

Chapter Three

THE CALCULUS OF RELATIONS

Remy was in a London hotel room, listening and speaking:

“It’s a maze getting here.” The door had opened without being knocked on. “M. Remy Montpellier?”

The officer in the light beige uniform standing five paces from Omar, who was bent over a desk memorizing classification subsections in *L’organisation d’une bibliothèque municipale*, was of medium height, in his early thirties, and had a narrow face which made prominent his thick black eyebrows, themselves lifted appreciably by his inquiry.

A deep-blue kepi by and large concealed his hair, but the visible closely cropped edges signaled that it was likewise dark.

Initially believing the man—his badge, one stripe of gold over silver, indicated he was a second lieutenant—had come to the wrong room, Omar started to correct him, and then concluded, summoning up the expanse of the ten weeks spent in the indoctrination and assimilation program, the French military did not err, at least in such controlled spheres.

His cap removed, he walked to the cot opposite the desk, where, sitting down, he withdrew from his briefcase a document and a notebook. Both he passed to Omar. “If you are M. Remy Montpellier—and I, forgive me, am M. Le Contact à Vous—you were a foundling (‘conceivably’ illegitimate), reared at a Carmelite orphanage near Reims.”

He pointed to the birth certificate and the *calepin* with its gilded-fleury cover. Since he paused, Omar apprehended that he was expected to flip through the latter, pages of dated annotations in a neat feminine script, its beginning entry from 1940.

“You stayed with the nuns during the terrible war years—while all the world was falling to pieces—and afterward, studying diligently and with adoration counting your rosary beads. You were on the average an excellent student.” He presented Omar, recently alerted by his psychologist that he would soon learn who he was, with some examination papers which adeptly mimicked his *écriture*.

“Following secondary school, you, who were always bookish, matriculated in the Faculty of Library Sciences at the University of Lille, from which you have just received your baccalaureate.” An additional set of records was balanced on his lap, since his hands were already full.

“Two months ago, rather certain of your graduation, you mailed an application for the post of junior clerk at the library of Le Puy-en-Velay, it being—as any indigene

knows—a charming red-roofed town, with sweet water and fresh air, cupped by four hills or more correctly volcanic outcrops, three of which have been converted into some sort of religious manifesto. A favored place where a man can look to his future, yet, in as much as it's in the central Auvergne region, 'the stony heart of France,' not totally forget his past."

So they do not wish it either, Omar was persuaded. "I'm happy to inform you that your application has been favorably acted on, and you take up your duties there in four days. Naturally, you'll leave straightaway—no time for celebration—to secure lodging. That is, if you are Remy Montpellier."

So half was disposed of. "What about my family?"

"That you must do yourself. We don't provide the wife and children."

"What of my family?"

"But you are an orphan, if you are Remy Montpellier."

Omar's right hand swung upward, endeavoring to shield from the *sous-lieutenant's* waggish gaze the paralyzed emptiness which had overwhelmed his features. Although unsought, the effect was immediate.

"Excuse me. My manner lacks honing. Your family. *Pardon!* Every morning since your abduction, your father, companioned by four or five neighbors, trudges to the police stations. He's retained a French lawyer, expending the money—and I fear this will pain you—he'd reserved for the haj he planned next year.

"Women sit with your mother throughout the day and into the night. Her health, I must report, is not as good as your father's. 'His is a badge of honor for Algeria,' to everyone he memorializes your seizure. 'Our Noura's is a rag of shame for France.'"

He has broached it, an allusion that worried Omar. "And my sister?"

2

"We are blessed! We are doubly blessed!" His mother rushed from behind the mat on which lay the slumbering baby and where moments before she had rhythmically clapped louder and louder, sending forth such a din that his father called from the shop below, "What's going on up there? You startle my customers,"

She clasped Omar, who had not been staring at her while she had banged her taut palms together, but at his sister sleeping.

"She will speak only to God. Hear only God. O blessed! Blessed! She will be free of all the evils that come from the heard and the spoken." (*I am in a London hotel room, speaking and listening*, he reminded himself.)

His mother crumpled to her knees and began to sway. "She is touched by God. His Hand gently enfolds and caresses her. *Allahu Akbar!*" With her patulous eyes level with Omar's, she reverently explained, "We tend merely her body. Already to Heaven she is in midflight."

Three years later, when he was seven, his father summoned him into the tiny garden behind their store. From the chamber above floated an Arabic *berceuse*, for his mother was lullabying the child. During that inchoation, he had competed with her in the care of Noura.

"No, no," she would insist. "Today I'm to clean my lovely one. Outside, your

friends beckon.” He would start to whimper. “Here, a coin for a sorbet.” Blubbing noisily, he would hurl it at her. (Afterward he would realize his parents’ strategy.)

“Oh, my precious Omar, your mother has little time and much toil, yet not this instant. Let me have the joy o’ my daughter.” Having retrieved the coin, she would wedge it between his interlaced fingers, and he, though won over, would sulkily tramp out.

They sat on a concrete bench under the withering acacia. “Your mother and I will have this gift as long as God decides. Thereupon He will grant you Noura as His Beneficence. You’ll be married—”

“No! No!”

“That’s not God’s Way. You’ll be married and have many sons and daughters, God willing. Perhaps your wife or her mother will not treasure Noura. God is without jealousy, but man is without that ‘without.’ You must protect your sister, whose understanding transcends evil, from any cruelty. I cannot impose, but can intimate, a *nathr*, ‘a pledge to God, a bond.’ Do you grasp what I propound?”

“Yes! Yes!” doubly exclaimed Omar. (*And even now, my heart like a redbird flies up to Paradise.*)

3

By 1958 (the war still had four more years to wend its course), French tanks and trucks had settled into their “substantial pageant,” a daily parade up and down the boulevards and streets of Algiers—Carnot, Bugeaud, Gambetta, Victoire, Verdun, Bab Azoun, Vallée, Bab el Oued—all lines of fire to the Casbah.

On rare occasions the convoy would stop; and several tarpaulin-covered trucks would turn onto Rue Marengo which dissected the Casbah east to west or the less broad Rue de la Lyre, farther east and thus closer to the harbor.

The latter “is aptly named,” one French colonial had rhapsodized to another before the Insurrection intensified, “for in its blind alleys are found the spiciest music and the most musical of spices—gray ginger stalks and metallic cantharides, conical pimento and orange marjoram, thyme, sage, white-flowering caraway, and peppers of such bright carmines, verdets, and blacks that you would swear the vendor’s cart was made of Nilean sillage.”

Fifteen paratroopers, in red berets and green combat suits, would jump down, unshoulder their MAS-36s, and insert bayonets. A year ago, the growls of the truck engines would set Casbah women scurrying, merchants shuttering their shops, and young men scrambling to rooftops to hide in water tanks or scamper from building to overhanging building to evade the *ratonnade*, the “rat-sweep.”

A decree from the FLN, itself in retreat, forthwith had forbidden that pusillanimity: “They witness us rodent-skittering and judge we’re on the run. Should they obtrude, disdain all recognition of them. The moment Algerians refuse to acknowledge a French presence, it will cease to be.”

Plausible logic for a psychologist—a safe distance from the chase—but what of the fortyish mother of seven, three of whom are with her, who is shoved onto the cobblestones, whose white half-face *niquaab* is ripped off, betraying her visage for the first time to an

étranger, and whose head is kept depressed by the rifle butt of a trooper, gnarling, “Lick the dust of the Casbah—I order!—from my boots”?

Omar was not there that December Wednesday when two trucks surprisingly veered from the five o’clock Boulevard de la Victoire convoy onto Rue de Thèbes and, the drivers having shifted downward, commenced the rumbling descent.

He was at the University of Algiers library, in his hands a judicial Wahhabi explication of a Hanbali passage against the “opening of the gates of *ijtihad*” (for the School of Law curriculum focused on Islamic and Algerian common law). This “defense of the fourth-century AH decision to ban—shut the door on—any further interpretation of Islam” interested him, though less than his vibrant prospects about the conclave at eight in nearby Blida.

A representative from the ALN, the FLN’s military wing, had wended his dangerous way from Oujda, Morocco, where the army staff, in exile, was shepherding the war, to a safe house in the *Wilaya IV* town, an hour south of the capital.

The agent’s mission was twofold: to confirm Col. Si M’hamed as the province’s new FLN leader, Si Azzedine having been captured the month before, and to discuss how to reorganize the Casbah’s network, wiped out in last year’s disastrous Battle of Algiers.

Si M’hamed was to let Omar deliver the recommendations on the latter.

It was not until the next day, around four, the cabal having lasted throughout the night and his afternoon classes having to be attended (for the French monitored the rolls), that he could make his way to his home. His father met him at the door of their shop, for none he encountered had dared mention to Omar that yesterday in a swoop paras, eschewing its quota of convenient males, had snatched up seven teenage girls.

“‘The scholar’s work has [no] end.’ All ni—” His father’s greeting was interrupted by a moan from his parents’ bedroom. The latch of the cypress door clicked, and his mother staggered onto the landing, eager to proclaim her guilt. “I have lost our Gift from God!”

Omar inceptively was nonplused not by the word *lost*, but by “how many years since she or any of us had so described Noura.” A black “forever-mourning” *niquaab* eclipsed her face and body, and as she persevered in her confession, it puffed out and was sucked inward.

(And never again would he behold his mother unveiled. To his question—the year was ’82—HIV “nothing extenuate[d]”: “Her hands which had just released your father’s after pleading ‘Forgive! Forgive!’ were clutching that lamentation cloth when she died. In her illness he had soothed her with the promise she would be buried in it. However, our informant, their neighbor Mme. Remidi, who washed and wrapped the body, dissuaded him from fulfilling that.”)

“She deemed it not out of the ordinary, the soldier’s cutting between us. For I had not hastened our pace and was staring ahead where boys, just come from Dhuhr, were gathering stones to hurl at the invaders. Our clenched palms severed, simultaneously I was grabbed by a second paratrooper and crammed against a sandstone wall. ‘Flee from the devil!’ I blared, without patriotic devotion, but the dark-green starched shirt suppressed my mew, which—so weakly flustered, I disremembered—the air we cry into would have wafted deaf to her ears.

“Minutes elapsed during which I could not see. Then a hollo erupted, ‘*Allahu Akbar!*’ The paratrooper let me slump, and I descried our Noura, who never understood sole touching

soil, far from me, treading submissively, hand in hand with the French soldier, strolling as if with your father or you or me.

“‘*Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!*’ The other six girls, who in their screeching and squirming must have perceived all eyes were on her, were spurred by the glorious salutes to God she had inspired. They ‘disdain[ed] all recognition’ of those grappling them, lined up behind her, and were marching down the alley toward the canvassed truck.

“Born an angel, what would she know of martyrdom, humanity’s plight? Yet that the throng would have her. ‘*Allahu Akbar!*’ staunchly trailing, they cheered, transforming God’s Gift into man’s curse.

“The children broke into a dervish dance, spinning like tops, their laughter ringing in their exaltation, ‘*Allahu Akbar!*’ To the trooper, before he scudded to join his column, I had implored, ‘She cannot hear or speak. She is God’s innocent. What good is she to you?’”

Though he would never reveal the answer to his mother, Omar found it two days later.

4

“You must register her disappearance at each police station,” the French lawyer, placing the bag with his mother’s dowry gold in his office safe, prescribed over his shoulder during Omar’s second visit. “On comprehending that she’s retarded, and naught can be wrung from her—a given she’ll be raped, but that ye know—they’ll probably drop her near a mosque.”

By that time and at that *poste*, fourth farthest from the Casbah, it should have been easier for him to discuss Noura, Omar conceded. “Deaf and mute” had not jittered out. Still the muscles in his throat constricted when he added, “insensitive to the world,” an admission which prompted the desk sergeant to glance up.

“Ah! Meek of mind, eh?” he observed. “These poor souls require looking after,” and he unleashed an accusing glare at Omar. This trifler was “more detestable” than the French, for he was an Algerian in their service.

“Doubtless that explains it,” he continued. “She’s wandered off. No ‘rat-sweep,’ to adopt the term you’re dodging, occurred in northwest Casbah three days ago, and if there had, why corral the females?”

A gruff snort mocked as absurd the insinuation. “No bayonet is needed on Rue de la Lyre, for which our *filles de joie* right now are resting up. Check back, not before next week.” The sergeant scanned the crowded room. “Many have wandered off. The meek of mind, it’s best to leave them in the care of the state.”

Outside, Omar, engrossed in what hope he could proffer to his mother, walked down Jean Macé, turned north at its intersection with Berthezène, and in five minutes was passing the Monument aux Morts. At its curb he was halted by the stream of traffic.

A beige Peugeot 403 suddenly braked, and a man in a gray *gandoura* climbed out and started to close its back door.

From behind came a shove, and Omar’s face and chest were propelled against its roof. The one in the robe whirled and, vising his left arm, bundled him through the gaping door, his own body following. A third in the *siège arrière* immediately trussed his head,

detruded it facedown, and plumped his buttocks on it. Omar's own bottom was being straddled by "the gray tumbler," and once the door was slammed, "the initial thruster" sent a crushing weight onto his legs.

"What's this? What's this?" the people at the corner shouted before the car sped away.

"I'm being smothered," Omar asseverated into the leather-grained vinyl. "My father, my mother, a daughter and a son! I will be true!" Tenacious fingers hooked the beltline of his jeans and with an upward yank wrenched the front copper button into the pit of his stomach. A downward jerk scraped the skin below his navel.

He evoked the many nights he and his friend Khaleel had rehearsed, exchanging sodden-hawser whacks to their legs and back, immersing each other's head in a water bucket, and touching the skin under fingernails with a naked electrical wire.

A needle pierced two centimeters into his tense buttocks. "By God's Surmounting Strength, I will not talk!" he affirmed. Then he was aware of nothing, not even his vow.

As he looked down on the unconscious Omar, bare-butted backseat cushion for three men, and heard his thoughts testify to a fidelity that had run the gauntlet of honed torture, a brooding smile of envy flitted across Remy's countenance.

Mouthing the twenty-eight-year-old demand, "And my sister?" had induced him to pivot away from the window with its view of a segment of early morning and gaze into the darkness that he had imposed on the hotel room, eight levels above the too-much-with-us-late-and-soon world of London.

M. Le Contact à Vous had responded by praising the security and "pleasant seat" of the cloister. "In the heart of a countryside not punctured by the FLN, high-walled as Jericho, to preserve the chastity of the nuns, and vegetated as richly as Eden, fig trees luscious with fruit and teeming vines of gravity-taxed grapes, eucalypti, apple trees, and maples, all food or shade magnets for birds, love of your sister. Over the fields abutting the convent—broad stretches of wheat with aberrant patches allotted for maize—an easterly sea breeze wafts till noon.

"The three times you called, scaling the date palm which skirts the northern wall, while at our bidding a sister led your sister into your line of vision, did you not retire sanguine that we had havened her in the safest and most congenial nunnery?"

"Our 'black-footed' colonists—*pieds-noirs*, rather style them *bêtes-noires!*—fueled by the news from Évian, lash out against the innocent they believe they are, though the attack, as expected, was blamed on the FLN. By the time eight Sikorsky helicopters arrived, the refectory, granaries, and calefactory had been reduced to embers.

"Of the thirty-eight there, twenty-one corpses have been identified. Your sister's definitely not among these. Four, including two nuns, were found quailing among the cornstalks below the southern gate, a hopeful sign that some were able to flee and hid. When more is known, you'll be told."

He rose. "We are not unfeeling, M. Montpellier. I'll come back in one hour to finish the priming, for today you must be whisked to Le Puy." At the door, he tendered an oblique

commiseration, “All of France appreciates your anguish since we too have lost—are abandoning, ‘brader’—our sister Algeria.”

5

At the point he regained consciousness, it was so lightless he deduced, “Praise God, I’m dead.” The solace, however, was brief-lived, for he realized the two quizzing angels, Munkar and Nakir, would any moment appear, and, their inquisition completed, beside his name the latter would record, “Of the family, careless with Noura, beloved in Heaven,” words for eternity.

