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Re-Presenting the Orient: A Re-Orientalist Study of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003)

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Abstract

Diasporic writing is generally regarded as representative of the native people and their culture. In this regard, South Asia has been depicted in a variety of ways by writers of South Asian origins living in the West. While considered representatives of the South Asian tradition, diasporic writers' depiction of the region, its people, and their culture has also come under scrutiny for reinforcing the East/West binary that reinstates the latter' superiority. Khaled Hosseini is among those South Asian writers whose fiction is informed by his declaration "that Afghanistan is 'my land of origin'" (Aubry, 2009, pp. 27-28); however, while Hosseini's work has been a major source of information about Afghanistan for the West, at home, he is, at best, an ambivalent figure that has invited criticism pertaining to his representation of Afghanistan especially in his debut novel, The Kite Runner (2003). This article critically analyzes Hossini's The Kite Runner through the lens of Lisa Lau's theorization of re-Orientalism (2009) and bell hooks's notion of patriarchal maleness to argue that the novel perceives the Afghan land and people through a patriarchal gaze that renders them inferior and subordinate, hence feminine vis-à-vis the superior, masculine, and patriarchal West. In this way, the novel ends up reinforcing the Orientalist project of perpetuating stereotypical images of the Orient. While previous scholarship mainly focuses on the development of the protagonist's character through the themes of guilt, sin, and redemption in the novel, the uniqueness of this paper lies in its exploration of the text's re-Orientalist proclivity. Critically analyzing the novel's depiction of Afghanistan, its people, and culture, the paper argues that the text, through its patriarchal gaze, accords a superior place to maleness and reinforces the Western practice of feminizing the Orient.

Introduction

South Asian writing in English is deeply invested in the diasporic experience of making a home away from home. Mostly living in the Americas and Britain, diasporic writers have played a significant role in representing South Asian people and culture to the western world. However, these writers have also come to be criticized for being complicit in the neocolonial enterprise that continues to deploy a select elite group of intellectuals that is expected to "despise home culture" as "inferior" and "as less culturally and technologically sophisticated" (Rita, 2004, p. 84). In Said's terms, some of these writers have accepted "the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient" (Said, 1979, p. 2). As such, these writings differ significantly "in style and content" from the works produced within South Asia, giving rise to the belief that the physical location of the diasporic writers influences "their approach to writing in English, the audience for whom they write, and the concerns which they choose to draw attention towards" (Lau "Making the Difference", p. 237-238). Khaled Hosseini is among those South Asian writers whose fiction has been a

major source of information about Afghanistan for the West; however, at home, Hosseini is, at best, an ambivalent figure that has invited criticism pertaining to his representation of Afghanistan especially in his debut novel, *The Kite Runner* (2003).

The Kite Runner acclaimed as "a novel of sin and redemption" tells the story of a writer named Amir whose life and experiences in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the US shape his identity as an immigrant Afghan (Noor, 2004, p. 148). Written in the first person, the novel details the protagonist's relationships with his own family and other Afghans both in Afghanistan and the US, intricately tying the personal with the political. This paper engages in a re-Orientalist reading of the novel from the perspective of Lisa Lau's theory of re-Orientalism (2011) and bell hooks's notion of patriarchal maleness (2004). The paper seeks to argue that the novel's patriarchal gaze that tends to feminize Afghanistan, its people, and the culture, helps reinforce the orientalist representation of the East that renders it inferior to the West.

Scholarship on *The Kite Runner*

Since its publication, *The Kite Runner* has been praised for "its ability to cross the borders between nationalities and ethnicities" depicting "a country central to the United States' war on terrorism" (Aubry, 2009, p. 26). Though mainly addressed to an American audience, the novel "foregrounds its foreignness" through its depiction of Afghan culture and its use of Persian vocabulary (Aubry, 2009, p. 26). David Jefferess analyzes the novel for its "ethical demand" in relation to "contemporary conceptions of humanitarianism" maintaining that the novel demonstrates global ethics in an allegorical way (Jefferess, 2009, p. 389). Jefferess asserts that the novel moves away from the traditional model of determining political community and identity through race and nation and rather advances the "idea of the 'modern' as the framework for determining the 'human'" (Jefferess, 2009, p. 389).

