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Karachi's Fragmented Interdependence: Kamila Shamsie's *In the City by the Sea* (1998)

Karachi is a real place. Despite the cultural turn which has contributed so much valuable insight to our understanding of reality since the 1970s, the last thing one might want to do is look a Karachiite in the eye and say, "Your city is a cultural construction—it is not real." One might be able to get away with calling Karachi "unreal," but not "not real." The City—never named in the novel—that was Pakistan's first capital is a very real, very turbulent place, going through cycles of political crises which give the impression of a present concurrent with its recent past, what is called "pendular time" in Kamila Shamsie's first novel, published in 1998. Pendular time is linked very early to homecoming, nostalgia, escape, immobility and to reality as well, leaving Salman, under house arrest, to conclude: "Too much reality can kill a man" (20). And while Karachi is real, it is also a metaphor, meaning simply that this particular city is a "pivotal" site which goes beyond its materiality in time and in space, carrying signification beyond its immediate, material specificity (see Djelal Kadir 2; 11). The concept of pendular time affects history first of all, but consciousness too, both individual and collective, is "ordered temporally," according to Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, thus leaving these Karachiites stuck in a continuous present / past in both real and metaphorical ways, since the pendulum never seems to swing toward the future (40). Within *In the City by the Sea*, Karachi is seen from a child's eye, an eleven-year-old boy who is on a quest "to throw a pendulum out of whack;" Hasan is a knight armed with a cricket bat and a vivid imagination, to save his uncle Salman and, unwittingly, the country (211). As goes Karachi, so go the country and the family—family life and the life of the nation are inextricably woven together, and the hub is the City which occupies and is occupied by Karachiites. Although fragmented by divisions of class, age, gender, ethnicity, military/civilian and such, the City provides the space of contact, of intersection, and ultimately of transformation and hope as the country and the family swing beyond pendular time, out of the infernal cycle of political crises and status quo.

"The City," we are told early in the novel, "had changed in a week. It used to be home, but now it was just a place that existed outside Salman Mamoo's house" (38). Salman is Hasan's uncle, and the house has become his prison since his political party won a no-confidence vote against the cur-

rent government (12); Hasan, seeing the house for the first time since his uncle's arrest, asks his father "What's happened to Salman Mamoo's wall"?, to which he replies: "It's profitable to be a building contractor in favour with the government these days, Hasan. The government puts someone under house arrest, and you double the height of his wall to increase that prison sensation. And all at the prisoner's expense" (9).

The armed guards complete the prison décor, although it's clear that these three flunkies are present for the sake of form, disappointing Hasan, who was expecting an entire squad of combat troops: "The reality proved so much less threatening than his imagining" (10), although the reality of Karachi politics will prove to be every bit as threatening as Hasan had feared, including Salman's later indictment on trumped-up charges of treason, carrying the possibility of the death penalty. If, as Richard Lehan suggests, the city determines "our cultural fate [and] has become inseparable from our personal and national destiny" (3), we must also keep in mind Catherine Belsey's reminder in terms of the real, and of Salman's situation in particular: "Death doesn't do fiction, but eliminates the body and the speaking subject [...] Death puts an end to the cultural game for each of us" (14). Such is the dilemma in which Hasan finds himself – how to save his uncle and, in so doing, save the leading member of the opposition party, perhaps the only one who is capable of bringing down the current President. House arrest has only increased Salman's popularity. Every evening pine cones rain down inside the yard in a massive show of solidarity, pine cones having been adopted as the symbol of the Anti Corruption Enterprise; even the man paid by the government to remove the pine cones is an ACE supporter (16). Hasan's father, an avid etymologist, nevertheless warns: "'Pine,' he said. 'From *pinean*: to suffer. Old English.' He shook his head. 'Be careful of the symbols you adopt, Huss. They may haunt you'" (35). These same pine cones represent a threat to the government, not only as a symbolic gauge of the opposition's popular strength, but in their allegorical transformation into grenades later in the novel. Hasan thus finds himself squarely in the middle of a budding family tragedy which becomes, due to Salman's stature as a progressive reformer, a key episode in the life of the City and the nation as well. Hasan's mission becomes a way of resolving what Lehan calls the "terrible contradiction between what the city symbolizes and the human reality it has generated," especially as concerns the potential of the ideal city when released from the pendular time of human reality (125). In many ways, the City and its inhabitants cannot be separated; Lehan, in a discussion of William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, contends: "humans simply are their environ-

ment, and where they begin and the city ends is no longer a meaningful question,” an insightful observation which we could easily apply to *In the City by the Sea* as well (283).

