



Moth Smoke

By Mohsin Hamid

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Available for the first time from Riverhead—the debut novel from the bestselling author of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Look out for Mohsin Hamid's next book, *Exit West*, coming March 2017

Moth Smoke, Mohsin Hamid's deftly conceived first novel, immediately marked him as an uncommonly gifted and ambitious young literary talent to watch when it was published in 2000. It tells the story of Daru Shezad, who, fired from his banking job in Lahore, begins a decline that plummets the length of Hamid's sharply drawn, subversive tale.

Fast-paced and unexpected, *Moth Smoke* was ahead of its time in portraying a contemporary Pakistan far more vivid and complex than the exoticized images of South Asia then familiar to the West. It established Mohsin Hamid as an internationally important writer of substance and imagination and the premier Pakistani author of our time, a promise he has amply fulfilled with each successive book. This debut novel, meanwhile, remains as compelling and deeply relevant to the moment as when it appeared more than a decade ago.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Since the late 1970s, India in all her infinite variety has been brought to life as a posse of Indian authors writing in English have exploded onto the scene: Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Rohinton Mistry, Vikram Seth, Bharati Mukherjee--the list is legion. But what of Pakistan--that Siamese twin, painfully separated in the partition of 1947? Though neither as numerous nor as well known as their Indian counterparts, Pakistani writers are beginning to make an impression on Western readers. Novelists from Rushdie to the Pakistani Bapsi Sidwha have written about the partition and the bloody civil war that followed; even stories set in modern-day Bombay or Lahore cannot escape the aftershocks of the division. On the surface, Mohsin Hamid's first novel, *Moth Smoke*, seems more domestic than political drama: narrated from several different perspectives, it tells the story of Daru Shezad's ill-fated affair with his best friend's wife, Mumtaz. But in a country like Pakistan, the personal and the political are difficult to separate, and as the story moves along, the divisions between gender, class, and opportunity provide a not-so-subtle commentary on the fissures that run through contemporary Pakistani society. The novel begins, tellingly, with a historical fragment about the internecine wars of succession that followed the rule of Emperor Shah Jahan (builder of the Taj Mahal):

Imprisoned in his fort at Agra, staring at the Taj he had built, an aged Shah Jahan received as a gift from his youngest son the head of his eldest. Perhaps he doubted, then, the memory that his boys had once played together, far from his supervision and years ago, in Lahore.

Jump ahead several hundred years to Lahore in the summer of 1998. Childhood playmates Daru and Ozi have just reunited again after Ozi's three-year stay in America. Glad as he is to see his old friend, Daru can't keep his eyes off of Ozi's wife, Mumtaz. "You know you're in trouble when you can't meet a woman's eye," he says. But woman trouble isn't his only problem; he's also addicted to hash, which leads to his dismissal from an upscale job as a banker. Soon Daru spirals out of control into a degraded existence on the fringes of society. Then a young boy is killed in a hit-and-run accident, and he is accused and jailed. Shah Jehan would probably recognize this age-old story of love and revenge playing out once more--this time against the backdrop of the Indian-Pakistani arms race. Hamid artfully weaves the subcontinent's tragic history into his characters' no-less-tragic present, rendering *Moth Smoke* a novel that resonates on many levels. --Sheila Bright

From Publishers Weekly

Hamid subjects contemporary Pakistan to fierce scrutiny in his first novel, tracing the downward spiral of Darashikoh "Daru" Shezad, a young man whose uneasy status on the fringes of the Lahore elite is imperiled when he is fired from his job at a bank. Daru owes both the job and his education to his best friend Ozi's father, Khurram, a corrupt former official of one of the Pakistan regimes who has looked out for Daru ever since Daru's father, an old army buddy of Khurram's, died in the early '70s. As the story begins, Ozi has just returned from America, where he earned a college degree, with his wife, Mumtaz, and child. From the moment they meet, Daru and Mumtaz are drawn to each other. Mumtaz is fascinated by Daru's air of suppressed violence, and Daru is intrigued by Mumtaz's secret career as an investigative journalist; the two share a taste for recreational drugs, sex and sports. But their affair really begins after Daru witnesses Ozi, driving recklessly, mow down a teenage boy and flee the scene. Daru decides then that Ozi is morally bankrupt. But as Daru becomes more dependent on drugs, the arrogance he himself has absorbed from his upper-class upbringing stands out in stark contrast to his circumstances. Daru's noirish, first-person account of his moral descent, culminating with murder, interweaves with chapters written in the distinctive voices of

the other characters. One in particular comes vividly to life: Murad Badshah, a sort of Pakistani Falstaff, officially the head of a rickshaw company, but kept afloat by drug dealing and robbery. Hamid's tale, played out against the background of Pakistan's recent testing of a nuclear device, creates a powerful image of an insecure society toying with its own dissolution. (Jan.)

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From Library Journal

Set in Hamid's native Lahore, Pakistan, this first novel provides a pitch-perfect tale of the destruction of a young man. Socially unconnected, Daru loses his precarious footing among the respectably employed and falls into an abyss of emotional depression, moral turpitude, and criminal activity. He goes from bank employee to drug dealer to holdup man, while falling in love with Mumtaz, the journalist wife of Ozi, Daru's boyhood best friend and rival. Ozi strips Daru of his self-respect, and Mumtaz can never merely be Daru's lover, for she is both liberated and besieged by her own moral ambiguity. With a sure hand, Hamid paints Daru, Lahore, the weight of Western materialist values, and evolving and devolving friendships, giving us near-photographic realism softened by the shading influences of well-turned phrases. Moving quickly but inviting prolonged retrospection, this first novel lays bare a human core that festers in its own unremitting heat. Hamid is a writer to watch. For all public libraries.

Francisca Goldsmith, Berkeley P.L., CA

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Nancy Reese:

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Eliza Gold:

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