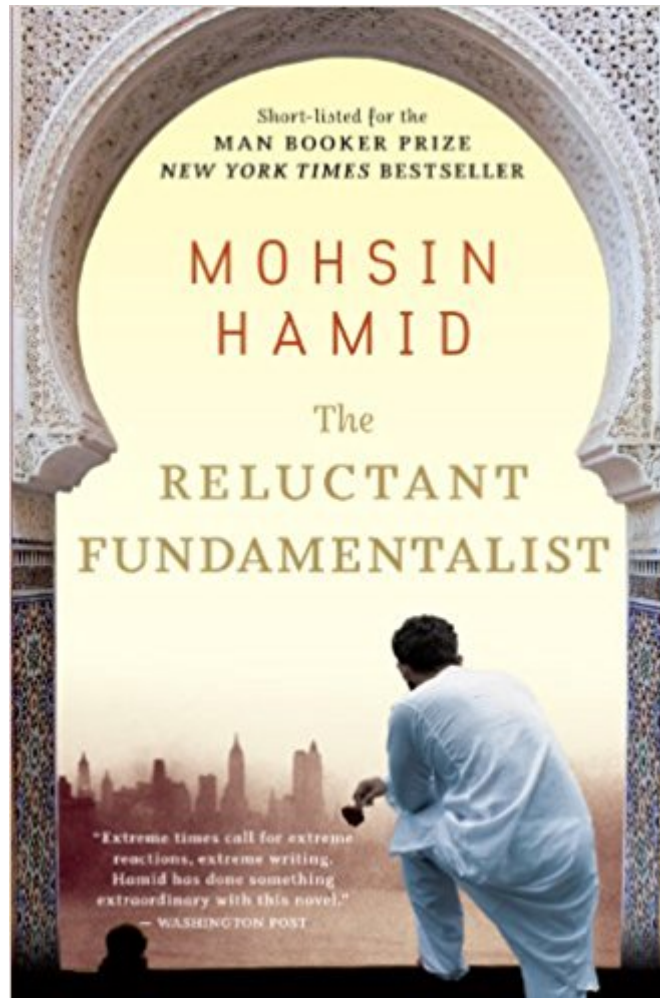




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The Reluctant Fundamentalist



Synopsis

Now a major motion picture Short-listed for the Man Booker Prize New York Times bestseller “Extreme times call for extreme reactions, extreme writing. Hamid has done something extraordinary with this novel.” —Washington Post “One of those achingly assured novels that makes you happy to be a reader.” —Junot Diaz At a café table in Lahore, a bearded Pakistani man converses with an uneasy American stranger. As dusk deepens to night, he begins the tale that has brought them to this fateful encounter . . . Changez is living an immigrant’s dream of America. At the top of his class at Princeton, he is snapped up by an elite valuation firm. He thrives on the energy of New York, and his budding romance with elegant, beautiful Erica promises entry into Manhattan society at the same exalted level once occupied by his own family back in Lahore. But in the wake of September 11, Changez finds his position in his adopted city suddenly overturned, and his relationship with Erica shifting. And Changez’s own identity is in seismic shift as well, unearthing allegiances more fundamental than money, power, and maybe even love. “Brief, charming, and quietly furious . . . a resounding success.” —Village Voice A Washington Post and San Francisco Chronicle Best Book of the Year A New York Times Notable Book

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Customer Reviews

Mohsin Hamid’s first novel, *Moth Smoke*, dealt with the confluence of personal and political themes, and his second, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, revisits that territory in the person of Changez, a young Pakistani. Told in a single monologue, the narrative never flags. Changez is by turns naive,

sinister, unctuous, mildly threatening, overbearing, insulting, angry, resentful, and sad. He tells his story to a nameless, mysterious American who sits across from him at a Lahore cafe. Educated at Princeton, employed by a first-rate valuation firm, Changez was living the American dream, earning more money than he thought possible, caught up in the New York social scene and in love with a beautiful, wealthy, damaged girl. The romance is negligible; Erica is emotionally unavailable, endlessly grieving the death of her lifelong friend and boyfriend, Chris. Changez is in Manila on 9/11 and sees the towers come down on TV. He tells the American, "...I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased... I was caught up in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees..." When he returns to New York, there is a palpable change in attitudes toward him, starting right at immigration. His name and his face render him suspect. Ongoing trouble between Pakistan and India urge Changez to return home for a visit, despite his parents' advice to stay where he is. While there, he realizes that he has changed in a way that shames him. "I was struck at first by how shabby our house appeared... I was saddened to find it in such a state... This was where I came from... and it smacked of lowliness." He exorcises that feeling and once again appreciates his home for its "unmistakable personality and idiosyncratic charm." While at home, he lets his beard grow. Advised to shave it, even by his mother, he refuses. It will be his line in the sand, his statement about who he is. His company sends him to Chile for another business valuation; his mind filled with the troubles in Pakistan and the U.S. involvement with India that keeps the pressure on. His work and the money he earns have been overtaken by resentment of the United States and all it stands for. Hamid's prose is filled with insight, subtly delivered: "I felt my age: an almost childlike twenty-two, rather than that permanent middle-age that attaches itself to the man who lives alone and supports himself by wearing a suit in a city not of his birth." In telling of the janissaries, Christian boys captured by Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in the Muslim Army, his Chilean host tells him: "The janissaries were always taken in childhood. It would have been far more difficult to devote themselves to their adopted empire, you see, if they had memories they could not forget." Changez cannot forget, and Hamid makes the reader understand that--and all that follows. --Valerie Ryan