The hypnopompic vision provoked a trembling of his naked body, and with this movement the burning at the arch of his back slackened. Although his legs had cramped, he pushed his crouched frame upward, and instantly the nape of his drooped neck struck a blistering top. “*Les tombeaux!*” he hailed, exultant at delaying the angelic rendezvous.

It was from no Algerian the FLN had learned about “The Tombs,” but through the howling of a French chief sergeant, who, even granting the torture had missed no part of his *anatomie*, was resolved to stay his death as long as possible.

In a hulking concrete building in the El Biar suburb was “a row of gray wall lockers,” he had shrieked. “Ventless and narrowed over the unlucky one! Fixed on cracking his ribs!” He had rationed his crumbs until his tormentors wearied.

“So God has bestowed on me a second chance to redeem myself and revive my family’s honor. Noura can be avenged,” Omar triply pledged.

He awoke coveting air and puling about immobility. Both appetitions mastered, he inclined his crown on the scalding front tinplate of the steel locker and napped again.

With a jangle, the door sprang open, and a burst of diamond-hard light enveloped him. He toppled over, scratching his cheek on the rebounding hasp, as his numb hands and knees automatically pitched forward to break the fall.

Prostrate on the cement, he gasped the delicious taste of unpinioned air.

A left buttock’s thump preceded the jussive to stand. “Resistance, which your physical nature attributes to mental obstinacy, the dreamy source of its suffering, will make your body the traitor of your mind,” the FLN manual had enjoined. “Bribe it: e.g., should they offer, take the cigarette.” Omar had gotten to his knees when a boot horsed him back down.

From a distance away a voice snapped, “*Fais vite!* ‘Hurry up!’”

Hands from each side clasped his armpits, plucking him up, yet only after ten faltering treads could his shambling feet step with theirs. He glimpsed at the bank of lockers, sending a benediction to each, “Brother, be strong, for God is Merciful. *Allahu Akbar!*”

Bustled to a small, windowless second-story room, he was instructed by his exiting warders to bathe and dress himself. On the sink to the left of the doorway was an unwrapped bar of soap and over an adjacent rack a fresh towel. Two paces from the rear whitewashed wall was a square oak utility table, under which barely fit two metal folding chairs.

A prison uniform and underclothes were draped over the back of the far one, in its seat a pair of slippers—“all my sizes.” On the table was a bottle of Saïda water and a plastic ashtray, but no cigarettes. On the right wall (to Omar’s left since he had taken the distant

chair) hung a crudely framed canvas of gray Arabian horses sparring, the room's solitary décor.

He was sipping from the bottle when a man in flannel trousers and an open-collar shirt entered, a yellow legal pad in his hand. Installing himself in the empty chair, he unsealed a pack of Gitanes Brunes and tossed it midway to Omar, having tapped one out for himself.

Over the subsequent fifteen minutes, he acquainted Omar with much about himself, never once pausing to seek confirmation.

“As the aide of Rabah Zerrari (‘Si Azzedine’)—captured last month, he ‘ratted’ on you—and of his replacement Ahmed Bougarra (‘Si M’hamed’), you are subject to summary execution,” he concluded, flipping the pages to their original position. He yawned conspicuously, caught up the *paquet* from which he had smoked three and Omar four, and lumbered out.

After another quarter-hour, heralded by blatant raps, a lieutenant and two corporals strode in. The officer was short, his size—“true of many a Napoleon”—making him appear younger than he probably was. Sparkling blue eyes, faint dimples, and a pencil-thin moustache distinguished his reddish-tanned face.

“So this is how our life flashes before us, a recitation in monotone delivered by a colonially garbed French clerk,” he chuckled in his approach to the table, addressing Omar in near-perfect Classical Arabic.

“Please stand. This subordinate”—he looked to his right—“will strap your hands. Do not resist.” Rising and putting his arms behind, Omar turned his back to the paratrooper. “Monsieur, a handkerchief will now incommode your mouth, and your ankles will be trussed. Again, no hindrance, I beg.”

While being shackled, Omar gnawed the cloth to render it less uncomfortable. “Ah, the kerchief. It's given us away, not across your eyes. Sorry, it'll prevent you from smoking.”

A sharp two-beat knock sounded from behind the painting. “Our cue,” the lieutenant casually apprised the detainee. Then “*Allons-y!*” he effervesced to the corporals.

Gaffing Omar's axillae, they hoisted him from the chair. His leg manacles compelled all three, like old women, to shuffle to the wall.

There the lieutenant unhooked the picture, disclosing a pineapple-sized aperture, level with his chin. Having angled his right eye to it, he said in French, “Our peephole works,” glancing from one corporal to the other. “Our wormhole. Let our guest discover whether or not I speak the truth.”

The officer having sidled away, four mauleys jammed Omar's face to the slit. The room he espied was dimly lit by a low-watt bulb hanging from a strand of wire. It principally illuminated an off-centered zinc-top table, though before Omar could discern anything else, his vision was obstructed by an olive-drab mass pressing in front of the slot. The smudge retreated, allowing him to identify it as the uniformed arms and torsos of four men, their legs and heads beyond his scope.

The lieutenant forced his cheek against Omar's, yet with the imperative, “Expose!” he drew back slightly, his left hand synchronically clamping Omar's nape, the total bracers now five. With military precision the soldiers stepped aside, two taking a pace leftward, two, to the right.

“No!” Omar, struggling to twist from the hole, remonstrated through the *mouchoir*, but what issued forth was an *awgh*, for as every Muslim he knew: It was a sin a man cannot forget or God ever forgive. A brother looking on his sister’s nakedness.

6

The lieutenant’s taper fingers glided through Omar’s dark hair and, gradually clenching, with a tug bared his shunted face. His own he deployed so near that his lips seemed bent on kissing the gagged mouth.

“My friend, would you kindly listen?” from above he whispered in Arabic, for Omar had been tolerated to slide two spans below the opening. “You can hear. Your poor blindfolded sister cannot, so imperfectly fabricated by her God. She’s not of this world.

“Nonetheless, dear Omar, we can bring her into it. Strip away her shield of innocence. Penetrate her saintliness and transport her, as you and I—protesting newborns—were flushed, into the sensate world. Is not this admirable? To correct what God botched. Is not there time for Heaven at some unspecified tomorrow? Today let her seize the joys of titillation.”

With a handkerchief withdrawn from a chest pocket, he dabbed the perspiration from Omar’s brow before patting the cloth, now damp, against his eyes.

“Please, my charming boy—and are not you as handsome as she is beautiful?—you will help me. Just bits and pieces: *ça* [‘here’] a code book, a munitions-smuggling route *là* [‘there’], a momentary aura of FLN malaise when *partout* [‘everywhere’]. We’ll go to egregious lengths—beyond the gates of hell!—to protect you. And your mute and deaf *bonne sœur* will be sheltered far from this ugly insurrection, among flowers and butterflies as speechless as she, and pied birds, whose songs her ears were forged to hear.”

A chalky wad of saliva had seeped into the left corner of the lieutenant’s mouth. Though Omar shrank back, in his immediate reprobative jiggling, his parietal lobes repeatedly banged against the wall, the violent fanning apparently unloosed the drool, for it plopped onto his right cheek. The officer, his frustration vented by intensifying his grip of Omar’s hair, shoved the captive’s face upward to the slit.

“*Sans* sight, *mon ami*,” for his shutting eyes had been observed, “as she is *sans* voice and audition. Thus I must be your globes.” With his free hand, he stroked Omar’s frons.

This is God’s Will, he submitted, accepting anew the plaguing touch of the lieutenant’s cheekbone, *and He, our sole Strength, will strengthen me*. Allahu Akbar!

“She’s flung across the table. Her mouth’s been gagged, as even yours, although why, Heaven—who tongue-tied her at birth—only knows. My demure friend, you may look, for a wool blanket’s been scrounged up to camouflage her. No, do not, I interdict! Merely her physiognomy is being veiled, the swaddling so tight that the unnecessary muzzle is revealed.

“Four comrades have rigorously moored her pairs of limbs. A sixth intrudes—our cast is large—bearing (what’s that?) an ordinary army field telephone, *la gégène*, a crank on one side and two aspic electric fangs protruding from the other. What are they up to? Unseal your eyes and educate me. No good, I’m sure.”

Omar heard a scroop like the grating of wave-driven pebbles through the sand. On Noura's first day at the beach, bolting from his grasp, she had rushed toward the sea, terrifying him; but his father, sweeping him up in his sinewy arms, tempered their pursuit. "She is wooed by any element not of man, yet will stay chaste to us."

"Still another bumbles in, our seventh, clutching a beer. The insouciant toper leans over her trunk, his head above her privates. A right forefinger is stuck down his throat—I myself approve of your Arab custom of employing the left hand for puking . . . and masturbating. He heaves, and a tsunami of spit-filled lager engulfs the stubble of her pubic zone.

"From his pocket, he retrieves a green kerchief, pats his lips. The soldier restraining her left leg flumps to the cement—myself, I never laugh without control!—and your sister, unfettered, kicks feebly until he snares it afresh."

The lieutenant nestled his mouth against Omar's right ear. "The lubricant will make it tickle," he whickered. "This scrawny recruit from Alsace grabs the insulated handles clipped to the dangling wires, the confiscation startling the sixth who, nevertheless, begins to crank. The inebriate pageants the two slender filaments for all to inspect.

"Akin to the tentative artist before a canvass, debating where his inceptive brush stroke will alight, he beseeches inspirational guidance. While most stare at her saucy pudenda, the cognoscente entrusted with your sister's left arm hops about. Gesticulating at her left nipple, for emphasis he darts out his disengaged hand and pinches it. The others, an accommodating bunch, shrug a waiver.

"The wired Alsatian retreats and, warily (for one so tipsy) positioning the handgrips close to his sinciput—do you detect a resemblance to Satan's bumps?—charges."

After a pause, the lieutenant cheered, "Bull's-eye! As deep as a 'well-done,' and even your sister salutes his triumph, for her frame a-quiver shoots up to 'Olé!' him."

During the next half-hour, Omar watched—"Ah, you rouse. I smell incest!" was crowed—for sharing her suffering would blind him to her nakedness. The jagers were dispatched to his sister's right mammilla, her fingers, and her toes. Her body flipped over, they invaded her anus and, filliped again, were raked across her genitals.

No running commentary, simply at points did the lieutenant gloss:

"She cannot speak, but if she could, would not she ask, 'Where is my brother?'"

"She cannot speak, but if she could, would not she snivel, 'I disown my substantial flesh. Why did my brother not teach me what pain is?'"

"She cannot speak, but if she could, would not she confide, 'I curse my brother. God only I love?'"

As the wires were withdrawn from the genitals and he watched her gyrate spasmodically for an additional thirty seconds, the lieutenant susurrated, "She cannot speak, but if she could, would not she avouch, 'I will inveigle God who loves me to curse this man called Omar?'"

"Only seven have entered her, granted several, several times. Yet she is but bruised."

Except for those moments when the lieutenant and his two corporals, against his will, yanked him from the hole Omar had not relinquished sight of the procession:

The seven troopers had stripped. Their first audible line was delivered by the one atop Noura's shoulders, his huge buttocks resting on her bosom and his hairy flanks encircling her face: "My lieutenant, it is difficult—as arduous as a swim in Algeria's Savornin's Sea—if not impossible, for her to suck me with the kerchief in her mouth."

A white cloth had been placed under his sister's fundament. Another soldier advanced. After rubbing saliva around his glans penis, he thrust inside her. The member he extricated was specked with blood. A trickle followed, stagnating on the lips of his sister's vulva.

"We'll preserve this Rorschach fabric, for we French are respecters of all Arab customs, and on occasion parade it about your neighborhood, a proud flag of your sister's chastity. She is indeed a virgin," the lieutenant trumpeted into his ear, "or was!"

Some gurgles exuded from beyond the haunches of the one squashing Noura. "She's coming into the world. Do you wish this? She's losing contact with God: going from God, and God from her. Into this world she comes, as each of us, an orphan. What's that she enounces? You have lived with her, night and day, for fifteen years. Can you, my precious, better interpret that whoop than I? Is she confiding, 'I like being . . . bruised'?"

"I'm next!" The three vociferators lurched forward, jostling playfully.

Omar was wrenched downward into a crouch. For the ensuing quarter-hour, the lieutenant assumed the role of "your faithful voyeur," halting his reportage only to funnel obiter dicta to the soldiers or to let Omar hear theirs. When one of the rapists squealed in agony, the lieutenant guffawed, "That one got his due. Catching him off-guard while he was unsheathing, Yves splashed a glass of wine on his cock. He reels for real! Poor Jean-Paul."

With a tone of misprision, he squawked, "François, you comport yourself so, and you a first-class private!" A whiny plea parried, "But, my lieutenant, beloved as an older brother, I didn't fancy surrendering my place in line, and I've swilled a tun of manly beer."

In Arabic was hobnobbed, "He is a roué. From Paris, still we also have our peasants in Paris. He egressed pissing, splattering the buttocks of Claude, perched on your sister's gullet, and Michel, our saintly Michel, who cleaves to her right leg."

The lieutenant admonished through the opening, "Every pot is not meant for pissing. Remember that, enuretic." Towering above, he addressed Omar. "As should I: 'No kitchen duty for François!'"

Twisting back, he shouted, "There are sores on your cock and balls, Bernard, shameful sores." Condemning mutters emanated from the room.

"They've opted to mount her from the rear." Again he had switched to Arabic. "I do not blame them. I wouldn't crawl into any bed where Bernard's slept. He's taking injections. I insisted. My God! How can they succeed when every night he lurks about our vicinal mosque to intercept that clowder of *femmes fatales* promenading from their prayers?"

"I've cautioned him, 'Such proximity to a holy site is no warranty of cleanliness,' unfortunately not always abutting godliness. Yet he's so religious he won't listen. 'Get them after they've been with God!' he jubilates."

A raspy groan poured forth. "Oh my, your sister must shit thin turds! Be that as it may, Marc's squeezed in." With a jerk, Omar was prodded to the aperture. The lieutenant *encore*

une fois maneuvered his cheek athwart his right. “*You* enlighten me. Is she a double virgin? Oozes blood from her ass?”

The one who had been draped across his sister’s neck and head now straddled her scapulae. Omar’s face, never out of touch with the lieutenant’s, was tugged to the left, the officer’s remaining at the slot.

“This you must not see. Claude’s been gifted by God. His cock’s so nigra-long he rodomontades that he can fuck and be sucked at the same time. A pitiable lot, his, poor devil: A mere peek at the monster prompts a girl to flight. Will your sister flinch at it? Will she flee . . . from the devil?”

Haled back to the orifice, he heard an artificially husky bellow: “Turn her over. I have no fear of Bernard’s mouse-droppings.” The lieutenant cried out, rubbing his cheek against Omar’s, “Tattle, stubborn mime! What is he scooping from her ass? Is he smearing its blood on his Gift from God? A strange lubricant, if so.”

Simultaneous kicks at the ligaments of his knees crumpled him, with the lieutenant correspondingly sinking. “I will be dumb,” he murmured into Omar’s ear. “Two taps on the wall imports that she survives. Has she more grit than, say, a Moroccan whore?”

For the next five minutes, the fingers of the lieutenant’s left hand twirled strands of Omar’s hair while his right axilla, unstained with perspiration, cupped his head. One knuckle-rap came and half a minute later a second.

Omar was upheaved. Shyly galumphing to the peephole, the soldier Claude stuck his broad square-shaped face in close. He had dabbed some beer suds under his eyelids and in the sooty holes of his nostrils. “I love her dearly,” he cooed into the slot. “She is the Gift that God has sent for me, my Promised One. Kind sir, let me marry your sister. Should you require me to convert to ‘Mussulmandom,’ have them cart in the circumcising scythe.”