With specific reference to 9/11, the novel has been viewed as providing a window to the American audience into the Afghan people and culture. In this regard, Alla Ivanchikova's analysis of the novel alongside M. E. Hirsh's *Kabul* (1986) and Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) argues that these texts delineate "divergent strategies of imagining Afghanistan's past" in addition to offering "a path towards imagining its future as well as the future of the globe" (p. 197). Ivanchikova maintains that these novels' representation of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 explains the role of the United States in contemporary geopolitical ventures. The novel engages with the United States as "a geographical entity, a new 'homeland' territory to be reckoned with" ((Blumenthal, 2012, p. 252). Through the physical journey from one country to another, the protagonist of the novel traverses both national and ideological boundaries. However, "Hosseini troubles the notion of homeland" by attending to "both Afghan and American cultures as he searches for an ideological homeland" (Blumenthal, 2012, p. 258). Blumenthal maintains that Hosseini's work refuses to "settle geographical, ideological, or textual homelands in either Islamic Afghanistan or the United States, preferring instead to trouble notions of a monolithic, static homeland at every level" (p. 262). Blumenthal also praises the novel for embodying the "American narrative of the self-made man" while simultaneously relying on Persian/Afghan literatures to form its "narrative core" (p. 262).

Stephan Chen, in particular, focuses on the novel's ambivalent representation of Islamic heroes who are "as American as they are Afghan or Pakistani" (Chan, 2010, p. 829). Chan concludes that these characters have hardly any discernible characteristics that conform to their ethnic, religious, or geographical origins. They are educated and conversant with "Western manners and affectations, English grammatical constructions, subtleties, and conceits" (Chan, 2010, p. 829). In the same vein, Naeem Inayatullah criticizes the novel for Hosseini's inability to sketch the Taliban "with a plausible sociology, a social psychology, or a political economy" (Inayatullah p. 333). Inayatullah further contends that the only Talib who has been given some detailed description is Assef whose motives for joining the Taliban are "not ideological, religious, or even monetary"; rather, his love for violence is responsible for his choice (p. 333). As evident in the discussion above, while previous research has analyzed *The Kite Runner* with a focus on the text's search for a home or its geopolitical perspective, this paper focuses on the text's tendency to re-Orientalize the East through the text's femininization of Afghanistan, its people and their culture. Drawing on the theoretical ideas of Lisa Lau and bell hooks, the paper explores how the text furthers re-Orientalism through the patriarchal gaze of its narrator that feminizes everything it encounters.

Re-Orientalism and Patriarchal Maleness

Drawing on Edward Said's groundbreaking work in *Orientalism* (1978), Lau introduces her theory of re-Orientalism in her article "Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals" (2009)

maintaining that diasporic writers further Orientalism through their privileged position both as "the insider and the outsider, where the representing power can be simultaneously self and other" (Lau, "Re-Orientalism," 2009, p. 572). Lau argues that although diasporic writers identify with the Orient ethnically, culturally, and linguistically, they enjoy "a position of power and dominance" owing to their location outside what she terms "the Orient" (Lau "Re-Orientalism" 2009, p. 572). Hence, their physical location outside the Orient grants these writers privilege over those located within the Orient "particularly where the issue of literary representation and image construction is concerned" (Lau "Re-Orientalism" 2009, p. 572). Identifying their writings as a "literary sub-genre," Lau maintains that through these works "the Orient continues to be re-orientalised," "voluntarily or otherwise," hence questioning the place of diasporic writing "as representative of the diverse majority" (Lau "Re-Orientalism" 2009, p. 573).

Lau further argues that these writings maintain the West/East binary through "continuing to define the Orient relative to the Occident," thereby resulting in "skewed, distorted and dogmatically generalized representations of South Asia," its people, and the culture (Lau "Re-Orientalism" 2009, p. 590). This process of allocating a central position to the West results in a "deliberate self-Othering" by elite Orientals, which, in turn, normalizes Orientalism (Lau & Mendes, "Introducing Re-Orientalsim," 2011, p. 4). In this way, the diasporic writing continues the agenda of western powers through elite Orientals thus maintaining the "internal consistency of Orientalism" through promoting particular aspects of the orient "at the expense of a more holistic representation" (Lau & Mendes, "Introducing Re-Orientalsim," 2011, p. 3). Lau's re-Orientalism implies that in choosing a peripheral position for themselves and perpetrating Orientalism, the elite Orientals place themselves at the top of the hierarchy, "a direct legacy of the imperialist order" (Lau & Mendes, Introducing Re-Orientalsim, 2011, p. 4). Though the position of re-Orientalists validates their authority, re-Orientalism debates the "instability of representation" of diasporic writing and questions its authenticity (Lau & Mendes, Introducing Re-Orientalsim, 2011, p. 5). In this way, the re-Orientals refuse to perform the task of bridging the gap between the East and the West, and end up further widening it to create "a willfully misrepresented South Asia" that leads to a "cultural stereotyping" of the Orientals (Lau & Mendes, Introducing Re-Orientalsim, 2011, p. 7). In this way, Orientalism has been "reinscribed into the cultural imaginary by Orientals themselves" (Lau & Mendes, Introducing Re-Orientalsim, 2011, p. 7). Lau's theorization of re-Orientalism as a re-inscription of Orientalism is a useful lens for analyzing Khaled Hossieni's re-presentation of Afghanistan in *The Kite Runner*. Engaging with Lau's lens, this paper argues that Hossini's representation of Afghanistan and its people perpetrates Orientalism thus further marginalizing the land and its people.

