

## *Editorial*

Olivia of Illyria walks into the office of Jack Straw, Leader of the House of Commons, and tells him that as a way to mourn her brother's death:

The element itself, till seven years' heat,  
Shall not behold her face at ample view;  
But, like a cloistress, she will veiled walk.  
(William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, Act 1, Scene 1)

The Honourable Jack Straw tells her it is not British to wear a veil and so she ought to find another way to mourn. Confused, she turns to her companion, Cesario, and asks, puzzled: "What means he by this, O beloved Cesario? Have not the noble ladies of England worn veils for many years?"

Cesario replies: "My lady, when my eyes first lay upon the veil that covers your face, indeed I felt affronted. Surely your beauty, grace, and radiant light deserved a viewing by my gaze. Recallest not that day when I, a humble messenger of dear Duke Orsino, didst first appear in your chambers, and requested that you remove your veil that we might talk? But, as you say, it has been an ancient tradition of this and other lands for women to wear veils when they leave their homes and also attend to their religious services. I know not what the Honourable Mr. Straw means by this notion."

Olivia affirms: "Indeed, humble Cesario, I do recall your brazen request and how your forthrightness to a lady of honour didst cause me such distress. Since your appearance pleased my eye, I did agree to it, though I have not the same response to this effrontery from Jack Straw. Recallest not how our Lord did command, in 1 Corinthians 1, that a woman ought to cover her head? Why, even our Jewish sisters have worn veils for many centuries."

As they walk to their car, a tall, white, middle-age man spits at Olivia, yelling at her: "Go back to where you came from!"

Cesario attempts to block the man's anger, but cannot do so in time. "O honourable Lady Olivia, how did I fail you, and allow your self to be covered in filth from such a man! What provoked him so?"

Olivia, wiping the spittle from her veil, notes sadly: "Dear Cesario, in these lands some people are hostile to those who dress differently. It is the same in Illiyrria, and all over the world these days ... Look, Cesario, let us take refuge in this church, a sanctuary in the turbulence of these times."

They enter the church and, after sitting down, Cesario, who is looking around at the walls, gasps. Olivia asks him: "What, pray tell, has bothered you?" Cesario, speechless, points to the image of the Virgin Mary on the wall: She is wearing a veil, though her face is not covered. Before Olivia can respond, the priest with the bride and groom and their wedding party enters the church for a wedding rehearsal. They don't notice Olivia and Cesario.

The bride, talking heatedly with her bridesmaid, exclaims: "I know it seems old fashioned, but I want to do it! I was on the Internet yesterday and discovered a website that sells the most beautiful wedding veils ... more than 50,000 possible combinations! Can you imagine?!" ([www.veilshop.com](http://www.veilshop.com).)

Her friend retorts: "Yes, and didn't that website also tell you that the veil is a legacy from our past when women were 'given' to the groom by the father, and that sometimes, in arranged marriages, the first time he laid eyes on her face was when he lifted the veil after the marriage?!"

"Arranged marriage? You mean in India?" The bride is bewildered.

"Victoria, please. I mean in English history, we had arranged marriages like they do in India today! The way the veil was used back then! In the Middle Ages, no respectable woman left the home without her veil! She had her head, neck, and shoulders covered with a wimple, and often a veil as well. The veil is a patriarchal legacy that has no place in modern society."

"Peggy, do you have to ruin my wedding with all this historical stuff? The veil is such a beautiful part of the dress. And look, isn't the Virgin Mary covered with a veil?" The bride points to the picture of the Virgin Mary on the wall.

Cesario, hearing this exchange, leans over and whispers to Olivia: "Wouldst that Mr. Straw were with us now." The wedding party only now notices them sitting in the pews. They finish their discussions with the priest and, as they leave the church, Peggy tells Victoria: "Look, didn't you see that poor oppressed Muslim woman sitting in the pews? What is she doing in a church anyways? It's disgusting how they come to this country and impose their alien ways of life on us. We're an open and tolerant society, but we have to put our foot down somewhere!"

Victoria, her head full of white gowns, lace, veils, and flowers appears confused: "But weren't you just telling me that English women in the Middle Ages wore veils?" Peggy gives an exclamation of disgust: "It's different. And besides, we've advanced since then. We don't want these Muslims dragging us back to the Dark Ages."

Olivia and Cesario leave. Turning to Olivia, Cesario says: "O honourable Olivia, I cannot say that I understood all of what they said, but it troubles me nonetheless. Why did they call you a Muslim?"

