leroy]" (2).

The p. 11 note below, "*katb el-kitb*," N1:31-32, will provide a more complete explanation of the Islamic marriage contract.

- p. 2: "dowry": In Islam, the groom must provide the dowry. Instead of "dowry," a better English translation of *mahr* is "marriage gift."
- p. 2: "play the game in 'merry-sport[ful]' Washington": Assuming that Ballard will accompany him ("tag along") to D.C, Leroy asks him whether he thinks they can "play the game in 'merry-sport[ful]' Washington?"  
The single quoted passage is adapted from *Merchant of Venice*, 1.3.142-49, where Shylock tells Antonio, "Go with me to a notary, seal me there / Your single bond; and, in a merry sport, / If you repay me not on such a day . . . let the forfeit / Be nominated for an equal pound / Of your fair flesh."
- p. 2: "nipping . . . air." From *Hamlet* 1.4.2: "It is a nipping and an eager air," Horatio tells Hamlet. A fuller version of the quote will be used on 18.293.
- p. 2: "an hour of furious swimming": According to my chronology, Ballard swam from 4:10 – 5:10 p.m.
- p. 2: "the prayer call for sunset": The sunset prayer call in Arabic is *salaat il-maghrib* or Maghrib prayers. On this day the call came at 6:20; it is repeated for three minutes, until 6:23.  
Over the next sixteen minutes, Muslims make their way to a mosque. At 6:39, a second call is given to those who have gathered in the mosque, an indication for them to line up for prayers, which would begin at 6:40 and end at 6:55.  
Note: Since the times of the prayers are established by sunrise and sunset, they change, often from day to day.
- p. 2: "roused him on schedule": On p. 1, Ballard had selected his spot on the beach so he could hear the sunset prayer call from the cliff mosque. He knows that this call travels only half way down the beach. Thus he had to walk farther than he normally did to the seashore. This is an example of his "precaution," he tells

himself (1).

- p. 2: “not to go to the rendezvous with Mohammed”: Ballard seemingly explains why he has come to Zaracova Beach, to meet a man named Mohammed.
- pp. 2-3: “In the sudden incandescence . . . their own accommodation”: The action flashes back to what Ballard had thought about in the ten minutes (5:10 – 5:20) between his swim and the nap he drifted into.  
Ballard’s visceral account mentions a clicking on of a light in a room revealing a woman Houda in a bed. Her inebriated brother Mohammed struggles to protest at seeing her naked.  
Ballard, horrified, drops some money (“meant for Leila”) on the floor before he rushes from the room, carrying a pair of night-vision goggles and “leaving brother and sister to reach their own accommodation” (3).  
The vague recountal suggests that Ballard himself does not want to confront directly what had happened between him and the siblings.
- p. 2: Houda: The sister of Mohammed. The name Houda in Arabic means “good” or “right guidance.” As with Leila’s name, it was chosen for its symbolism.
- p. 2: “the collar of the beer”: The collar is the lower part of the finish of a beer bottle. A bottle has six distinctive parts (from bottom to top): the base or punt, the heel, the body, the shoulder, the neck, and the finish.  
The finish, sometimes referred to as the “mouth,” is everything above the terminus of the neck. The finish typically consists of the lip (the upper part) and the collar (the lower part). How he got the beer is explained in section 2, pp. 3-4.
- p. 2: “seeing the nakedness and recognizing it as his sister’s, among Muslims a sin God cannot forgive or a man ever forget”: Looking on any naked person is forbidden in Islam, as is stated in the Qur’an 24:30: “And tell the believing men to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things) and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts).”  
The Hadiths (a collection of sayings or acts of the Prophet Mohammed) of Ibn Mufih and Abu Dawood state that Mohammed said, “A boy who reaches the age of ten should be prevented from sleeping naked [in the same room] with his sister.”  
This idea about a brother looking at his naked sister occurs in similar wording two other times in the novel: 3.43 and 14.226.  
A Moroccan friend of mine described the consequence of a brother, even accidentally, viewing his sister nude as “a sin God no forgive, a brother no forget.” His wording I have modified and incorporated into my novel.
- p. 2: hashish: a drug made from hemp which is chewed or smoked for its intoxicating and euphoric effects. It is the drug of choice among the Arab youths of northern Africa.

- p. 3: “to ‘bungee’”: Not listed as a verb in the dictionaries which I consulted, hence the single quotes. However, it appears as such in articles found through an online search. There its meaning is “to bounce up and down like a bungee jumper at the end of his or her fall.”
- p. 3: “turning up his palms . . . not unlike a Muslim at prayers confronting his God”: At the beginning of an Islamic prayer, when the worshipper is standing, the hands are held at shoulder level with the palms open. The position is assumed at the other standing positions during the prayer.
- p. 3: “*c’est-la-vie* pose”: “That’s life!” in French. This expression of resignation occurs two other times in the novel: 16.268 and 18.302.
- p. 3: “*Al-shrh Akbar!*”: The second exhortation of the muezzin directly follows Ballard’s drowsy thought that he did not wish “to go to the rendezvous with Mohammed” (2).  
As indicated in the text, the distortion of the *takbir* (“God is Great!”) is caused by a faulty wire in the loudspeaker.  
This electronically distorted cry will be used again in the symbolic last sentence of the novel (21.368).
- p. 3: gride: a harsh, rasping sound.
- p. 3: Rothman: a British cigarette.
- p. 3: Tango: an Algerian beer, the one mentioned on p. 2.
- p. 3: “And in the lowest deep a lower deep / Still threat’ning to devour me opens wide.” From Satan’s speech in Milton’s *PL* 4.76-77. The phrase “lowest deep” is found in Psalms 88:6 and presumably influenced Milton’s wording.  
By quoting Satan, Ballard is acknowledging that on the night he has described he participated in something evil involving or ensnaring Mohammed and/or Houda.
- p. 3: “the strength to seek forgiveness”: However, section 1 ends with Ballard pondering a most un-devillike thought: Whether he has “the strength to seek forgiveness,” presumably of Mohammed and his sister.

pp. 3-4: SECTION 2

- p. 3: “a little after four just prior to his swim”: This time establishes that after Ballard found a place on the beach (3:45), he thought about the night Leroy announced the Washington assignment, his relationship with Leila, and at about 4:05 the incident with Mohammed and Houda, this memory lasting up until the time he walked to the seashore for his swim (4:10).

p. 3: “protested . . . pounce on himself”: What I tried to do in this section is to merge two literary conventions: the interior monologue (the stream of consciousness of a character which records the person’s internal, emotional experience; the voice of one character, without an overt audience) and the dramatic monologue (the conversation of one character in a dramatic situation; the voice of one character with a designated audience).

By combining aspects of the two, I sought to create a dramatic scene in which the mind of a character creates two separate characters (internal antagonist and protagonist) who debate the interpretation of an event in the work. I call it an “interior dramatic duologue.”

The idea of such an internal debate is similar to Yeats’s concept of self and anti-self, presented in his *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1959 ed.), where he writes that “we make . . . poetry out of quarrels with ourselves” (331).

However, Freud’s notion of the dueling between the superego and the id is also suggested.

The interior dramatic duologue should be used sparingly, I feel, and only when a situation or event in a work is so agonizing that the main character needs an intermediary (usually an antagonistic one) to help him confront the situation. Often this self-created antagonist will serve the role of “Job’s comforters.”

In this novel, I use it four other times (2.21-22; 3.47-51; 15.255-56; and 17.289-92).

On p. 3 one aspect of Ballard’s psyche (his ego or self) “protests to himself” that he is not responsible for his action involving the brother and sister.

His mind immediately creates an antagonist (superego or anti-self) who “pounce[s] on himself,” and begins to ridicule this attempt at evading responsibility and to offer evidence of how he is culpable.

p. 3: *faiblement*: The French adverb for “weakly; feebly.”

p. 3: “Like Satan, before assuming the guise of the serpent, you stood by the innocent”: This episode is from Milton’s *PL* (4:358-92), where in the guise of a cormorant, not a serpent, Satan spies on the then-innocent Adam and Eve.

