

Name: Jasmine Yang

Text: The Reluctant Fundamentalist

IB English Language and Literature HL: Written Task Two

Topic: Power and Privilege

Research Question: How and why is a social group represented in a particular way?

Thesis: In the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, author Mohsin Hamid portrays various institutions as symbols for the United States' capitalist mindset during the period surrounding 9/11, ultimately criticizing members of the capitalistic system for appearing seemingly good while inherently possessing racial prejudice.

BTS 1: Hamid criticizing the existence of fake appearances surrounding Princeton to symbolize the deceptive nature present in the US capitalistic mindset.

- a) "I was one of only two Pakistanis in my entering class—two from a population of over a hundred million souls [...] A thousand of your compatriots were enrolled, five hundred times as many, even though your country's population was only twice that of mine" (3). "Students like me were given visas and scholarships, complete financial aid, mind you, and invited into the ranks of the meritocracy" (4).
 - i) Hamid first utilizes ethos and logos to describe how little foreign students were being admitted into Princeton as compared to American students. He uses these numbers and statistics to highlight the racial prejudices Princeton held while admitting students.
 - ii) However, Hamid also uses diction in the second quote to juxtapose Princeton's attitude towards international students. He uses words like "invite" to portray Princeton as outwardly accepting of international students. This makes the reader question whether or not Princeton's compassion for international students is genuine or not due to the harsh comparison of Hamid's portrayal of Princeton's racist selection process.
- b) "Pretend all is well or work hard to restore things to what they were. I chose both. At Princeton, I conducted myself in public like a young prince, generous and carefree. But I also, as quietly as I could, held down three on-campus jobs" (11).
 - i) Hamid uses a simile to draw attention to the facade Changez had to put on in order to "fit in" at Princeton. He had to assume a different outward appearance to seem comparable to the other students at Princeton. Princeton forced him to care about his appearances.
 - ii) Hamid also uses juxtaposition between the "young prince, generous and carefree" and the "three on-campus jobs" to show the disparity between Changez's public persona to the reality he was actually facing. This draws parallels with the

outwardly acceptive nature Princeton appears to have and the racism that is inherent within the system.

BTS 2: Hamid portrays pre-9/11 Underwood Samson as ostensibly acceptive of Changez and his culture to describe the facade the members of the US capitalistic system put despite their racist undertones.

- a) “A magnificent property that made me think of *The Great Gatsby*. It was beside the beach—on a rise behind a protective ridge of sand dunes” (43).
 - i) Hamid alludes to *The Great Gatsby* to emphasize the corruption behind Underwood Samson. He uses the allusion to highlight the appearance vs. reality situation that surrounds the company just as it surrounded the book.
 - ii) Hamid also uses extravagant imagery to support his allusion to *The Great Gatsby* to reinforce that the group he is critiquing is the rich, American, capitalists.
- b) “I was, in my own eyes, a veritable James Bond—only young, darker, and possibly better paid. How odd it seems now to recall that time; how quickly my sense of self-satisfaction would later disappear!”(63-64)
 - i) Hamid uses a simile when Changez describes himself as James Bond. This is significant because James Bond is a spy, forcing him to take on a different identity. By comparing Changez to James Bond, Hamid is emphasizing the fact that Changez is taking on a different identity while in America and is straying from his actual self. His time in America changed his persona.
 - ii) However, Hamid also utilizes foreshadowing to reveal that the new-found acceptance Changez receives is not going to be long-lived. He wants the readers to know that this “acceptance” Changez experiences is merely on the surface and racial prejudice against Changez will spark later in the novel.

BTS 3: Hamid’s portrayal of post-9/11 Underwood Samson exposes the racist undertones possessed by members of the US capitalistic system, ultimately highlighting his distaste for the racist tendencies of this social group.

- a) “At Underwood Samson I seemed to become overnight a subject of whispers and stares [...] ‘I don’t think it’s making you Mister Popular around here’” (130).
 - i) Hamid uses a hyperbole to describe the transformation of Changez’s acceptance as “overnight”. He does this to highlight the suddenness in which Changez’s feelings of acceptance change. Additionally, Hamid is emphasizing the magnitude of the inherent racism underneath big American corporations and how easily it is unleashed.
 - ii) Hamid also uses subtle humor in Wainwright’s dialogue to emphasize the judgemental environment Changez is suddenly surrounded by when Wainwright utilizes the phrase “Mister Popular”.

- b) “The others, if they bothered to look at me at all, did so with evident unease and, in some cases, a fear which would not have been inappropriate had I been convicted of plotting to kill them rather than of abandoning my post in mid-assignment” (160).
- i) Hamid uses juxtaposition between the “plotting to kill them” and “abandoning my post” to illustrate the intensity of the fear Changez’s ex-coworkers felt towards him. This describes the racism deep within the company that is brought out only after an event such as 9/11.
 - ii) Hamid also uses subtle humor to allow the readers to judge the unjust nature of this situation. The readers feel a sense of uncomfortable humor when reading this due to the juxtaposition between the two situations and this uncomfortableness reinforces Hamid’s criticism of the unfair racial prejudice that underlines American businesses.

How and why is a social group represented in a particular way?