Olivia sighs: “Dear Cesario. The world is full of hypocrites and those who like only their own kind. Muslim women are some of the few left who cover their heads, and sometimes faces, with veils. Not recognizing themselves in me, they mistook me for an outsider.”

They walk in silence, passing by a newsstand. They stop to glance at the day’s papers, whose headlines blare: “Vatican wades into veil debate.” Olivia, not reading past “Vatican,” reminisces to Cesario about the time she was at a mass given by the Pope: “I was at the back, worried I wouldn’t be able to see him when he entered. The crowd was getting more and more excited as the time approached...”

Cesario, not really listening, begins to read her the story: “Cardinal Renato Martino and Archbishop Agostino Marchetto spoke at a news conference presenting Pope Benedict’s message for the Catholic Church’s World Day of Migrants and Refugees, in which the Pontiff called for laws to help immigrants integrate...”

(Olivia): “There were women from all over the world. Many of the Spanish and Latin American women wore the old fashioned *mantillas* (veils), and the nuns had on their veils and wimples...”

(Cesario): “Immigrants of other religions ‘must respect the traditions, symbols, culture, and religion of the countries they move to,’ said Martino, head of the Vatican’s Council for Justice and Peace, in response to a question about the use of the veil. ‘It seems elementary to me and it is highly justified that authorities demand it,’ he said.”

They both stop talking abruptly and look at each other. Before they can say another word, an elderly woman bumps into Cesario as she rushes in distress down the street. She cries: “O kind sir, please forgive me. My tears have blurred my vision.”

Cesario says sympathetically: “Dear Lady, worry not, for I am more concerned to see you unhappy than a slight bump to my shoulder. What, pray tell, troubles you?”

Adjusting her veil and barrette, which had been displaced, she told an astonished Olivia and Cesario of her troubles: “I am a former Queen of England, Eleanor of Aquitaine. Having rested after returning from Castile, where I chose one of my granddaughters as a bride for Louis VIII of France, I decided to visit Parliament and meet some old colleagues. Well, strangers full of notions I can’t quite comprehend were sitting in their offices. One man, named something like ‘Straw,’ began criticizing my veil, of all things, even before I even had a chance to introduce myself! He told me it was a mark of separation and an indication I did want to fully integrate into British society, but rather, live in a ghetto, a parallel community! Since I invented

this barrette and have taken the veil as a nun in the Fontevraud Abbey, I am incensed with this up-start trying to tell me what is and is not properly British, and moreover that he thinks he can tell me how I should dress!”

Olivia again turns to Cesario bewildered: “O Cesario, Italy, the land of the Virgin Mary, is opposed to the veil?? The heirs of Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine consider it a sign of un-Britishness?? What means this modern nonsense, which forgets its own history while looking to the practices of others?”

Cesario replies: “My dear ladies, I cannot fathom it myself. Perhaps we should remove ourselves from this land that has estranged itself from us and move to Egypt. As Lady Olivia reminded me earlier, I’ve heard that the Muslim ladies there still wear a veil. Perhaps you will not be so out-of-place.

Eleanor disagrees heatedly: “O new friends, how on earth could I move to Egypt, when it was I who launched the Second Crusade against the heathen Saracen!”

Olivia replies: “I’ve heard that Saracen ladies have great freedoms, and that Jews and Christians live prosperous and peaceful lives there, free to practice their own religions yet under Turkish rule. The past is the past, dearest Eleanor. Why not come with us and see?”

Eleanor agrees, and they board a plane to Egypt. While awaiting take-off, they notice nasty stares coming from their fellow passengers. They shift uneasily in their seats, trying to ignore the looks. A flight attendant comes to Cesario and asks him to leave the plane. He asks why, and is told that the pilot will not fly with him aboard. Puzzled Cesario gets up to leave, and Eleanor and Olivia rise too. “We will not fly without him,” they say. As they get off, they overhear a passenger mutter to his neighbor: “These Muslim men might be violent terrorists, but can you image being able to marry more than one wife! Whatto, eh?!”