A Conversation with Mohsin Hamid Set in modern-day Pakistan, Mohsin Hamid's debut novel, *Moth Smoke*, went on to win awards and was listed as a New York Times Notable Book of the Year. His bold new novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, is a daring, fast-paced monologue of a young Pakistani man telling his life story to a mysterious American stranger. It's a controversial look at the dark side of the American Dream, exploring the aftermath of 9/11, international unease, and the dangerous pull of nostalgia. .com senior editor Brad Thomas Parsons shared an e-mail exchange with Mohsin Hamid

to talk about his powerful new book *Read the .com* Interview with Mohsin Hamid --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Hamid grabs hold of the American Dream as seen through the eyes of a young Princeton grad from Pakistan in a post-9/11 world. As the protagonist, Changez, finds moderate business success and romantic love in New York City, his heritage and identity will be lost in a sea of subtle and blatant bigotry as well as international politics. In relating this journey from loving to loathing of all things American, Changez speaks to a nameless and speechless American whom he encounters in the marketplace of his home city, Lahore, Pakistan. Bhabha's English-influenced Pakistani accent proves soothing and inviting for listeners. His gentle demeanor captures the courteous and polite manner of Changez. His American accent comes in the form of a Midwestern accent with a confident --almost arrogant tilt. He lapses when it comes to vocalizing women. Though lighter, his voice exudes a stoic resonance instead of a feminine one. But the casual tone of Changez telling his life story translates perfectly with the help of Bhabha's velvet voice. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Hamid's approach of letting the reader listen in on a conversation in real time through one character's comments is captivating. The book is short (takes about 3 hours to read) but chocked full of the main character's (Changez) provocative observations and experiences as a Pakistani educated and working in the U.S. Nothing is simple in the story, and the reader is given great latitude by the author to create and explore multiple interpretations of events, motivations, ethical commitments, and political values. Luckily, I've had the opportunity to talk with others who have read the book, thereby realizing how varied people's interpretations are. Don't let the title dissuade you by suggesting that this is a simplistic treatment or defense of political or religious themes. The book goes far beyond these to explore complex human motivations that cross cultures and contexts. The only disappointment I have is that I can never read the book again for the first time.

I read this after I read *Exit West*, which is the better book. This is a very personal and particular first-person narrative that is meant to have a broader relevance as its told in the context of the post-9/11 world to a mysterious American about whom we know nothing (is he a business man, military, embassy personnel, possibly a spy?). Hamid addresses a very topical question - why do barely observant, highly financially successful, seemingly assimilated Muslims reject the society that

"welcomed" them (It didn't, not really - that's pretty much the answer). The book flows; it's an easy read; one gets a good sense of a range of scenes - from a busy family restaurant in Islamabad to corporate board rooms, but has two flaws. One is the romance with the American woman, who is unattainable b/c she can't get over the loss of a childhood sweetheart to cancer. Maudlin. The second is that we get very little sense of his fundamentalism. He's returned to Pakistan. He refers to his beard. He may be entrapping his interlocutor, who is very nervous, but at best he seems a half-hearted or even quarter-hearted fundamentalist.

Beautifully written but disturbing in content, Mr. Jamie's book doesn't ascribe to the traditional successful immigrant tale. There is no upwardly mobile thrill of new goals achieved, of dire situations escaped. There is only building resentment and a sad estrangement from the American dream. There is very little possible improvement indicated. We are too interfering in the world, especially the mid east, they are our victims. I want to understand the thought process of militants such as the college educated and well to do men who killed thousands on 9/11 and this book helps me to see their perspective a bit. Not to forgive but to see.

Reading a NY Times best-seller initially attracted my interest. It was a complex read from the first page. The bombing of the Twin Towers leaves a Pakistani native bereft, longing for cohesion among family and friends, while laboring through a prestigious "sanitary" job in white collar NYC. Among native friends he was accepted as an equal in his class; in America he was fundamentally an outcast due to his native Muslim/Pakistani roots, his non-standard physical bearing, and his personal peculiarities. Princeton educated but lonely and far removed from his roots (family, friends, peers), he was essentially challenged to remain open-hearted and emotionally alive in the USA. To achieve personal self-mastery outside of these familial parameters (in his mind) is to die a thousand deaths due to disenchantment with the whole game of modern life. His heart begins to change in subtle ways. The drama is acute at the end. A real-page-turner. My visceral reaction is that there is much more to the end game of this short story, and it is never quite resolved/finished. Explanations are wanting. I found myself craving a real discussion afterwards to further open up the beauty, depth, and love I found in this very well-written 1st person (semi-autobiographical?) expose. There is also a motion picture of the same title. I look forward to watching it soon.

I picked up Mohsin Hamid's book *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* after seeing it appear on one of the older NY Times Notable Books list and also hearing what a great author he is. I was not

disappointed in the least bit and found the book to be incredibly well written, fast paced, and thought provoking. The book is about a man named Changez who grew up in Pakistan but made a life for himself in the USA after being admitted to Princeton and then getting a job at a prestigious financial firm in New York City. He ends up being quite successful at work at the young age of 22 and reignites a flickering at best flame with Erica from college whose sickness doesn't let her fully commit to him as a boyfriend. Eventually, Changez grows discontent and somewhat skeptical of his life in NY as his homeland is facing threats from neighboring India and Erica becomes sicker by the day. The story is told from the perspective of Changez and he sits in a cafÃ© with a purported CIA agent and tell him his life story over a meal. I enjoyed the voice the author gave to Changez and found the novel to be quite stimulating on many levels--including reiterating in my mind the perspective of many towards the US. A very good read and although several years old still quite relevant in terms of subject matter and likely will be for many years to come. I highly recommend it.

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