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Storytelling, Liminality & the Textual Fashioning of a Post-Colonial "Ancient Mariner" in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

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Abstract

This paper examines Mohsin Hamid's 2007 novel The Reluctant Fundamentalist as a post-colonial re-writing of S. T. Coleridge's narrative poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798). A comparative analysis is carried between these two works to establish their affinities in terms of storytelling technicalities and the space of liminality where they position their narrators. The comparative analysis shall prove that Hamid's affinities with Coleridge's work are deliberately employed to fashion his central character Changez as a post-colonial ancient mariner, which ultimately lies to the heart of the novel as both a contemporary politico-moral fable and as an act of resistance to post 9/11 American neo-colonialist discourses.

Keywords

liminality, storytelling, postcolonial novel, Mohsin Hamid

Discussions of Mohsin Hamid's 2007 novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* focus exclusively on reading the novel as a "political discourse" on 9/11 and the subsequent "War on Terror". This resulted in overlooking the real points of excellence in this novel, notably, its unusual narrative form.

Changez, the narrator and the reluctant fundamentalist of Hamid's novel, recounts his unfortunate American experience and his subsequent rejection of its ideal after 9/11. While Changez looks retrospectively over his shoulder over years of his experience in America, the actual narration spans an evening and a night in Lahore, the hometown where he returns after 9/11 as a lecturer at a local university.

Technically, the novel is a monological conversation between Changez and his silent American interlocutor in a café in Lahore. This method was not positively appreciated. Jones and Smith find it a "cumbersome device" (2010, p. 940), while Changez is tongue-in-cheeks labeled as "Hamid's hero/narrator/sole-spokesman-on-behalf-of-other-characters" (Chan, 2010, p. 829). King quite mistakenly identifies Albert Camus' novella *La Chute* as Hamid's narrative model on the sole resemblance of the authors' use of autobiographical details in their narratives to create an ambiguous narrative "double perspective" (2007, p. 685).

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is nothing like *La Chute* in narrative form but King is pointing out a way to understand the narrative form of Hamid's novel via analogues and narrative models. However, the closest analogue to this novel is not to be found in fictional prose but, rather, in S. T. Coleridge's narrative poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". So far, the critical literature on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* does not acknowledge this connection/resemblance with Coleridge's poem except for a very brief footnote in Lois Arschen's short article on this novel in Jeffery W. Hunter's anthology *Twenty-First Century Novel* (2011, p. 947). He lists "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", among other works, as featuring a similar narrative technique to that of Hamid, which is that of "the single narrator, addressing a reluctant but fascinated stranger, with notes to help with nineteenth-century language and references". But the parallels between these two works are deeper and go beyond the question of storytelling technicalities. In addition to their shared storytelling legacies, these works share two other important areas of similarity, namely, the liminal space of the narrator and Hamid's textual fashioning of Changez as a post-colonial ancient mariner.

However, the re-writing of canonical Western literary texts by post-colonial novelists is a standard tactics of resistance to the cultural closure of Western imperialism Thus, Edward Said, the leading orientalist, notice "today writers and scholars from the formerly colonized world have imposed their diverse histories on, have mapped their local geographies in, the great canonical texts of the European center (1994, p. 53).

Both works employ the same narrative technique of frame narrative which features an identified interlocutor in the grip of an involved first person narrator. They start in medias res to create a heightened atmosphere of narrative immediacy with their narrators hooking an audience to their stories. The mariner stops a wedding guest to tell his story whereas Changez intrudes upon an American tourist (or secret intelligence agent) in a café in Lahore. Both interlocutors are passer-bys and might appear to be randomly chosen. Coleridge's choice of a wedding guest as his story's interlocutor is part of the allegorical design of his poem. The dynamic activity of the real life of marriage and the senses contrasts greatly with the meditative calmness of the mariner's present world. The marriage guest is torn between these two worlds but he can't choose but wait and listen to the mariner's griping narrative. However, Hamid's choice of an American average man as his story's interlocutor is more pertinent to the ideological implications of his narratives of 9/11 American Islamophobia and current day Pakistani

national crisis.

Both works show close similarities in the narrator's choice of an interlocutor in terms of intention and method. Their inner stories drive their significance from the listener being chosen. The listener functions to contextualize the narrator's personal experience into a universal pattern of meaning. The ancient mariner overtly justifies his choice of the wedding guest as his listener at the end of his narrative:

I pass, like night, from land to land;
I have strange power of speech;
That moment that his face I see,
I know the man that must hear me:
To him my tale I teach (*Lyrical Ballads*, 2005, pp. 619-623).