Air Algeria finds them seats at the last minute, and they resume their flight to Egypt. They land, exhausted but optimistic. As they look for a hotel, a cavalcade of cars pass by. They hear people around them saying that it was Lord Cromer on his way to the office. The main car’s window is slightly open, and Olivia, Cesario, and Eleanor overhear Cromer saying: “We have a duty to introduce the ‘light of Western civilisation’ to these backward places ... In fact, the new generation of Egyptians has to be persuaded or forced into imbibing the true spirit of Western civilisation” (Cromer, *Modern Egypt*, 2:100, 538). His companion, a missionary, agrees: “We are focusing on the women. If we get them, we will get the next generation. Already we are paying our students to remove their veil when they come to class.”

The motorcade passes by, leaving Olivia, Cesario, and Eleanor again in a state of confusion. Cesario stops at a newsstand and sees a small green

publication entitled *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*. “Dear ladies,” he tells them, “here is a journal produced by scholars. Perhaps it can shed light for us on these strange and bizarre encounters we’ve had for the past few days.”

He scans it and recounts: “The first article, Bican Şahin’s ‘Toleration, Political Liberalism, and Peaceful Coexistence in the Muslim World,’ provides a comparison of political and comprehensive liberalism and argues that the concept of toleration related to political liberalism is best suited for the Muslim world to come to terms with its differences and establish peaceful societies.”

Eleanor interjects: “Sounds like Jack Straw and the Italian archbishops would benefit from reading that article too!”

Cesario continues: “The next article is ‘Corporate Social Responsibility from an Islamic Perspective.’”

Olivia asks: “Corporate Social Responsibility? What is that? I thought all corporations were supposed to do was to make profits!”

Cesario, skimming the article responds: “Well, it turns out that that is an outdated neoclassical understanding of corporations. Western scholars talk now of ‘reputational capital,’ which means that corporations that, say, pollute the environment or otherwise act in a socially irresponsible way lose business. Thus they are increasingly obliged to attend to their social responsibilities vis-à-vis society. The authors, Asyraf Wajdi Dusuki and Nurdi-anawati Irwani Abdullah, argue that a particular aspect of Islamic law, *maqasid al-Shari’ah* (the Shari’ah’s objectives) and applying the principle of *maslahah* (the public good) are akin to the notion of corporate social responsibility. A business ought not to engage in practices that harm society, such as dumping toxic waste in residential areas.

Eleanor: “Fascinating. Someone who follows these ideas would truly be a great leader for their society. What else?”

Cesario: “Another article emphasising humanity’s responsibility to the environment, Abdul Kabir Hussain Solihu on ‘Making Sense of Natural Disaster: An Islamic Hermeneutics of Malevolent Phenomena in Nature and Its Implication for Sustainable Development.’ This article seeks to account for natural disasters from an Islamic ethico-religious perspective. It argues, counterintuitively, that a natural disaster, when viewed from a macro perspective, is not always a disaster. From a micro perspective, it suggests that disasters are better understood not as blind acts of an evil nature, but rather as human-induced either through humanity’s impact on the environment or from violating the divine moral law.”

Cesario continues: “The last article is also about Islamic law. In his article, ‘*Ijtihad by Ra’y: The Main Source of Inspiration behind Istihsan (Juristic Preference)*,’ Saim Kayadibi demonstrates the widespread practice of *ijtihad* and *ijtihad by ra’y* at the time of the Prophet, the Companions, and afterwards. He argues that these practices were precursors to the more technically defined practice of *istihsan*, which has been – and remains – an important tool for jurists to maintain the Shari`ah’s flexibility and upholding one of its key goals: the ease and removal of difficulties as the circumstances of life change.”

Olivia comments: “Well, that seems very interesting, especially since there are countries around the world that want to reject the Shari`ah, claiming that it drags them back to the Dark Ages ...”

Eleanor interjects: “Watch what you say, my dear, for I reigned for a time during the ‘Dark Ages’ – it wasn’t at all dark, you know. I can recall seeing things quite clearly.”

Cesario finishes his summary: “Finally, the ‘Forum’ section seems to contain two very interesting pieces: a collection of speeches given at the launch of a book entitled *Islam and Global Dialogue*, which states that it is imperative for people of all faiths to come to a common understanding in order to avoid the supposed ‘clash of civilisations’ prognostications, and an exchange between a translator and the one who reviewed his translation for this journal.”

Olivia: “O Cesario, let us buy this little green journal. It sounds as if it might give us some insight and guidance on how to respond to these bewildering days. Here is some money. And look over there ... I see a hotel over the street advertising ‘rooms available.’ Let us repair to our rooms.”

Exeunt all.

Katherine Bullock