This 4:05 image of Milton’s Satan partially explains the later 6:42 reference to the poet’s Satan, given out of chronological order at the end of section 1.

Sarcastically, Ballard’s anti-self terms Ballard, not Mohammed and Houda, the “innocent.”

p. 3: cerecloth: burial shroud.

p. 3. Mohisen: The attendant of the beach’s public changing room.

p. 3: Bab el Oued: A reference to the beach located two miles south of Zaracova mentioned in the p. 1 note, N1:1-2.

It is named for the Bab el Oued district which runs along the coast north of the

center of Algiers and incorporates Algiers' fabled Casbah.

The district's capital, Bab el Oued City, is located in the inland area of the district northeast of the Casbah. The city, which is where Mohammed and Houada live, has a population of about 100,000.

The Casbah, various places in Bab el Oued district, and Bab el Oued City will all be major settings in the novel.

- p. 3: "'pity' and 'abhor[rence]'"': Ballard's anti-self maintains that Ballard, again seen as Satan, did not view the brother and sister in the room with just the "pity" (sympathy) which his recounting maintains, but with "abhor[ence]." The words in quotes are adopted from Satan's monologue (*PL* 4.374, 392).
- p. 3: "the attendant of the public changing room": Presumably hoping to stop the inner argument, Ballard decides to swim. At the water's edge (4:09), he refers to someone more sympathetic to him than his anti-self: Mohisen, the public beach changing room attendant, who waves at him. Ballard says Mohisen will watch him as he swims and when he sees him growing exhausted will walk to the café next door and tell the waiter to bring a beer and a pack of cigarettes (hence the references to them in section 2) to his spot on the beach.
- p. 3: "had I comprehended all, I wouldn't have participated": Ballard began this section maintaining this position ("I wasn't privy to that"). Thus his antagonistic anti-self has not changed Ballard, his stasis symbolized by his "wading into the polluted surf."
- p. 3: *le dernier mot*: French for "the last word."
- p. 3: "measure for measure": Ballard's anti-self (or superego) conjures up the scene of "Brother and sister, caught in the luminescent blaze, taking measure of each other—measure for measure." This is the first of seven chapters which use the measure-for-measure motif. It will also appear on 5.71; 13.206, with the Biblical verse being exactly quoted; 14.221 and 229; 15.246 and 256; 17.291; and 21.362. Shakespeare appropriated it from Matt. 7:2 (Geneva Bible of 1560, the one Shakespeare principally used): "For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." The title of the play is mentioned in Duke Vincentio's speech where he condemns Angelo: "Like doth quit like, and measure still for measure" (5.1.419), where "quit" means "requite."

- p. 4: *vestiaire*: French for a “public changing room.”
- p. 4: ‘get the beauty of it [cold],’ the beer he would crave after his swim”: The quote is adapted from Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, “A Game of Chess”: “And they asked me to dinner, to get the beauty of it hot” (167), where “it” refers to a ham. As is my habit to repeat an early image late in the novel, Eliot’s line will be quoted exactly on 20.338.
- p. 4: SECTION 3
- p. 4: “Ballard jammed . . . Lear out-howled”: Section 3 flies by quickly in Ballard’s thoughts, taking around two minutes (6:22 – 6:23), as a contrast to the tortured, contentious analyses of what happened between him and Mohammed and Houda. It deals mainly with his joyous love for Leila, and this happiness propels his reminiscences.
- p. 4: “gray sand: The seacoast of Bab el Oued, not just the other two beaches on which I based Zaracova Beach, is gray.
- p. 4: “prepunctual”: Listed in the online *Urban Dictionary*, but with the annotation “isn’t defined yet.” I did not find it listed in any standard online or print dictionaries, and a search of Google produced only a few online nonacademic entries. Here, it means “more than punctual” or “arriving well before an appointed time.”
- p. 4: Zouabi: Leila’s father’s farm lies outside Zouabi, a Berber village of around 3,000 people located in northeastern Algeria near the border with Tunisia. Zouabi is in Souk Ahras province, the birthplace of St. Augustine.
- p. 4: “SNTF train”: A French acronym for *Société Nationale des Transports Ferroviaires*, Algeria’s state-owned national railway operator. At the time of the novel, the train trip from Constantine, the largest city in east Algeria, to Algiers took seven and one-half hours.
- p. 4: Renault Quatre: A French-made automobile, popular in Algeria in the 1980s. It was a hatchback economy car.
- p. 4: “marriage contract”: What Ballard had implied by the use of “dowry” (1) is confirmed here where he refers to the marriage contract required in Islam. The Arabic for “marriage contract” is *katb el-kitb*, as mentioned above on p. 2 and in its note, N1:6-7. It will be further examined on the p. 11 note, N1:31-32. It is a prenuptial agreement which details the rights and responsibilities of the groom and bride or other persons involved in the marriage proceedings. In the chronology of the novel, the marriage contract was signed at the farm of Leila’s

father, in the presence of the requisite two adult male witnesses, on Jan. 7, 1989. Later that night a comment by Ballard to Leila's brother disclosed that he had been born a Jew. The next morning, the contract was renegotiated with five hundred dollars being added to the dowry.

The conversation with Leroy about the Washington assignment occurred on Jan. 13. During that conversation his comments suggest that he does not know about the marriage. See the p. 2 note, "I was a Jew," N1:6-7.

- p. 4: "a most attractive passport—and our children will concur with their mother on that": Ballard, of course, had an American passport. Leila's comment about their future children is the first presentation of a major philosophical contrast stressed in this novel: Men typically look toward the past while women basically focus on the future. In chap. 12, entitled "Women, Mostly," characters more fully discuss this concept.
- p. 4: "In his proposal . . . 'When I'm seventy, you'll be forty-nine,' she had parried, 'Forty-eight'": According to my chronology, the proposal occurred on Dec. 9, 1988. There is a twenty-two year difference in their ages. Since Ballard was born in 1943, in 1989 (the time of the novel) he is 46. Leila was born in 1965, so she is 24.
- p. 4: El Riadh: At the time of the novel, the restaurant of the El Riadh Hotel was one of the best in Algiers. (Unfortunately, not so today.) It will be mentioned again on 17.282.
- p. 4: M. Thierry Devereaux: Established here as one of Leila's courtiers before she met and fell in love with Ballard, Devereaux will become an important character later in the novel.
- p. 4: "I accompany him to improve my French . . . a Berlitz cassette that picks up the tab": The repartee between Ballard and Leila is designed to testify to the breadth and depth of their love.
- p. 4: cinereous: ash-gray.
- p. 4: wretch: "a base, despicable, vile person" (*Webster's Third*).
- p. 4. "the vile deception on Leila . . . by *me* conspired and inflicted on Houda (and Mohammed): Ballard, who had since section 1 sought to excuse his unspecified conduct toward the sister and brother, now admits to the horror of his actions. By placing Mohammed's name in parentheses (or so Ballard visualizes it), he indicates that the sin against Houda is greater than that against Mohammed.
- p. 4: "would not I have Lear out-howled?": Ballard's mind goes to Shakespeare's *Lear*. On 5.3.62, Lear's first words when he comes on the stage bearing Cordelia's body are "Howl, howl, howl!"

## p. 5: SECTION 4

p. 5: “Maghrib”: The shortened name for *salaat il-maghrib*, the “sunset prayers,” mentioned in the p.2 note above, “the prayer,” N1:7.

p. 5: “the thirty-three strands”: The number is symbolic in Islam. For instance, a Muslim’s prayer beads typically consist of either three groups of thirty-three or thirty-three beads in three groups of eleven.

The beads are intended to help one keep track while saying the prayer known as *Tasbih* of Fatima, the daughter of Prophet Mohammed. This prayer is often recited after finishing each of the daily five ritual prayers.

It consists of repeating three praises glorifying God thirty-three times each. Prophet Mohammed used the fingers of his right hand to keep count during the prayer, but over time the ninety-nine prayer beads became popular. Some Muslims carry the prayer beads with them constantly.