Hasan’s immediate family, although ensconced in their comfortable upper middle class bubble—the boundary walls that now keep Salman in were initially constructed to keep undesirables out—have not only lived through the war but seem to be carrying on a family tradition of opposing abusive power:

“So is this like a tradition passed on from uncle to nephew in your family?” Zehra said, leaning on the railing. “Going to prison, I mean.” [...] “Zafar Haq walked out of the prison and the first person he waved to among the throng gathered to greet him was his nephew, eight-year-old Salman.” [...] “Three months later Zafar Haq was elected Prime Minister.” (76-77)

Salman, having been “anointed” by his uncle, has little choice but to accept the infiltration of political events into his private life, a burden which he nevertheless bears with humble good faith (see Nadia Butt 2). Nichola Khan, citing Katherine Ewing, suggests that the level of “interpersonal engagement” in Pakistani societies is very strong, leading to positive intra-psychic autonomy—a psychological safety net of sorts, wherein the group is the basis for individual strength—and we see examples of this not only throughout *In the City by the Sea* and indeed Shamsie’s entire oeuvre, but throughout contemporary Pakistani fiction generally (qtd. in Khan 55). To this formula could be added what Khan calls “a practical concept of biographical time” which, for political militants, comes to the fore in times of conflict (15). It is primarily this sense of intertwined personal and social history, and indeed the resulting destinies, which motivate both Salman and Hasan:

[the] telling of life stories—and with their complex relation to the structures of the social fabric—that is, what life stories may reveal about “the impacts of global relations of domination, regional politics, repressive state apparatuses, diverse nationalisms, local hierarchies, and multilevelled patriarchies, from the transnational to the familial.” (Chaudhry 261; qtd. in Khan 10)

Hasan’s family is an excellent example of personal stories weaving themselves into the social fabric, and his sphere widens to include other groups within his intimate circle, creating what Mary Louise Pratt has called a “contact zone” with which to go beyond pendular time (4), what Kadir refers to (in a discussion of comparative theoretical approaches) as being “not a narrative of linear continuity, necessarily, but the record of certain intersec-

tions where the inheritance of these precursors and our current notions and practices criss-cross, diverge, and transform each other en route" (9). Diana Coole and Samantha Frost expand on the possibility of revolutionary change within the context of the Althusserian "void:"

In politics [...] the state is always inscribed with the possibility of its imminent collapse or reconfiguration, where the utter indifference of the people to rule and their unresponsiveness to interpellation by the state apparatus yields the permanent possibility of a revolutionary event capable of halting the political machine. Such events occur in what Althusser calls the void: the space in which the encounter occurs that reconfigures the current conjecture's elements. (35)

The space of the encounter, or the contact zone, or the void wherein political and social transformation occurs goes by another name in Shamsie's novel—the City—that fragmented mosaic of disparate elements whose various interactions add up to more than the sum of its parts and hence develops into the vehicle for change, what Nadia Butt calls a space of "contention [...] "connection and conjunction" (4).

Hasan's family, like so many in Karachi, is the product of immigration, and thus of ethnic difference, although socio-economic class is a more significant marker of identity in the novel; his mother and uncle come from the North—from whence the pine cones, whose odour accompanies "the mingled scent of sea-air, garbage, eucalyptus and dust" (7)—and yet call the City home. Hasan's cousin Azeem is from the North too; his mortal fall from the rooftop while flying his kite traumatizes Hasan, who struggles with the memory throughout the novel, leaving him to deduce, in this city where no one seems to die of old age, or from smoking for that matter (30): "people die of bullets and gravity and rope" (183). Hasan's parents are intellectually cultivated, his father a lawyer and his mother an artist, although both have had their activities curtailed because of their relation to Salman: his father, a brilliant trial lawyer, has been reassigned to chamber law (132), and his mother's art gallery has been closed, at least temporarily:

"The landlord said there was some problem with the rent agreement, and I would have to close the gallery while he sorted it out, or face eviction." "I see." Salman Mamoo's voice was grim, as Hasan had only heard it once before—the day he defined "military coup" over a phone line which started crackling half-way through the conversation. "And what exactly was the nature of this rent problem? Your relationship to a certain *persona non grata*?" (18-19; original italics)