Working within the tradition of parabolic narratives of the medieval balladry the ancient mariner achieves a visionary company by exercising a sense of supernatural physiognomy. However, identifying his chosen listener is only half the task, the other being relating his narrative to him. This process has a therapeutic function. The ancient mariner is in a never-ending torment because of his ghastly experience:

Since then, at an uncertain hour,
That agony returns:
And till my ghastly tale is told,
This heart within me burns (pp. 615-618).

Similarly, Changez displays the same sense of physiognomy and therapeutic function of narrative in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist.* Earlier in the novel he shows a superior sense of physiognomy when he explains to the American tourist:

> How did I know you were American? No, not by the color of your skin; we have a range of complexions in this country, and yours occurs often among the people of our northwest frontier. Nor was it your dress that gave you away; a European tourist could as easily have purchased in Des Moines your suit, with its single vent, and your button-down shirt. True, your hair, short-cropped, and your expansive chest—the chest, I would say, of a man who bench-presses regularly, and maxes out well above two-twenty-five—are typical of a certain type of American; but then again, sportsmen and soldiers of all nationalities tend to look alike. Instead, it was your bearing that allowed me to identify you, and I do not mean that as an insult, for I see your face has hardened, but merely as an observation (2007, p. 5).

Unlike the ancient mariner, Changez's sense of physiognomy is cultural rather than bardic because his narrative requires a cultural type to signify its intentions. He needs an average intellectual middle class American listener to highlight the ethics of his political allegory. Being topical of the majority of the present-day American people the unnamed American listener becomes a focalizer for the political

paradigm of Changez's American experience. This typifying tendency in Changez's listener is also present, but in a different shape, in the wedding guest. The listener of the ancient mariner is not individualized person as might seem for the first time. Characters in literary works of allegorical/parabolic dimension, such as Coleridge's poem, are never individualized. They are necessarily types in the social or humanistic sense of the word. The ancient mariner confesses that the wedding guest is one of many listeners he had to identify as the chosen to attend to his narrative over the course of his life after the traumatic sea experience. Thus, Hamid and Coleridge write fables, whether moral or political, that seek to fashion the zeitgeist of their ages. It is at this point that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* departs from Coleridge's poem. The Humanistic-Universalism of Coleridge's narrative narrows into a political-cultural paradigm. None of the characters in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner bears a name or is given a distinguishing personal attribute. Names, like the ancient mariner and the wedding guest, are overtly allegorical. Hamid, instead, gives his characters symbolic names to suggest their role in his political fable. Lois Kerschan (2011, p. 945) pinpoints this name symbolism:

> The name Changez sounds like "changes" and suggests the changes the narrator decides to make in his life. The name Erica derives from the word America. This character symbolizes the nostalgia that Changez thinks might affect the United States. Underwood Samson stands for U.S. corporate wrongdoing. The dead boyfriend Chris represents the exploitive history of the United States, its cancerous past, all the way back to European colonization of North America.

Nevertheless, the listener in both narratives remains unnamed. They are identified as guest and tourist and this generalization is symbolic enough in terms of role-play in narrative schemes. The wedding guest becomes a guest to the ancient mariner's story while the American listener of Changez cannot be present in Pakistan and had such amble time to chat and be conversational except as leisure tourist in a foreign country. They are also people of the senses who are geared to enjoy the pleasures of life whether in the marriage parties or in sightseeing but are compelled to suspend their active communal life for the sake of the privacy of fabulist narratives. Hence, the lure of the external communal life keeps intruding on the narrator and speaker in both works and is subsequently kept in the eavesdrop of the story. The marriage feast is the strongest sensory stimulus to the listener of the ancient mariner. He is particularly drawn by the warmth of the communal sense of the event: "The guests are met, the feast is set: /May'sthear the merry din" (pp. 7-8). He is equally drawn by the gratification of the senses such occasions provide:

The bride hath paced into the hall,
Red as a rose is she;
Nodding their heads before her goes,
The merry minstrelsy (pp. 37-40).

But in the end, the sensual and the communal combine to interrupt the rugged privacy and Sharp isolation of the mariner's narrative of traumatic experience: "What loud uproar bursts from that door!

/The wedding-guests are there" (pp. 624-625).

