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ferment that informed the Aligarh Movement which, in its turn, acted as a catalyst for the production of a considerable body of literature in Urdu.

The last section contains excerpts from Mirza Muhammad Hadi Ruswa's celebrated fictional work, *Umra'ā Jan Aida*. The selection of the text is quite appropriate inasmuch as it represents the genre of the novel. It also offers readers some insight into the ethos that produced so much that is significant in Urdu culture. However, the section would have gained in perspective if Russell had started with some specimen from a *dastān* and proceeded through Mir Amman, Sarshar, Nazir Ahmad and Sharar, to Ruswa.

In his Introduction, Russell has clearly set out his objectives: fulfilling the needs of non-Urdu readers and the children of Urdu-speaking parents in Europe and America. There is no doubt that they will be squarely met. □

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INTIZAR HUSAIN. *Basi*. Translated by FRANCES W. PRITCHETT. With an Introduction by MUHAMMAD UMAR MEMON. Delhi: Indus/HarperCollins Publishers, India, 1995. xxiv, 287 pp. Rs. 95.

AS I READ AND REREAD *Basi* (town, city, neighborhood), I found myself detecting resonances of other writings by Husain, of works by other authors, even of lyrics at considerable remove from the novel. "We are all just prisoners here of our own device," from the Eagles' mythic *Hotel California*, perfectly describes for me the experience of *Zakir*, the protagonist of *Basi*, a man trapped in the memory and remembering of his own histories. By his own histories, I mean not only the sum of experiences that for him constitute his personality and person, but also his particular fashioning of the history—religious, cultural, and psychic—that he shares with others. That chapter seven consists largely of extracts from *Zakir's* diary of events, and that *Zakir* is a professor of history, reinforce the importance of history and make *Zakir's* prodigious recollections plausible. And the fact that his very name means "the one who remembers" will certainly be lost on no Urdu reader and is pointed out by Pritchett in the comprehensive glossary (pp. 273–86) that accompanies this controlled and nuanced translation.

Zakir's recollections of Shiite and Subcontinental history in particular are mediated, as Memon points out in an excellent Introduction to the volume, by

the knowledge that Islamic history "has been one of constant internecine feuds among Muslims for political dominance" (p. vii).¹ This fratricidal history provides the background for a novel that is both a chronicle of and a meditation on the wars that have riven India and Pakistan. It is in this context that the story of Cain's slaying of Abel is evoked by Husain early in the novel (pp. 6–7). Pritchett sells herself short when she says that her use of language reminiscent of the King James Bible only feebly suggests traditional Muslim religious vocabulary (xxii); it is, on the whole, successful, as is her translation overall. Indeed, the novel opens with lovely passages of wonderment and newness, lyrical and fresh (p. 3), ingenious. In the idyllic context of the city there described, the innocent questions of the young voice are not out of place: "Bi Amma, did elephants once fly?" (*ibid.*).

The writer and critic Salim-ur-Rahman is, however, disappointed. Looking back on Husain's earlier works, he feels that mythic childhood and urban doubt are "repeated here with less vigor and noticeable lack of panache."² Other critics take it a step further and accuse Husain of recycling older material, of writing a derivative novel. I think immediately of Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, where so much has previously been tapped for its creative energies, and wonder, first, whether it is fair to accuse a creative writer of *auto plagiarism*, and second, whether reworking need necessarily be an unproductive exercise. For Memon, *Basi* is "a summation, an ingathering of all those creative strains that have preoccupied Husain since he began writing," with an emphasis on "memory as a principle of healing and integration" and the "same inexorable need to relate to one's deeper self," made urgent in a world of declining morality.³ For him, the first chapter is a blueprint of the entire novel (p. xi), and the so-called failures (*pace* the critics) of *Zakir*—to display any demonstrable will, to join or get his childhood sweetheart Sabirah to act—are interpreted by him not as failure but as the demonstration of "how a personality survives in a morally corrupt universe by drawing on its own inner resources" (p. xii).