Omar was pushed aside. “It’s the father, not the father’s son, who must entertain your proposal,” the lieutenant scolded into the opening. His manifested irritation branching out, he rebuked the two corporals, “For God’s sake, wet his lips!”

At the table, however, it was the lieutenant himself who patted a moist hand towel on the vermilion border above and below the *mouchoir*. In Arabic he repeated, “She is but bruised, a black mark as modest as Satan’s. I’ll let you streak in and beat these Cronusians who abuse her even as we palaver. She will marvel as you chase them from the room.

“I’ll provide you with rose water to wash away the slobber of Claude’s ‘reechy kisses’ and a white robe of spun Ethiopian cotton in which to swaddle her. But . . . bruised. Never at another will she look. She’ll dedicate the rest of her life to gawking at you, much like the first, spent ‘novitiated’ to Allah. Who does not aspire to become a god to the one he loves?”

The lieutenant whispered the words, his breath stirring imperceptibly the edges of the gag. “Simply agree to our ‘merry bond,’ our *nathr-ette*. I’ll command these men who trammel your pate to release, and you will bob your concurrence. She is but bruised.”

Omar’s head shot forward. His teeth, having failed in their lunging snap at the nasal tip—for the lieutenant, his instincts more finely tuned, had instantaneously recoiled—champed at the handkerchief, imbuing it with the saliva brought to a fruition by the dampening.

“Ah me, a million *hélases*,”

8

you heard him sigh, as you were resecured by the corporals. The chair overturned, your occipital struck the cement floor. They could have caught you, yet those who initiate the tipping seldom interrupt the tumble. Dragged to and jammed against the slit, you catalogued the differences: She was no longer being held down. The chartreuse blanket, which earlier veiled only her face, had been extended to her bust. From sole to crown she was trembling.

Yes.

With his cheek pulled away from yours, the lieutenant waxed ontological: “She has lost the will to kick. She’s settled into this world now and, resigned to Heavenly perdition, has ripened into no more than you or I—a ‘Poor Fool’ shiverer. Though she cannot speak, you’ll soon witness her begging to live. Though she cannot speak, she would gain accommodation with this world: She will deny God.”

Yes.

A soldier tottered into your periphery, swigging from a bottle of cheap Algerian wine, its meanness distinguishable by its thin-walled glass. Hiccupping contentedly, he—it was the one designated Marc—flaunted it before the hole so you could read what had been crudely scribbled in red ink across its label, “There is no God save Allah, and Mohammed is His Prophet,” with the Arabic misspelled in numerous places.

Must I keep saying “yes”?

Yes.

Yes.

The bottle slid from your view, disclosing five who had reclamped your sister’s head and limbs. Marc, stereotyping “the drunk,” faltered toward her while two stretched her legs farther apart. Claude—the other one you knew by name—bending down, with two thumbs prized open her vulva, exposing a reddened clitoris. You heard the objurgation to the elevated, quarter-filled bottle, “No more!” Disdainfully glowering at the sloshing portion undrained, Marc began to rub its mouth against the clitoris . . . then plunged it into your sister’s vagina.

. . . Yes.

To the tittering of his companions, he darted it in and out. Its neck vanished, but at its sloping shoulders, a grind and bump were vital to wedge the wider body inside. Your sister’s abdominal muscles started to heave, and the bosoms beneath the coverlet arched.

Yes.

You were iterating to yourself when the lieutenant murmured the same into your right ear: “There is no God save Allah, and Mohammed is His Prophet.”

Yes.

Anchoring his legs, this Marc exerted an intensifying hoard of power against the punt of the bottle, ramming the base deeper. As Claude’s thumbs eased away from the labia majora, his hands were shaking. He snapped, “She took mine. This sliver will earn a merry twit from her.” Yet he must have doubted victory in this challenge, for after thirty seconds of suspenseful disbelief he raised a clenched fist and defiantly slammed it against the flesh above your sister’s pubes. . . . I have paused long enough.

Yes.

“She denies God!” the lieutenant hosannaed. “I translate the sound that comes from beneath the blanket!” And you assented, notwithstanding your metaphor intoned, “The song of a redbird which cannot sing.”

Yes.

Your eyes were focused on the shard of glass that pierced the skin and on the intestinal cruor mustering about it. But when Marc, the bottle-shover, hauled at it, you glimpsed at him. His wresting auspicious, he exhibited a serrated, neckless base, its musky green color dulled by the masking blood.

Yes.

“What’s going on over there?” the lieutenant demanded, and without waiting for an answer thrust you aside. “What have you done?” he blared into the room. “I never ordered this! Have you seen what they have done?” Your face was forced to the aperture. In front of it, displaying his right hand, Claude whimpered, “I have nicked my pinkie, *mon lieutenant*.” He retreated, eying sorrowfully his wound. Your sister’s body had ceased to move. A glance revealed that an expanding, murky red splotch besmeared the pale green cloth about her mouth. *Is it her breath or blood which causes it to quiver?* you pondered.

Yes.

And still you question, even after what you discerned later.

Yes.

“I send Bastille jailers to perform a soldier’s work,” the lieutenant harrumphed, having nudged you aside. “Fetch a doctor! She’s no good to us dead!” Screwing his head round, he screamed into your ear, “*Pardon! Pardon!* How sapient was your Prophet in forbidding the consumption of alcoholic beverage . . . orally or vaginally!” *Noura is dead or dying, thank God!* you acceded. *There is no God*, and you slumbered here before continuing.

Yes.

Save Allah, and Mohammed is His Prophet. “Ah, the medico approaches. Oh please, renowned physician, bring her back from the dead! In resurrecting her, me you exculpate.” Wrapping you in a headlock, the lieutenant, discombobulated, yanked you to the peephole. “Give me hope! Give me hope!” he implored.

Yes.

A soldier—saintly Michel?—now clumsily donned in a white frock and surgeon’s cap, stumbled in, a stethoscope dangling from his ears. After scrutinizing the breasts that protruded through the wool, he flumped the hollow-cupped bell atop the vulva. His confederates, their visages grimaced, clustered around. With a shake of his head, he withdrew the instrument, leaving a ragged circle in the blood. Each gaping trooper collapsed into another’s arms and commenced to weep. You heard clamorous wailing.

Yes.

As the lieutenant released his enervated clasp, he soughed toward your slumping form, “Ah me, a million *hélasses* to support a thousand *pardons*. Were I a master of calculus—yet little of its relationships do I know—I could not enumerate my sorrow. I am defeated. Not by you. Not by your sister. Not by your God, but by a warrior who, ‘perplex’d in the extreme’ that your sister could harbor a galleon grander than his, or mayhap by Nature’s general

infidelity in sanctioning a common ‘mumbler,’ a glassblower, to fashion a contrivance more magnificent, struck out in fury. Not accountable, I will be so held.”

Yes.

For a moment the lieutenant coyly shuffled the steel toe-taps of his patent-leather oxfords. “I don’t suppose you’d consider penning a wee note—nothing except the truth required, since of all the standers-by you had the truest vantage—absolving me of all responsibility.” Breathlessly, he tarried, but you, a *pro forma* listener, were determining what you must effect before he escaped the room.

Yes!

“No, I didn’t think so. The unselfish gesture is out of mode today. I’m thoroughly convinced I almost had you and the five or six sessions of filibustering torture we could mete out wouldn’t crack you now.” Incredulously, he queried the men, “Mark you not that he’s dead on his feet?” You were borne from the wall to the chair. The lieutenant took the opposite one and slouched glumly while water was doused on your face. Five minutes crept by, for you were scheming how to lure his skull within striking distance of yours, never once disputing that this time the blow would reach and kill.

Yes.

“I would have forfeited my two gold stripes to have heard your voice. I’m sure it has a deeply varied resonance, shifting as your ‘unlugged’ balls jiggle. None of Ahmed ‘Yapping Poodle’ Ben Bella’s falsetto. How dashingly handsome some of you Muslims are!” his Classical Arabic confided. The trace of a smile, neither hidden by the handkerchief nor lost on the lieutenant, sneaked into the corners of your lips.

Yes.

“’Tis said a man’s voice is registered in his eyes. Despite your silence, since you more faithfully clung to it than did your dear mute sister, who after all did bubble a repudiation of God toward the end, I’ve read yours and always—it’s a ‘foregone’ I’ll be cashiered to France, to swivel in a desk chair and linger over a file cabinet—I will remember it. Therein, some consolation for me, my bosom friend.” He growled to his subalterns, “*Sortez!* ‘Get out!’”

Yes.

But you sniggered, “Yes. Yes,” at the time.

Yes. Yes.

Slipping behind you, he began to massage your shoulders and with a sudden dip kissed your head at its crown. “Art thou able to erect thyself?” he tutoyered. “I will assist. Lean on me, and even though ’tis contra regulations, I’ll guide thee to the meuse, through it to view her *corpus delectabilis* ere we part.” He matched your short strides, the synchronicity unnoted, for you had skipped ahead to the dénouement: *I’ll gaze at Noura, and the ecstasy will embolden my neck which stormlike will lash my brow onto his.*

Yes.

The lieutenant, wincing, drew back from the opening. “She looks at peace. *Mon bon ami*, if you desire to ogle, you may.” You saw her as before, her legs pendent over the table. Below on the floor droplets rippled a bedimming red puddle. Abruptly, the soldier who had been outfitted as a doctor, but now was arrayed in freshly starched military greenery, stepped

forward and—quite a laggard you were in shrinking from the loop, uh, peephole!—flung back the blanket. In France, after you discovered what happened to Noura, you wished you'd been quicker.

No. Yes.

A darkling belgard squinted your eyes. *The face is not hers!* You pounded your forehead against the whitewash above the judaslike slot and protested, “No! No! No!” Nonetheless, the sound, gag-restrained, that gnawed its way out and was snatched up by the lieutenant, skilled at translating, was *awgh, awgh, awgh*, an imperfect imitation, still one you approve.

Yes.

Returning (your doubt of whether from a dream or to a dream fleetly resolved), you beheld a blindfolded Noura, with troopers in full military regalia on each side of her, standing a distance from the “wormhole,” naked in her innocence. A voice piped, “Among butterflies and birds.” To one who dared not avert his eyes for fear of losing her again, the soft words persisted, “She is whole with God. She is not ‘bruised . . . for our iniquities.’ The Gift of God is intact. Every play has its rehearsal. Every star, her understudy. Will not you help me, darling Omar? Will you, *mon cher*, help me?”

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

A popliteal whack buckled your knees and scraped your lubricated cheek along the distempered surface. Your mind carried the untarnished vision—no, the reality—of your sister. *Yes*, you wept, *yes, yes, yes*, but it came out *bâillon*-choked *awgh, awgh, awgh, awgh*. A good approximation?

All *aywa*'s, *oui*'s, and *yeses* lead to *awgh*.

The lieutenant, pinching at the seams of his trousers, crouched down. Having eased you around, he placed his left arm behind your neck and with his right untied the *mouchoir*. Your mouth was freed, and as he brushed his hair against yours, you exulted, “Yes yes yes yes yes,” needful of no translation or transliteration.

Yes.

Amazed you were to learn you'd been at *Les tombeaux* for barely three hours, “an absence too scanty for the FLN to suspect anything,” you were assured by the man who was to be your case officer, “handler.” It was he who uplifted you from the heft of the wall and steered you to the table. You recollect that the empurpled shadow of the lieutenant as he rose was overwhelmed by that of this intruder kneeling beside you. The shadow of the latter became the first. Eventually you would conclude that, as you, the lieutenant disappeared into his own.

Yes.

That evening (for you made your afternoon university classes) while you walked home in the fine incessant drizzle, prepared to report to your father and mother the morning rounds you'd spent searching for Noura, the dusk, whose sundry colors blur and blend and bruise—yes, that was the word you evoked—shape and size and substance, was settling over Algiers. The letterings of the shop signs were obscured by the twilight and mist, albeit “most positively” they were in French.

“Noura was safe,” you told yourself, and yourself told, your only cerebation until you turned from Boulevard de la Victoire onto Rue de Thèbes, ushering you into the Casbah and

within five alleyways of your neighborhood; and that was the moment another sprang up and that was when, closing in on home, you gave a thought, your other thought, an alms-for-the-beggar thought, to the suffering of that poor girl who had been Noura's "understudy."

Yes.

Now we will sleep.

Notes and Commentary: Chapter 3: “The Calculus of Relations”

April 7, 1989 (Friday)

- p. 35: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TITLE OF CHAPTER 3: The title was taken from a Bertrand Russell’s *The Principles of Mathematics* (1903), subsection of chap. 2, pp. 23-26, where relationships are used to clarify binary mathematical principles. The section begins, “The calculus of relations is a more modern subject than the calculus of classes” (23). Russell is by and large critical of the concept, concluding that “the usual formal apparatus of the calculus of relations cannot be employed, because it presupposes propositional functions” (509). However, he does analyze how some earlier mathematicians worked with it. In this chapter of my novel, the term generally refers to the familial relationship between Omar (Remy) and his sister, father, and mother. Specifically, on p. 48, it is casually used by a French lieutenant, who states, “Were I a master of calculus—yet little of its relationships do I know—I could not enumerate my sorrow.” His sorrow, as he points out, is occasioned not by the horrible event that has just occurred, but because he himself has been “defeated” (48). Russell does use familial relationships in one example: “The square of the relation of parent and child is the relation of grandparent and grandchild” (26).
- pp. 35-51: CHRONOLOGY OF CHAPTER 2: In Remy’s London hotel room from 1:30 – 5:10. Remy tries to sleep, but cannot. At five he gets out of bed and from his eight-floor room stares at early-morning London. He begins to think about four important times when he was Omar Naaman, returning to the present, his suite, briefly at four points (36, 37, 40, and 51).
- (1) June 25, 1961 (section 1 and the last part of section 4), set in a military camp in France: Omar learns that he will be assimilated into French society under the new name Remy Montpellier, a librarian. He also finds out what has happened to his family in the two months’ interval since he was flown out of Algiers.
 - (2) An unspecified date in 1944 and another in 1947 (section 2), which deal with his love for his baby sister Noura, who was born deaf and consequently will be mute.
 - (3) Dec. 5, 1958 (sections 3 and 4), when something horribly happens to Noura.
 - (4) Dec. 8, 1958 (sections 5 through 8), when Omar learns how he is responsible for what had happened to Noura and he must make an agonizing decision.
- With his reminiscences finished by around 5:10 a.m., Remy goes back to bed, but the first word of chap. 4 will indicate that he did not sleep.

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AT THE END OF THE NOTES TO THIS CHAPTER, N3:41-44, THERE IS A SHORT ESSAY ENTITLED, “PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION, AND THE MURDER MYSTERY GENRE.”

pp. 35-36: SECTION 1

p. 35: “London hotel room”: Having left Trimalchio’s at 1 a.m., Remy is back in his London hotel room at around 1:30, April 7, 1989. In bed, still struggling with the new course his life must take, he had been unable to sleep (35).

Finally at 5 a.m., called “early morning” (40), he got up, walked to the window of his eight-story hotel room, looked down on waking London, and recalled four important incidents from his past as Omar Naaman.

p. 35: “M. Remy Montpellier”: I attached the symbolism to the names which I felt the French intelligence service (SDECE, the predecessor of DGSE) would. On p. 36, Remy’s case officer will mention that the place where they decided to locate him is symbolic.

A similar symbolism is contained in the name SDECE selected for him.

Remy is not a popular name in French, and it is made even more peculiar by being spelled without the usual acute accent over the *e*. (The nineteenth-century poet Rémy de Gourmont so spelled his first name.)

It is derived from the French word meaning “oarsman,” and I imagined SDECE was fixating on the position of an oarsman: He is typically aiming for an unseen point ahead of him (the future), yet can perceive only what is behind him (the past).

As for Montpellier, while being a French family name, it is also a city in southern France to which many European Algerians and some *harkis* who supported the French would flee after Algeria’s independence in 1962.