The same textual tactics are employed in Changez's narrative in spite of the danger of digression and its weakening bearing on the dramatic unity of the story. So far, the representation of the city in The Reluctant Fundamentalist has been analyzed extensively by Gopika Sankar U, Aysha Iqbal in their article "Real or Imaginary: Reading the City in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*" (2011). They conduct a sociological study of the changing urban space and its effect on the character of the narrator and the shape of his experience but their analysis never relate the cityscape of Lahore and New York to the narrative dynamics of storytelling. Changez keeps attracting the attention of his guest/listener to the attractions of Lahore around them throughout his narration. Kerschan (2011, p. 945) believes that the narrator's digressions are meant to "convey the tension and danger in the meeting between Changez and the American stranger. Hamid uses a sense of mystery to keep the reader engaged in the monologue". He finds Hamid's narrative strategy similar to that of the *Arabian Nights* in which the narrator Shahrazad every possible narrative strategy, including digressions, to sustain the suspense of her listener Sharaiar who intends to put her to death by morning or when her story falters. Changez alternatively uses digressions about mundane matters that the urban space of Lahore provides such as ordering tea and food, to provide breaks in the tension of his story and provides further hooks for his listener's attention. A good illustration of this strategy occurs in Changez's introduction of Erica, the American woman he was in love with:

> Do you see those girls, walking there, in jeans speckled with paint? Yes, they are attractive…Tell me, sir, have you left behind a love—male or female, I do not presume to know your preference, although the intensity of your gaze suggests the latter—in your homeland? Your shrug is inscrutable, but I will be more forthcoming. I did leave behind a love, and her name was Erica (p. 11).

In fact, Changez frequently uses this strategy to engage and disengage his listener in his story at various levels of awareness. He carefully reads the physical reaction of his listener to calculate the lead he needs to arouse the suspense of his listener.

Changez's American interlocutor, in this respect, shows similar stock response to that of Coleridge's wedding guest: surprise and fear. They are surprised because they are taken off guard but their fear seems to be a reaction to the narrators' bizarre shape. The ancient mariner exclaims "By thy long grey beard and thy glittering eye. Now wherefore stoppest me?" (p. 9). Similarly, Changez reads his interlocutor's fears in the opening sentence of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*: "Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America" (p. 5). The focus on the beard as fear invoking is more than coincidental but culturally distanced. The wild beard of the ancient mariner might give him a ghastly shape: "thou grey-beard Loon". But Changez's is definitely related to 9/11 and America's "war on terror". Hence, Changez's immediate reassurance that his beard is not a sign of religious fundamentalism. The man is a lover of America.

Both works show a similar tendency to highlight the physical reaction of the listener during recruiting and throughout the inner story. However, with the wedding guest his physical reaction remains within the scope of his resistance to the spell of the storyteller. It is caused by the call of the external world around him, notably, the merriments of the wedding feast: “The Wedding-Guest he beat his breast, /Yet he cannot choose but hear” (pp. 41-42). Hamid takes this to extremes as the listener he constructs for Changez’s story is never allowed to speak. He remains a passive interlocutor as a result of the imposition of the monological over the essentially dialogic voice of the novel form. Consequently, critics, like Bjerre (2012, pp. 257-258) read The Reluctant Fundamentalist as “a counternarrative to the hegemonic narrative of Western culture in general” by effectively effacing the voice of the American tourist. Changez becomes the reader’s window over the identity and intentions of the American listener. Bjerre goes further to read such effacement in the context of identity and the other:

> Changez effectively silences the American voice, and the reader is presented with a one-sided discourse, a story from the viewpoint of “the other”. It is, however, a story about the inability of an Other to pass as an American. While Changez is almost able to pull it off, in the aftermath of 9⁄11, he realizes that many Americans view him as an Other, and most importantly, he begins to act on the many resentments towards the US that he has hitherto been able to suppress.

This might justify why Changez is speaking on behalf of his listener. The effacement of the listener’s voice in the text becomes an act of cultural appropriation, a kind of psychological mechanism of rejecting the Otherness imposed upon him after the events of 9/11. Once more, Changez’s act of storytelling becomes therapeutic in a way much similar to that of the ancient mariner. Like the ancient mariner, Changez does this act of storytelling on regular bases and that the American tourist is one of many he selects, in the manner of the ancient mariner, to practice cultural appropriation through the act of storytelling. Changez alludes to this process when he concludes: “we cannot reconstitute ourselves as the autonomous beings we previously imagined ourselves to be. Something of us is now outside and something of the outside is now within us” (p. 76). This schism of identity cannot be redeemed but shortly though the appropriation of a cultural space through the act of storytelling.