For me, the first chapter is effective and succeeds—if that is the right verb—on a number of levels. In the first instance, it vividly depicts the life, the city, and the *modus vivendi* of a time past, a time of divinely inspired balance, of cosmic

¹ This 14-page Introduction (pp. vii–xiv), the 4-page Translator's Introduction (pp. xxi–xxiv), and "A Few English Sources on Intizar Husain" appeared together with the translation of the first chapter of the novel (and the necessary notes and glossary items) in *Ekhtiyar: The Journal of Middle Eastern Literature* NS 5:1 (1994), pp. 125–70.

² Muhammad Salim-ur-Rahman, "An Enriched White-Bread Novel," in Muhammad Umar Memon, ed., *The Writings of Intizar Husain*, Special issue of the *Journal of South Asian Literature* 18: 2 (1983), p. 206.

³ *The Works of Intizar Husain: Selected Short Stories*, edited with an Introduction by Muhammad Umar Memon (Colorado Springs: Three Continents Press, 1996), p. 4. I am most grateful to Muhammad Umar Memon for having shared his manuscript with me.

justice and sagacity: "Bibi, when cholera comes the Muslims die, when plague comes the Hindus die" (p. 12). The interweaving of the Hindu and Muslim elements in the novel is reminiscent of passages in O. V. Vijayan's Malayalam work, where, for instance, Gandharvas sire lustful *śāstri*.⁴ Throughout, Zakir has recourse to Qur'ānic, Shi'ite, Biblical, Hindu and Buddhist tradition and folklore to help him make sense of the destruction and disintegration around him, but the focus of his reminiscences is very much the ideal city of Rupnagar. Rupnagar is the vortex around which the novel revolves, even if it exists only "in cranial space," even if it is "pure fiction" (Memon in *The World of Inizar Husain*, p. 33)—but only a fiction in the way Macondo or Malgudi are. It is not so much that Rupnagar does not exist, but that it is the emblem of all those cities of which it is a symbol, traditional cities.⁵

Rupnagar is an emblem also of everything of worth that has been lost: values, balance, commitment, serenity. Eventually, Rupnagar can exist only as part of the unnamed adoptive city in which the novel is set, probably Lahore in late 1971. Zakir says, "In my mind is a prayer for Rupnagar and its people as well, for I can no longer imagine Rupnagar apart from this city. Rupnagar and this city have merged together inside me, and become one town" (p. 167). He concludes: "But I myself am the ruined city. 'It's as if my heart is the city of Delhi [Mir's pun on *dill*]' " (p. 207). This need to salvage both (all) cities and this dirge are mirrored in Afzal's offer to run Pakistan, with Zakir and Ifrān as his virtuous arms. Zakir laughs bitterly at this suggestion, to which Afzal dejectedly responds, "Yar, among those disgusting people [who have spoiled the face of Pakistan] we are the only beautiful ones" (204). Intentionally or not, the location chosen by Pritchett to render this thought, and indeed the tenor of Afzal's remark, remind me of Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1968) and hints at similarities between Armah's unnamed protagonist and Zakir.

One of the most beautiful exchanges in the novel takes place between Zakir and Sabirah. They are talking about books. When Zakir tells her how good a particular novel is, Sabirah says, "Zakir, will you bring *Paradise on Earth* for me?" (p. 47). The blissful quality of their childhood interaction, disrupted and ruptured by a separation and fall inseparable from its edenic overtones, is preaged in passages such as:

Just then thunder rumbled in the clouds, scaring them both, and at once the rain came down so hard that before they got from the open roof to the

⁴ *The Legends of Khazak*, tr. O. V. Vijayan (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 25, 10, 76.

⁵ Cf. Inizar Husain, "The Vanishing Traditional Cities of the Indian Subcontinent," in *Yatra 4* (1994), pp. 159–69.

staircase they were both drenched. (p. 27)

The critics are dismayed that Zakir fails to (re)connect with Sabirah. For me, this is not a failing of Zakir's or a failure at all, unless one looks at it in a Hollywood or Proppian sense. Should we also criticize Chekhov's protagonist in "The House with the Mansard" for not seeking out Missyus?