But at the time of this episode, June 25, 1961, Montpellier was receiving merely a trickle of refugees.

Also Remy’s team may have been influenced (as I was) by its first syllable, *Mont*, “mountain” in French, an appropriate part of a name for someone being relocated to the mountainous Auvergne region.

The second part *-pelliers* is formed from the French word *pelé*, meaning “bare” when speaking of a hill or other landscape which has little or no vegetation.

As such, the SDECE would have selected the name to provide Remy with a daily reminder of his treasonous past and the spiritual desolation or barrenness of any traitor’s soul. For instance, the subsequent banter of his *contact* will produce a “paralyzed emptiness” (36) on Remy’s face.

p. 35: “ten weeks spent in the indoctrination and assimilation program”: Remy was flown from Algiers on April 13, 1961. A span of ten weeks would mean that it is June 25, although this date is never specified in the novel.

I selected it because its two numbers total seven.

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- p. 35: *L'organisation d'une bibliothèque municipale: The Organization of a Municipal Library*. At the assimilation camp Remy is being trained to be a librarian.
- p. 35: Le Contact à Vous: Your Contact. Remy will retain this first case officer from June 25, 1961, to an unspecified date in 1966, when he gets his second contact.
- p. 35: “‘conceivably’ illegitimate”: A hopeless pun.
Remy and the next persona the French assign him, Christian Lazar, are both orphans, with Lazar later saying that he “was orphaned at four” (6.99).
- p. 35: Reims: A city in northeast France.
- p. 35: *calepin*: French for “notebook.”
- p. 35: 1940: SDECE retained Omar’s birth year for Remy.
- p. 35: “counting your rosary beads”: Omar’s Islam is discarded for Catholicism.
- p. 35: “on the average an excellent student”: The ambiguous phrasing indicates how his first contact and even SDECE as a whole viewed Remy.
- p. 35: “he would soon learn who he was”: Ironically, the quest of Remy throughout the novel, as mentioned in the 2.38 note.
- p. 35: *écriture*: handwriting.
- p. 35: Lille: A city in northern France.
- pp. 35-36: “Le Puy-en-Velay . . . a charming red-roofed town . . . air”: This tourist-guidebook description of Le Puy, I appropriate from one.

- p. 36: “the stony heart of France”: My notes from twenty-three years ago indicate that I took this phrase from a book or magazine article on the Auvergne region, but the source is not identified.
On the internet (2013) I did find the Auvergne described as the “the rocky heart of France.”
- p. 36: “a man can look to his future, yet . . . not totally forget his past”: The symbolic importance of the setting is discussed in the 3.35 note on Remy’s name, N3:2.
The French do not wish Remy to forget how their obligation to him is bound up with his obligation to them.
They want him to become a loyal Frenchman, yet never forget that he was a loyal traitor for France in the past.
- p.36: “*So half was disposed of*. ‘What about my family?’”: Accepting that his future is settled, Remy inquires about his past, his Algerian family. However, his contact’s playful response tries to focus Remy on his French identity.
- p. 36: *sous-lieutenant*: second lieutenant.
- p. 36: “the money . . . reserved for [his] haj”: Both parents will be shown giving up special money held in reserve in order to regain an abducted child. As usual in the novel, these are not presented in chronological order.
On this page, April 14, 1961, the day after Omar was seized, his father surrenders to a French lawyer the money he had saved for his haj.
On p. 39, it will be revealed that Omar’s mother offered her dowry, again to a French lawyer, the second day after Noura was kidnapped on December 5, 1958.
- p. 36: “badge of honor” and “rag of shame”: The first phrase indicates that Omar’s father felt that under French torture his son would be or would have been “true to God and Algeria” (2.26).
The second brands France as shameful for kidnapping a deaf-mute girl.
- p. 36: “And my sister?”: Remy will receive a partial answer to this question on pp. 40-41.
- pp. 36-37 SECTION 2: Time span: Remy thinks about two periods of Noura’s early life: Shortly after her birth in January 1944 (not specified in the novel) and a second undesignated day in 1947 when his father talked with him about Noura.
- p. 36: “Doubly blessed”: Aziza Naaman (Omar’s mother’s name was given on 2.27) accepts the Islamic position that a physically or mentally disabled child is not a sign of divine punishment, but a source of God’s blessings, which will be showered on those who take proper care of those born impaired.
Noura is twice blessed, her mother avers, since she can neither speak nor hear any

evil concocted by human beings.

- p. 36: “*speaking and listening*”: In the London hotel room, Remy interposes with these words which began the chapter (35), but reverses their order.
- p. 36: “*Allahu Akbar!*”: “God is great!” in Arabic.
- p. 36: patulous: Rarely used, it means “gaping.” From the online 1913 ed. of *Webster’s*, which cites the quotation by Sir J. Hill: “The eyes are large and patulous.”
- p. 36: “We tend her body. Already to Heaven she is in midflight”: These positions are extreme and most Muslims would hold them as anti-Islamic. However, throughout the novel Omar, his father, and his mother by and large view Noura as an ethereal being.
- p. 36: *berceuse*: Arabic for “lullaby,” as the sentence conveys.

- p. 37: “joy o’ my daughter”: The “joy o’ . . .” expression is used six other times in the novel: previously on 2.29 (see its note); 6.90-91 (three times); and 7.117. Its source is *Antony and Cleopatra* 5.2.259 and 279, where the Clown speaks about “joy o’ the worm.”
- p. 37: “the withering acacia”: On 8.120, as Omar and his father do here, Remy will sit with another person under an acacia tree.
- p. 37: “gift”: This is the first time Noura will be described as a “gift” from God, as “His Beneficence.”
The word “gift” was used on 1.7 to describe the Patek Philippe given to Ballard. In 2.25, Remy’s annual stipend was first called a *cadeau* (“gift”).
The word occurs throughout the novel since Remy will be bearing a gift at its climax (17.290), and near its end (21.365) a present will be a principal signal of the desire to connect or reconnect.
It will be capitalized by four characters in the novel, principally in chap. 3, in order to express how their tone of voice conveyed their sincere or facetious connection of the word with God: 3.38, 39, 46, and 50 and 17.290
- p. 37: *nathr*: As the text defines the Arabic word, a *nathr* is “a pledge to God, a bond” sealed with Him to do something. It is a statement of intention, but the intention should emphasize the present commitment, not the future obligation. It does not need to be made verbally; *the nathr* can be made in one’s mind or heart.
In Omar’s case, his *nathr* is “Before God I am undertaking the joyful task of protecting my sister for as long as she lives.” An invalid *nathr* would be “Before God, it is my intention to undertake the joyful . . .” or “Before God, I will undertake the joyful . . .”
Omar is seven years old, again the number is symbolically used, when he makes the *nathr* concerning Noura.
- p. 37: “redbird”: The image will be clarified on p. 40 and will reappear on p. 48.
- pp. 37-39: SECTION 3: Time span: Although the FLN presence in the Casbah had been broken by November 1957, the French continued to make intimidating raids into the old district during which they randomly arrested young men. This and section 4 will deal with a raid on Dec. 5, 1958, just after Dhuhur (noon prayers), its purpose strangely to seize seven teenage girls.
- p. 37: “‘substantial pageant,’ a daily parade”: Based on *Tempest* 4.1.155: “And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,” with its negative prefix dropped.
The Shakespearean allusion will occur three other times in the novel: 7.103, 20.337, and 21.367, all of which use “insubstantial pageant.”
The military exercise was a “parade” since, as noted, the FLN network in the

Casbah had been crushed.

- p. 37: “Carnot . . . Rue de la Lyre: The colonial names of the major streets leading to the Casbah and two streets inside the Casbah with their present-day names in parentheses: Blvd. Carnot (Blvd. Zirout Youcef); Blvd. Bugeaud (Blvd. Ben Boulaïd Mustapha); Blvd. Gambetta (Blvd. Ourida Meddad); Blvd. de la Victoire (same); Rue Verdun (Blvd. Abderazak Hadad); Rue Bab Azoun (same); Bab el Oued (same); Rue Marengo (Rue Arbadji Abderahmane); and Rue de la Lyre (Rue Ahmed Bouzrina).
- p. 37: “lines of fire”: The singular of this expression, “the course of a bullet or shell that has been, or is to be, fired,” will be used three other times (11.183, 18.302; and 21.352), with the last of which providing the most important late-chapter contrast with the one first used here in chap. 3.
- p. 37: “the spiciest music and the most musical spices”: Both images pun on the name of the street, Rue de la Lyre. On p. 39, a character will reveal another reason why the street was so spicy and musical.
- p. 37: “metallic cantharides”: Technically not a spice, but a powdered ingredient made from dried Spanish flies. It is mixed with true spices to form a blend which is rubbed on meat and vegetables or stirred in soup.
Cantharides powder is one of the world’s oldest alleged aphrodisiacs.
- p. 37: verdet: “verdigris green; a moderate yellowish green” (*Webster’s Third*).
- p. 37: “the vendor’s cart was made of Nilean sullage.” “Nilean” is a neologism meaning “of or relating to the River Nile.”
The noun “sullage” is the “silt or sediment deposited by running water.”
A 1991 note which I took from a commentary on the sixth circle of Dante’s *Purgatorio* states that according to an ancient belief all creatures sprang from the black earth of the Nile delta.
The note, whose source I neglected to record, provides the basis for “Nilean sullage,” the image designed to suggest the variety of spices, of music, and by extension of life found in the Casbah’s Rue de la Lyre.
The only reference to the Nile in *Purgatorio* occurs in the sixth circle, Canto 24, line 64, where Dante comments on the wintering birds about the Nile, not on the Nile delta being the source of life. My research on the Nile, certainly not exhaustive, turned up nothing about this supposedly ancient belief.
- p. 37: paratroopers: The French counter-insurgency unit which in 1955 was stationed in Algiers to suppress the rebellion.
For more details about the “paras,” see the 2.26 note.
- p. 37: MAS-36: A carbine-style rifle which had a seventeen-inch spike bayonet and a telescopic sight. It and the MAS-49 rifle were the principal combat weapons used by the French during the Algerian War.

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- p. 37: “A year ago”: December 1957, by which time the French had virtually destroyed the FLN’s presence in the Casbah, leaving the residents helpless.
- p. 37: “to hide in water tanks”: Rooftop water tanks are used to catch rain water.
- p. 37: “from building to overhanging building”: The narrow passageways of the Casbah and its close-packed three-story houses, with their flat roofs bordered by privacy walls and their cantilevered balconies, make it appear that the structures hang over and span the streets.
The acclaimed 1966 film *The Battle of Algiers* shows 1957 FLN leaders using a short plank to go from one house to another.
On 20.343, this non-terrestrial travel will be more fully presented.
- p. 37: *ratonnade*: The term the French soldiers applied to the rounding up of suspects in the Casbah.
Horne in *Savage War* (54) defines it as a “rat-hunt” and limits it only to the random killing of Arabs by mobs of French civilians. It is sometimes spelled as *ratonade*.
- p. 37: “the FLN, itself in retreat”: The FLN forces not killed or captured in the 1957 Battle of Algiers sneaked out of the Casbah, confining itself to messages of advice and encouragement.
On 6.88-90, this FLN guerrilla offensive against the French, which lasted from Jan. 28 to Oct. 8. 1957, will be described.
- p. 37: “white half-face *niquaab*”: The traditional veil worn by Algerian women. A different type of veil was described on 2.26 and in its note.

- p. 38: *étranger*: foreigner; non-Muslim.
The French soldiers committed so many unspeakable acts in order to humiliate the Algerian Arabs that I doubt not this occurred, although I confess I found no record of it.
Without that documentation, it is my concoction.
- p. 38: Rue de Thèbes: The colonial name for the street now called Rue Père et fils Boudries. It is in the northwest part of the Casbah.
On 2.27, Omar said that his family lived in “northwest Casbah.”
During the revolution, Rue de Thèbes was the site of a huge explosion set off under the cover of darkness by French paras on Aug. 10, 1957. Four buildings were destroyed and seventy were killed, including many children.
This atrocity prompted the FLN to organize its own bombing campaign against the European sectors of Algiers.
- p. 38: Wahhabi: A Sunni Muslim sect which adheres closely to the Qur’an and the Sunnah (words and actions of the Prophet Mohammed).
Omar entered the university as a law student (2.21), so this reading was part of his curriculum.
- p. 38: Hanbali: Of the four schools of jurisprudence in Sunni Islam, Hanbali is the most conservative and the strictest.
- p. 38: “opening the gates of *ijtihad*”: The Arabic word *ijtihad* means the personal interpretation of the Qur’an and the Sunnah, instead of relying upon the accepted interpretation of Islamic scholars (“ulema,” plural of the Arabic *alim*).
Such independent interpretation, as the next sentence of the text explains, was forbidden by Hanbalists in the fourth century (AH, comparable to the tenth century, CE); that is, the gates were closed on *ijtihad* or independent thinking.
- p. 38: AH: In the year of the Hegira or the year the Prophet Mohammed fled from Mecca to Medina, another city in Arabia, in 622 CE. The Muslim Era dates from this flight.
- p. 38: “nearby Blida”: A city about forty-five km. (twenty-seven miles) south of Algiers. Although not mentioned in the text of chap. 2, Blida appears in the 2.21 and 2.24 notes. It is first mentioned in the text here, p. 38.
It is the site of Remy’s initiation ritual into the FLN (2.24).
In 1958, as the text indicates, it took an “hour” for Omar to travel to Blida.
- p. 38: “the ALN, the FLN’s military wing . . . Oujda, Morocco”: The military wing of the FLN was the *Armée de Libération nationale* (ALN). Its headquarters was located outside Algeria, principally in Oujda, Morocco, since it was too dangerous for ALN military leaders to be stationed in Algeria.
France could not bomb Moroccan territory. Oujda is a large city in eastern Morocco, about 15 km. west of its border with Algeria.

The ALN units there engaged in no military action. Instead, their principal duties were to infiltrate forces and provide weapons and supplies to those basically guerilla ALN units in-country. These waged hit-and-run actions against the French, particularly in rural areas.

The leader of the ALN at Oujda in 1958 was Col. Houari Boumediène (his nom de guerre), whose rise was meteoric. He went from an ALN commando in 1955 to the chief of the ALN operations in western Algeria in September 1958, when at only twenty-five he was made a colonel, the highest rank in the FLN's army.

His career would continue to soar. He became chief of the staff of the ALN in 1960, the first Defense Minister of an independent Algeria in 1962, and through a bloodless coup in 1965 the chairman of Algeria's Revolutionary Council and thus its de facto leader.

He held that post until he was formally elected president in 1976, serving until his death in 1978.

His later career as Defense Minister and President of an independent Algeria was mentioned in notes on 2.17 (N2:13), 2.27 (N2:43), and 2.32 (N2:59). In my novel's representation of him, he will become a minor character in chap. 14.

Alternate transcriptions of his name in Western languages are Boumédiène, Boumedienne, Boumediene, and Boumediene.

- p. 38: *Wilaya*: As pointed out in the 2.21 note, the FLN divided Algeria into six provinces and one autonomous zone, the capital Algiers. *Wilaya IV* encircled Algiers.
- p. 38: “Col. Si M’hamed . . . Si Azzedine”: In November 1958, Si Azzedine, the FLN leader of *Wilaya IV*, was captured by the French, as explained on 2.21. For more information about Azzedine, see 2.21 and 24 and their notes, N2:27, 28, and 35. Replacing Azzedine was Col. Si M’hamed, who was MIA in May 1959, presumably captured and then killed by the French.
- p. 38: “the disastrous Battle of Algiers”: On Jan. 28, 1957, as mentioned in the p. 37 note above, the FLN brought the war to Algiers. This offensive ended on Oct. 8, 1957, with the FLN's presence in Algiers virtually destroyed.
- p. 38: paras: The shortened form for French paratroopers. See the p. 37 note above on N3:7.
- p. 38: “seven teenage girls”: Another heptad.
- p. 38: ““The scholar's work has [no] end””: From *Emerson in His Journals*, ed. by J. Porte (Belknap, 1982), p. 346: “A mechanic is driven by his work all day, but it ends at night; it has an end. But the scholar's work has none.”
- p. 38: ““All the ni—””: Omar had spent the night of Dec. 5 sleeping over in Blida. The next morning he made his way back to Algiers in time to attend his afternoon classes.