Salman has in fact become a politician in spite of himself, seeming to have been thrust into the role as a consequence of pendular time and family heritage. Even Hasan's parents, although they support the opposition, confess their distaste for politics, especially as it concerns their family; Hasan's mother is fed up with "the whole bloody mess" (171), and his father admits:

"God knows I admire the struggle, but there are certain prices I cannot pay to assist it." Hasan's mouth tightened, and Aba added, "I would rather live under a dictator and Salman safe at home, than achieve democracy through his imprisonment." (90)

Hasan's parents display what Sayantan Dasgupta calls "the status quoist stance" of their comfortable position, going on to cite Umber Khairi's description of Shamsie's characters: "charming people with their wit, their ability to quote from texts both eastern and western and their parlour conversation; but they are also guilty of compromise, guilty of social apathy and guilty of trying to preserve this *status quo* in terms of class and privilege" (qtd. in Dasgupta 304). We are nevertheless reminded in the novel that not all forms of strength and revolutionary conduct are alike, that the brave and strong are not always those we find on the front lines: "Strong like knights and martyrs, but not like the knights' and martyrs' parents" (34). While it is certainly true that people who enjoy material comforts are less likely to become outspoken revolutionaries, it is also true that the middle classes often become the motor for change in a society: the lower classes aspire to social mobility, and the leaders of the revolution generally come from the educated middle classes. It is this collaboration, this "fragmented interdependence" which will make for a successful revolution in *In the City by the Sea*, at the same time allowing the physical reality of the City to be reappraised to include its humanity as well, according to Lehan:

Before the city is a construct, literary or cultural, it is a physical reality with a dynamics of its own, even as that dynamics becomes difficult to assess. The most convincing constructs are those that confirm our sense of reality, validate experience, and suggest coherence in the face of chaos. [...] Abstracting from rather than grounding reality, each gives us a way of conceptualizing the city so that it can be retrieved in human terms, brought into intellectual focus, thus making possible an intellectual understanding of the city separate from its physical reality. (291)

The encounter of the different classes and ethnicities becomes the catalyst for change, especially in an environment like Karachi, leading Khan to ask (in a discussion of MQM militancy) how "violent conflict can vitalize a real

and imagined space of 'possibility,' and contribute to the creation of new spaces for improving lifeworlds?" (6).

The city is at a standstill, in a state of general strike, as Salman's supporters increase the pressure on the current government, and Salman's case literally becomes a transnational issue. For the time being, Salman has only been imprisoned, although his trial before a military court has been scheduled forty days hence. A conviction for treason would carry the death penalty, but the President is hesitant to kill Salman owing to international pressure. Yet the President is willing to go to extraordinary lengths to have Salman out of his way, going so far as to sign trade agreements with other countries, agreements which are clearly to Pakistan's disadvantage, with the understanding that those countries would then turn a blind eye to Salman's execution. He is, in other words, squandering the nation's resources to buy himself political "*carte blanche*" (81-82). Hasan's quest to free his uncle from prison becomes an urgent mission to depose, even murder, the President, his entire plan to do so being both realistic and flavored by his eleven-year-old imagination:

But I don't have a ring of invisibility. I don't know how to get a ring of invisibility. Let's face it, there probably is no such thing as a ring of invisibility. He stared at his reflection in the window. If I could, would I do it? Would I kill the President? (158)

Although Hasan feels that saving his uncle and the country is solely up to him, he encounters a diversity of collaborators along the way, and while not all of them correspond to his chivalric ideal, they will help to create what Coole and Frost call, in a discussion of new critical materialisms, "multitiered ontologies [...] the complex and reversible causalities that run between different levels of the social system and especially between the microlevel or everyday, and the macrolevel or structural," not to mention the level of imagination and dreams (32).

The Widow, for example, arrives at Uncle Latif's house, carrying only a feather pillow after being dispossessed by her late husband's brothers (49). Like Hasan, she seems to partially inhabit a parallel reality to complement the real, a dream-world to which she escapes every night, each morning waking to find "a feather from her pillow curled around her wedding ring" (51), and responding to Hasan's nervous query concerning the finite quantity of feathers—and hence dreams—in her pillow with "I will die" (53). Like the borders between classes or ethnicities which become more porous in the City, a necessary porosity if one is serious about escaping pendular time, the

realm of dreams and imagination is not separate from reality; indeed, much like Hasan, the Widow clearly illustrates that the real and the ideal coexist and depend on one another:

