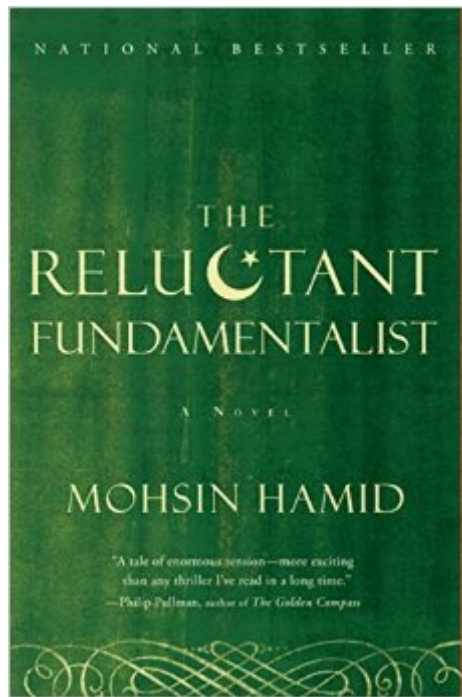


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The Reluctant Fundamentalist



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

Book Information

Paperback: 191 pages

Publisher: Harvest Books; 1 edition (April 14, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0156034026

ISBN-13: 978-0156034029

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.5 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 stars See all reviews (603 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

In a recent article in The Washington Post" (7.22.07) titled "ROOTS OF RAGE: "Why Do They Hate Us?", Mohsin Hamid writes about an encounter at a book signing in Texas for "The Reluctant Fundamentalist." He was stopped cold when a man asked the subtitle question in a politely pleasant

manner that put both author and reader in the "us" category. Hamid notes that he had spent almost half his life in the United States: emigrating from Lahore, Pakistan at the age of three with his father (who was accepted to a PhD program at Stanford), learning to sing "The Star Spangled Banner" before the Pakistan national anthem, playing baseball before cricket, writing English before Urdu, and other activities of a typical American kid. The question cut to the quick because in many ways he is, or it seems should be, one of us. The Post piece goes on to lay out an autobiography which in considerable part became the plot of "The Reluctant Fundamentalist." Hamid returned to Lahore at the age of nine, growing up there pleasurably before the city was adversely impacted economically and culturally (strict morality codes, intimidation of politicians, academics, and journalists) by American backing of Pakistan's dictator Mohammed Zia ul-Haq in exchange for Zia's support of the mujaheddin, the Afghan guerrilla group fighting the Russian occupation which later became an American holy war adversary. Like the character Changez in the novel, he returned to the United States to attend Princeton University. How much of the remainder of the book (Changez's outstanding performance in a business evaluation firm prior to being fired in debilitating disenchantment when he recognized the havoc his work was causing in the global workplace, the American girlfriend who ultimately fails him, et cetera) is unknown.

By now, you know what the book is about. And you've heard the disagreements - fundamentalist, not so; controversial, innocuous; hate mail, balanced viewpoint; etc., etc. It seems like there is little left to say. But let me try and present some different perspectives on the book - things I see less talked about but which I believe are crucial to its understanding, interpretation, and appreciation. So, let me start by stating the two key themes I am not going to be discussing: the sort of "coming-of-age" and maturing of an individual as a consequence of the social and political events around him, and the analysis of the transition that a society goes through as exemplified by the impact of some dramatic events on an individual or a family. I think both these themes are played out in this book, and played out very well like almost everything else in it, but they are still secondary themes. The real objective of the book I believe is to showcase the entire generation of "reluctant fundamentalists" that have spawned among Generations X&Y across the globe (primarily as a result of the huge economic disparities between the developed and developing nations, but that's an altogether separate debate and something I won't go into further here). These fundamentalists are not born so, they are not trained to be so, they often feel ashamed to be so, and are quintessentially not so, but nonetheless, when cornered, they become so as a natural outcome of some primal human behavioural traits like love for one's own and protecting of one's territory. These are the circumstantial fundamentalists.

Changez is just one such man, and the dichotomy playing out in the minds of these reluctant fundamentalists is demonstrated in an excellent fashion through his actions in this book.

Rarely will I describe a book as beautiful. Yet I cannot think of a more befitting descriptive for Mohsin Hamid's *THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST*. The story centers around a meeting at an outdoor café in Lahore between a Pakistani man named Changez and a suspicious-looking American with the bearing that makes him out to be either military or intelligence agent. Changez engages the man initially in tea and conversation. After awhile, seeing the American most attentive --and also a bit wary of his surroundings, the Pakistani orders dinner for the two of them; meanwhile going deeper into his memories about times spent in America, as a student at Princeton and later as a rising star at a New York valuation firm. Changez also recollects his budding romance with Erica, the daughter of a wealthy investment banker who was sure to enable Changez's entry to high society. Changez was well on his way to success when the twin towers of the World Trade Center came tumbling down on September 11, 2001. Changez's reaction to their collapse alarms and confuses him; he finds himself smiling and overjoyed. The elation, however, isn't over the deaths of 3,000 innocent people, but rather that there are those who are able to strike at the United States --an entity which has long held him in awe with its almost limitless power, wealth and ability to affect the world: sometimes for the best, sometimes for the worst. As America becomes enraged and seeks revenge upon anything and anyone Muslim, he reads reports of Pakistan becoming coerced into the war against Afghanistan and of India taking advantage of this situation threatening his homeland. Becoming ever more distanced from our society and his work, it becomes increasingly harder for Changez to continue at his career.

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