After them, at around 4 p.m., Dec. 6, he arrived at his family's grocer/house. His father assumes that he spent the previous night studying with some friends in Algiers.

- p. 38: "cypress door": An indication that like the door to the shop (2.26) the door to his parents' bedroom was made of cypress. Because of its firmness and sweet odor, cypress is an excellent wood for doors. As also explained in the 2.26 note, in many societies the cypress is viewed as the tree of mourning, and it is frequently planted in Muslim cemeteries. Here with a cypress door as the background, his mother, now and forever veiled from her family, brings the news of the seizure of Noura, symbolically the death of the Naaman family. The door to the shop, altered by time, will be mentioned on 10.154. Replaced by shoddy planks, there it becomes not just a familial symbol, but also a national one, an emblem of the personal, social, and political degeneracy of Algeria in the twenty-seven years since its glorious independence.
- p. 38: "black 'forever-mourning' *niquaab*": Previously mentioned on 2.26 and defined in its note, it is a veiling garment fully draping a woman's body.
- p. 38: "nothing extenuate[d]": The quote is from Othello's final speech 5.2.352-53: "Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate, / Nor set down aught in malice." Here "extenuate" means "to lessen or to try to lessen the real or apparent seriousness of (as a crime, offense, or fault) or extent of (guilt) by making partial excuses" (*Webster's Third*). That is, HIV did not withhold any of the painful details of the 1982 deathbed scene of Remy's (Omar's) mother.
- p. 38: "'Forgive! Forgive!'": On her deathbed Omar's mother pleaded with her husband to forgive their only son for his treason.
- p. 38: "Mme. Remidi": Called here a neighbor of the Naaman family, she will reappear on 10.155 and 157-59 and be mentioned on 17.280, 20.342, and 21.364. Remidi is an actual Algerian surname. I chose it because it sounds like both the English and French word for something which or someone who relieves or helps another.
- p. 38: Dhuhur: Noon prayers; full Arabic term, *salaat idh-dhuhur* [stet; the expected *il* (meaning "the") used in the other prayers assimilates to *dh* before an Arabic word beginning with *dh*].
- p. 38: *Allahu Akbar!*: "God is great!"
- pp. 38-39: "sole touching soil": A play upon "sole" and "soul," which stresses the spirituality of Noura and her absence of earthly materialism ("soil").

- p. 39: “disdain[ed] all recognition”: From the FLN directive cited on p. 37.
- p. 39: “dervish dance”: A Muslim sect which incorporates whirling and chanting as part of their worship.
- pp. 39-41: SECTION 4: Time span: Dec. 6, 1958, late afternoon, to Dec. 8 (late afternoon).
- p. 39: “the French lawyer, placing the bag with his mother’s dowry gold in his safe . . . Omar’s second visit”: Noura was abducted on Dec. 5, but Omar was not told about it until Dec. 6 at 4 p.m. He directly sought out a French lawyer, who told him that he would take the case if he was paid in advance.
Omar returned home where his mother offered her dowry gold. He brought that to the lawyer the next morning (Dec. 7), his “second visit,” and is told to register Noura’s disappearance at each police station in Algiers.
- p. 39: “but that ye know”: This archaic expression will be used twice in the novel to deal with age-old prejudices, here to describe the casual acceptance of rape, and on 16.258 to convey humanity’s seemingly inbred lust to persecute Jews.
- p. 39: “that *poste*, fourth farthest from the Casbah”: *Poste* is the abbreviated form of *poste de police* or police station.
Remy spent the morning and afternoon of Dec. 7 visiting the first three police stations (not described), at each encountering long waits.
On the morning of Dec. 8, he reached the fourth, the police station on Blvd. Baudin (now Blvd. Col. Amirouche), located in Algiers Centre, the European section of the city and around one mile south of the Casbah.
- p. 39: “jittered out”: Omar spoke the words without his voice showing any nervousness. Although I used this verb phrase in 1991, it was not until 2012 that I found an example of it in the online dictionary *Wordnik*: “her heart trip-hammered; it jittered out of rhythm when she was under stress.”
- p. 39: “Meek of mind”: The phrase calls up Matt. 5:9, “Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.”
However, the desk sergeant probably means “simple-minded” since Omar had described Noura as “insensitive to the world” (39).
- p. 39: “This trifler was ‘more detestable’ than the French”: Omar realizes that this Muslim Algerian policeman was trifling with him.
Ironically, Omar will condemn him as more despicable than the French “for he was an Algerian in their service,” words which will come back to haunt Omar by this day’s end.
For the punishment which the FLN inflicted on those Muslim Algerians who served the French during the revolution, see the 2.22, 24, and 31 notes, N2:30, 36, and 58.

- p. 39: “rat-sweep”: See the p. 37 note on *ratonnade*.
- p. 39: “Rue de la Lyre, for which our *filles de joie*”: The expression *filles de joie* is one of the French terms for “prostitutes.”
In colonial Algiers, nighttime Rue de la Lyre was the street where Muslim prostitutes strolled, mainly servicing European Algerians.
I withheld, but hinted at, this aspect of the street in my description of de la Lyre on p. 37 in order to provide an unexpected “spice.”
- p. 39: “Jean Macé . . . Berthezène”: From the police station, Omar crosses over Blvd. Baudin and walks northwesterly for around two hundred kilometers.
This trek brings him to Rue Jean Macé (which retained that name until 1995, when it received its current name, Rue Gara Djebilet).
He walks another two hundred meters down Macé to where it intersects with Rue Berthezène (now Rue Docteur Saadane Cherif).
He turns north, bound for (but this is not stated in the novel) a police substation beyond the Monument aux Morts. This monument he reaches after a walk of around one hundred meters.
- p. 39: Monument aux Morts: Colonial Algeria’s imposing memorial to the French soldiers who died in World War I. It was constructed in 1929 and was a rallying point for European Algerians in the early 1960s.
After Algerian independence in 1962, the FLN government demolished and cemented it over.
Symbolically, Omar will be kidnapped in front of it.
The monument will reappear on 9.151-52.
- p. 39: *gandoura*: Although many Algerian men wear western-style clothes (shirt and pants), some wear a robe-like outer garment in either of two styles: The *djellaba* has long sleeves and a hood, while the *gandoura* is sleeveless and had no hood.
See the 1.14 note.
- p. 39: *siège arrière*: back seat of a car.

- p. 40: “the gray tumbler”: The man in the gray *gandoura* whose body tumbled (fell suddenly) after he had bundled Omar into the car.
The quotations around the expression, as with those about “the initial thruster,” indicate Omar’s characterization of the two men.
- p. 40: “My father, my mother, a daughter and a son!”: The exclamation means “(I swear) By my family!” However by individualizing the members of his family, including himself, Omar hopes to gain a familial strength to resist the French torture he is certain awaits him.
The irony does not seem to cross Omar’s mind: In attempting to recover his abducted sister, he himself is kidnapped.
- p. 40: “I will be true!”: Before he loses consciousness, he swears that even under torture he will be “true,” presumably to the “God and Algeria” that his father would (not coincidentally) invoke two years and four months later on April 13, 1961 (2.26).
- p. 40: “his friend Khaleel”: Khaleel will be referred to as Omar’s “best friend” on 6.88, 10:156, and 21.364, and be mentioned on 16.263 and 20.349.
- p. 40: “rehearsed” torture: From some of the historical accounts I read, FLN members practiced self-torture or torturing each other in order to be prepared in case they were captured by French paras.
The verb “rehearse” foreshadows a reversal which happens near the end of this chapter (50).
- p. 40: “whacks . . . immersing . . . electrical wire”: Three methods of torture which the French used on captives.
- p. 40: “needle pierced two centimeters into his tense buttocks”: An ultra-short dosage of a barbiturate, quickly provides a reliable loss of consciousness works after being injected into a muscle (as with Omar) or a vein.
- p. 40: “As he looked down on the unconscious Omar”: The action shifts back to April 7, 1989, and to the London hotel room where Remy is recalling these events of his past.
- p. 40: “the twenty-eight-year-old demand, ‘And my sister?’”: Remy recalls the question he had put to his first case officer in the assimilation camp (36) on June 25, 1961.
Remy rounds off the number of years. From June 25, 1961, to April 7, 1989, would be twenty-seven years and nine and one-half months.
- p. 40: “too-much-with-us-late-and-soon world of London”: From Wordsworth’s sonnet: “The world is too much with us; late and soon, / Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers” (1-2).
I have recklessly transformed Wordsworth’s first sentence into a hyphenated adjectival phrase and appended the adverbs of his second sentence to his first.

- p. 40: “pleasant seat”: The answer to his question about his sister is given by his case officer (“M. Le Contact à Vous”).
In his description of the place where Noura had been taken, he borrows an image from *Macbeth* 1.6.1: Duncan describes Macbeth’s castle as being “a pleasant seat [site].”
- p. 40: “birds, love of your sister”: Noura’s love of birds was first suggested on 2.27 where it is stated that “birds sing melodies her [Noura’s] ears cannot hear but she can.”
This love also provides an additional grasp of Remy’s self-exclamation in the London hotel room: “*And even now, my heart like a redbird flies up to Paradise*” (37).
- p. 40: “The three times you called . . . congenial nunnery”: The dates are not specified when Omar visited the nunnery to verify that Noura was safe.
One would have undoubtedly occurred shortly after Dec. 8, 1958, to ensure that the French were keeping their bargain. Thereafter Omar spaced them out, seeing her once a year, until Apr. 13, 1961, when he was flown from the country.
This passage about the nunnery explains the sentence on 2.27 where Noura is described as “safely tucked away . . . in an immured nunnery a mere thirty-minute excursion” from the Casbah.
- p. 40: “‘black-footed’ colonists—*pieds-noirs*”: The term *pieds-noirs* was used to designate those Europeans who settled in Algeria in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth.
They largely came from France, Spain, Italy, and Malta, and though they at no time represented more than fifteen percent of the total population of Algeria, they held political, social, and financial power and took measures to suppress the indigenous Muslim Algerians.
Why did they call themselves *pieds-noirs*? As the text reveals, the expression means in French “black-footed.” There are many explanations, none definitive, of why the term (its earliest use is 1901) came to refer to the European Algerian settlers.
The one I use involves footwear: A prominent distinguishing aspect between the colonists and the indigenous Muslims was that the latter wore sandals while the former wore shoes, typically black. (A related theory holds that the colonists, like the French army stationed in Algeria, wore black boots.)
The term, very early applied pejoratively by the Muslims, in time was proudly adopted by the settlers.
The FLN insurrection (1954-1962) presented the *pieds-noirs* with the prospect of having to surrender their dominant position in the country. Thus they opposed the negotiations between France and the FLN, which began in May 1961 and led to the Évian accords of March 1962.
This agreement produced a ceasefire between the French army and the FLN and basically granted independence to Algeria, the July 1962 referendum a formality, at which point Muslim FLN leaders took over the government of the country.
As mentioned in the 2.31note, around 900,000 *pieds-noirs* emigrated to France or

other European countries just before or after independence. By the 1980s only a few thousand remained in Algeria.

p. 40: *bêtes-noires*: black beasts or black brutes.

Although the French contact for Remy—no longer viewed as Omar—does not use the name of the group, he is referring to the European-Algerian paramilitary group *Organisation de armée secrète* (OAS: The Secret Army Organization).

The idea for a militia of *colons* (settlers or colonists) to oppose the FLN more brutally than the French Army in Algeria rose in the *pied-noir* suburb of Algiers, Bab el Oued, in 1960.

The OAS was formally established by some disenchanted French military officers (including some generals) and politicians in January 1961 at a secret meeting in fascist Spain. In May of that year, the OAS announced its intention to scuttle the French-FLN negotiations in Switzerland.

During the rest of 1961 and into 1962, the OAS carried out a horrific campaign of assassination and bombing in major Algerian cities, trying to goad the FLN or the French to break off these.

Their targets were wanton, included hospitals and schools, and their victims were as often Algerian *colons* as Algerian Muslims. Not until April 1962 did the regular French army in Algeria track down and deplete the ranks of the OAS, which then ceased to be a force in the country.

p. 40: “the attack, as expected, was blamed on the FLN”: On June 25, 1961, his contact informs Omar (now designated Remy) of the attack on the nunnery.

Although not specified, the assault must have happened just a few days before their meeting, probably June 22 or 23, given the preliminary accounts of this contact about the casualties.

My confession: I found no record of a nunnery being ravaged in Algeria, so the attack on this one in June 1961 was my invention.

p. 40: “Sikorsky helicopters”: France used the Sikorsky H-34 Choctaw in the latter part of the Algerian War for the transport of paras and quick-reaction commando teams. Sud-Aviation, the French state-owned aircraft manufacturer from 1957 to 1970, either reassembled 134 American-made H-34s or built 166 through an agreement with Sikorsky.

p. 40: refectory: a dining hall in a monastery or a nunnery.

p. 40: calefactory: a common room in a monastery or a nunnery.

p. 40: “Your sister’s not among these [the identified corpses] . . . you’ll be told”: After Omar as Remy is settled in Le Puy, his French contacts never bring up Noura again. On 2.22, he seems to have put her fate behind him since he imagines his sister being “raped” and killed in “the tiny field of corn” south of the nunnery.

For the readers of my novel, this unresolved state of Noura will probably linger in

their minds throughout Remy's return to Algeria, where his sole stated purpose is to visit with his father, not to investigate what happened to his sister.

p. 41: *brader*: “Abandon” or “sell out” are two of its meanings in French. See the 2.16 note.

The use of *brader* ties together the familial with the political. His contact tells Remy that just as he had lost or abandoned his sister Noura, so France is abandoning Algeria, a sisterly province of France.

As far back as 1848, the Mediterranean coastal region of Algeria was decreed to be an indigenous part of France and its *colons* French citizens.

pp. 41-43: SECTION 5: Time span: At 10:15, his abductors reached the El Biar building where Muslim Algerians were tortured. Omar was placed in one of the tomb-like lockers right away, staying there until the injection began to wear off (10:30).

At around 10:40, he is taken to an upstairs room for the first part of his interrogation which ends with a surprising revelation for Omar (11:40).

The remainder of chap. 3 occurs on the day of Omar’s kidnapping, Dec. 8, 1958, from around 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Omar will think that only “three hours” (50) elapsed from his kidnapping to his being freed (1 p.m.)

He then attends his university classes; it is “evening” (50), c. 6 p.m., when he is walking toward his family’s residence/shop.

p. 41: “lightless”: The darkness Omar awakens into parallels the aphotic depth which Ballard sinks into on 1.14.

p. 41: “the two quizzing angels, Munkar and Nakir”: In Islamic eschatology, Munkar and Nakir are angels who almost immediately appear following death in order to test the faith of the dead.

Since on death, body becomes soul, first the two angels return the soul to its body and the body to life in order to gauge the person’s response to three basic questions: “Who is your Lord? Who is your Prophet? What is your Religion?” (The correct answers are Allah, Mohammed, and Islam.)

However, Munkar and Nakir may also question the deceased about his/her good and evil deeds in life and other specific aspects about Islam and the Qur’an. If the answers are faulty or otherwise incriminating, the person is chastised until the Day of Judgment.

If the answers are correct, the deceased spends the time before Judgment Day in pleasant contemplation.

While the Qur’an states that a person will be tried and judged in his/her grave soon after death (Suras 8.52 and 47.29), neither verse mentions Munkar or Nakir. However, in numerous places the Hadiths, sacred narratives concerning the words and deeds of Prophet Mohammed, do refer to them by name as the quizzing angels.

p. 41: “of the family . . . in Heaven”: This verdict will be repeated on 17.289.