In order to further probe into Hosseini's representation of his native land and its people, this paper draws on bell hooks's notion of patriarchal maleness outlined in her essay "Understanding Patriarchy" (2004). hooks defines patriarchy as:

> a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence. (hooks, 2004, p. 30)

Sharing her own experiences as a female in a dominantly patriarchal household, where strong men and weak women created a "natural social order," hooks admits witnessing and rejecting the "pornography of patriarchal violence" against women (hooks, 2004, p. 32). Such violence was deemed necessary for females in order to "reinforce both the message and the remembered state of absolute powerlessness" against the patriarchal hold. (hooks, 2004, p. 32). hooks maintains that patriarchal violence reinforces the "dominator model" which favors "the practices of subjugation, subordination, and submission" (pp. 34-35). This results in perpetuating "abusive patriarchal masculinity" to which most male conform in one way or another (hooks, 2004, p. 37). hooks rejects the "patriarchal methods of organizing nations" which serve "as a means of social control" deeming these responsible for "the slaughter of millions of people on the planet" (p. 38). In this way, hooks's notion of patriarchal maleness creates "a perverse form of connection" between men and women which "replaces true intimacy with complex, covert layers of dominance and submission, collusion and manipulation" (pp. 40-41). The solution to the problem of patriarchal dominance lies in challenging psychological patriarchy along with its "concrete manifestations" in male behavior and envisioning "alternatives to patriarchal masculinity" (hooks, 2004, p. 41).

Hence, drawing on the theory of re-Orientalism along with hooks's notion of an ever-present patriarchal maleness as a conceptual framework, this paper analyzes the process of feminization of Afghanistan, its people, and culture in Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. Through a close textual analysis of the text within this framework, the paper argues that the novel views the Afghan land and people through a patriarchal gaze that renders them inferior and subordinate hence feminine vis-à-vis the West as superior, masculine, and patriarchal. In this way, the novel reinforces

the Orientalist project of perpetuating stereotypical images of the Orient. While hooks provides an analysis of the damage patriarchal violence has done to the weak and the subordinate, Lau's re-Orientalism shows how the text culturally stereotypes the East and its inhabitants through a feminization of the characters.

Re-Orientalizing through Re-presentation: Patriarchal Maleness in *The Kite Runner*

Set in the 1970s Afghanistan, this first-person narrative relates the life and experiences of two boys, Amir and Hassan, from two different ethnicities growing up in turbulent times in an "unhappy, chronically troubled, afflicted land" (Hosseini, Foreword, 2013, p. xiv). It is "a tale of prejudice, racism, and hatred; a tale of bullies, sacrifices, and brutal attacks" (Caillouet p. 32). While Amir, the privileged Pashtun boy, who is also the protagonist, finds an opportunity to leave the worn-torn country to settle in America, Hassan, his servant's son, is doomed to face the atrocious treatment for being a Hazara. Though growing apart, the lives of the two boys are joined through shame, guilt, and redemption. As the narrative progresses, the Talibanization of the country and the decades of political upheaval are depicted in connection with the personal lives of its, mostly male, characters. The overlapping of the personal and the political is rendered through flashbacks from the past that plays a pivotal role in shaping the lives and relationship of the novel's main characters as "past claws its way out" (p. 1).