Also of the Ninety-nine Beautiful Names of Allah, number thirty-three is “the Supreme Glory.”

Lastly, dwellers in Paradise, according to tradition, will exist in a state of being that they were at age 33 on earth.

The thirty-three strands across a doorway will be used again on 20.335.

p. 5: “M. John, you return . . . an American”: The first name which Mohisen gives to Ballard appears to contradict his name given in paragraph two of p. 1, “Paul Ballard.” A form of this “teasing” (5) greeting reappears twice later in this chapter (9) and on 7.110.

p. 5: *Amrekaanee*: Arabic for “an American.”

p. 5: “earlier sensed my worry”: Earlier at around 3:40, Ballard had entered the changing room to put on his swim suit. There he briefly spoke to Mohisen, who picked up in Ballard’s voice that something was bothering him.

On p. 8, trying to relieve Mohisen’s obvious worry, Ballard mentions “some nagging problems at my office” have caused his vexation.

p. 5: “*comptoir*”: French for “the counter of a shop.”

p. 5: “Tall and scrawny . . . a nose bent . . . ‘a ribbon from my father’”: Ballard’s description of Mohisen will parallel one of the youth given by another person on 6.92, even down to a speculation that the broken nose had been caused by a beating from Mohisen’s father.

Such mystical similarities, I felt essential in pressing the philosophical idea that there is a possibility that “everything” does “connect.”

p. 5: “the fourth, in July . . . Mohammed, snared quickly”: The detachment suggested by “snared” is meant to contrast with the sympathy which Ballard had just

expressed toward Mohammed and his sister at the end of section 3.

According to my chronology, Ballard took up his diplomatic post in Algiers on May 15, 1988. He became acquainted with Mohammed on May 24.

He had also very early started using Zaracova Beach since he refers to his fourth time there as occurring in July.

The phrasing “the fourth, in July” is coincidental and has no patriotic symbolism.

p. 5: *baksheesh*: The term used in north Africa and the Middle East for a “tip or gratuity.”

p. 5: *bonhomous*: The adjective of “*bonhomie*,” meaning “amiability.”

p. 5: “a friend not a waiter”: Ballard does not heed Mohammed’s advice about being a prudent tipper, but he learned from it how to make Mohisen friendlier.

This episode reveals not only the childish selfishness of Mohammed, who wants Ballard to spend his money only on him not on waiters, but also Ballard’s seeming desire to please everyone, from Leroy to Leila’s family to a changing room attendant.

p. 5: “most of the centimes . . . Ten dinars (one dollar)”: The first mention of the currency of Algeria. In 1989, as the text conveys, ten dinars (the smallest paper money) officially equaled one US dollar, although on the black market a dollar was worth almost twice that in dinars.

In the first series issued in 1963, a five-dinar bill was printed, but in the 1983 issue, it became a coin. At the time of the novel, additional denominations of paper notes were 20, 50, 100, 200 and 500 dinars.

The abbreviation of the Algerian dinar is AD, which is placed before the number, for instance, AD50 (fifty Algerian dinars).

One dinar is made up of one hundred centimes, the country’s coinage. Coins, which were made of aluminum, brass, nickel, or combinations of these, were in 5, 10, 20, and 50 centimes as well as 1, 5, and 10 dinars.

p. 5: Bordj el Kiffan is a coastal village about twenty kilometers (c. twelve miles) west of the capital. It is located on the semicircular Bay of Algiers.

p. 5: *mon ami*: French for “my friend.”

p. 5: *sadeek* (“friend”): As the text translates, *sadeek* is Arabic for “friend.”

A variant *sadeekee*, meaning “my friend,” will be used much later in the novel (16.262).

p. 5: *bien*: As translated in the text, French for “all right.”

## pp. 5-7: SECTION 5

- p. 6: “three-quarters full, waning gibbous moon”: This is the phase of the moon following the full moon. As the text indicates, it is approximately three-quarters full.  
The date of this chapter is February 27, 1989, or 21 Rajab 1409. On this date in the Muslim lunar calendar, the moon will be in its waning gibbous phase.  
The moon is “in the wings” because the sun has not yet set since Maghrib or sunset prayers will start after about twelve minutes, at 6:40.
- p. 6: “palm-grove rendezvous”: The place where Ballard and Mohammed are scheduled to meet is established: a palm grove.
- p. 6: gluteal cleft: The groove between the buttocks; also called the intergluteal cleft, the natal cleft, or the vertical gluteal crease.
- p. 6: “the rule of the public bathhouse in the Islamic world”: Citing the verse from the Qur’an 24:30, quoted in the p. 2. note above, N1:8, most scholars state that Islam forbids the exposure of the private parts in a public place, such as a bathhouse or a changing room.  
In such public settings, Muslim men are supposed to wear shorts while changing or showering.  
In most North African and some Middle East Muslim countries, this requirement of the *awrah* (that area of a male from the navel to the knees which is not to be exposed in public) I did not find to be observed in public settings.  
In Algeria in the 1980s, swimming in jockey shorts or tight trunks was commonplace.
- p. 6: “in the Toumi apartment, when [Ballard] had asked to see Mohammed’s penis”: The seedy nature of Rue Toumi, a street in Algiers which I invented, is suggested by Ballard’s having rented it for his rendezvous with a male prostitute.  
It will be more fully described in a 4.63 note, N4:34. In chap. 13, a character will walk from Algiers’ Casbah to Toumi, a distance of about a half mile.  
Although sections 1 and 2 established that something bizarre had happened between Ballard and the Belmazoir siblings, this statement suggests something even more startling, especially given Ballard’s stated love of Leila and his marriage to her: Ballard is in a homosexual relationship with Mohammed.
- p. 6: “This doesn’t count with God. I couldn’t do this around Muslims”: There is a double standard among quite a few Muslim men: They do not engage in homosexual acts with other Muslims, but believe that it is not forbidden or sinful to do so with non-Muslims.  
This hypocrisy will be examined more thoroughly on 9.141 and its note, N9.16-17.

- p. 6: “pre-Islamic import to [the] length and girth” of the male penis: Evidence for this is gained in the writing in the transitional period between paganism and Islam. For instance, the ninth-century (C.E. or Common Era) Afro-Arab poet Al-Jahiz satirized the obsession of men with a longer penis, by writing, “If the length of the penis were a sign of honor, then the mule would be [accorded the highest honor]” and one of the *Arabian Nights* tales is entitled “Ali with the Large Member.”  
The lack of prudery regarding the body among the inhabitants of Mecca before the time of the Prophet Mohammed is revealed by their dancing naked around the Kaaba during Haj, one of the first actions that Mohammed stopped when Mecca was taken by his followers.
- p. 6: “But we are poor, and a poor man must take his pride wherever he can”: A statement wise beyond Mohammed’s eighteen years.
- p. 6: “his last half year: ‘dungeon-like, since through my weakness I kept each a prisoner from the other’”: The dungeon image I appropriated from *Samson Agonistes*, where the Chorus says to Samson that “you” are “the dungeon of thyself” (l.156).  
The phrase “my dungeon darkness” will appear on 15.239 and “Saracen dungeon” on 17.281.
- p. 6: “Houda had been kept from Mohammed until “that horrible Wednesday which— God granting!—tonight will bring me absolution”: Ballard appears to give a day to the confrontation between Mohammed, Houda, and himself described on pp. 2 and 3. He also says that he had kept his relationship with Houda from Mohammed.  
Furthermore, his use of “God granting!” a Muslim expression in speaking about the future, suggests that Ballard has become or is in the process of becoming a Muslim.  
The purpose of his palm-grove meeting with Mohammed seems to be to seek absolution for the offense he committed against him and his sister on that Wednesday. The phrasing connects with the question asked at the end of section 1, “Have I the strength to seek forgiveness?” (3)
- p. 6: “five weeks ago”: Since it was on Feb. 27 that Ballard visited Zaracova Beach, five weeks before it would be Sunday, Jan. 22. The next day he told Leroy that he would not be going to Washington.
- p. 6: “Manila posting”: In 1982, as the next section will reveal, Leroy was serving as Ambassador to the Philippines, and Ballard was also there as an economic officer.
- p. 6. “an a.m. BM”: A punning reference to a morning bowel movement.
- p. 6: “that translator who worked here”: Leroy establishes that Leila had been a translator at the embassy. He gives no reason why she no longer is.
- p. 6: rictus: a grin.