The events of 9/11 brought out many racial prejudices towards the Middle-East, whether they were pre-existent in America or not (Head). Airport security made radical changes and people began to become wary of the foreigners around them after 9/11(Combs). Mohsin Hamid singles out the social group of American businessmen involved in the capitalist economy and criticizes them through his novel. He highlights their racist undertones present before 9/11 and exposes their prejudice against people from the Middle-East through the perspective of a Pakistani. In the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, author Mohsin Hamid portrays various institutions as symbols for the United States' capitalist mindset during the period surrounding 9/11, ultimately criticizing members of the capitalistic system for appearing seemingly good while inherently possessing racial prejudice.

Hamid criticizes the existence of facades surrounding Princeton to symbolize the deceptive nature present in the US capitalistic mindset. Changez describes his experience at Princeton and how he was one of “two [Pakistani] from a population of over a hundred million souls [...] your compatriots were enrolled, five hundred times as many, even though your country's population was only twice that of mine” (3). “Students like me were given visas and scholarships [...] and invited into the ranks of the meritocracy” (4). Hamid first utilizes logos to describe how little foreign students were being admitted into Princeton as compared to American students by using statistics to highlight the racial prejudice Princeton held while admitting students. However, Hamid also uses diction in the second quote to juxtapose Princeton's attitude towards international students. He uses words like “invite” to portray Princeton as outwardly accepting of international students. This makes the reader question Princeton's compassion for

international students. Hamid continues to describe the environment at Princeton and states “At Princeton, I conducted myself in public like a young prince, generous and carefree. But I also, as quietly as I could, held down three on-campus jobs” (11). Hamid uses a simile to draw attention to the facade Changez has to put on in order to “fit in” at Princeton. He has to assume a different outward appearance to seem comparable to the other students at Princeton. Hamid also uses juxtaposition between “young prince, generous and carefree” and “three on-campus jobs”, showing the disparity between Changez’s public persona to his reality. This draws parallels with the outwardly acceptive nature Princeton appears to have and the racism that is inherent within the system.

Hamid portrays pre-9/11 Underwood Samson as ostensibly acceptive of Changez and his culture to describe the facade the members of the US capitalistic system put on to hide their racist undertones. Hamid describes his first party with Underwood Samson and how “the magnificent property that made me think of *The Great Gatsby*. It was beside the beach-on a rise behind a protective ridge of sand dunes” (43). Hamid alludes to *The Great Gatsby* to emphasize the corruption behind Underwood Samson. He uses the allusion to highlight the fake appearance that surrounds the company just as it surrounds the book. Hamid also uses extravagant imagery to support his allusion to *The Great Gatsby*. The “ridge of sand dunes” represents the protectiveness of the capitalist system in hiding the racism underlying their fake acceptance of foreigners.

Hamid, still feeling positive about his position, states “I was, in my own eyes, a veritable James Bond [...] How odd it seems now to recall that time; how quickly my sense of self-satisfaction would later disappear!”(63-64). Hamid uses a simile when Changez describes

himself as James Bond. This is significant because James Bond is a spy and is rarely allowed to express his true self. By comparing Changez to James Bond, Hamid emphasizes that Changez takes on a different identity while in America and strays from his actual self. Hamid also utilizes foreshadowing to reveal that the new-found acceptance Changez receives is not going to be long-lived. He tells the readers that this “acceptance” Changez experiences is merely on the surface and racial prejudice against Changez will spark later in the novel.

Hamid’s portrayal of post-9/11 Underwood Samson exposes the racist undertones possessed by members of the US capitalistic system, ultimately highlighting his distaste for the racist tendencies of this social group. After the events of 9/11, Hamid describes how “At Underwood Samson I seemed to become overnight a subject of whispers and stares [...] ‘I don’t think it’s making you Mister Popular around here’” (130). Hamid uses a hyperbole to describe the transformation of Changez’s acceptance as “overnight”, highlighting the suddenness in which Changez’s feelings of acceptance change. Additionally, Hamid emphasizes the magnitude of the racism underneath big American corporations and how easily it is unleashed. Hamid also uses humor in Wainwright’s dialogue to emphasize the judgemental environment Changez is suddenly surrounded by when Wainwright dictates the phrase “‘Mister Popular’”.

When Hamid finally makes the decision to leave Underwood Samson, he says how his ex-coworkers’ glances had “a fear which would not have been inappropriate had I been convicted of plotting to kill them rather than of abandoning my post in mid-assignment” (160). Hamid juxtaposes “plotting to kill them” and “abandoning my post” to illustrate the intensity of the fear Changez’s ex-coworkers felt towards him, highlighting the racism deep within the company that is brought out only after an event such as 9/11. Hamid also uses subtle humor to

allow the readers to judge the unjust nature of this situation. The readers feels uncomfortable when reading this due to the juxtaposition between the two situations and this uncomfortableness reinforces Hamid's criticism of the unfair racial prejudice that underlines American businesses.

Hamid uses Princeton and Underwood Samson to critique the racial prejudices that America held around 9/11. He uses the transformation of Changez's feelings toward big businesses and his role in them to display the shift of attitude American corporations had on foreigners. 9/11 ultimately exposed the true, racist nature of American capitalists and businessmen.

Word Count: 987

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