Don DeLillo, Mao II (1991)

what photos mark off the different sections?

>--football riot

>--khomeini demo

historical moment of rushdie affair, khomeini's funeral, islamic fundamentalism, tiananmen

what is plot?

What, for you, are key passages in first half?

question: who are the main characters?

>--bill, brita, karen, scott, charlie, j-c julien, george haddad, abu rashid

bill: what do we know about him as a writer?

20/   modern classic author

28/   writing is physical, material, human

>[Bill Gray looking at] ...what he'd written during the day, the scant drip, the ooze of speckled matter, the blood sneeze, the daily pale secretion, the bits of human tissue sticking to the page.

45-46/   "When I was a kid I used to announce ballgames to myself. I sat in a room and made up the games and described the play-by-play. […] And I've been trying to write toward that kind of innocence ever since. The pure game of making up. You sit there suspended in a perfect clarity of invention. There's no separation between you and the players and the room and the field. Everything is seamless and transparent. And it's completely spontaneous. It's the lost game of self, without doubt or fear."

48/   bill's identity is constituted through literature:

>[Bill]: "Every sentence has a truth waiting at the end of it and the writer learns to know it when he finally gets there. On one level this truth is the swing of the sentence, the beat and poise, but down deeper it's the integrity of the writer as he matches with the

language. I've always seen myself in sentences. I begin to recognize myself, word by word, as I work through a sentence. The language of my books has shaped me as a man. There's a moral force in a sentence when it comes out right. It speaks the writer's will to live.

question: how is bill like/unlike a terrorist? charlie and george both see alignment:

97/   [Charlie]: "You have a twisted sense of the writer's place in society. You think the writer belongs at the far margins, doing dangerous things.

130/   [George Haddad:] "And isn't it the novelist, Bill, above all people, above all writers, who understands this rage, who knows in his soul what the terrorist thinks and feels? Through history it's the novelist who has felt affinity for the violent man who lives in the dark. Where are your sympathies? With the colonial police, the occupier, the rich landlord, the corrupt government, the militaristic state? Or with the terrorist?"

on a related note, george asks:

157/   [Haddad:] "Is history possible? Is anyone serious? Who do we take seriously? Only the lethal believer, the person who kills and dies for faith. Everything else is absorbed. The artist is absorbed, the madman in the street is absorbed and processed and incorporated. Give him a dollar, put him in a TV commercial. Only the terrorist stands outside. The culture hasn't figured out how to assimilate him."

question: does bill think he's aligned with terrorist? no.

bill sees himself at odds with terrorists

156-57/ [Bill:] "For some time now I've had the feeling that novelists and terrorists are playing a zero-sum game."
"Interesting. How so?"
"What terrorists gain, novelists lose. The degree to which they influence mass consciousness is the extent of our decline as shapers of sensibility and thought. The danger they represent equals our own failure to be dangerous."
"And the more clearly we see terror, the less impact we feel from art."

individual vs. crowd (history vs. media)

link to bill: masterpieces of art about death drive

34/ They show the fence from a distance, bodies piling up behind it, smothered, sometimes only fingers moving, and it is like a fresco in an old dark church, a crowded twisted vision of a rush to death as only a master of the age could paint it.

Question: how do artists and terrorists relate (sim/diff) to history?

41/ [Bill]: "There's a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists. In the West we become famous effigies as our books lose the power to shape and influence.... Years ago I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do before we were all incorporated."

Question: do we need/want art anymore?

72/ [Scott]: "The novel used to feed our search for meaning. Quoting Bill. It was the great secular transcendence. The Latin mass of language, character, occasional new truth. But our desperation has led us toward something larger and darker. So we turn to the news, which provides an unremitting mood of catastrophe. This is where we find emotional experience not available elsewhere. We don't need the novel. Quoting Bill. We don't even need catastrophes, necessarily. We only need the reports and predictions and warnings."

What does Abu Rashid say about the rel. of terror to history at the end of the novel?

235/ [Abu Rashid's unnamed interpreter:] "Terror makes the new future possible. All men one man. Men live in history as never before. He is saying we make and change history minute by minute. History is not the book or the human memory. We do history in the morning and change it after lunch."

question: why the subplot of the mass wedding?

How is terror mentioned in story?

27/   [Brita]: "I feel as if I'm being taken to see some terrorist chief at his secret retreat in the mountains."

40-41/   [Brita on the traveling life]: "...there is no moment on certain days when I'm not thinking terror."

140/   [Scott remembers Bill saying:] "Stories have no point if they don't absorb our terror."

how is photography thematized?

question: what is delillo's point about photography?

        --warhol's mao II 20-21/ ptg indifferent to viewer

                                            62/   scott gives karen reproduction

        140/   [Scott realizes that Bill had his picture taken in order to disappear more completely and irrevocably.]

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