Thus fixing a listener becomes a pre-requisite for storytelling in both works. Like the ancient mariner, Changez succeeds to cast his spell on his listener. Changez’s style of persuasion, however, is smoother than that of the ancient mariner. The latter had his difficulties subduing his listener. He tried to hold him with his “skinny hand” and with his “glittering eye”. The mariner finally succeeded to had his listener under his full spill: “The wedding guest stood still/And listens like a three year’s child; /The Marinere hath his will” (pp. 18-20). The mariner had a hypnotic power on his listener as he succeeds to fix him by his eyes. The mariner is described as “bright-eyed” and his eyes are “glittering” invoking a shamanistic aspect on him. He is a sort of magician, a prophetic story-teller. His mystical power mesmerizes his listener: “The wedding-guest sate on a stone, /He cannot chuse but hear: /And thus spake on that ancyent man, /The bright-eyed Marinere” (pp. 42-44).

Changez, on the contrary, is a secular person with no such extraordinary powers. Yet, he succeeds to grip his listener. He uses his knowledge of America to trick his listener's curiosity. He engages his listener in a conversational exchange leading him gradually into his main narrative. His perfect English and natural ease of manners bring his listener into accept his intruder as a companion or, at least, a trusted tourist guide. His words work their magic on his listener who also sits in a manner much similar to that of Coleridge's wedding guest. Changez's description of the rugged café invokes the rugged rock of the wedding guest: "Yes, this is the one. Its metal chairs are no better upholstered, its wooden tables are equally rough, and it is, like the others, open to the sky" (p. 5).

Being grotesque and marginal to their immediate social milieus, the ancient mariner and Changez share the same unique space of liminality. They look strange and fearful to their forced listeners and they hang freely between two worlds without belonging to either of them. These are the attributes of the subject or individual caught in liminality. The anthropologist Victor Turner, the ultimate authority on this subject, elucidates this indeterminate nature the liminal in work *The ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*:

> The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon (1991, p. 95).

These precepts apply to the ancient mariner and Changez as they are caught between two worlds in what looks like a painful process of initiation. Both are stuck at a threshold or borderline of experience between two worlds and resulting in their alienness and strangeness. One such space materializes in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner with the death-in-life horror of the ancient mariner and his crew. This state of existence belongs to neither of the two worlds of the mariner; the human and the infernal. Ursula K. Heise (1998, p. 120) identifies the ancient mariner's liminal space as the space of the curse he feels in the eyes of his dying mates: "Too quick for groan or sigh, /Each turned his face with ghastly pang, /And cursed [him] with his eye" (pp. 212-215). Heise invokes the aesthetics of the gaze as the textual site where this correlation occurs:

> Too close to death to utter speech, the dying sailors communicate with the ancient mariner through the eye, through a gaze that goes blank in the act of looking. What comes into being here is a discourse out of absence that speaks through the disembodied gaze, originating in and surviving the death of the one who looks: "The look with which they looked on me/Had never passed away", the mariner affirms long after his shipmates' end (pp. 255-256). Such a gaze can

> communicate nothing other than what it is—the transition from life to death, from language to silence—and to live forever in this liminal state is exactly the curse it inflicts upon the ancient mariner.

Coleridge is locating the politics of liminality in the textual space of the gaze is part of his manipulation of the gaze all over his poem. The fixing gaze of the narrator soon leads to the gaze of the dying sailors, only to end in the gaze of the narrator back on the marriage party. As for Changez the gaze prefigures the cultural dividedness of his world. The tourist fascinated gaze of the American interlocutor, like that of the post-colonial Changez over America, is meant to evoke the rhetoric of cultural Otherness.

It is interesting, here, to note the striking resemblances between this correlation of liminality with curse and the Islamic concept of Arraf which is a mountain between Hell and Paradise where those whose sins equal their good deeds are kept on waiting for God's final sentence in Doomsday. Like the ancient mariner they are between and betwixt, in Turner's words and their grotesqueness comes not only from watching the horrors of Hell but also from the very transitoriness of their state of existence. Torturous waiting and the fissure it informs between the terrifying silence of Hell and the fascinating language of Paradise is similarly the essence of the Quranic Arraf as a compelling liminal space. One basic attribute of Arraf and the liminality of Coleridge's narrative is the uneasy coexistence of certainty and uncertainty where the subject dwelling in the liminal space is caught in.