She treated the waking world like a dream which has revealed its unreality, and for the most part she would participate in it with amusement, even suspicion at its illogic, but always with an air of remove, always waiting for her eyelids to droop and the real work of living to begin. But there were always those moments when she would suddenly snap her neck up, open her eyes wide, lean out of the nearest window and sniff at the air. "Smell it," she would say, "Sorrow and greed." Then she would walk out of the house and sometimes disappear for days. (52)

Despite the otherworldly impression she gives, the Widow is fearless in her mission to defend other women from suffering her same lot, going out into the very real, very dangerous streets to wherever she is needed, in spite of death threats (54); she is an example of what Margaret Archer argues for, an approach that "makes our real embodied selves living in the real world really load-bearing" (22; see also Coole & Frost 25). In doing so, the Widow becomes the focal point of contact between the upper middle classes, bridging the walls that separate the wealthy enclaves and their inhabitants from the rest of Karachi, the streets where the protests take place and where ACE supporters are routinely killed—the Widow reinforces contact with the real, and does so at great risk to herself. She understands, in Kathleen M. Kirby's words, that one needs to dematerialize the boundaries to effect political change (95) – even as boundaries seem necessary to political activity— not merely the physical, material boundaries that separate people, but also the social conventions, rules and habits that limit our perception and "create" reality: "It is imagination alone which can portray a lucid and an enduring picture of reality," Nadia Butt reminds us, what we had called attention to earlier regarding the gap between the ideal city and a reality invented by humans (7). Uncle Latif laments, along these same lines, "Tyranny is killing our imaginations" (157). Indeed, at one point early in the novel, the implicit danger in rigid boundaries becomes clear, in a paradoxical manner; a group of students from a neighboring school are rioting, chanting Salman's name, and arrive at Hasan's school hoping to enlist more students and swell their ranks. Owing to some confusion, the gates are closed *after* the mob had already entered the grounds, hence when the police arrive the students must scale the walls to escape (26-27). Shortly thereafter the Bodyguard comes into being just outside Uncle Latif's house, for the express purpose of protecting the Widow; class division is brought to the fore as the Bodyguard, whose mem-

bers speak Urdu or village dialect and escort the Widow wherever she goes, yet who never enter the house:

When Uncle Latif demanded to know why the four strangers were sitting in the patch of lawn just outside his house, the eldest woman replied, in village dialect, "Because you have not invited us in yet." Uncle Latif's hospitality opened his mouth to invite the four in, but his social snobbery and City-dweller suspicion of strangers constricted his voice box, so he could only gape. (55)

The composition of the Bodyguard changes every day, and it functions as the chorus in a Greek tragedy—Berger & Luckmann suggest that a "chorus" operates as a dialectical form of "reality maintenance" (171)—or as an ultra-efficient private intelligence agency; it has the uncanny ability to know everything that happens in the City, and without the Bodyguard's help those who are their social and economic superiors would be much more vulnerable to the dangers of the city (75). The family driver, Khan, also knows the City as only one who goes out into its streets every day could, and is able to navigate, almost by instinct, its back streets and thus protect the family from the current dangers of the streets during the massive strikes and protests (29). Like the Widow, the Bodyguard becomes part of the family, are fed and engaged in conversation, especially by Hasan and Zehra, who discover that in fact some members of the Bodyguard speak English, thus breaking down one more class-based stereotype.

As he proceeds on his mission, preoccupied with the question of how to avoid death, the young protagonist consults regularly with The Oldest Man; although the difference in age might seem to make their collaboration improbable, The Oldest Man takes Hasan very seriously, and indeed counts him among his close friends, and for his part Hasan feels that he can discuss things which he couldn't with anyone else (163-64). On a previous visit, The Oldest Man had explained his secret for a long life – which interests Hasan for his uncle Salman's sake—especially as concerns the person's individual relation to his/her spirit: imprison the spirit for short-term gain, give in to the spirit's desires for a more tenable long-term philosophy (121-22). Hasan believes that the President's spirit has taken up residence inside Zehra's dog, Ogle; given the coincidences between Ogle and the President, Hasan's anxiety is not unfounded, and the greater worry, given Hasan's mission to kill the President, concerns how to deal with the problem. The Oldest Man replies: "What are you saying? You think the President's spirit has been imprisoned inside the dog? If that is so, and you need to break open the prison to free the spirit, where does that leave the dog?" (165), a compassionate response