- p. 41: “The hypnopompic vision”: “Hypnopompic” refers to “the semiconsciousness preceding waking” as in the phrase “hypnopompic dreams.”
The opposing “hypnagogic” refers to the mental pictures we experience as we are falling off to sleep, as in “hypnagogic hallucinations.”
Both examples are from *Webster’s Third*.
- p. 41: “*Les tombeaux . . . El Biar suburb . . . gray wall lockers*”: “The Tombs” in French, as the next paragraph translates. The El Biar suburb is located in the heights above Algiers, about three km. (two miles) west of the city’s center.
The building for torture overlooked the Bay of Algiers. The details of the torture room are drawn from Pierre Leulliette’s *St. Michael and the Dragon: A Paratrooper in the Algerian War* (1961).
Leulliette writes that the coffinlike boxes along the wall of the front room of the building were narrow topless voting booths lent by the city, their opening shoved against a wooden wall.
I changed them to metallic wall lockers without any top ventilation to magnify the claustrophobia and lack of air.
- p. 41: “French chief sergeant”: In French, *sergent-chef*; it corresponds to a US staff sergeant.
- p. 41: *anatomie*: French for “anatomy.”
- p. 41: “a second chance to redeem myself”: Realizing that he is not “dead,” Omar does not think about the pain he is in or the personal agony that the expected torture will bring.
Rather, he seizes on this unexpected second life as providing him with an opportunity to fulfill a triple pledge: to himself, to his family, and to Noura.
He had made a *nathr*, a pledge to God, to always protect Noura (37), but having become caught up in the revolution, he was focused on a political meeting at the time of her kidnapping.
Thus every word his mother uttered about her blame in losing their “Gift of God” (38-39), Omar knows should rightfully be his.
His failure to protect the blessed Noura has caused his family to lose its honor, which he the sinner must restore.
Lastly the torture which he imagines Noura had endured or was going through was caused by his putting something above his pledge to God. This suffering of hers must be revenged by vicariously hurting the representatives of those who had harmed her.
The theme of sin/repentance/redemption: This pattern which I use in my novel was employed by both Dante and Milton: Sin which leads to a desire to repent which brings redemption or its promise.
DC presents a journey from sin (*Inferno*) to repentance (*Purgatorio*) to redemption (*Paradiso*). *PL* follows a similar pattern: From Adam’s sin to his repentance (his and Eve’s sorrow afterwards) to a promised redemption through Christ.

In my novel Omar's sin (the broken pledge and the subsequent treason) leads him as Remy to embark upon repentance (to return to Algiers to seek his father's forgiveness), which he hopes will result in redemption.

Although the idea of redemption is suggested in chaps. 1 and 2, it is here on p. 41 that the word is first used.

Variants of it will be incorporated into ten of the remaining eighteen chapters, One in the last chapter—"a last chance to redeem myself" (21.357)—echoes the phrasing here, "a second chance to redeem myself."

At the end of the notes to chap. 18, N18:72-74, there will be a short essay on the theme of redemption in the sin/repentance/redemption pattern of the novel.

- p. 41: "puling": From Omar's noble resolutions he at once descends into whimpering like a fretful child.
Such rapid contradictions in character (for instance, from noble resolve to whimpering) will also be manifested by Remy when he is no longer Omar.
- p. 41: "appetitions": desires (from *Webster's Third*).
- p. 41: "tinplate": "thin sheet of iron or steel coated with tin" (*Webster's Third*, which spells it as one word; other standard dictionaries spell it as two words).
- p. 41: "scratching his cheek": Cf. 2.24, the "scratch" on Omar's temple left by the blade. See the 2.24 note which has a list of the other places in the novel where "scratch" and "nick" are used symbolically.
- p. 41: horse: As an informal transitive verb, "to shove; push."
- p. 41: "*Fais vite!*": "Hurry up!" in French as translated in the text.
- p. 41: "Saïda water": Saïda, a northwestern Algerian city, is dubbed "the city of waters" because of its numerous underground springs. Almost all bottled water in Algeria, most of which does not come from this city, is still labeled Saïda, as it was at the time of my novel.

- p. 42: “gray Arabian horses sparring”: The painting is an emblem: The French wanted to promote the idea that factions of Muslim Algerians were more intent on fighting among themselves than combating the French.
- p. 42: Gitanes Brunes: Gitanes is a brand of French cigarettes, also popular in colonial Algeria.
Despite the gypsy woman (French, *gitane*) dancing on its pack, its dark brown (French, *brune*) version is described as having a strong masculine “bite.”
For many years its company resisted producing a filtered version, but finally relented in 1956.
- p. 42: “‘Rabah Zerrari (“Si Azzedine). . . he ratted on you. . . Ahmed Bougarra (“Si M’hamed)’”): For the two FLN leaders, see the p. 38 note above, N3:10.
The French clerk informs Omar that Si Azzedine informed on him. This accusation is a reversal of that of the TV interviewer (an aspect of Remy’s mind) from 2.21, who suggested that Omar “snitched” on Azzedine.
- p. 42: *paquet*: pack (of cigarettes).
- p. 42: clerk: A government official responsible for keeping records. This person may also be vested with specified power or authority, such as to issue writs or other processes ordered by a court (from *Webster’s Third*).
- p. 42: “Classical Arabic”: Technically the Arabic of the Qur’an, the Hadiths, and of scholarly texts written in the two centuries following Prophet Mohammed’s death. In practice, it means a formal, carefully enunciated Arabic, used by university-educated Muslims.
As a law student, Omar would have been knowledgeable in it. That the French lieutenant was fluent in Arabic linguistically separated him and Omar from the two accompanying corporals.
- p. 42: “the kerchief . . . not across your eyes”: Typically prisoners before a firing squad (a form of the “summary execution” mentioned by the clerk) would have a piece of cloth tied across their eyes.
The jocular mood of the lieutenant contrasts sharply with the matter-of-fact mien of the French clerk.
- p. 42: “*Allons-y!*”: “Let’s go!” in French.
- p. 42: gaff: to hook; “to strike and secure with a gaff” (*Webster’s Third*).
- p. 42: “Our peephole”: Leulliette in *St. Michael* reported that torture rooms in the El Biar building had a hole in their ceilings, allowing others to be spectators of the torture. I changed the position of the peephole from the ceiling to the wall.
The peephole will become a recurring visual image of the novel, appearing ten times in seven chapters: 3.42, 46, 48, and 50; 4.62; 6.87; 12.197; 15.256; 16.260; and

20.351, mostly by Remy and sometimes metaphorically.
The image is also implied on 18.298.

- p. 42: “wormhole”: a hypothetical space-time tunnel or channel connecting a black hole with another universe, with a white hole, etc.
The term was coined in 1957, so the lieutenant interrogating Omar (in December 1958) had kept himself up-to-date on concepts in physics.
The wormhole image will be used later in this chapter (50) and on 15.254.
“Black hole” referring to a dark region in space, perhaps formed by the collapse of an enormous star, with such a great mass that no light can escape from it, occurs ten times: 6.82 (twice), 84 (twice), 85, and 91; 11.180; 14.225; 15.243, and 20.350.
And “white hole” makes one appearance, 18.312.
On 3.42, the wormhole connects the black hole which Remy’s world has collapsed into by Noura’s disappearance to another black (or white) hole in the adjacent room.
- p. 42: mauley: “hand; fist” (*Webster’s Third*).

p. 43: *mouchoir*: French for “handkerchief.”

p. 43: *awgh*: This coined interjection is used here to express unbearable, animalistic pain, as it will be utilized in six other chapters: 11.176; 14.236; 15.253, 254, and 256; 17.282, 287, and 291; and 18.311 and 312.

However, later in this chapter on p. 50, it will be used antithetically to articulate supernatural joy, equivalent to “speaking in tongues.”

While on p. 43 it conveys the protesting “No!” on p.50 it imparts an ecstatic “Yes!”

p. 43: “a sin a man cannot forget or God ever forgive”: Omar sees his naked sister. This confrontation binds Omar’s sin with that which Ballard described on 1.2, where the wording is slightly changed: “seeing the nakedness and recognizing it as his sister’s, among Muslims a sin God cannot forgive or a man ever forget.”

See the 1.2 note.

Remy will not uncover the connection until 14.226.

pp. 43-44: SECTION 6: Time span: 11:40 – 12:00.

A stylistic point: In this section the lieutenant’s Classical Arabic of section 5, conveying precision and joviality, becomes marginalized by vernacular Arabic expressions and fustian, both of which I tried to convey by intermixing Latinate and Germanic English words.

This verbal whimsy conveys his delight or mock-delight in what he is witnessing.

The lieutenant’s syntax also becomes as torturous as the acts of torture he describes.

In writing sections 6-8, I was conscious of being influenced by the tone of the scenes of mental torture which Bosola inflicts upon the Duchess of Malfi in Webster’s play.

p. 43: “bent on kissing”: Several times in pp. 43-50 the lieutenant will say or do something to indicate to Omar that he is homosexually attracted to him.

p. 43: “you will help me . . . your mute and deaf *bonne sœur* will be sheltered”: The lieutenant presents his quid pro quo: Noura will not be tortured if Omar will become a French mole in the FLN, using his position in its hierarchy to pass on information about its activities.

p. 43: *bonne sœur*: “good or kind sister” in French.

p. 43: “ça . . . là . . . partout”: The French for the expression, “here, there, and everywhere” (meaning “in every possible place”), is used piecemeal by the lieutenant in listing some types of information which Omar would be expected to obtain.

The expression will be used on 8.127; 10.158; and 20.341, the last of which mimics its piecemeal wording here.

- p. 43: “pied birds, whose songs her ears”: Cf. 2.27, “birds sing melodies her ears cannot hear but she can,” and its note.
The spiritual Noura is supposedly able to hear the sounds of nature, but not of human beings.
- p. 43: reprobative”: “expressing or conveying reprobation” or the rejection of something as “unworthy,” “evil,” or forbidden “by God’s decree” (*Webster’s Third*).
- p. 43: “sans”: French for “without.”
- p. 43: audition: the act or sense of hearing.
- p. 43: “globes”: “eyeballs” (*Webster’s Third*).
- p. 43: frons: forehead.
- p. 43: “Allahu Akbar”: “God is great!” The Arabic is not italicized since this passage uses italics to convey Omar’s exact thoughts.
When used within an italicized sentence, a word or expression normally italicized is rendered in roman type.
- p. 43: “Heaven . . . only knows”: This idiom means “Only God knows, that is, neither I nor anyone else knows.”
To avoid taking God’s name in vain, euphemisms such as “Heaven” or “Goodness” are sometimes used, as here by the fastidious and facetious lieutenant.
- p. 43: “a wool blanket’s been scrounged up to camouflage her”: The bed covering hiding the features of a female connects her ordeal with that of Houda, who had “shrouded herself with the bedsheet” on 1.2.
- p. 43: “physiognomy”: face or facial features.
- p. 43: *la gégène*: A man-powered telephone generator.
Horne’s *Savage War* and Leulliette’s *St. Michael* were the principal sources for the description and effects of this infamous method of torture.
The field telephone, which had to be slightly modified for torture, was only one-foot-squared.
- p. 43: asp: “aspish; relating to an asp, a small venomous snake of Egypt” (the online *Wiktionary*, citing its use by the American poet Wallace Stevens).

- p. 44: “scroop”: “a rasping sound” (*Webster’s Third*).
- p. 44: “wooded by any element not of man . . . yet will stay chaste to us”: The Naaman family fixated on the ethereal nature of Noura.
This scene of Noura rushing to the sea and of Omar’s father picking him up to alleviate his worry will appear again on 21.367, the penultimate page of the novel.
- p. 44: “chaste”: The typical punning on “chaste/chased” is employed.
- p. 44: “our seventh”: As is to be expected in this novel where things come in symbolic heptads, there are seven French torturers: One holding her head in place, four grasping her limbs, the one with the field telephone, and the seventh who will lead the electric wires to her breast.
- p. 44: toper: drunkard.
- p. 44: “puking . . . and masturbating”: Numerous Hadiths, for instance Muslim 2020 and Al-Bukhari 65.288, enjoin Muslims from using their right hand for unclean activities.
They specify that the right hand, employed significantly during prayer and in eating, must never touch one’s private parts or be used to clean the anus.
Neither the Qur’an nor the Hadiths directly mention masturbation. Some scholars hold that it is forbidden while others say that it is acceptable when “normal” sex is not available. In the latter, the left hand must be used.
- p. 44: “of spit-filled lager”: A distant pun on “spiteful.”
- p. 44: whicker: titter.
- p. 44: Alsace: a region in northeastern France.
Alsatian: a person from Alsace.
- p. 44: “pageants”: An archaic verb, according to *Webster’s Third*, meaning “to surround with pageantry.”
This meaning is slightly extended here to mean “display with the full richness and color of a pageant.”
- p. 44: pudenda: The plural of “pudendum,” meaning “the external genital organs . . . of a woman, usually used in its plural” (*Webster’s Third*).
- p. 44: sinciput: forehead.
- p. 44: “Satan’s bumps”: A reference to the horns which in medieval artwork Satan was portrayed as having.
While Satan is never described in the Bible, images of him were based on pagan

horned gods, such as Pan.

The lieutenant suggests that with the handgrips on his forehead the Alsatian resembles the horned Satan.

p. 44: “As deep as a well-done”: The lieutenant puns on the compliment “well-done” and Mercutio’s “No, ’tis not so deep as a well” (*Romeo* 3.1.95), quoted exactly by Saul on 2.29 and discussed in its note.

p. 44: “Bull’s eye! . . . “*Olé!*”: Bullfighting quibbling.
The Spanish interjection is neologically used as an infinitive.

p. 44: “rouse”: A double entendre: “awakening from sleep” and “sexual arousal.”

p. 44: “jaggers”: A jagger is “something sharp or prickly” or “a frayed bit of wire on a worn cable” (*Webster’s Third*).

Here the word denotes the electric wires of the *gégène*.

p. 44: fillip: flick or to propel something with a light, quick, snapping stroke, as with the fingernail.

p. 44: “She cannot speak”: In the questions appended to the four sentences beginning, “She cannot speak,” the lieutenant progressively makes Omar fade into nothingness. According to him, Omar’s sister first calls for him to help her.

Then she disowns her flesh, the source of her pain, faulting her brother for not preparing her for this agony.

Next she curses him and regrets having loved him, averring now that she loves only God.

Finally she says that she will maneuver God who loves her to curse him, with whom she has broken all familial ties by branding him not as her brother, but as “the man called Omar.”

pp. 44-46: SECTION 7: Time span: noon – 12:30 p.m.

p. 44: “Yet she is but bruised”: The word “bruised,” carrying both a religious and sexual connotation, will be used seven times in sections 7 and 8.

In both Judaism and Christianity the Messiah is described as being “bruised . . . for our inequities” (Isa. 53.5) and in Islam the fourth rite of Haj is the stoning of Satan (*Shaitan*), leaving him covered with symbolic bruises.

Rape victims are often described as battered and bruised by the ordeal.