However, the physicality of the ancient mariner's liminal space persists in Changez's because, yet his liminality is culturally constructed. This aspect of Changez's liminal space of storytelling is masterly analyzed by Richard Gray (2011, p. 62) in his seminal study After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11:

> This is a novel set in and about a liminal world, a proliferating chain of borders, where characters and cultures cross and recross the landscape, dissolving and reconfiguration what might once have seemed a series of static opposition: past and present, Muslim and American, East and West. The verbal slippages, such as Erica/(Am)erica, Changez/changes and Chris/Christopher Columbus are a vital part of this, inviting us into a verbal world where even the primary act of naming turns out to be partial and provisional, constantly open to later act of renaming.

Actually, Changez felt the liminality of his position in America directly after 9/11. The racism and Islamophobia he encountered in America shattered his illusion of globalization. His American education and the identity it fashioned in him are therefore encountered with extreme regression into his original national Pakistani-Muslim identity. Probably the highest point in his liminality and identity crisis is well captured in the metaphor of the Janissary near the end of his American experience. His Chilean client Juan-Bautista compares Changez to the janissaries, "Christian boys...captured by the Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in a Muslim army...They were ferocious and utterly loyal: They had fought to erase their own civilizations, so they had nothing else to turn to" (p. 67). This comparison

gives Changez a deep insight into his luminal position as caught "between and betwixt". He is now convinced that he is right: "I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country faced the threat of war" (p. 68). It is at this point that Changez renounces his American identity, only to emerge from his liminality as the mature voice of the frame narrative.

But Changez had already shown strong symptoms of his divided identity. Even at his greatest moments of success in his American identity betrays his post-colonial identity as a Muslim and as a Pakistani. His self-contradictory response to 9/11 is the ultimate moment of this identity-split. Changez harking back at his initial response to 9/11 shows this masterful manipulation of the visual perspective and self-justification within a highly ethical context. Changez confesses to his American listener that his "initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased" (p. 35) in response to the news of 9/11 attacks. But he soon qualifies apologetically:

> Your disgust is evident; indeed, your large hand has, perhaps without your noticing, clenched into a fist. But please believe me when I tell you that I am no sociopath…So when I tell you I was pleased at the slaughter of thousands of innocents, I do so with a profound sense of perplexity (p. 35).

The American listener is paraded as a visual spectacle invoking the typical American response to 9/11. His subsequent statement of self-excuse masterly employs and critiques the American addiction to the visual spectacle and its negative effects on the world-views they construct about their existence:

> But at that moment, my thoughts were not with the victims of the attack—death on television moves me most when it is fictitious and happens to characters with whom I have built up relationships over multiple episodes—no, I was caught up in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees. Ah, I see I am only compounding your displeasure. I understand, of course; it is hateful to hear another person gloat over one's country's misfortune. But surely you cannot be completely innocent of such feelings yourself. Do you feel no joy at the video clips—so prevalent these days—of American munitions laying waste the structures of your enemies? (p. 35)

The screen has come to replace the natural human consciousness of the Americans. Screens of the media become the site for reality formations for them but at the risk of itself precluding truth. Changez then cites a typical image from America's war on terror, that "of American munitions laying waste the structures of your enemies?" While this invokes a counter-image of the current 9/11 image of America as victim, it shows how the media conditioned the public American mind to accept atrocity as victory in America's dirty wars of the early twenty-first century.

Storytelling becomes part, if not the focus, of narration in The Reluctant Fundamentalist. While presenting his own history, Changez is busy maintaining his stature as a storyteller throughout his narrative to such an extent that his history at times seems to lose its credibility for his listener, He is

aware of this problem and so tells his listener:

> But surely it is the gist that matters; I am, after all, telling you a history, and in history, as I suspect you—an American—will agree, it is the thrust of one's narrative that counts, not the accuracy of one's details. Still, I can assure you that everything I have told you thus far happened, for all intents and purposes, more or less as I have described (p. 54).

The precedence of "thrust" over "accuracy" in Changez's narrative ethics shows that his history is being mediated by memory rather than the objective methods of historiography. But what Changez actually emphasizing here is the all-American perspective he is framing his narrative within. Americans live by narratives, whether the American dream or globalization. They construct their reality around these narratives. No matter whether these narratives are true or false. What matters most is the "thrust" or narrative impulse of such narratives. Hamid puts these American narratives of identity and existence to severe scrutiny. Changez's American interlocutor had to be kept silent and denied a narrative voice if the twenty-first America is to listen to Hamid's negotiation of its cherished narratives of identity and, hence, the spirit and form of the Socratic Dialogues that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* assumes.