which reveals an important underlying philosophy: although the President must be removed, there are non-violent means of doing so without going beyond the bounds of civilized society, a form of realistic resistance which proposes “a responsive and responsible model of the subject, one that neither abandons political realities nor arrests possibilities for change” (Kirby 36). Although Hasan feels embarrassed asking such a question, The Oldest Man understands his frustration and continues his explanation of life-choices with analogies from cricket, making even the most difficult choices seem relatively straightforward in a language that an eleven-year-old cricket fan can comprehend. There is no generation gap here. In response to Hasan’s parting question, “What were you like when you were my age?”, The Oldest Man replies, “I, too, was full of questions then. But I was also surrounded by people who had straight answers for everything. It instilled terrible habits in me” (166), reminding us of the importance of imagination and stories to the social fabric, especially since the world of the imagination allows for more radical critical thinking and ways to better realize that, in Belsey’s words, “things can be other than they are” (19). And of course, in relation to the City, it is the City which does not exist which holds the most potential, and is ultimately, in its indeterminacy, the most threatening to the dominant power and the status quo; “a particular definition of reality,” Berger and Luckmann remind us, is often “attached to a concrete power interest” (141), a point highlighted by Kadir as well:

As students of mathematics, literature, and history, we know that what does not exist, or what exists as virtual integer rather than as overtly actual presence, holds the greatest potential. In the as-yet-unrealized, whether in national culture or in mathematical probability, the need to be represented as reality becomes paramount [...] The indeterminacy and virtual probabilities of such potentiality have always proved threatening... (117-18).

Threats do not always come from where one expects them. Although Salman has been arrested and will be tried in a military court, and Hasan and the rest of his family and entourage—indeed, the entire ACE movement—live in fear of the army, it is clear that not every soldier is a mindless brute. One officer in particular is an aficionado of fine art, and causes some confusion when he calls Hasan’s mother, telling her he would like to hang her in his drawing room (133). Later in the novel we discover that General Jojo, very influential in the current regime, is an old family friend:

The world was full of generals these days. "But we don't like military men," Hasan objected. "We like this one," Ami said [...] "General Jojo. He was a great friend of your Nana's. I had a huge crush on him when I was thirteen because he could recite Urdu poetry backwards and lock eyelashes with his horse. Salman absolutely idolized him." (139)

Later still, during a beach outing to the Officer's Cove supervised by the General, Hasan meets the man and discovers him admiring a painting by his mother, and wondering if anyone realizes that the model for the painting was his uncle Salman. The General introduces himself, fully aware who Hasan is:

"Your Nana was a great friend of mine," he said. "I'm sure he would be happy to know that the ties of friendship between our two families have extended down the generations." He released Hasan's hand and looked up at Ami's painting. "She's captured the slope of Salman's back perfectly." (145)

The day trip to the Officer's Cove reminds Hasan of a previous trip to the seaside, when he saw a school of dolphins, which become the metaphor for consensus and hope, of forgetting, at least temporarily, people's differences; Salman explains to his nephew, making the connection to the President, also a General:

"All countries need dolphins, Hasan. But the General, our self-exalted leader, well, I've seen the way he operates. If he saw people in a hut drawing together to view a dolphin, he would shoot the dolphin dead. Then he'd plant clues to suggest to each person that someone else in the hut had pulled the trigger, and when the accusations turned to violence and everyone was intent on ducking and throwing punches, he would sneak out and sell the carcass for a handsome profit. The worst part is, before long some of the people in that hut would become dolphin-killers themselves. And Huss, I don't think I could live in a world without dolphins." (150)

General Jojo, it would seem, is no dolphin killer, and if Hasan comes to realize that the entire army is not necessarily on the same ideological wavelength as the current regime, it must also be said that some of the most frightening episodes for him come in fact from ACE supporters. The ACE-inspired riot at Hasan's school has already been mentioned; another incident takes place in the military convoy on the way to the Officer's Cove, passing through a part of town where all the shops are closed and pro-Salman graffiti covers the walls. As the military vehicles wait for the light to change, an ACE supporter spits betel-nut juice—the colour of blood—on the window, startling Hasan, who "was seized with a desire to roll down his tinted window and poke out his head in full view. The — ACEmen, no question of it—would see Salman Mamoo's features just underlying his own, and they would raise their