- p. 45: Savornin's Sea: The name popularly given to the deposits of water-holding sandstone under the Sahara. Its official name is Nappe Albienne.
In the 1920s the French geologist Justin Savornin postulated that beneath the Algerian Sahara was a boundless source of water for the desert.
By the late 1930s, through deep drilling the French succeeded in tapping into the sandstone bed and bringing the water to the surface.
Not being a "sea," but an expanse of sandstone containing water, the soldier is correct in saying it would be "difficult" to indulge in "a swim in Algeria's Savornin's Sea."
- p. 45: fundament: the buttocks.
Dr. Samuel Johnson most famously used a variant of this word when at an Apr. 20, 1761, mixed-gender soiree he described a woman as having "a bottom of good sense."
When his audience tittered, Johnson made matters worse by emending that he was merely stating that the woman was "fundamentally sensible."
- p. 45: "Rorschach fabric": The stain of the hymenal blood on the white cloth placed beneath his sister's buttocks is compared to a Rorschach inkblot design.
A tradition in rural Algeria is for the blood-stained wedding bed sheet or a towel placed on the bed to be waved before assembled neighbors to prove that the bride was indeed a virgin.
- p. 45: "a proud flag of your sister's chastity": The cloth metaphor is similar to the one Omar's father will say after Omar's kidnapping: "His is a badge of honor for Algeria . . . Our Noura's [abduction] is a rag of shame for France" (3.2).
- p. 45: "lived with her, night and day, for fifteen years": Noura is fifteen, and Omar is four months shy of nineteen.
"Night and day" is a jibe at Omar because he was absent on PLN political matters on the afternoon Noura was kidnapped and did not learn about it until the next afternoon, a full night and day.
- p. 45: obiter dicta: incidental remarks.
- p. 45: "He reels for real!" A conspicuous instance of the lieutenant's punning banter.
- p. 45: misprision: contempt; scorn.
- p. 45: "I've swilled a tun of manly beer." This echoes *I Henry IV*, 2.4.442-43, where Hal says to Falstaff: "There is a devil haunts thee in the likeness of an old fat man; a tun of man is thy companion."
Here Hal puns on *tun* (a large barrel) and *ton* (large weight).
Mine simply quibbles on Shakespeare's line.
- p. 45: Michel: The French spelling of Michael.

Michael is the archangel mentioned as the field commander of the army of God.

In 1469, he was chosen as the patron of the first chivalric order of France, the Order of Saint Michael (St-Michel in French).

Roman Catholics refer to him as Saint Michael the Archangel, hence the play on his name by the lieutenant, “our saintly Michel.”

p. 45: “enuretic”: a person unable to control her or his urination.

p. 45: “clowder of *femmes fatales*”: A “clowder” is “a group of cats” (*Webster’s Third*), here used metaphorically for a group of “enticing women.”

p. 45: “cleanliness, unfortunately not always abutting godliness”: A playful inversion of the adage, “Cleanliness is next to godliness.”

pp. 45-46: *encore une fois*: “once more” in French.

- p. 46: “been gifted by God . . . his Gift from God . . . Gift that God, my Promised One”: The lieutenant uses this expression in speaking of Claude’s penis.
He had learned beforehand that the epithet had been used by the Naamans in referring to Noura.
See the p. 37 note on “gift” for earlier paralleling uses of it.
The Frenchman mockingly views Noura as the Messiah.
- p. 46: “nigra-long”: This use of the slang “nigra” (for Negro) precedes in time its use in 2.21, but a connection of prejudice from here (1958) to its appearance in Trimalchio’s (1989) is established.
- p. 46: hale: drag; haul; force to be.
- p. 46: “stubborn mime”: This refers to Omar, silent although his face has been pressed to the opening.
- p. 46: “more grit than, say, a Moroccan whore”: “Grit” means “stubborn courage; brave perseverance; pluck.”
Moroccan prostitutes have the reputation of being the sturdiest in all of North Africa.
- p. 46: Mussulmandom: “Mussulman” is an archaic term for a Muslim.
Claude adds the suffix *-dom*, producing a neologism for Islam, the religion of Muslims.
- p. 46: “circumcising scythe”: Claude exaggerates the size of his member by declaring that it will take a “scythe” to cut away its foreskin.
The Qur’an never mentions circumcision, so it is not even a required procedure in Islam, though it is recommended.
The time when the operation is done varies from one Muslim culture to another. Some parents prefer it done early while others delay it until the boy reaches puberty. Most Muslims have the procedure, performed, without any ritual, at birth in a clinic or hospital.
- p. 46: vermilion border: the sharp demarcation between the lip and the adjacent normal skin.
- p. 46: “She is but bruised, a black mark as modest as Satan’s”: A bruise is connotatively a temporary black (or black-and-blue) mark caused by the congestion of blood under the skin.
By using “modest” the lieutenant tries to reassure Omar that the raping has left no permanent physical damage.
Figuratively, a “black mark” is an “unfavorable item in one’s record,” a demerit not rising to the level of a sin or crime.
Thus Noura’s black mark will be no more conspicuous than the symbolic bruises which the Islamic *Shaitan* (Satan) receives during the stoning-of-the-devil ritual by Haj pilgrims.

However, Satan's "black mark" (treason against God) is a sin, the one which the lieutenant would lead Omar into.

On p. 50, this "modest" "bruising" of Satan is implicitly compared with the physical bruising of the promised Messiah (from Isa. 53:5), which Noura will escape if her brother intervenes.

In no way did I imagine the lieutenant to be referring to the "mark" of "the beast" (Satan) in Rev. 14:9-11, that sign which Satan places on a convert's forehead or hand.

- p. 46: "Cronusians": A coined word meaning those who imitate Cronus.
In Greek mythology Cronus was the Titan who castrated and deposed Uranus, his father and the ruler of the universe. This castration, according to the myth, created the gap between heaven and earth.
On p. 45, the lieutenant says that in the raping of Noura, the soldiers are separating her from God and bringing her into the physical world: "She's coming into the world. . . . She's losing contact with God: going from God, and God from her."
- p. 46: "Claude's 'reechy kisses'": From *Hamlet* 3.4.184, where Hamlet tells his mother not to be seduced into betraying him by "a pair of reechy kisses" from King Claudius.
- p. 46: reechy: Having a strong odor; rancid; filthy.
- p. 46: "novitiated": Again, a coined word, since "novitiate" (a novice in a religious order) has no verb form.
- p. 46: "whispered the words": In Islam, *Shaitan* principally does his evil by whispering into a person's ear.
The satanic image of the lieutenant is reinforced by the use of "recoiled" in the next paragraph.
- p. 46: "our 'merry bond'": In *Merchant Shylock* speaks of "this merry bond" (1.3.172) which he will seal with Antonio, a pound of the latter's flesh being its collateral: "Give me directions for this merry bond."
On 1.2, Leroy quoted from this scene but from an earlier speech by Shylock, "Your single bond; and, in a merry sport" (143). See the 1.2 note.
- p. 46: "our *nathr-ette*": A *nathr*, as defined on p. 37 and in its note above, N3:6, is a vow made to God, thus establishing a bond with God to do something.
In using the *-ette* suffix meaning "little" or "a substitute for," the lieutenant demeans the concept.
- p. 46: pate: a humorous term for "the head."
- p. 46: "*hélasses*": The French interjection "*Hélas!*" is equivalent to "Alas!" in English. Its use as a plural noun is unconventional.

- pp. 47-51: SECTION 8: Time span: 12:30 – 1:00, after which Omar is released. What happens from 1:00 – 6:00 is revealed rapidly, pp. 50-51. The last sentence of the chapter is spoken in the London hotel room on April 7, 1989, at around 5:10 a.m. This section employs the interior dramatic duologue technique, as on 1.3 (discussed in its note, N1:10) and 2.21-22 (in its note, N2:26). However, Remy's id (or self) is largely passive, mumbling "Yes" or variants of it to the narrative being spoken by his superego (or anti-self). In essence, Remy's superego, basically a dispassionate and objective conversant, forces Remy's id to confront the rape and its aftermath.
- p. 47: "your heard him sigh": This clause is not capitalized since it completes the sentence begun by the lieutenant at the end of section 7 (46). The difference is that there is a new narrator, Remy's anti-self, who like Remy himself witnessed the events described and who is directly speaking to Remy using the second person, "you."
- p. 47: occipital: the bone that forms the back part of the skull.
- p. 47: tumble: a sudden, helpless fall.
- p. 47: "Yes": This response by Remy's self seldom varies. It is used as the immediate response to his anti-self's narration twenty-seven times. In one of these (49) it is repeated twice. Another time the "Yes" is quickly followed by a "No" (50). In the last variant, the "yes" response is said a total of five times (50). The last statement by his anti-self (51) will not receive a response until the opening of chap. 4, where the expected "Yes" will be a "No."
- p. 47: "Heavenly perdition": an oxymoron since a theological meaning of "perdition" is "hell," thereby producing "Heavenly hell."
- p. 47: "a 'Poor Fool' shiverer": See *Lear* 3.2.68-69, 73: "Come on, my boy. How dost, my boy? Art cold?/ I am cold myself. . . . / Poor fool and knave." "Shiverer" means "one that shivers" (*Webster's Third*).
- p. 47: "She will deny God": The lieutenant tells him that his sister has resigned herself to having lost heaven and soon will deny God just as she has denied her brother.
- p. 47: "There is no God save Allah, and Mohammed is His Prophet": This affirmation is called the *Shahadah*, the statement of the Islamic creed. *Kalimah* is the term used for the recitation of these words in Arabic, all that is required for a person to become a Muslim. A recitation of these is the first of the Five Pillars of Islam. The exact wording of the *Shahadah* is not found in the Qur'an, but comes from the Hadiths (collections of the words and acts of the Prophet Mohammed) of Al-Bukhari,

Muslim, Abu Dawood, and other recognized collectors of the Hadiths.

- p. 47: “Must I keep saying ‘yes’?”: The Omar aspect of Remy is still reluctant to confront what happened that afternoon.
Four paragraphs down, the ellipsis marks in “. . . Yes” again reveals his hesitancy.
- p. 47: “stereotyping ‘the drunk’”: A theatrical image. Remy’s anti-self stresses that a performance is being staged for Remy’s benefit.
- p. 47: “mouth . . . neck . . . shoulders . . . body . . . the punt of the bottle . . . the base”: The first four are common terms for the parts of a bottle, as is the last.
“Punt,” also called the “kick,” refers to the concave bottom of a bottle (*Webster’s Third*).
See the use of some of these terms applied to a beer bottle in the 1.2 note.
- p. 47: dartle: As a transitive verb, “to thrust at repeatedly” (*Webster’s Third*).
- p. 47: “grind and bump”: An inversion of the striptease movement where a “bump” means the trusting forward of the lower part of the torso, followed by a “grind” or a circular twirling of the hips.
Here Marc has to grind or twist the bottle and give its bottom a bump or a light blow to force its shoulders deeper inside the vagina.
- p. 47: labia majora: “the outer fatty folds bounding the vulva” (*Webster’s Third*).
- p. 47: “a merry twit”: a laughable reproach.
- p. 47: “suspenseful disbelief”: A play on Coleridge’s “a willing suspension of disbelief” which a reader must make to accept non-realistic elements in literature (*Biographia*, chap. 17).
“Suspension” and “suspenseful” have the same etymology.
- p. 47: pubes: the region at the lower part of the abdomen surrounding the external genitals and covered by hair.

- p. 48: “hosanna”: “to acclaim with or as if with shouts of ‘hosanna’” (*Webster’s Third*). See its use as a verb on 2.26 and its note.
- p. 48: “the song of a redbird which cannot sing”: On 2.37, Remy in the hotel room recalls what he as the seven-year old Omar felt on making his *nathr* regarding Noura: “(And even now, my heart like a redbird flies up to Paradise.)” See also p. 40 and its note above which stresses Noura’s love of birds.
- p. 48: “shard of glass that pierced the skin”: The shard image is used at crucial points of the novel: Here, the word is employed at the most brutal point of the rape. On 8.124, a character will quote the passage from *Hamlet* where the word is used: “Shards, flints, and pebbles should be thrown on [Ophelia’s body]” (5.1.231). And on 20.351, a “shard” of a broken Pepsi bottle will make a prick in a neck near the carotid artery. In its note, this injury will be tied to the fatal carotid artery wound which Ballard received in the first chapter (1.14).
- p. 48: cruor: coagulated blood.
- p. 48: *mon lieutenant*: “my lieutenant” in French.
- p. 48: “even after what you discerned later”: The revelation of p. 50.
- p. 48: “Bastille jailers”: The principal guards at the Parisian Bastille during its storming on July 14, 1789, were eighty-two *invalides* (older or disabled soldiers no longer capable of service in the field).
- p. 48: harrumph: As a verb, “to protest or complain in a pompous or self-righteous way.”
- p. 48: “She’s no good to us dead!”: The lieutenant blurts out that with the demise of his only bargaining chip he knows Omar will never agree to become a French agent.
- p. 48: “How sapient was your Prophet in forbidding the consumption of alcoholic beverage . . . orally or vaginally!” In Islam, the consumption of alcoholic beverages is forbidden on the basis of Sura 5:90-91 of the Qur’an: “intoxicants and games of chance” are called “abominations of Satan’s handiwork.” Muslims are ordered to abstain from them. In numerous Hadiths, Prophet Mohammed forbade the drinking of any liquid which had an intoxicating effect. Although alcohol is generally considered *haraam* (“forbidden”) in Islam, only the most conservative counties, such as Saudi Arabia, impose a ban on it. For instance, in Algeria, alcohol is not prohibited except during Ramadan, and the average annual consumption of alcoholic drinks was 6.8 liters per person in 2010. Egypt has a booming alcohol industry, and beer and liquor are available in such Middle East and North African Muslim countries as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia. A 2011 survey reports that in Mideast-African Muslim countries the consumption of alcohol has increased by twenty-five percent from 2005-2010. Even in Saudi Arabia,

I can personally attest, bootleg whisky could be obtained in the 1980s and 1990s. Thus, concerning alcoholic consumption, there is a huge gap between principle and practice in most Muslim countries.

- p. 48: “sapient”: The word *sapient* has as its standard meaning (“full of knowledge; wise; sagacious; discerning”) but it also carries the meaning of the “wisdom of God.” Dante uses Sapientia (Beatrice as Divine Wisdom) in *Purgatory*, Canto 3:114 and 128-29.
- p. 48: “*There is no God, and you slumbered here*”: Eight paragraphs above, the lieutenant shouted that Noura “denies God.” Here in the moment’s pause, Omar seems to be contemplating the same.
- p. 48: medico: an informal term for a physician.
- p. 48: “resurrecting her”: The religious imagery continues.
- p. 48: “a ragged circle”: See the 2.33 note, N2:62-63, which explains how the “ragged circle” image occurs at four crucial points in the novel. This is its second use. It is made by the stethoscope’s bell being placed against the bloody vulva. As explained in the N2:62-63 note, the “ragged circle” of this chapter symbolizes that “nothing connects” because at its end the French succeed in severing all of Remy’s bonds to his God, family, and country by using his sister to break his spirit.
- p. 48: “Were I a master of calculus—yet little of it relationships do I know—I could not enumerate my sorrow”: See the p. 35 note above on the significance of the title of the chapter, N3:1, for an analysis of how the phrase “the calculus of relations” was taken from Bertrand Russell’s *The Principles of Mathematics* and how it is used in this chapter. Here the lieutenant’s sorrow is occasioned not by the horrible death, but because he himself has been “defeated” in his plan to make Omar become a French collaborator.
- p. 48: “by a warrior who, ‘perplex’d in the extreme’”: From Othello’s last speech: “Of one not easily jealous but, being wrought, / Perplex’d in the extreme” (5.2.355-56).
Perplex’d: distraught.
 The paratrooper Claude is the “warrior” whom the lieutenant described as “perplex’d.”
 This quotation from *Othello* will reappear on 14.233.