In the first chapter is recounted an exchange between him and Sabirah. When Zakir makes a mud pile, she asks him what he has made, and he answers, "A grave" (p. 25; cf. the grave dug by the crow in the story of Cain and Abel). With "a kind of warmth in her tone" (*ibid.*), she asks him to make her one too and he tells her to do it herself. When she is done, she tells him her grave is better and asks him to test it: "[H]e put his foot forward, and slid it into Sabirah's grave ... And for some time he kept his foot in that soft, warm grave" (p. 26; emphasis mine). This significant event he remembers slightly differently when it is recounted in the last chapter: "My foot—in the grave molded by Sabirah's soft white foot. How soft, how cool—" (p. 246; emphasis mine). This barely perceptible change belies the importance of the changes that have overcome Zakir, changes already signaled throughout: "When he observed his own non-human walk, the strange thought came to him that it was not he who was walking, but someone else in his place" (p. 132).

Nothing is truly external to Zakir. When his mother tries to prevent him from going out because of the shooting, fires, and insecurity outside, Zakir reflects, "That's just fine, let anything happen outside," he muttered. "Nothing is happening outside. Everything is happening inside me. Everything that has already happened" (p. 247).

With Ifrān, Zakir has the following exchange, at exactly the mid-point of the novel. I include the meaning of the characters' names for the uncanny dimension it adds to the passage:

"Ifrān [knowledge]."

Ifrān [knowledge] looked at him [remember], but he was silent.

"What is it?"

"Yar!" He paused, then said somewhat hesitantly, "Yar, was it good that

Pakistan was created?"

Ifrān [knowledge] looked at him sharply. "Have you [remember], too, been influenced by Salamāt [peace]?"

"Not by Salamāt [peace], by you [knowledge]."

"How?"

"Once doubt begins, there's no end to it."

Ifrān [knowledge] made no reply. He looked at Zakir [remember] somewhat angrily, and tightened his lips. Zakir [remember] sat in silence.

"I know one thing," Ifrān [knowledge] said at last, "In the hands of the wrong people, even right becomes wrong" (p. 130; emphases mine)

Husain relies heavily on symbols. Three in particular caught my attention. The first is trees, e.g. "He came back with difficulty from the world of trees" (p. 204) which for me distantly echoes Anis Zaki's closing reverie in Najib Mahfuz's *Sangara fauqa n-Nil*.⁶ Cats are not only a permanent occupant of the café frequented by Zakir and his friends but also present in the following reverie: "A cat standing up on her hind legs opened the door, looked at him intently, and closed the door" (p. 133; cf. Al Stewart's *The Year of the Cat*). And thirdly, monkeys: they overrun the town at the beginning of the novel (pp. 17-20), and Zakir is terrified of being raised on Judgment Day as an ape (p. 252). This symbolism is identified by Javaid Qazi in a 1983 article as typical of Husain's second phase (of three)—the 1960s, where the emphasis is on animal imagery and metaphor. But Husain's emphases in his first and third phases (*pace* Qazi)—the 1950s where it is on social, cultural and religious symbols, and the 1970s where it is on the self and identity—are also important preoccupations in *Basti*: these three emphases merge.⁷ Religion is especially significant, as are the notions of collective and individual responsibility.

Sometimes Husain seems to be practicing overkill with his use of symbolism and his quotations from scripture, poetry, and folktales—for instance, in the closing chapters—and one is thus inclined to agree with the view that the novel "drags on for four more chapters" (Memon, *The Worlds of Intizar Husain*, pp. 35-49). One might even argue that the novel seems to drag for the last five chapters, this in spite of the fact that (or because?) chapter seven incorporates the diary section. Indeed, in the one-page preamble to the extracts from the diary, we are treated to a collage of Hindu (Ramayan, 254), Shi'ite (Kufa, 254), Buddhist (Buddha, 255), Persian (Hafiz Tai, 256), Qur'anic (Sura 22:01, 256), Urdu (Afgha Hajju Sharaf, 257), and Biblical (Eccles. 1:4, 257) motifs, culminating in the 187 disaster (via Ghaleb and Mir) (pp. 252-58).