This cultural critique of post 9/11 America has long been recognized by Hamid's critics and detractors alike as the gist of the novel's political discourse. However, the implications of this recognition are not fully grasped because almost all the critical appraisals of this aspect of the novel tend to overlook the fact that Changez, like his creator, is a post-colonial subject caught in the grip of the neo-colonizers of the twenty-first century. Because the colonized is constructed in the discourse of orientalism as an alien Other always occupying a position of marginality in relation to the colonial center, Changez's migration and embracing the cultural identity of the neo-colonizer cannot be but a form of transgression which must bring retribution with it. This is even similar to the thematics of transgression and retribution in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". The killing of the bird is only the catalyst of the ancient mariner's original sin of transgressing the human limits. The man had sailed beyond the boundaries of the human, trespassing into the domain of the supernatural where the laws of the human logic are suspended. Changez's transcending the marginality of his colonialized space into the colonial centre must have brought the wrath of a cultural Nemesis. His stunning success in America makes him the perfect embodiment of the American Dream and this conferred on him the cultural identity of the neo-colonizers of the post-Cold War era. Changez affected a crucial move from "us" into "them", thereby contesting his cultural identity in melting pot of American Multiculturalism. But this move is a transgression of the antipodal sanctity of the centre-margin disseminated by the cultural production of the colonial discourse (Said, 1994, pp. 43-61). So, Changez's false consciousness is painfully dispelled after 9/11 terrorist attacks. The racism and Islamophobia he encounters in America shatter his sense of a global identity and a Multicultural homogeneity. This sense of cultural transgression and the retribution it brings problematize boundaries as is implied in the conceptualization of the term "fundamentalist". It is the colonizer/American metropolitan culture who is the ultimate authority in

fixing the meaning of this term. Post 9/11 American political discourse associates this term with the deadly dangers of Al-Qaida jihadist project. A fundamentalist is used to describe Muslim extremists but in American financial world Changez is trained to be a fundamentalist. Changez was instructed by his employers at Underwood Samson to "focus on the fundamentals" as his only "guiding principle" (p. 46). Changez description his training in American financial fundamentalism is strikingly similar to the Jihadist recruitment and fashioning of religious fundamentalist. Changez says that this principle is:

> Drilled into us since our first day at work. It mandated a single-minded attention to financial detail, teasing out the true nature of those drivers that determine an asset's value. And that was precisely what I continued to do, more often than not with both skill and enthusiasm. Because to be perfectly honest, sir, the compassionate pangs I felt for soon-to-be-redundant workers were not overwhelming in their frequency; our job required a degree of commitment that left one with rather limited time for such distractions (p. 46).

Like in religious fundamentalism, this process fashions extremism and ruthlessness as the leading personality traits of the fundamentalist produced. It is no coincidence that the moment of his epiphanic liberation from his false cultural consciousness becomes the moment of his awareness of the colonizing working of post 9/11 America. The paranoid Changez sees America's "War on Terror" as an extension of this financial fundamentalism. He believes that "a common thread seemed to enter these conflicts and that was the advancement of a small coteries concept of American interests in the guise of the fight against terrorism which was defined to refer only to the organized and politically motivated killing of civilians by killers not using the uniform of soldiers" (p. 78). Hamid, here, re-writes America as a victimizer, rather than the victim of terror. Its wars did not make the world a safe place for democracy. Changez's immediate response is evident in his unconscious regression into his former Islamic identity by wearing a beard in an environment hostile to any sign of Islam and the East. Later, hedecides "to refuse to participate any longer in facilitating the project of domination" (p. 69) and returns to Pakistan to facilitate the end, if not the means, of Al Qaeda. He becomes a political activist against the American policies in the region, sharing his new awareness with his college students. His new radicalism announces itself brief appearance on U.S. cable news vindicating attacks on U.S. targets, on the grounds that "no country inflicts death so readily upon the inhabitants of other countries...as the Americans" (p. 80).

But Changez's ultimate act of resistance to America's neo-colonialism remains his continual telling of his story to selected Americans in his home city Lahore in a way much similar to that of the ancient mariner. Ultimately the figuration of storytelling as an act of resistance fashions Changez as a post-colonial ancient mariner.

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