fists in solidarity” (143). Fortunately for Hasan, the light changes before he can act, his eleven-year-old naiveté not fully understanding the consequences of being seen as a General’s guest in this city where the formula of allegiance and affiliation can be very complicated indeed. The most terrifying moment for Hasan is when he and Zehra, returning from one of the Widow’s rescue missions, are seen by ACE men patrolling the streets to enforce the strike; Hasan quite literally fears for his life at the hands of Shehzad, who is nevertheless his uncle’s most trusted associate: “Shehzad, who once covered Salman Mamoo’s body with his own when he saw the glint of sun on gun-muzzle during a rally, and so passed into legend” (179). Khan, the family driver, manages to get them to safety in the courtyard of a house, and the ACE men leave when they hear police sirens approaching; once again, Hasan was tempted to simply show himself, thinking that his relation to Salman would clear up any misunderstanding, and once again is prevented from doing so (179-80). Threats as well as promises of protection come from both the army and ACE, refusing to fit into a simple good guys/bad guys paradigm, leaving Hasan confused and wondering, to paraphrase Kadir, if it is more dangerous to be taken in or left out (82).

In any case, Hasan doesn’t have a choice; he and Zehra, Azeem and the beggar girl, were all born into the situation. Indeed, the enormous gap between Hasan’s environment and that of the ragpickers leads Dasgupta to ask, “which Pakistan does [Salman] represent?,” a legitimate question since even a victory for the ACE party, although meaning more freedom, would by no means guarantee the eradication of poverty, or even a minimum of economic security (303). Children are often the heroes in Shamsie’s fiction, and these City children will play an important role in ultimately overthrowing the President. When he hears that the President will be the special guest at the oratory competition, Hasan realizes that he will have his chance to get close enough to kill him; reality is accommodating his imagination: “Forget spirits. Forget dolphins. [...] No need for rings of invisibility. A poem can bring me face to face with the President, and then. And then. I can do something” (188). Hasan is almost certain to win the contest, although his botched rendition of a political poem from memory—“Some Advice to Those Who Will Serve Time in Prison”—loses out to Nargis Lotia’s more conservative and safe performance of “Daffodils” (188). Although distraught at losing his chance, he needn’t have worried; just prior to the elocution contest, a green-eyed girl bearing flowers makes her way to the President:

The President took the flowers with a smile. The girl's right hand was fisted. She opened the fist. [...] Something conical and segmented lay in the girl's palm. The dilation of the President's pupils gave the thing a name: grenade. [...] But really it was a pine cone. (200)

Eight of the President's advisors simultaneously received the same "grenade," and the President, understanding the message perfectly, does not even wait for the end of the elocution contest to flee the country, Salman is released from jail and elections will take place in less than three months (203; 206; 209). The Widow empties her pillow of its dream-feathers which land indiscriminately on the entire spectrum of Karachi's fragmented yet interdependent mosaic: "soldiers, economists, ACEmen, the Bodyguard, artists, lawyers, suits, *shalwars*, a helicopter and a green-eyed girl" (205; original italics); the Widow will quite probably join Salman's government as Minister of Law, "just the thing to throw a pendulum out of whack" (210-211). In pursuit of their ideal these protagonists have engaged in realistic resistance, collaborating and exploiting their stories and imaginations in order to face the excess of reality which, recalling Salman's concern, can kill a man, as many of the ACE supporters can attest. For his part, Hasan has worked through Azeem's deaths—the frozen moment of his fall has become part of the ongoing story – and allows his own spirit free reign in its desire to touch the sky, but rather than shoot down the sky to bring it within reach, he opts to pursue it:

He jumped straight up into the night, his hands a pendulum cutting down in the air and then back up again, up in front of his body. The pendulum reached its maximum height, began its downward journey, but no! someone, somehow, caught his hands: Khan's-brother-in-law-Azeem-the-green-eyed-girl reached down from the stars and grabbed his hands, pulled them further up, beyond the limits of the pendulum's parabola. (213)

The City, Salman concludes, "can get under your skin, and never be sweated out. I mean, it's still aesthetically traumatic, but it's got spirit" (210), the same kind of spirit that The Oldest Man was talking about in human terms and which so inspired Hasan. Salman's survival translates into the survival of his family and the nation, and especially of the City, a city that once again holds potential because, liberated from pendular time, it can re-engage the process of becoming the city it could be, alert to its "historical moment" and aware that "in occupying one's historical time and place one is occupied by that historical moment even more – already preoccupied and inevitably defined by it in turn" (Kadir 3). The City, because it is both real and

imaginary, particularly when seen through the eyes of an eleven-year-old hero, manages to dematerialize boundaries which then allows one to “interpret the past, test our sense of reality, and structure the future,” the City, like Hasan’s family or the nation’s destiny, is “ultimately redeemable” (Lehan 292; 276).

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