The novel opens at the end with glimpses from the past as Amir, the protagonist, recalls the incident that is central to the narrative: Hassan's rape by Assef, the rich boy in the neighborhood while Hassan is kite running for Amir. Hassan has always been bullied by Assef and others on account of his ethnic identity as Hazara. Ashamed of having witnessed Hassan's rape from "behind a crumbling mud wall," Amir's decision to run away instead of helping Hassan shapes the relationship between the two boys for the rest of their lives (p. 1). While the rape itself feminizes Hassan, Amir's initial introduction of the former as "the harelipped kite runner" (p. 2) whose face is "like a Chinese doll" (p. 3) establishes Hassan's inferiority to Amir from the outset. While Hassan's father owns "the prettiest house in all of Kabul" (p. 4), Hassan is a mere Hazara servant whose family has served Amir's family over the years. Though a courageous boy, who has perfected the skill of using a slingshot, Hassan has been portrayed as a subservient attendant, the purpose of whose life is to please Amir in a relationship that continuously reinforces Amir's superiority, in the same way as a woman is supposed to 'serve' her better half in South Asian culture. Interestingly, Hassan's fidelity to Amir adds to his feminine portrayal since the narrative treats infidelity as a demeaning characteristic of bad women like Hassan's run-away mother. While the boys are often caught committing some mischief planned by Amir, Hassan remains loyal: "But he never told on me. Never told that the mirror, like shooting walnuts at the neighbor's dog, was always my idea" (p. 4).

Similarly, Ali, Hassan's father, who has been a long-time trusted servant of Amir's Baba has been depicted as an incapacitated man with a polio-struck "twisted, atrophied right leg" and "a congenital paralysis of his lower facial muscles" (p. 8). Ali has been feminized through his inability to walk like a man or to express his emotions, owing to his distorted facial features. Like his son, Hassan, Ali is also feminized in terms of his submissive relationship with Amir's father. While Ali is aware of the fact that his only son is a product of a secret liaison between Amir's father and Ali's wife, Sanaubar, he continues to serve Baba unconditionally. Thus, whereas Hassan is feminized in relation to Amir, Ali's identity is subjugated to Baba's patriarchal maleness.

Endorsing the South Asian code of masculinity through the figure of Baba and his relationship with his son Amir, Hosseini also further reinforces patriarchal maleness in Amir's relations with Hassan. The portrayal of Amir's Baba as a man of extraordinary prowess conforms to the South Asian standards. Baba, who has been nicknamed "*Toophan agha*, or Mr. Hurricane", has been famous for having wrestled an enormous black bear bare-handed (p. 12). Baba has been depicted as being capable of performing the most impossible of tasks that many men could not even imagine attempting. Baba's life has been one long success story, from building an orphanage to marrying "a highly educated woman universally regarded as one of the Kabul's most respected, beautiful, and virtuous ladies" to having risked his life in a fearsome quarrel with a Russian soldier to protect a woman (p. 15).

Baba's masculinity serves to feminize Amir who is a "glaring exception" to Baba's otherwise fulfilled life (p. 15). Amir's love for poetry is one reason for Baba's concern who believes: "Real men didn't read poetry" let alone composing the genre (p. 20). They rather play Soccer matches and watch challenging games like *Buzkashi*. Above all, Amir has been guilty of crying while watching the game and seeing one of the riders fall form his horse forcing Baba to "conceal the disgusted look on his face" (p. 21). Baba's code of masculinity does not allow any display of physical or emotional weakness in a male: "There's something missing in that boy" (p. 22). Any sign of such weakness is regarded feminine in the Afghan culture that elevates and glorifies the virtues represented by Baba himself. Hence,

Baba's constant fear regarding Amir: "A boy who won't stand up for himself becomes a man who can't stand up to anything" (p. 22). It is interesting to note that while apparently Hosseini is criticizing Baba and his code of masculinity through the character of the narrator, Amir, he ends up reinforcing the same power dynamics in his own relationship with others, especially Hassan.

This is especially evident in the scene of Hassan's rape by Assef when instead of saving Hassan, he prefers to run away.:

> I ran because I was a coward. I was afraid of Assef and what he would do to me. I was afraid of getting hurt. That's what I told myself as I turned my back to the alley, to Hassan. That's what I made myself believe. I actually aspired to cowardice, because the alternative, the real reason I was running, was that Assef was right: Nothing was free in this world. Maye Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba. Was it a fair price? The answer floated to my conscious mind before I could thwart it: He was just a Hazara, wasn't he? (p. 77)

Being disloyal to Hassan brings Amir the advantage of getting close to the most masculine figure around him, his Baba, that he idealizes while also criticizing him: "I finally had what I'd wanted all those years" (p. 85). Interestingly, it is winning the kite tournament that restores his Baba's trust in Amir hence, achieving masculinity at the cost of a loyal companion's honor. The narrative establishes that masculinity is superior and attaining it is the supreme goal even if that involves deception, lies, or dishonor. Ironically, however, embracing feminine values of infidelity, deception, and betrayal become the requisites for attaining masculinity.