- p. 6: “Elbert”: Elbert Medlin is the Deputy Chief of Mission of the American Embassy in Algiers.  
A DCM is the second in command at an American embassy.  
That Medlin is a tattler is seen in this first mention, for he has passed on to Leroy the embassy gossip about Ballard and Leila.  
A major character in the novel, his names suggests his contrary nature. “Elbert” is based on an Old English word meaning “noble, bright, famous”; over time as a first name, it has lost popularity to the similar-sounding “Albert,” thus suggesting Medlin’s inferiority complex.  
His last name connotes “middling” or “ordinary” in intellect and sociability, as well as his meddlesome or “snooping” (6) nature.  
Medlin is a fictional character, in no way similar to the person who served as DCM at the American embassy in Algiers in the late 1980s.
- p. 6: “set her up in a suite”: Even before the marriage contract was drawn up and signed (Jan. 8), Ballard had rented an apartment for Leila in Algiers (4) on Dec. 15, 1988, according to my chronology.
- p. 6: “Last Tuesday”: Feb. 21.
- p. 6: “the revised list of the three whom the ambassador had selected for Washington”:  
The introduction of a plot thread: After Leroy received word about his appointment to Washington (1-2), the State Department allowed him to select three from the Algiers Embassy to accompany him.  
Gossip did not place Medlin among the initial three, but when the official list was “circulated” a week before (Feb. 13), Medlin was on it.
- p. 6: DCM: As mentioned above and in the text, the abbreviation for Deputy Chief of Mission.
- p. 6: Amal: Medlin’s Arabic secretary. She will appear in an important scene in chap. 12, 187-90.  
Her name, which means “hope” in Arabic, was chosen simply because in this her first appearance Medlin gives her the hope that she will accompany him to Washington.
- p. 6: “Have I congratulated you, Elbert?”: Again this aspect of Ballard, who seeks accommodation with a person who has just publicly insulted him.

- p. 7: “‘the deeds, not to the doer’ . . . *The service, not the server*”: On p. 1, Ballard had said that Claude “characteristically” referred to “the service, not the server.”
- p. 7: “Palace of the Nations”: Palais des Nations is a magnificent conference center located in the elegant Staoueli suburb of Algiers. It is the venue of most important national and international conferences in Algeria. Twenty kilometers west of the city’s center, it is on what is called the Turquoise Coast, a series of sandy beaches. The one closest to the conference center is, naturally, called the Palace of the Nations Beach; it is much favored by tourists. Later it will be disclosed that Ballard and Mohammed first met at Palais des Nations Beach (4.62).
- p. 7: “not sneaking away to frolic . . . with lads at Palace of the Nations or Zaracova” and leaving “with a beachcomber or two in tow”: In front Algerian workers, an emboldened Medlin brazenly accuses Ballard of conducting what appeared to be homosexual liaisons.
- p. 7: umbrageous: giving shade; shady.
- p. 7: “He feels he earned the Washington assignment through the gossip he had fed Claude”: Early information suggested that Ballard had withdrawn himself from such consideration as soon as he heard about it, his “decision . . . not to tag along” (1) and his Feb. 23 disclosure to Leroy that he would be staying in Algiers (6).
- p. 7: “One syllable from me and perhaps you’ll not be ‘Washington ho!’”: Ballard descends to a threat by asserting that because of his long-standing friendship with Leroy he can block Medlin’s appointment.
- p. 7: “the plastic knife [which Medlin] was mechanically jabbing into his left thenar”: After pouring himself a cup of coffee, Medlin had picked up a plastic knife to stir the sugar he had added to it. Ballard’s threat so affected him that he unconsciously began to jab the palm of his hand with the plastic knife.

pp. 7-9: SECTION 6

- p. 7: “6:33”: In the dressing stall, Ballard notices that Mohisen had fondled his expensive watch. The time is given as 6:33.
- p. 7: Patek Philippe: Among those “*Genève horlogers*” (Geneva watchmakers) who, Leroy parrots an ad, “have no regard for time.” A Patek Philippe 18-carat gold wristwatch sold for around \$18,000 in the mid 1980s. I remember reading a 1980s advertisement in the *International Herald-Tribune* in which a Geneva watchmaker used a play on how it never considered the commercial

pressure of time in making its timepieces, but a recent Google search turned up nothing.

- p. 7: “John Ridgemont”: Ballard’s alias. It explains why on p. 5 both Mohisen and Mohammed refer to him as “M. John.”

Just as Ballard’s ambivalent sexuality, so the need for an alias is designed to baffle the reader and to cause him/her to wonder what other surprises about Ballard are on tap.

- p. 7: “red Renault”: Ballard’s Renault Quatrelle was mentioned on p. 4.

- p. 7: “The watch . . . a 1984 gift from Claude”: Ballard recalls that the watch had been given to him by Leroy, who in 1984 was the ambassador to Pakistan.

- p. 7: “posting in Islamabad, where Leroy, now three times an ambassador”: Not all of Leroy’s assignments are listed, but they indicate his “stately rise” mentioned on p. 1 since he was moved from one diplomatic trouble spot to another.

My notes indicate that his first ambassadorship was to Chile from 1978–81, during which General Augusto Pinochet, with American support, solidified his dictatorship.

Leroy was then shifted to another sensitive area, serving as ambassador to the Philippines from 1982–83. President Ferdinand Marcos, a staunch ally of America, was at the height of his power, although discontent with his unofficial dictatorship was rising. Marcos’s fall was about to begin with the assassination of his chief rival Benigno Aquino, Jr., in August 1983.

From 1984–1988, Leroy was ambassador to Pakistan during the period in which the US was supplying money and sophisticated arms to Pakistan, whose intelligence agency would then distribute to various Afghan mujahedeen groups which were fighting the Soviets and its puppet government in Kabul.

The Pakistani middlemen siphoned off about three-fourths of both the money and armaments, according to one history I consulted.

With the withdrawal of the Soviet army in 1988 and the establishment of a pro-Western government in Afghanistan, Leroy was assigned as ambassador to Algiers.

As indicated above, here he had just secured his major diplomatic victory, the November 1988 accord in which the Palestine Liberation Organization recognized Israel’s right to exist. See the p.1 note on N1:5.

Ballard accompanied Leroy on each of these diplomatic assignments.

I attach another disclaimer: Although the historical events of this area are accurately presented, Leroy is a “fictional character” and in no way resembles those real American diplomats serving in the countries mentioned.

- p. 7: “the trifle in the Philippines”: The watch was given partly to dispel some melancholy which Ballard had fallen into after an unspecified “trifl[ing]” incident when they were posted in the Philippines in 1982.

- p. 7: “Above all, my friend, because . . .”: At this point, Ballard interrupts his thoughts, leaving unstated a second reason for the gift, which will be given on p. 10 and will explain Leroy’s allegiance to the lowly positioned Ballard. Instead Ballard recollects what had happened in the Philippines.
- p. 7: “another brother and sister”: Ballard muses over how that incident had also involved a brother and sister, thus tying the former episode with his relationship with Mohammed and Houda.
- p. 7: Ermita: As the text indicates, a red-light district of Manila which tourists dub “Sin City,” with a probable pun on the Philippines’ strait-laced Cardinal Jaime Sin, who was to play an important role in Marcos’s downfall.
- p. 7: “Mor then youl ever no”: The intended English is “More than you will ever know,” an advertisement touting the size of the teenage prostitute’s penis.