- p. 49: “‘mumbler’”: As defined in the text, a “glassblower” (*Webster’s Third*, which lists it as principally British).
It was a glassblower who crafted the wine bottle used by the soldier Marc.
- p. 49: “standers-by”: A verbal means to connect the rape in this chapter with what happened to Houada on 1.3, where Ballard is called by his anti-self “an innocent stander-by.”
- p. 49: *pro forma*: a Latin phrase meaning “for the sake of form; as a matter of form; perfunctory.”
- p. 49: “two gold stripes”: the insignia of a lieutenant (or first lieutenant) in the French army.
- p. 49: “unlugged”: A coined word (“lugged” with a negative prefix).
See the 1.13 note where “lugged,” used in describing Leila’s brother, by implication means “chained” or “restrained.”
The lieutenant’s use here refers to a French belief that Algerian Arab men did not wear an undergarment beneath their robes; thus their testicles swung freely.
- p. 49: “Ahmed ‘Yapping Poodle’ Ben Bella’s falsetto”: At the time of this incident (Dec. 8, 1958), Ahmed Ben Bella had been in a prison in France for just over two years. Stationed as an FLN spokesman in Cairo in 1954, he developed a friendship with Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, which will be mentioned on 9.135 and in its note, N9:2.
His strident support for Nasser in the 1956 Suez Canal crisis caused him to be targeted by the French, who succeeded in hijacking his plane in October 1956. For his career after Algeria achieved independence in 1962, see the 2.17 note.
As for Ben Bella’s falsetto voice, I base this detail on the slenderest strand of evidence: I listened to a cassette of him speaking in Arabic and adjudged his voice as high-pitched as a “yapping poodle.”
The immediate reference to the lieutenant’s “Classical Arabic” (68) contains a further gibe at Ben Bella, who though an FLN leader surprisingly spoke no Arabic, only French. Ben Bella, however, was to teach himself Arabic while in prison.
- p. 49: “a ‘foregone’”: The adjective is used as a noun, a clipped form of “foregone conclusion.”
- p. 49: “*Sortez!*”: French for “Get out!” as defined in the text.
- p. 49: “Yes. Yes.” The repetition indicates Omar’s excitement that through the lieutenant’s apparent homosexual attraction to him he will be able to exact his revenge.
- p. 49: “meuse”: the peephole in the wall. *Webster’s Third* defines it as “a gap or hole (as in a hedge or wall) through which a wild animal is accustomed to pass” and

“something affording a means of escape,” such as a “loophole.”

Ironically, this “meuse” will provide Omar, soon to be reduced to animalistic utterance, with no “means of escape” and additionally will reveal the French “loophole.”

- p. 49: *corpus delectabilis*: An obvious pun on *corpus delicti* (used “loosely” to mean “the body of the victim in a murder case,” according to *Webster’s New*).
Delectabilis is the Latin word for “delectable,” which is the kind of luscious ogling which the lieutenant states that Omar will bestow on the corpse of his sister.
On p. 44, he had already taunted Omar, “I smell incest!”
- p. 49: *mon bon ami*: In French, “my good friend.”

- p. 50: “loop—er, peephole!”: Remy’s anti-self uses the first syllable of “loophole,” but cuts it short before substituting “peephole.”
- p. 50: “darkling belgard”: One meaning of the adjective “darking” is “mysteriously, threateningly, or uncannily dark or obscure,” as in “a darkling glance” (*Webster’s Third*).
 “Belgard,” means “a loving look.” It is now obsolete, the same dictionary states (but not for me who will use it four more times in my novel: 5.70; 10.163; 17.283; and 18.300).
 The two words, I felt, allowed me to capture the look of love which Omar had always fixed upon his sister just as this stare is mysteriously modified and darkened by the realization that the body is not Noura’s.
- p. 50: “judaslike”: A “judas” is a peephole, as in the door of a prison cell.
 Remy’s anti-self chooses this synonym in order to align Remy with Judas Iscariot, regarded by some, Dante notably, as among the greatest of traitors.
- p. 50: *awgh*: For the definition of this coined interjection, see the p. 43 note above. It is used seven times by Remy’s anti-self (the overjoyed Omar) here, the same number of times it will be uttered by Remy on 15.254, a mirroring scene.
- p. 50: “your doubt of whether from a dream or to a dream fleetly resolved”: Based loosely on the closing lines of Keats’s “To a Nightingale”: “Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?”
- p. 50: “wormhole”: See the p. 42 note above.
 Wholly serious, I intone: The peephole is a wormhole leading from one black hole (Omar’s ordeal while viewing the torture of his “sister”) to another (Remy’s life as a traitor).
- p. 50: “Among butterflies and birds”: See p. 43: “among . . . butterflies as speechless as she, and pied birds.”
- p. 50: “She is whole with God. She is not ‘bruised . . . for our iniquities.’ The Gift of God is intact”: The internal quote is from Isa. 53:5, generally interpreted as a reference to the Jewish Messiah: “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”
 Christians interpret the verse as anagogic.
 “Whole” is an obvious sexual pun, and “intact” plays on the Latin etymology (“not touched”).
- p. 50: “Ever play has its rehearsal. Every star, her understudy”: The lieutenant whispers to Omar that this girl was merely Noura’s understudy and the rape of her was only a rehearsal for what will now be carried out on his sister.
 The “rehearsal/understudy” imagery is used frequently in my novel. Variants of

“rehearsal” have appeared already on 1.8 (the Filipino) and 1.12 (Ahmed Chabane), on 2.19 (Saul), and earlier in this chapter, p. 40 (Omar and Khaleel).

Future chapters where variants of “rehearsal” will be used are 4.56 and 60; 7.114; 11.178; 12.186; 16.270; 17.291; and 18. 294.

“Stage business” appears on 6.84, and “understudy” on 15.251 and 17.290.

- p. 50: “Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes”: The French ruse breaks Omar’s resistance, and he agrees to become a collaborator.
- p. 50: popliteal: of or near that part of the leg behind the knee.
- p. 50: *bâillon*: French for “gag placed across the mouth.”
- p. 50: *aywa*: Arabic for “yes.”
- p. 50: “you’d been at *Les tombeaux* for barely three hours”: Kidnapped at 10 a.m., he had been sped to the torture building in El Biar, arriving at around 10:15. Still unconscious, he was immediately placed in one of the tomb-like lockers. He is interrogated in an upstairs room from 10:40 until a little before 1 p.m. when he is released in time to attend his afternoon university classes.
- p. 50: ““handler””: Another synonym for “case officer.”
- p. 50: “The shadow of the latter became the first . . . the lieutenant disappeared into his own”: Again, a verbal means of tying Omar/Remy to Ballard. The situation on this penultimate page of chap. 3 is similar to that of the next-to-last page of chap. 1, p. 13, where Ballard thought, “*My soul seeks refuge in my shadow.*”
- p. 50: “blur and blend and bruise”: This metamorphosis of the Casbah street is symbolic of the changed state of Omar himself. The triplet is also symbolic. “Blend” represents “connection.” It occurs here and in only one other place in the novel, 15.246. “Blur” and “bruise” represent the factors which promote disconnection. “Blur,” a mental process which distorts reality and prevents connection, was used earlier on 2.32 and will appear later on 8.119 and 131 and 16.260. “Bruise” is a physical manifestation of the resistance to connection. It occurs on 3.44, 45, 46 (three times), and 50 (twice). I will reappear on 15.262 (twice), 271, and 273 (twice), and on 21.361 and 364.
- p. 50: “shape and size and substance”: An example of polysyndeton (repetition of conjunctions which are seemingly unnecessary), “shape and size and substance” will become “size and shape and substance” on 15.253 and 19.317, when the phrase is used by another character. On 17.279 and 21.354, however, when Remy is thinking, it will have the same order as on p. 50.

p. 50: “‘Noura was safe’”: Omar learned that Noura would be kept as a hostage in a nearby nunnery to insure he did not break his bond with the French.
See his contact’s description of the nunnery on p. 40, which uses words similar to those by the lieutenant on p. 43.

p. 50: cerebration: thought.

p. 50: “Boulevard de la Victoire onto Rue de Thèbes”: For these two streets, see their notes on p. 37 and p. 38 above.

- p. 51: “alms-for-the-beggar thought”: Alms-giving (*Zakat* in Arabic) is one of the Five Pillars of Islam, but my North African Muslim friends, particularly in Egypt and Morocco, where poverty is the norm, often seemed to regard the pauper’s request as an irritation, a burden, or an interruption, and met it with sarcastic gibes or a mechanical thrust of a coin.
Remy realizes the depth of his selfishness because only as a mechanical afterthought does he recall that a real person, “Noura’s understudy,” had gone through that horrible ordeal that day.
- p. 51: “Now we will sleep”: This suggestion by Remy’s anti-self will be answered at the beginning of the next chapter and not with the accustomed “yes” of section 8, since Remy, now having decided to embark on a reunion with his father, no longer has the desire to put behind him his Algerian past, symbolized by the word “sleep.”
The “Yes” here followed by the “No” which opens chap. 4 contrasts with the “No. Yes” answer to anti-self’s contention that Remy (in France) wished he had more quickly struck his head against the lieutenant’s (50).

PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION, AND THE MURDER MYSTERY GENRE

Murder mystery novels, I feel, should have a greater philosophic underpinning.

Certain classic works, such as *Oedipus Rex*, *Hamlet*, and *Crime and Punishment*, employ the basic formula of this genre: They open with a murder, present a series of clues to help an investigator (Oedipus, Hamlet, Inspector Petrovitch) solve the crime, and end with the exposure and punishment of the murderer (Oedipus himself, King Claudius, and Raskolnikov).

In these literary works, however, the physical act of murder is less important than its metaphysical consequences. “Murder most foul” destroys not just a person, but social order (the “something is rotten” in Denmark and the plague in *Oedipus*); the protagonist’s psychology (Hamlet’s “madness” and Raskolnikov’s delirium); and religious belief (the Chorus’s assertion of the proper relationship of mortals and immortals in the last lines of *Oedipus*; Hamlet’s “There is a divinity” speech before the fifth-act duel; and Raskolnikov’s religious redemption, in which he finds spiritual freedom in a Siberian prison).

At a far less—infinately far less—level of complexity, in *The Mysterious Plus*, my murder mystery novel, I sought to incorporate a measure of philosophical texture. The novel opens with the beachside murder of a U.S. embassy officer in Algiers; a teenage Arab hustler is arrested for the crime. (The situation inverts Camus’s *The Stranger*, which deals with a Westerner killing an Arab on an Algerian beach; both novels, however, examine the Judeo-Christian West vs. Muslim Middle East conflict.)

The structure of *The Mysterious Plus* sprang from the 18th-century Scottish philosopher David Hume’s ontological thesis, “[Events] seem conjoined, but never connected.” From this contention, I worked up the following paradigms, which became the titles of four of my novel’s twenty-one chapters:

Everything Connects (EC) – God/Allah/the Tetragrammaton YHWH (Yahweh) as creator and sustainer connects everything in the Great Chain of Being.

Nothing Disconnects (ND) – Christ/Islam’s Prophet Mohammed/the Jewish Promised Messiah, as God’s agents to wayward humankind, seek to reassert the theological bond.

Nothing Connects (NC) – Satan/Islam’s *Shaitan* (“The Deceiver”), themselves self-deceived, strive to destroy all divine connections by raising doubts that God created everything. Judaism’s *ha-Satan* (the accuser or adversary) is not the equivalent of the Christian and Islamic Satan. *Ha-Satan* is a supernatural entity who with God’s permission may challenge the faith of a human being, such as Job, but it is the person not *ha-Satan* who is responsible for disobedience to God.

Everything Disconnects (ED) – The Anti-Christ/*Dajjul* (the Qur’anic term for the Anti-Christ) are the agents of this deceit and destruction. The Jewish

concept of anti-messiahs (they portrayed more than one) appears in Jewish writing during a limited period (500 BCE – 50 CE). While Christians and Muslims regard the last days as being warlike, the Jewish Messianic Era will be one of global peace and harmony. Again, in Judaism the agent of deceit and destruction is within a person's mind, not in some figurehead.

These four perspectives become pivotal in *The Mysterious Plus*. For instance, at the opening murder, the American victim, as the knife enters his throat, is described as thinking, "Like all of us he died affirming, at that point of separation [from life], that nothing disconnects."

Likewise, at the resolution, when the private investigator discovers who the murderer is, horrified he exclaims to himself, "You talk as if things could be foreordained, as if a mist of '*Inch Allah*' [God Willing] hangs over the world. . . . Have you taken leave of your soulful senses and come to doubt that which everything, everyone affirms: 'Everything disconnects'?"

In all chapters, there appear the word *connect*, its cognates, and its synonyms [bond, promise, pledge, *nathr* (Arabic for promise to God), obligation, and so forth]. Bonds involving the mental (e.g., guilt, fear), familial (son-father, brother-sister), social (the evils of French colonialism in Algeria or the corruption of greed), and political (treason and torture) are severed.

However, the one which my novel focuses on is a religious mindset: How fanatic-inflamed theological divisions between Muslims and Christians or Jews are fraying the ties that bind humanity.

(I believe that 9/11 is a consequence of this West-Middle East inhuman "disconnect.")

Such personal opinions aside, I believe that the murder mystery genre can be invigorated not by changing its structural formula (murder, clues, and solution) but by writers providing it with a more texturally philosophic perspective.

Additionally, I dislike any novel where one is force-fed a philosophy: For instance, Mann's *The Magic Mountain* where Western liberalism easily triumphs over all or Sartre's or Camus' novels where Existentialism tilts against "straw men."

A writer should disguise her/his philosophic bent. What philosophy is incorporated into a novel should evince itself through the characters or events, not through authorial commentary or forced symbolism.

The philosophical model which I used in *The Mysterious Plus* was that of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. There each major character represents a central

philosophic outlook which was dominant in the history of America up to Hawthorne's time: Reverend Dimmesdale (Puritanism, 17th-century America), Dr. Chillingworth (Rationalism, the 18th-century Deism of the Age of Reason), and Hester (19th-century Romanticism/Transcendentalism).

From Hawthorne's correspondence we know he was a critic of all three ideologies (Puritanism, Deism, and Romanticism/Transcendentalism), although he admired aspects of each. Thus Hawthorne was not trying to ram down his reader's throat any philosophical outlook. The ideological texture of his novel emerges through the interaction of the characters and the situations.

While Hawthorne employed three major characters (reinforced by many minor characters) to present the philosophic history of the U.S., in my murder mystery I used one character (its protagonist) to embody my theological/philosophic thesis, that the present-day fanatic-inflamed divisions between Muslim Middle East and Judeo-Christian West (including Israel) are fraying the ties that bind humanity: love, respect, tolerance, etc.

My protagonist straddles both worlds: Born an Algerian Muslim, as a young man he flees to France and (for reasons of self-preservation) converts to Christianity. Many years later, kidnapped by Palestinians, he confronts their torture by taunting them, "Strike me as if I were a Jew!" Thus my protagonist (and consequently the reader) is allowed to view the world from these three religious perspectives.

Additionally, during my novel certain Christians jeer at and persecute Muslims just as certain Muslims, in turn, gibe and torture Christians. (As to be expected, both take literal shots and potshots at Judaism and its adherents.) Admirable aspects of all three religions, however, are presented, even if only as an afterthought: Religion comforts the survivors of a corpse-filled struggle which religion has itself promoted.

During the almost two decades in which I taught in the Middle East, I gradually became cognizant of this growing zealot-driven divide between this region and the West. Therefore, to be frank, I was shocked by neither the horrors of 9/11, carried out by radical Muslims (and despite their protests to the contrary they are not a minority), nor subsequently by the naked photographs of Arab prisoners, "shot" by Christian Americans (and though immoral, they are not a minority in the U.S.), at Abu Ghraib Prison in Baghdad, nor by the atrocities which Jews and Palestinians daily commit against each other.

Sadly, I have concluded that these three major religions have become old constructs (just as nationalism is now as outdated as feudalism) because at present they have failed in the central role of religion: to promote harmony within and between human beings.

If the characters and plot developments of my novel manifest this thesis, then

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religion becomes a part of the philosophic construct of my novel. (Other types of construct are present, for instance, the political construct: colonialism/oligarchy vs. Western democracy vs. communistic socialism. One character in the novel comically asks whether with the death of communism or the Second World, Third World countries are automatically promoted to Second World status.) These two—and there are many other constructs, such as the familial, the aesthetic, and the economic—make up the “philosophy” of any great novel, and thus should be considered by the murder mystery novelist.