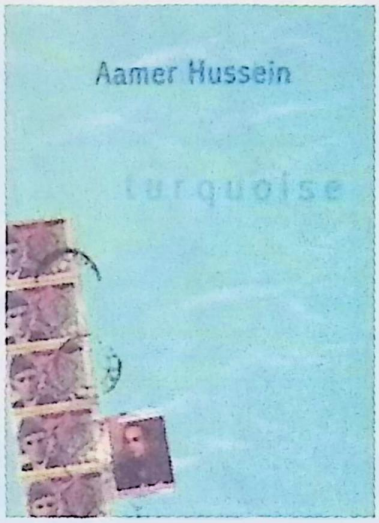
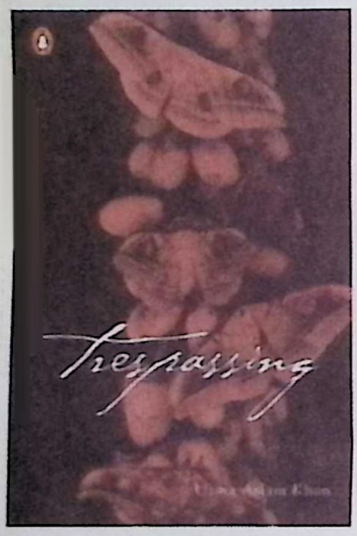
New South Asian Fiction



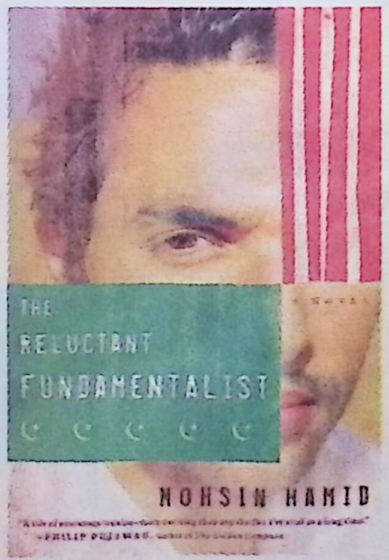
Turquoise
by Aamer Hussein
ISBN-10: 0863563252; $13

Direct and startlingly intimate, Hussein's stories are set in troubled times in Karachi, Lahore and London amid war, partition, and military rule, the anticipation and anxiety of changing homes or cities, the mixed blessings of family life, the hopes and failures of love and work. Turquoise is a collection of stories that illuminate the passions and fears of a world more complex and more beautiful than the media images of Islam and Pakistan convey.



Trespassing: A Novel
by Uzma Aslam Khan
ISBN-10: 0312423551; $14

Khan portrays the conflicts between modern Western and traditional Pakistani mores in an intelligent, ambitious novel about two star-crossed young lovers in contemporary Karachi. Daanish, a journalism student in "Amreeka," as his aunt calls it, returns home to Karachi for the funeral of his beloved father, a prominent, forward-thinking doctor. He catches the eye of a comely Karachi student, Nini, with whom his traditional mother would like him to make an advantageous marriage. But when Daanish meets Nini's best friend, the thoughtful and challenging Dia Monsour, who helps run her family's silk farm, romance blossoms quickly. Their families' disapproval casts a pall over their meetings, though, and Daanish begins to feel uncertain about seeing Dia as the date for his return to America draws closer. Khan's portrayal of life in Karachi, seen from multiple perspectives, is rich and complex, and her supporting characters, such as Salaamat, a young fisherboy who becomes a driver for a group of freedom fighters whose attacks have a deadly impact on Dia's family, add great depth. Khan's frequent flashbacks can be jarring, and the affair between Dia and Daanish is stretched perilously thin as the primary story line, but Khan's prose, ornate yet precise in its discussions of both love and politics, mark her as a truly gifted observer of moments grand and minute.



The Reluctant Fundamentalist
by Mohsin Hamid
ISBN-10: 0151013047; $22

Hamid's second book (after Moth Smoke) is an intelligent and absorbing 9/11 novel, written from the perspective of Changez, a young Pakistani whose sympathies, despite his fervid immigrant embrace of America, lie with the attackers. The book unfolds as a monologue that Changez delivers to a mysterious American operative over dinner at a Lahore cafe. Princeton graduate Changez is on top of the world: recruited by an elite New York financial company, the 22-year-old quickly earns accolades from his hard-charging supervisor, plunges into Manhattan's hip social whirl and becomes infatuated with Erica, a fellow Princeton graduate pining for her dead boyfriend. But after the towers fall, Changez is subject to intensified scrutiny and physical threats, and his co-workers become markedly less affable as his beard grows in ("a form of protest," he says). Erica is committed to a mental institution, and Changez, upset by his adopted country's "growing and self-righteous rage", slacks off at work and is fired. Despite his off-putting commentary, the damaged Changez comes off as honest and thoughtful, and his creator handles him with a sympathetic grace.