- p. 8: “‘Not her . . . a way to ditch her’”: This sequence dispels the notion which the Houda-Mohammed incident had suggested, that Ballard is a bisexual. Here, he is intent on picking up a male “trick” and immediately begins to devise a scheme to get rid of the girl prostitute.
- p. 8: hobbledehoy: an awkward and gawky young man.
- p. 8: *joven*: In Spanish, “a young person,” either female (as here) or male.
- p. 8: “princox”: A vain, pert young man (*Webster’s Third*).
- p. 8: “‘My sister! My Sister!’”: The youth had presented the girl as his girlfriend, not his sister.
- p. 8: “off his radar”: The idiom “off one’s radar” means “to be forgotten or ignored, often because someone’s attention is on something more important” (the online *Free Dictionary*).
- p. 8: *muchacho*: In Spanish, “a young man.”
- p. 8: “‘being instinctive . . . ascertained the girl was not hurt’”: Again this dual nature of Ballard: proposing a repulsive sexual act and then instinctively stopping the car to be sure the girl has not been injured.
- p. 8: “No ‘*Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin*’ for me”: The quote is from Dan. 5:25. These Aramaic words, which literally translate as “numbered, numbered, weighed, and divided,” had been seen in a dream by the Babylonian king Belshazzar. It is Daniel who interprets them correctly, telling the king that the writing on the wall means that God had numbered the sins of Belshazzar and of Babylon (*mene, mene*), found them wanting, that is, weighed them (*tekel*), and would divide (*upharsin*) and destroy both Belshazzar and Babylon. Here Leroy (his last name translates from the French as “the king”) uses the phrase to say that unlike Belshazzar he will not be destroyed by Ballard’s indiscretion. His stress would be on the first word, “No.”  
The Aramaic phrase will be employed again on 20.340, as a thematic balance to its use here.
- p. 8: “This is Marcosland”: A combination of Filipino president Ferdinand Marcos, at the height of his power in 1982, and fantasyland, where reality can become only the imaginary and where some actions which hurt someone can be obliterated.
- p. 8: *Hermano y hermana*: In Spanish, “brother and sister.”
- p. 8: *porte battante*: In French, “swinging door.”
- p. 8: *walad*: In Arabic, “boy,” although it is applied to any male though his teens. A secondary Arabic meaning, related to a waiter, will be given on 13.214.

- p. 8: “*Amrekaanee sadeek*”: In Arabic, “American friend.”
- p. 8: “‘nagging problems at my office’ . . . subjoining, *No lies for Mohisen*”: Ballard says he has had some problems at his office, perhaps specifically thinking of the meeting with Leila’s brother Ahmed at the embassy that morning, which will be detailed on pp. 11-13.
- p. 8: “1,089 plastic beads”: 33 beads per strand x 33 strands. See the p. 5 note above, N1:14.
- p. 8: *de novo*: The Latin phrase means “once more” or “once again.”
- p. 8: “he [Ballard] withdrew a one-hundred-dinar bill . . . ‘a week’s provision for his [Mohisen’s] family’”: Again the unnecessary act of kindness and generosity by Ballard is puzzling.

- p. 9: ““No girl? . . . yourself an American!””: To coax Mohisen into accepting the enlarged gratuity, Ballard summons up part of the attendant’s typical greeting to Ballard after his swim (5).  
The section will end with Mohisen’s singing this greeting out (9).  
See the p. 5 note above, N1:14.
- p. 9: egress: An intransitive verb meaning “to go out” from a place of confinement or to “exit” (*Webster’s Third*).
- p. 9: ““you’ll not cheat me . . . the emphasis on *tricherez*”: The French verb, as the text implies, means “you [the formal *vous*] will [not] cheat.”
- p. 9: “yon”: Archaic for “yonder,” meaning something or someone a long or short distance from the speaker.
- p. 9: “The ‘Oho-the-old-earth-is-frolicsome-tonight’ jollity”: The quote is adapted from the penultimate scene of Hawthorne’s “My Kinsman, Major Molineux”: “The Man in the Moon heard the far bellow. ‘Oho,’ quoth he, ‘the old earth is frolicsome tonight.’”
- p. 9: spangle: As in intransitive verb, “spangle” means “to glitter with or as if with decorative spangles.”
- pp. 9-11: SECTION 7
- p. 9: *iqama*: At 6:39, as Ballard is leaving the changing room, he hears the *iqama*, which is defined in the text as “the call to those assembled in the mosque to line up for prayers.”  
Thus sunset prayers (Maghrib or *salaat il-maghrib*) that night were from 6:40 to 6:55.
- p. 9: *vestiaire*: A “public changing room,” as defined in the notes on p. 4 (N1:12).
- p. 9: Abderahmane Mira Avenue: Although Zaracova Beach is my invention, the avenue which runs in front of the two northernmost beaches which I modeled it on is (in French) l’Avenue Commandant Abderahmane Mira.
- p. 9: *Directeur* of the *Société Nationale Algérienne de Tourisme et d’Hôtellerie*: Director of the Algerian National Agency of Tourism and the Hotel Industry. Its acronym is SONATOUR.
- p. 9: *djinn*: Called “ghostly spirits” in the text, *djinn* (plural; the singular is *djinni*) are mentioned in the Qur’an as a supernatural order of beings created by God. (The English word *genie* is not derived from this Arabic term.)

Made from smoke, while man was created from earth, they are invisible to human beings unless they choose to assume a human form in order to destroy or torment a person.

Subsisting side-by-side with human beings, they may do good, but are generally considered as evil spirits. For example, the Muslim Satan (*Shaitan*) was a disobedient *djinni*.

They are often portrayed in Arab lore as treacherous and tricky. Like Satan they sometimes whisper in a person's ear to encourage him/her to submit to evil desires.

- p. 10: "a few times they had met there, the last five weeks back": Since the date of this chapter is Feb. 27, five weeks back would be Monday, Jan. 23. The events of the latter date will be mentioned on 13.216.
- p. 10: "Mohammed had some hashish customers": Although p. 2 (see its note, N1:8-9) stated that on the night of the confrontation between Ballard and the Belmazoirs, Mohammed had used "hashish," this is the first reference to him as a drug dealer. Ballard was aware that he was affiliating with an illegal "pusher." This information raises the question: Was Ballard, who seemingly is having a homosexual relationship with Mohammed, also his drug customer?
- p. 10: "coltish blade": Placed in quotation marks to signal that this is Ballard's exact wording in describing Mohammed. It can be paraphrased as "frisky, dashing young man."
- p. 10: "sluice in": As an intransitive verb, it means "to run or flow in or as in a sluice."
- p. 10: *fil de fer barbelé*: French for "barbed-wire fence."  
Barbed wire will connect four major settings of the novel. It circles the palm-and-pine grove at Zaracova, which not only Ballard in this chapter must maneuver through, but which two other characters in later chapters will: 6.94 and 15.252.  
On 4.60, it is the part of the inner barrier of a walled Algerian prison. Also, from 1957 to 1958 during the revolution, the French army circled Algiers' Casbah with three-meter-high barbed wire (6.89).  
Finally, a cantonment will be circled by "a chain-link fence canopied by barbed wire" (16.266).
- p. 10: "a briar . . . snapped up to nip his sockless ankle": Overt foreshadowing.
- p. 10: "'6:45: High-principled early": Ballard tells himself that he is arriving well ahead of his scheduled 7:15 meeting time, although he expected Mohammed to arrive fifteen minutes late at 7:30.  
For Ballard's obsession with the coined word "punctuality," see the p. 4. note above, N1:12.