Indeed, a stark absence of women in the narrative is further testament to the text's reinforcement of masculinity. Amir and Hassan are motherless boys whose lives are entirely influenced and shaped by the male figures around them. The narrative is full of motherless sons, wifeless husbands, and sisterless boys. Even a few women who make their way into the narrative are represented in a rather negative light. These women either have a "dishonorable reputation" for eloping with men or have brought disgrace to their families in other ways (p. 8). Sanaubar, Hassan's mother, epitomizes infidelity who not only tarnishes his father's name as a maiden but also cuckolds her husband; she even "refused to even hold Hassan" in her hands as an infant, and ran away with another man (p. 10). Her neighbors remember her "suggestive stride and oscillating hips" that "tempted countless men into sin" (p. 8). Hassan and Ali suffer the disgrace of having been related to Sanaubar, the "notoriously unscrupulous woman," and face public shame while walking the streets of Kabul (p. 8). It is interesting to note, however, that while Sanaubar's infidelity is a source of shame, Baba enjoys a respectable position despite his association with her and their illegitimate child.

Likewise, Amir's dead mother becomes a source of Amir's feminine personality to the dislike of his father. Amir escapes his "father's aloofness" through his "dead mother's books," hence developing his love for poetry, novels, and epics (P. 19). The same makes him the target of his father's dislike who wants him to be masculine and refuses to accept "a son who preferred burying his face in poetry books to hunting" (p. 19). The narrative makes this distinction between what is masculine and glorified and what is feminine and vilified. While reading and writing poetry and novels is deemed feminine, playing soccer, hunting, kite flying, and watching sports, like *chapandaz*, are masculine. Similarly, being kind, considerate, and forgiving are considered feminine qualities while fighting back, taking one's revenge, and physically assaulting others are deemed manly.

Re-Orientalism and the American Experience

The breaking of bond between Amir and Hassan is followed by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan leading to the migration of Amir and Baba, along with many other Afghan families, to the United States. Amir's depiction of America is emblematic of Hosseini's tendency to re-Orientalize the East. Amir's Baba "loved the *idea* of America"; for him, "there are only three real men in this world . . . America the brash savior, Britain, and Israel" while the rest of the countries are "gossiping old women" (p. 125). Similarly, America is the dreamland for Amir as much as it is a land of opportunity. Comparing America with Afghanistan, the latter emerges in Amir's memory as a land beset with destruction and death, a country of "harelipped ghosts" (p.136). On the other hand, "America was different. America was a river, roaring along, unmindful of the past. I could wade into this river, let my sins drown to the bottom, let the waters carry me someplace far. Someplace with no ghosts, no memories, and no sins" (p. 136). As such, America comes to be represented as the "saviour" compared to the war-torn, primitive Afghanistan.

While living in America, Amir repeatedly compares Afghan culture with the American one. Kabul is sketched as infertile, fear-stricken, flocked by blood-thirsty Talibans, and incapable of inhabited by real men anymore. Amir's house, symbolic of Amir's pride and his Baba's wealth and superiority is now inhabited by the Hazaras, Hassan and his family, Farzana, and Sohrab. Thus, Hosseini feminizes Afghanistan as a woman who has been raped of her dignity

and whose superior people have deserted her leaving it to rot and suffer: “Alas the Afghanistan of our youth is long dead” (p. 216). On the other hand, America is glorified as superior to Afghanistan. The novel makes repeated references to America’s greatness. Living in America positively impacts Amir as noted by Rahim Khan:

> America has infused you with the optimism that has made her so great. That’s very good. We’re a melancholic people, we Afghans, aren’t we? Often, we wallow too much in *ghamkhori* and self-pity. We give in to loss, to suffering, accept it as a fact of life. Even see it as necessary. (p. 201)

Thus, the Afghan culture remains inferior to the American. Amir belittles Afghan sense of humor that is culturally linked with telling of Mullah Nasruddin jokes juxtaposing Afghan’s love for these jokes with the development that has taken place in the rest of the world: “Wars were waged, the Internet was invented, and a robot had rolled on the surface of Mars, and in Afghanistan we were still telling Mullah Nasruddin jokes” (p. 266).

