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IB Lang & Lit HL

**Outline:**

Prescribed Question: How has the text borrowed from other texts, and with what effects?

Texts Used: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *The Fall*, *Secret of the Pyramids*

Thesis: Hamid draws upon the second-person monologue and unreliable narration of Camus's *The Fall* as well as the shared narrative focus of the *Choose Your Own Adventure* series to construct a novel that allows readers to reflect on how their own political and cultural assumptions shape events through an active role as the judge of ambiguous characters.

- I. BTS 1: Hamid mimics the one-sided second-person monologue and unreliable narration of *The Fall* through Changez's deeply personal and increasingly suspicious conversations with the American in order to encourage reader introspection.
  - A. "I know what you're thinking: it's very hard to disentangle the true from the false in what I'm saying. I admit you are right." (Camus 36)
    1. The narrator within *The Fall* comes across a complete stranger similar to the nature in which Changez meets the American.
    2. Additionally, the reader who is referred to as "you" in the second-person narrative is silenced throughout both novels, creating a one-sided tale that falls into the unreliable narrator archetype which is also echoed in this excerpt in *The Fall* in which the narrator directly admits his manipulative nature
  - B. "Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America" (Hamid 1)

1. This statement made by Changez stands in direct contradiction to what Hamid actually asserts later in the novel: loving America but also the fact that the whole novel is a tale of how Changez loses his love for America and instead grows a sense of hatred towards it
  2. Falls into an unreliable narrator again as it could be seen as friendly or manipulative
- II. BTS 2: Hamid creates an atmosphere of interactive co-creation similar to that of the *Choose Your Own Adventure* series through consistent ambiguous narration to allow readers to visibly see how their pre-existing beliefs shape what they perceive in the novel.
- A. “Given you that you and I are now bound by a certain shared intimacy, I trust it is from the holder of your business cards” (Hamid 184)
    1. Based on the previous occurrences of the novel, what the reader perceives could be completely different from another reader who possesses differing political beliefs
    2. The ambiguity of this statement makes this novel an indirect and subtle version of the *Choose Your Own Adventure* series that guides readers to certain views based on their pre-existing beliefs
  - B. “If you decide that it is wiser to go to your hotel, go on to page 4” (Brightfield 3)
    1. Puts emphasis on the reader’s role as a storyteller and as a character in the story itself
    2. Is very direct in its traversal of story, referring to specific pages while Hamid’s approach to the second person is much more subtle

Prescribed Question: How has the text borrowed from other texts, and with what effects?

Moshin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* explores the extent to which the seldom-used second-person narrative can be applied to fiction in order to create an engaging and thought-provoking narrative. The novel explores a deeply one-sided conversation between the narrator, Changez and an American stranger in which Changez chronicles his alienation from the Western world post 9/11. Hamid maintains his own unique style but draws apparent inspiration from similar second-person narratives. Hamid himself states that he was impacted by *The Fall* by Camus which demonstrated the "potential of the 'you'" as well as the *Choose Your Own Adventure* series which Hamid read as a child (Hamid, "Second Person"). More specifically, Hamid draws upon the second-person monologue and unreliable narration of Camus's *The Fall* as well as the shared narrative focus of the *Choose Your Own Adventure* series to construct a novel that allows readers to reflect on how their own political and cultural assumptions shape events through an active role as the judge of ambiguous characters.

Hamid mimics the one-sided second-person monologue and unreliable narration of *The Fall* through Changez's deeply personal and increasingly suspicious conversations with the American in order to encourage reader introspection. *The Fall* revolves around a series of second-person reflective monologues in which the narrator lays his life story upon a silent stranger. Throughout *The Fall*, the narrator, Clamence, consistently hints at his unreliability, on one occasion stating, "I know what you're thinking: it's very hard to disentangle the true from the false in what I'm saying. I admit you are right" (Camus 36). The manner in which Camus approaches exposition and narration is frequently echoed in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Both

Changez and Clamence espouse their life stories to complete strangers who serve as the allegorical means through which Camus and Hamid speak directly to the reader. Additionally, these strangers in the second-person narrative are silenced throughout both novels. The limited information readers do receive about these strangers is solely through the narrator, creating a one-sided story in which readers take up an active role in discerning “the true from the false”. In this sense, Hamid certainly uses the archetype of the unreliable narrator in a fashion similar to Camus.

This similarity is apparent even on the first page of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, where Changez introduces himself to the American: “Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America” (Hamid 1). This statement juxtaposes Changez’s true beliefs and his hatred of America, a fact which Hamid slowly reveals throughout the course of the novel. These often backward and contradicting statements appear equally as frequent in *The Fall* where Clamence’s actions are often seemingly manipulative. Since Changez’s statements hold some truth in that he previously loved America, the irony and tone of his words, depending on the reader, stand out as either friendly or manipulative in an attempt to gain the trust of the American. Hamid’s decision to make Changez’s actions two-sided falls into his larger effort to maintain ambiguity similar to Camus but to a completely different effect. The ambiguity, in Hamid’s words, serves as “a kind of mirror” to show readers the impact their political and cultural assumptions have on their perceptions of the complex interactions between groups, in this case being America and Pakistan (Hamid, “Second Person”).

Hamid creates an atmosphere of interactive co-creation similar to that of the *Choose Your Own Adventure* series through consistent ambiguous narration to allow readers to visibly see

how their pre-existing beliefs shape what they perceive in the novel. The conclusion of Hamid's novel culminates in a situation where the reader must decide whether the American is pulling a gun or a business card holder out of his pocket in reaction to Changez's actions: "Given you that you and I are now bound by a certain shared intimacy, I trust it is from the holder of your business cards" (Hamid 184). These excerpts in which the onus is on the reader to decide what the truth is are scattered throughout *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, compounding to create a snapshot of a reader's perceptions and assumptions of Changez and the American's relationship. Readers could have completely different interpretations of the ending, thinking the American is either a malicious spy or just a friendly tourist. This freedom of interpretation and flexibility of the novel's mood stands out as a deliberate choice by Hamid in wanting the novel to tangibly show readers how their presumptions manifest and lead to certain perceptions of the text. In many ways, Hamid's novel stands out as a more subtle approach to the formula of the *Choose Your Own Adventure* series.

Within *Choose Your Own Adventure* novels, readers are guided by concrete statements such as, "If you decide that it is wiser to go to your hotel, go on to page 4" (Brightfield 3). These stories place emphasis on the reader's role as a storyteller and an integral character in forming the story itself. While these novels are very direct in traversing a reader through the story, referring to specific pages readers must go depending on their decisions, Hamid's approach to the second-person narrative is much more nuanced. While *Choose Your Own Adventure* novels visualize a reader's choices directly, drawing a clear cause and effect, Hamid coaxes out reader opinions through discussion of controversial and provocative topics. For example, when Changez shares that his "initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased" (Hamid 72) in response

to 9/11, readers immediately form a perception of Changez that subsequently acts as a basis for their beliefs as the novel progresses. With this shared narrative, Hamid replicates the interactive nature of *Choose Your Own Adventure* novels in a more subtle manner.

Hamid creates a dynamic and reader-driven second-person story in a similar manner to the unreliable second-person monologues of *The Fall* and the co-creative nature of the *Choose Your Own Adventure* novels. Through a dedication to ambiguity, Hamid forces readers to form their own perceptions of the events of the novel and prompts introspection on how pre-existing beliefs shape assumptions about cultural and political relations between different entities, specifically America and Pakistan.

**Word Count: 999**

## Works Cited

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