- p. 10: “. . . because you saved my life in Vietnam”: This clause completes the thought of Leroy from p. 7, “above all, my friend, because . . . .”
- p. 10: “in sanity”: The phrase here means “in soundness of mind,” but Leroy’s delight in punning shoves the two words together to produce the opposite, “insanity.”
- p. 10: “more than a year’s take-home salary for him”: In the mid-1980s, as the note to p. 7, N1:19-20, indicates, a Patek Philippe 18-carat gold wristwatch cost around \$18,000. On 5.77, Ballard’s take-home monthly salary will be given as \$1,428.41, which when multiplied by twelve is around \$17,141. Prior to deductions his annual salary in 1989 was around \$25,000.
- p. 10: Batangan Peninsula: It is located about 250 miles northwest of the capital of Vietnam (Saigon, in 1965, the year of this incident of the novel). Operation Piranha, a major U.S. marine assault, was launched in Batangan in Sept. 1965.
- p. 10: “in his sight”: “before one’s eyes; within one’s awareness” (*Amer. Her. Dict. of Idioms*). However, there is also a reference to “gun-sight,” a sight used for aiming a gun.
- p. 10: “How young he is, a boy!”: Ballard’s exclamation may be interpreted as sexual or as compassionate.
- p. 10: VC and Cong: Viet Cong, the communist guerrilla force which sought to overthrow the South Vietnamese government and later allied itself with North Vietnam.
- p. 10: “his body lunging forward to catch his soul”: Similar wording will be used later on p. 13: “his body had been deserted by his spirit. *My soul seeks refuge in my shadow.*”
- p. 10: “an extinguished sparklet buried in his subconscious”: A shellshocked Ballard remembered nothing of what had happened, but Leroy’s deposition stated that although both their legs were injured, Ballard had pulled him to safety. As a result, Ballard was awarded a bronze-gilt heroism medal (10).
- p. 10: “orange-red sand”: The color of the soil in Batangan Peninsula.
- p. 10: *tableau vivant*: French for “living tableau”; “a representation of a scene by a person or group, who pose silently without moving.”
- p. 10: “The painful we revive. . . . The heroic embarrasses us, so is submerged”: The theory or repressed memory, as formulated by Freud, is used to describe a significant traumatic memory that has become unavailable for recall. A subject blocks out painful or traumatic events. Freud later disavowed the concept.

The military psychologist in my novel reverses the concept by telling Ballard that we revive the painful (he remembers the damage to his body caused by the grenade), but submerge the heroic, his rescue of Leroy.

Later in the novel, such concepts will be referred to as “the twentieth-century equivalent of ‘speaking-in-tongues’: psychobabble” (4.66).

- p. 10: “orphaned at three”: On p. 2, Ballard said that he “was a Jew the first three years of my life.” On being orphaned, he was placed with a non-Jewish relative since he speaks of being a Jew for only his first three years.
- p. 10: “picklely”: Placed in quotes to indicate that it is a portmanteau coined word. Leila may be fusing *pickle* with *prickly*.
- pp. 10-11: “That morning five weeks ago . . . ‘betray me’”: Thinking about the Vietnam tableau brings to Ballard’s mind the continuation of his conversation with Leroy five weeks ago when he had told the ambassador he would be staying in Algiers (6). Ballard remembers that he had told Leroy that he felt like “a traitor,” but Leroy calmed him by replying that “not even in your thoughts could you betray me” (10). This is the first mention of “traitor” and “betrayal” in the novel. The idea of treason dwells on Ballard’s mind because the next section opens with him thinking, “Being loyal to one, you betray another” (11), a repetition of a thought that p. 12 will show he had considered that morning while speaking to Leila’s brother Ahmed. The novel will focus much on the political manifestation of “betrayal,” “traitor,” and “treason,” the last of which will be the major word of the penultimate paragraph of the novel (21.367).

## pp. 11-13: SECTION 8

p. 11: “Being loyal to one, you betray another”: At 6:48, situated on one of the picnic tables and staring into the shell of the disco, Ballard asserts that by being loyal to Leila and what she wished has led him to betray his longtime friend Leroy.

p. 11: tenebrosity: “darkness” (*Webster’s Third*).

p. 11: lipper: “a light spray from small waves” (*Webster’s Third*).

p. 11: “This was the country where ‘my weary age’ will strive to ‘find out the peaceful hermitage,’ and with Leila’s guidance, God willing, I will ‘wither into the truth’”: The first two quotes are from Milton’s “*Il Penseroso*”: “And may at last my weary age / Find out the peaceful hermitage” (167-68).

At first glance the passage seems inappropriate: “Hermitage” suggests “a retreat from other people,” but Ballard does not seek this. He is staying in Algiers with his wife Leila.

However, it is quite relevant if Leila is interpreted to represent Melancholy, the scholarly, contemplative person or soul-mate, with whom Milton’s speaker in the poem’s last line did “choose to live” (176).

The phrase “wither into the truth” is from Yeats’s four-line lyric, “The Coming of Wisdom with Time”: “Though leaves are many, the root is one; / Through all the lying days of my youth / I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun; / Now I may wither into the truth.”

“Truth” is partly the love of Leila and partly his conversion (termed by Muslims, “reversion”) to Islam.

p. 11: “tithing of martyrs”: Ballard thinks about Algeria’s past, particularly the bloody Algerian War of Independence waged against France (1954-1962). It is from Alistair Horne’s seminal study *A Savage War of Peace* that I got the “one in ten” or what I call “tithing” percentage.

Only estimates can be offered of the number of Algerian Arabs killed in the war and its aftermath. The Algerian government still maintains that 1.5 million were killed, while official French sources state that the number was 350,000.

Horne places the deaths during the war at around 700,000. This figure does not include those Algerians killed by the victorious FLN in post-war retaliation. Some historians put that latter number as low as 30,000 while others place it as high as 150,000.

p. 11: “agnosticism of will”: This phrase conveys the obsession (“will”) with materialism (“agnosticism”) of the Algerians since independence, which Ballard and Leroy feel replaced the sacrifice of the wartime generation.

- p. 11: “The perfect birthing ground for a second coming of fanaticism, the Islamists”: Leroy sees the emergence of a new or second “fanaticism” (for the martyrs were likewise fanatic, while their successors, the materialists, were simply egotistical): the Islamists.  
The idea of political fanaticism is borrowed from Yeats’s “Easter, 1916.” The title of his poem “The Second Coming” is also echoed in Leroy’s speech.
- p. 11: “the Islamists”: Modern-day Islamists hold that the orthodox principles of Islam should be applied to all aspects of life; for instance, Arabic should be the only language spoken; women should stay in the home; corrupting Western influences should be banned; there is no separation between religion and government, and so forth.  
In Algeria, an Islamist element was behind the October 1988 anti-government demonstrations in the country’s major cities against food shortages and an unemployment rate of close to 50%.  
The army fired on the demonstrators, mainly high school and college students, killing from 176 (the official estimate) to over 500.  
As a result of this overreaction, begrudgingly President Chadli Bendjedid sought to mollify the outrage at this “slaughter.” In December 1988, he pushed through the legislature amendments to the Constitution which established political pluralism.  
Ended was the monopolistic rule of his own National Liberation Front (FLN), the party which had directed the fight for independence and had governed (or misgoverned) the country since then (1962-1988).  
This is the background of Leroy’s political ideas which Remy recalled while sitting on the bench in front of the abandoned disco.  
Leroy proved prophetic for the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), which campaigned on a platform of a more religiously based society, swept the first election in 1990. Its subsequent electoral victory in 1991 led the army to cancel the results and depose Bendjedid.  
Guerilla warfare by Islamists against the army-approved government from 1991 to the present (2013) has resulted in the death of around 200,000 Algerians. By 2004, however, the tide had shifted against the Islamists for in the presidential election that year an Islamist candidate polled only 5% of the vote.  
Islamist guerrillas still continue to commit random “terrorist acts.”
- p. 11: “High-day, freedom! Freedom, high-day!” Leroy’s mocking chant is from *The Tempest* 2.2.184-85: “Freedom, high-day! High-day, freedom! Freedom, high-day, freedom!”  
“High-day” means “holiday,” and the speaker Caliban is averting that when he is free from Prospero’s tyranny every day will be a holiday.
- p. 11: “five hundred unreasonable October corpses”: Leroy did not accept the official figure that only 176 demonstrators were killed in the October 1988 student riots.