But this collapse into legends, poetry, scripture and folk memory is not overkill. It is, to borrow Memon's locution, symptomatic of the death of the creative self. No longer able adequately to frame or understand the structures around himself, Zakir is forced to construct them from the only material he has

⁶Naguib Mahfouz, *Adrift on the Nile*, tr. Frances Liardet (New York: Doubleday, 1993). Significantly, Husain confesses his interest in trees in "A Conversation between Intizar Husain and Muhammad Umar Memon," tr. Bruce R. Pray, in *Journal of South Asian Literature* 18:1-2 (1983), p. 160.

⁷Javaid Qazi, "The Significance of Being Human in Intizar Husain's Fictional World," in Muhammad Umar Memon, ed., *The Writings of Intizar Husain*, Special issue of the *Journal of South Asian Literature* 8:2 (1983), pp. 1-23. Cf. Memon's taxonomy in "Reclamation of Memory, Fall, and the Death of the Creative Self: Three Moments in the Fiction of Intizar Husain," in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13:1 (1981), pp. 73-91.

available. The experience of the walk to the graveyard is thus both a narratological and psychic exercise. Time ceases: "But time doesn't pass! It keeps passing, but it doesn't pass" (p. 245). The Syro-Lebanese poet Adunis reflects on the fractured Arab cultural and civilizational existence in similar terms:

The past has ended and yet has not ended.
(Why does the past end and yet is unending?)⁸

When we realize that Zakir is struggling with unfamiliar variables, within new parameters, under the burden of multiple, disabling histories, the most important charges leveled against him—those of passivity and absence of dynamic will—then become meaningless.

Basti is a subtly powerful statement about the Subcontinent, about creation, about the constitution of identities, and about (cultural) memory by a significant author in world literature. It is therefore appropriate that Husain has in Pritchett a translator sensitive to the nuances, references, and allusions of the work. Pritchett's translation reads very well, fulfills the technical aims she spells out in her introduction, and earns *Basti* a place in the "growing repertoire of good Urdu novels translated into English" (p. xxiii) to which Pritchett refers.

In the hope that this translation will see reprints, I include here a list of minor technical infelicities. I found the following phrases clumsy: "What! Have you put your brains out to pasture?" (p. 4); "This is the season when all my memories are returning" (p. 8); "And there's just no real end to them" (p. 179). And I had difficulty with "Fellow" as a term of address (e.g., p. III). Also: In the acknowledgment for the calligraphy on p. iv, for "fourteen" read "eleven," there being only 11 chapters; for "He had Surendar" read "He and Surendar" (p. 41, line 25); for "wasn't be seen" read "wasn't to be seen" (p. 43, line 33); for "was" read "were" (p. 45, line 8); for "his" read "him" (p. 8, line 10); "had" is superfluous (p. 8, line 21); for "to his" read "of his" (p. 88, line 17); the semicolon is superfluous (p. 113, line 4); for "car" read "car" (p. 113, line 30); for "is" read "it" (p. 164, line 20); for "faqir's" read "faqir" (p. 173, line 21); "lamps" should be singular (p. 180, line 33); *Are* would have been clearer if transliterated *Aré* or *Aray* (e.g., p. 148, line 17; p. 151, line 16); "Their" (p. 254, line 3) is unclear; for "take aback" read "taken aback" (p. 261, line 19); for "ghaal" read "ghazal" (p. 269, line 15). □

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⁸In his "Mugaddima li-T'arikh Mulk al-T'arā'if" [Introduction to the History of the Perty Kings] in *Vaqat bayan al-Ramād wa al-Yard* [A Time between Ashes and Roses] (Beirut: Dar al-Awda, 1972), pp. 19, 20.