



# Words in the Dust

Books Reviewed:

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Reviewer:

[Clive Barnes](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

Reedy has set himself a proper task here: to enter the mind and experience of a young Afghan girl during the early stages of the American and British intervention. It is a story of the suppression of women, both by the Taliban - Zulaikha's mother has been killed by them for being literate - and in general Afghan culture: Zulaikha's sister is married young to a rich older man, partly as an alliance that benefits her father economically, and dies as the result of a horrific domestic accident when her husband refuses to allow her to be taken to a hospital in Kandahar. The central incidents in the novel, the death of Zulaikha's sister and Zulaikha's own treatment by the Americans for a cleft lip, are based on incidents observed by Reedy as a serving soldier, and the novel makes much of Zulaikha's father's distaste for the idea of women in authority embodied in the Captain of the American troops stationed near Zulaikha's village. This description may suggest that the novel is a polemic. Rather, it is an empathetic study of family and social life, in which the ordinary aspirations of young women to make a good marriage and bring up a family are given proper weight, and Zulaikha's father is shown to be loving and considerate, and respected by his family, despite determining his daughters' futures without consultation and, in rage, confusion and outraged authority, hitting his wife. There are, perhaps, one or two false notes: the occasional American colloquialism doesn't ring true on Afghan lips; and the upbeat ending depends on a change of character of which there is no earlier indication. Still, this is a deeply felt, honest and, I would think, perceptive attempt to get under the skin of another culture.

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