- p. 11: “a December present . . . a showy couscous of choice”: As mentioned above, in Dec. 1988, the Algerian legislature passed amendments to the Constitution to end the one-party rule of the FLN by allowing competing political parties to form. Leroy seemed to regard these amendments as only a “show,” believing that the Algerian military would never allow democracy in the country.
- p. 11: couscous: The national dish of Algeria, it consists of crushed semolina, steamed with lamb or chicken in a spicy sauce.
- p. 11: “tender the tinder”: The overt meaning of this expression repeats the previous sentence: The government is offering (tendering) an unprepared people a kind of democracy which Leroy sees as a flammable material (tinder) that can be used to start a fire that can become a conflagration (the Islamist revolution). Other meanings of “tender” are certainly implied, for Leroy’s plays on words are not always simple or crude.
- p. 11: “revolutions are won today by sticking flowers in the barrels of guns”: Ballard recalls the night he told Leila about Chadli’s decree for a multi-party state. This non-violent capitulation pleased her. It is revealed that the couple plan to open a flower shop, which Leila jokes will be “a tiny cog in the new munitions cartel.” I have not been able to locate the photograph, but I believe that in the 1986 peaceful overthrow of Ferdinand Marcos, I saw a picture of a woman (perhaps a nun, or am I romanticizing?) putting a flower in the barrel of a rifle held by a rigid Filipino soldier.
- p. 11: Rue Docteur Frantz Fanon: Algiers is divided into two parts, the old city (the Casbah) and the new (Algiers Central or Alger Centre in French). Fanon is a major street in the modern section of the city. Frantz Fanon was a French psychiatrist and philosopher whose writings about Africa have been greatly influential. He was working in Algeria when the revolution against the French broke out in Nov. 1954. Sympathetic with Algerians because of the abuses of colonialism, Fanon secretly joined the FLN. In 1957, the French expelled him from Algeria. An FLN champion abroad, he died in 1961, aware that Algeria would soon be an independent country. His final interment was in a martyrs’ graveyard in eastern Algeria.
- p. 11: “We will be the tenders of flowers”: Ballard reveals that one week ago (February 20), with her raven eyes flashing, Leila had waved the deed to the flower shop before his eyes and spoke of her and her husband in almost Edenic terms.
- p. 11: *clair de lune*: French for “moonlight.”

p. 11: “patches of yellow asphodels and white rock lilies near the steps”: The flowers growing around the steps of the disco foreshadow the horrible political prospect awaiting Algeria and parallel the one soon to befall Ballard.

Both flowers, indigenous to Algeria, are associated with death. At three places in the *Odyssey* (11:539, 11:573, and 24:113-114), Homer refers to the first region of Hades as being covered by an “asphodel meadow.”

Not a flower garden, this section is a dark and drab place where the spirits of unadventurous people, neither virtuous nor evil, are sentenced; the ones here described by Homer wail and wallow in self-pity.

As in Homer, so in much of Greek mythology, the dull yellow asphodel is associated with the pallor of death.

The lily, likewise, is a symbol of death, with the flower traditionally being placed on the graves of children.

p. 11: “*katb el-kitb*”: Literally translated, the Arabic expression means “writing the book” or “drafting and signing the marriage contract.” See the pp. 2 and 4 notes above, N1:7-8 and N1:12-13.

A synonym for it is *aqd-nikah* since in Arabic *aqd* means “contract” and *nikah* means “coitus; sexual intercourse,” which the signing of the marriage contract immediately permits. This contract is mentioned in the Qur’an, 4.21.

However, marriage is not a sacrament in Islam. Instead, it is a covenant since it may be revoked through divorce.

*Katb el-kitb* has become the term primarily used to label the marriage contract, perhaps because it is more ameliorative sounding than the sexual *aqd-nikah*.

*Mahr*, as mentioned in the p.2 note, N1:6, is the Arabic word meaning “dowry,” that settlement, usually monetary, which a Muslim man makes to the woman or her representative (father or guardian).

In theory, it is the woman’s property, but in practice (I was told by many Middle East friends) the father or guardian sometimes retains control of it.

The contract, which is signed by the prospective groom, the father or guardian of the woman, and two adult male witnesses (not of the immediate family), may also allow the dowry to be paid in installments.

Following this signing, at which the woman is typically not present, the man and the woman must meet and say three times that they accept the other (each must give a forename and a patronymic) as their husband and wife.

The marriage finally must be publicized. However, the minimum degree of publicity which is required for a marriage to be valid is the presence of the two adult Muslim male witnesses at the signing of the contract and the exchange of vows.

The marriage ceremony is thus basically a private affair.

However, it is recommended that the marriage be publicized in a mosque, but sometimes this and the *waleema* (a celebratory dinner to which relatives and neighbors are invited) are delayed until the entire dowry is paid or other conditions set in the contract are met.

The provisional aspects of these conditions will become a significant plot thread in my novel.

- p. 11: “Claude’s prepaid wedding check”: On p. 6, Ballard was full of “anxiety” about how Leroy would react—with “a rictus or frown”—to the news that he was staying in Algiers with Leila, whom he had secretly married. His reaction was the former since it is revealed here that his pre-wedding gift (the couple were married by signing the contract, but the public celebration discussed in the previous note has not been held) was a large check which allowed Ballard to make the last dowry payment and he and Leila to purchase the flower shop.
- p. 11: “Except one”: Leila’s father and brother had insisted that Ballard must help Ahmed Chabane obtain a French work visa. Since this stipulation was part of her dowry, Leila had the right to refuse to fulfill it or to delay the fulfilling of it. She did so, certain that her foolish brother was too immature to go to France.

- p. 12: “*Jamais, au grand jamais!*”: As the text translates the French, “Never ever!”
- p. 12: Zouabi: The village in eastern Algeria, outside of which was the Chabanes’ farm. See the p. 4 note above, N1:12, for a longer description.
- p. 12: “two years younger”: Ahmed is two years younger than Leila, so he is twenty-two.
- p. 12: “the seven thousand [US dollars]”: The amount of the dowry.
- p. 12: “this morning”: February 27.
- p. 12: “There is an Ahmed Chabane who wishes to see you”: This is the first time that the cognomen of Leila’s family is given.
- p. 12: affinal: “related by marriage” (online *Free Dictionary*, which cites *Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary*, 1913).
- p. 12: perorate: to sum up or conclude a speech.
- p. 12: “your brother . . . M. My Brother”: Arabic, of course, has a term for “brother-in-law” (*neeseeb*), but I was told by Arab friends that it is more common to refer to a man who has married into a family as “brother.”  
Even unrelated Muslim men address a person totally outside of his family as “brother” since Islam makes everyone a part of a religious family.  
That said, Chabane is purposively fawning over Ballard when he addresses him as “M. My Brother.”
- p. 12: “God-drenched country”: The materialistic Ahmed’s description of Algeria.
- p. 12: “a Palestinian chum . . . their camp down south”: Around a hundred exiles from Palestine live in a camp about 140 kilometers south of Algiers.  
In my novel, through governmental permission they control the hashish market in Algeria.  
How Chabane became involved with the Palestinians will be explained in chap. 9.
- p. 12: “Mohammed Ahmed Belmazoïr”: His full name is given. His name and character were based on a Moroccan friend of mine.  
The novel is dedicated to this real-life Mohammed Ahmed Belmazoïr. He is one of the two characters with non-Algerian last names in the novel.
- p. 12: “flying”: A synonym for the slang expression “high,” being intoxicated or under the influence of drugs.
- p. 12: “Plo camp”: In the Middle East I sometimes heard Arabs speaking English use the one-syllable expression “Plo” instead of “Palestinian” or “a member of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).” It was pronounced to rhyme with “no.”

Since “Plo” is not listed in any dictionary, readers of the manuscript of my novel, hoping to be helpful, routinely changed the acronym “Plo” to the all-capitalized abbreviation “PLO.”

“Plo” and its plural “Plos,” which carry a familiar or derogatory connotation, occur frequently in the novel, particularly in chapters 15, 16, and 20.