Amir further dwells on the double standards of Afghan people and culture when his Baba gets him engaged with Soraya, the daughter of a former Afghan soldier, General Taheri, now living in America. The double standards of Afghan culture are nowhere more evident as they are in General Taheri’s case who appreciates good music and boasts of a large collection of songs by Afghan and Hindi singers, yet he believes that “performing of it (music) best left to those with lesser reputation” (p.177). While he would not allow his wife, Khanum Taheri, to sing in public despite having an “enchanting singing voice,” he approves of her love for gardening, an interest of a feminine nature (p. 177). Ironically, while Afghan boys living in America are in relationship with women, their families pardon their behavior saying, “they’re just men having fun,” while Soraya is constantly reminded of her past mistake by her relatives (p. 179). Afghan preference of race and blood over virtues and goodness is apparent in their treatment of Hassan and Ali as Hazaras, an ethnicity considered lesser by Afghans who pride themselves in being Pashtuns. It is this attitude that comes in the way of Amir and Soraya’s decision to adopt a baby when IVF is unsuccessful. General Taheri rejects the adoption proposition and maintains: “blood is a powerful thing, *bachem*, and when you adopt, you don’t know whose blood you’re bringing into your home” (p. 188). The very idea makes Afghan thinking inferior to American philosophy behind adoption where “people marry for love” instead of “family name and ancestry” (p. 188). Similarly, they adopt a baby “as long as the baby is healthy,” the family is happy and welcomes them.

Amir mocks Afghan culture’s “double standard” of favoring men in the case of women’s illegitimate involvement with a man (p. 146). It is a culture where “Fathers and sons could talk freely about women. But no Afghan girl—no decent and *mohtarram* Afghan girl, at least—queried her father about a young man” (p. 147). Indeed, Amir’s sketch of America establishes the masculine/feminine binary between the two countries. While Afghanistan became a danger zone for a pure soul like Hassan for belonging to a lesser ethnic group, Hassan might have made a great life in America “where no one cared that he was Hazara” (p. 226). Afghanistan is portrayed as a land beset with lies and deceit, illegitimate relationships and rape, fake and sham standards. Amir is shocked to hear the truth about Hassan’s paternity, who turns out to be his Baba’s illegitimate son from Ali’s wife, Sanaubar. Ironically, men like Amir’s Baba who apparently uphold standards of decency and manhood and command respect for the same, turn out to be deceivers themselves. Baba who had taught Amir to believe that “When you tell a lie, you steal someone’s right to the truth” (p. 18) happens to be “a thief of the worst kind, because the things he’d stolen had been sacred” (p. 225). The revelation once more establishes the inferiority of Afghanistan, the place “in which some things mattered more than truth” (p. 301). In contrast to his Baba, “a liberal who had lived by his own rules” and “disregarded or embraced societal customs as he had seen fit,” Amir is regarded as different from other Afghan men by his wife, Soraya (p. 180). Once more exalting masculinity, Amir contends that he is different “because I had been raised by men: I hadn’t grown up around women” (p. 180).

However, at the end, Amir’s consent to risk his life by traveling to Afghanistan to save Hassan’s son, Sohrab, from the clutches of Taliban is meant to absolve him of his guilt. Amir who has been disregarded by his Baba for being less masculine (or feminine, to be exact), for being a coward, and for displaying the tendency to cry in sad situations, for being “gutless,” and for suffering from car sickness is later glorified as someone who has “never lied to yourself about it” (p. 275). He consoles himself by believing that there is “Nothing wrong with cowardice as long as it comes with prudence,” hence implying that the Afghan idea of manliness is mindless and lacks prudence and propriety (p. 275). Interestingly, the final act of goodness, absolution, and redemption comes from a man who has been regarded as a lesser man throughout the narrative. Amir has to indulge in a bloody physical fight, something that he has carefully avoided all his life, with Assef to get Sohrab’s custody. It is important to note that the text establishes the fact that while Amir has always challenged and mocked Afghan notions of masculinity, epitomized in Baba’s figure, he ends

up practicing the same to assert himself through the fight for Sohrab's freedom. Similarly, the biggest reason to save Sohrab is to protect his father's progeny, his race and blood, the most masculine of Afghan traits. Hence, Amir's absolution lies in renouncing femininity and embracing masculinity. Ironically, the ending endorses Hosseini's re-Oriental project by mocking the standard of masculinity and loyalty upheld by Baba and other men who built these standards on sham notions of truth and manliness.

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