- p. 12: “I’ll bring it next Wednesday. I’ve got this American friend who pays me on Mondays”: These sentences establish that Mohammed went to the Palestinian camp on Wednesdays to pick up the hashish he was to dispense and to turn in the money for the drugs he had sold the previous week.  
The passage also fixes that he was paid by Ballard on Mondays.
- p. 12: M. Tinfingers: The chief of the PLO camp, as the text clarifies. He will play an important role in the novel, but for now I hope readers are intrigued by his name.
- p. 12: “your twin identities, M. Paul . . . M. John”: The Palestinians discover that Ballard, a U.S. embassy official, is using two identities. From them Ahmed has learned the first name of his alias, “M. John.”  
He hints that the Palestinians “imparted” more about Ballard which “would greatly interest my sister,” presumably about Ballard’s relationship with Belmazoir.
- p. 12: “Being loyal to one, you become a traitor to another”: Here Ballard means that being loyal to Mohammed has made him betray Leila, the sentence which with a different interpretation he will mull that night while sitting on the cement table (11).
- p. 12: ““Once the contract’s signed, should this fellow die today, according to the law, she’ll be entitled to her wifely share of all his goods””: A lawyer whom Ahmed sought out states that the signing of the contract and exchange of vows before witnesses meant that Ballard and Leila were “legally married.”  
The lawyer had then added that even if Ballard should “die today,” Leila would receive her “wifely share” of Ballard’s possessions.
- p. 12: ““Does not that render you, thereupon, dispensable to my family?””: Ahmed’s final intimidation, that Ballard is not indispensable to the Chabanes, may be interpreted as a veiled murder threat or it may be seen as simply an overt statement by the materialistic Ahmed that the family cares only for what monetary profit it can make from Ballard.  
Therefore Ahmed implies that should he expose Ballard’s bizarre relationship with Mohammed to Leila, the American will run the risk of losing not only the wife he has bought, but also his monetary investment (the dowry) in her.  
In Muslim law where there is evidence of physical or psychological harm inflicted on the wife, she may seek a divorce, which will allow her to retain the dowry. Sexual perversion, among the most reprehensible sins in Islam, fits into the category.

p. 13: “The bear had to be lugged”: According to Ballard, Leila had used this metaphor when she told Ballard that “never ever” (11) would she agree to her brother going to France.

The image is borrowed from *Henry IV, Part 1*, 1.2.72-73: Falstaff says to Hal, “I am as melancholy as a . . . lugged bear.”

A lugged bear is one led by a chain. Leila had stated that her brother must not be left free (unchained) to roam about France. However, it is Ahmed’s lugubrious, quarrelsome mien and lumbering appearance which Ballard wanted to express in using Leila’s comparison.

pp. 13-14: SECTION 9

p. 13: “How rapidly had everything”: Section 9 lasts from 6:51 – 6:55. In it Ballard does “not fail his rendezvous,” to use the words from the final line of Alan Seeger’s famous poem.

p. 13: “there is strength in confessing our weakness”: This paradoxical assertion exults Ballard, who believes that he can escape the consequences of his sins through confession.

p. 13: “his reverie nourished a fanatical hope, an avowal that ‘desperation is agnostic’”: Drawing on Leroy’s bolstering words about “agnosticism of will” and “fanaticism” (11), Ballard cherishes a “fanatical hope” that “desperation [i.e., the loss of hope] is agnostic [that is, not to be believed or accepted].”

Hope, in itself, is a testament that human beings live in a God-directed universe.

p. 13: “their wedding feast”: A joyous Ballard thinks about his wedding celebration (the *waleema*).

p. 13: ““Not jealous or boastful . . . rejoices in the right’ . . . this Pauline truth”: His quotation from St. Paul does not deal just with his personal love for Leila, but also with the interconnection of love among all who will be at the feast.

From 1 Cor. 13:4-7 (RSV): “Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant / or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; / it does not rejoice at wrong but rejoices in the right. / Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

Two other times a part of 1 Cor. 13:4-7 will be used: 11.179 and 19.326, and 1 Cor. 13:2 will be partially quoted on 14.236.

p. 13: “the prurient chirping of the cicadas”: The sexual drive immediately follows the declaration of love.

p. 13: *El-Hamdulillah!*: The text defines this Arabic exclamation as “Praise God!”

- p. 13: “*M. John, c’est meilleur ici.* ‘Here is better.’” The French sentence is translated in the text by the speaker. That is, the person says it once in French and then translates it into English.
- p. 13: tutoyer: to speak to familiarly, as, in French, by using the singular forms (*tu* and *toi*) of “you” rather than the more formal plural form (*vous*).
- p. 13: “*Je viens, mon bon ami.* ‘I come’”: The French is partly translated, “I come, my good friend.”
- p. 13: “For the second time in his life he felt that his body had been deserted by his spirit. *My soul seeks refuge in my shadow*”: The first time, the grenade wound in Vietnam, was described on p. 10: “Ballard sensed his body lunging forward to catch his soul.”  
The relationship of the body and the soul appears three other times in the novel: On 14.232, “Still sun and stone can martyr only the body. To harrow the soul, one must reinstate himself in the human ‘halo.’”  
On 18.310, “‘my conscious soul must have sleepwalked my subconscious body’ to the shack’s entrance.” And on 19.321, “the body becomes as wispy as the soul.”
- p. 13: “the blow had knocked him”: The weapon used is not specified here, except casually through the reference to those “chunks of wooden planks” on the floor of the abandoned disco (9).  
The weapon will be described more completely on 5.80; 11.183 (as “a nail-studded plank”); 12.192; 13.207; 15.239, and 20.340.

- p. 14: “an unrepentant countenance:” The text hints that the face is Mohammed’s, but since this is a murder mystery, it states that “an,” not “his,” “unrepentant countenance he beheld.”
- p. 14: “his head dangling over the top step”: The dangling image reinforces the disconnection theme.  
 Its use in this first chapter balances the dangling situation of a major character in the last chapter (21.356, “adangle over the top step,” and 21.363, “adangle at the top”).  
 The image is used to describe the pendency of characters in five other chapters: 5.79 (“left dangling”); 6.89 (“whose body was found dangling”); 10.158 (“dangled in midair”); 14.238 (“a dangling Houda”); and 15.242 (“the dangling litter”).  
 Thus in seven chapters the image of someone dangling is a central motif.
- p. 14: *djellaba*: A “robe” worn by an Algerian, as the quotation marks around that word in the next sentence indicates. Algerian men who do not wear Western clothes usually have as their public garb either a *djellaba* or a *gandoura*, styles of native robes.  
 The distinction between the two is that a *djellaba* has a hood and long sleeves, while the *gandoura* has no hood and is sleeveless or short-sleeved.  
 The garment does not indicate that a man is necessarily Ballard’s murderer since in order to disguise her sex a woman could have worn this hooded garment over her usual robe-like dress (the *haik* or outer robe and the *jilbab*, another robe sometimes worn under the *haik*).
- p. 14: *mécaniquement*: French for “mechanically.”
- p. 14: “he caught, since it gives off its own light, the glint of the dagger”: A variant of this expression will occur three other times in the novel (15.243 and 20.340 and 351, but in this last instance, the glint refers to a gun).
- p. 14: *pitmirk*: “intense darkness.” I came across the word in Scott’s *Guy Mannering*. *Webster’s Third* labels it as “Scottish dialect.”
- p. 14: “affirming, at that point of separation, that nothing disconnects”: Ballard’s dying thoughts are that “nothing disconnects” (the title of the chapter) and of Leila’s dark eyes.  
 In my chronology, but not specified in the novel, Ballard dies at 6:55.
- p. 14: “his aphotic soul”: “Aphotic” means “without light” and “specifically pertains to that part (aphotic zone) of the ocean below a depth of c. 100 meters (c. 328 ft.) which does not receive sufficient sunlight for photosynthesis.”
- p. 14: “sensate”: “Sensate” may be used as a transitive verb meaning “to feel or apprehend through a sense or the senses” (*Webster’s Third*).  
 The reference to the soul as able to “sensate” darkness harks back to Ballard’s description of his soul leaving his body (10 and 13).