

INFLUENCES AND TRANSFORMATIONS: MOHSIN HAMID'S MONGRELIZATION OF THE WEST AND THE EAST IN *THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST*

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511

In his conversations with various interviewers, Mohsin Hamid often uses the idea of mongrelization to express his view of identity formation in an age when migration occurs with frequency and globalization proceeds at a fast pace. "This mongrelized, migratory thing is something we all participate in [...] And there are people who don't recognize they are mongrels. But there isn't anybody who isn't one" (*Exit West* 36:40-37:50).¹ In Hamid's dictionary, mongrelization is a neutral word, signifying a variety of contemporary human conditions, including multicultural dissemination and influence. By his own admission, the influences he has received from reading others' writings are countless: "I am influenced by everyone that I read. The more I like someone, the more likely I'd be influenced. I am not always aware of my influences" (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist: Mohsin Hamid in Conversation with Akhil Sharma* 49:47-49:51). Mongrelization, accordingly, not only indicates a person's continuous becoming, but also the process of a literary work's production. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007),² filled with direct as well as discursive references to world literatures and religions, is a case in point.

Changez, Hamid's well-read narrator, literally mentions F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 masterpiece while revealing his ambition to emulate Jim, his boss, who owns a house in the Hamptons: "a magnificent property that made me think of *The Great Gatsby*" (TRF 43). Aggressive in his pursuit of the American Dream, the Pakistani transplant likens his fearless state of mind to that in "Sufi mystics and Zen masters" (TRF 13). In

the realm of romance, his competition with the spirit of Chris, however, feels like an inadvertent sacrilege of the Holy Communion between Erica and her late boyfriend, “a religion that would not accept me as a convert” (TRF 114). Ironically, his genuine conversion happens when the Chilean publisher Juan-Bautista, meaning John the Baptist, “baptizes” him with a story about the janissaries, prompting his journey to a newfound religion: Pakistani nationalism. After being suspected of instigating riots against the US government, the evolving postcolonial subject draws on Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899) to express his complicated sentiment: “I have felt like a Kurtz waiting for his Marlow” (TRF 183). He cites Washington Irving’s gothic tale “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (1820) as unnerving his American guest into a rude awakening that the contemporary United States of America is as indifferent to the outside world as the village of Sleepy Hollow.

512 Other textual influences are subtler, but the evidence of these influences can still be identified in Hamid’s essays and interviews. In “Get Fit with Haruki Murakami” (*Discontent* 98-101), Hamid acknowledges his longterm admiration for the Japanese writer. When Jai Arjun Singh points out in his conversation with Hamid the similar mental illness suffered by Erica and Naoko, the female protagonist of Murakami’s *Norwegian Wood*—a *Bildungsroman* also inspired by *The Great Gatsby*—Hamid agrees: “And what I did in my book was to embody that in an American woman” (see Singh). Accordingly, it is safe to say that Hamid’s portrayal of the ill-fated love triangle has its roots in the sexual-spiritual entanglement between Toru, Naoko, and Kizuki in *Norwegian Wood*. In a less straightforward fashion, Hamid revealed his reading of a Hindu sacred text while responding to an audience member’s question at a book festival (“Mohsin Hamid: *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*” 49:49). Arguably, the Hindu scripture Hamid did not name is the *Bhagavad Gita* (2nd century BCE), given the popularity of the story in the Indian subcontinent and the geographical proximity of Lahore, his and his protagonist’s hometown, to Kurukshetra, also known as the Land of *Bhagavad Gita*. Arjuna’s dialogue with his charioteer and spiritual guide, Krishna, is evoked in Changez’s conversations about the fundamental principles of Underwood Samson & Company (i.e., Uncle Sam) with his colleague, with his mentor, and even with his cab driver, whom he addresses as “a charioteer” (TRF 157).

Gerard Genette’s theory in *Palimpsests* helps clarify the formation of this literary lineage. According to the French theorist, “all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts” can be encapsulated in one word: transtextuality (1). Under this umbrella term, there are five types of transtextual relationships, and hypertextuality is one of them,³ which he defines as “any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary” (5). In other words, a hypotext is a pre-text “whose form and/or content inspires—or is reflected in—a later text or hypertext” (Martin and Ringham 100). During the process of transformation, a hypertext may either reference or evoke a hypotext. Thus, *The Great Gatsby* can be seen as a hypotext for *Norwegian*

Wood, whereas *TRF* is a hypertext of these two novels as well as of the *Gita*, *Heart of Darkness*, and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.” The relationships among these texts constitute only a portion of *TRF*’s transtextuality. In fact, quite a few scholars, such as Peter Morey, Greta Olson, Margaret-Anne Hutton, and Mohamed Salah-Eddine Madiou, prompted by Hamid’s confession of his fascination with Camus’s work in his interviews and essay “Enduring Love of the Second Person” (*Discontent* 102-05), have examined the shared formal features in *The Fall* (1956) and *TRF*. Any other texts, or for that matter, any movies and TV shows referred or alluded to in *TRF*, could form branches of its “family tree” and receive further analyses. Yet, such tasks are beyond the scope of this article.

I have uncovered the imprints of *Norwegian Wood* and the *Gita* on *TRF* through my own endeavours, but my investigation of *TRF*’s relationships with *The Great Gatsby*, *Heart of Darkness*, and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” is informed by others’ scholarship, with some of which I will engage when addressing such issues as capitalism, the American Dream, romance, and religion, at times adjusting the lens and adding my views. Striving to offer fresh insights, this essay aims, however, neither to take issue with the existing literary criticisms of *TRF* nor to debate theories of influence studies, but to highlight and connect the motifs, tropes, and spiritual disciplines in the Eastern and Western texts from which Hamid draws to portray Changez’s liminality and hybridity while examining how these sources are appropriated to historicize and critique fundamentalism of various kinds.

The main body of this article is divided into three sections, using “hypotext” and “hypertext” as organizing principles. To lay the ground for discussing the influences of Fitzgerald and Murakami on Hamid, the first section gives a short review of *The Great Gatsby* and locates its imprints on *Norwegian Wood*, briefly comparing how capitalism affects the American and Japanese psyche embodied by their characters. While Hamid reworks the myth of the self-made man in *The Great Gatsby* into Changez’s neoliberal career path in the US, the love sickness of Murakami’s trio leaves a deeper stamp on Hamid’s depiction of his melancholic protagonists, through whom the intersection between sexual obsession, spiritual confusion, and military aggression is unveiled. Thus, the second section examines how Hamid combines the images of sportsmen, warrior-knights, prostitutes, and the Eucharist with such dominant tropes as lights in Fitzgerald’s fiction and the firefly in Murakami’s to satirize the fanaticism held by worshippers of chivalry and advocates of capitalism’s beastly offspring, neoliberalism. The third section, besides linking Hamid’s contemplation on postcoloniality to the teaching of dharma and reincarnation in the *Gita* and to the issue of colonial violence in *Heart of Darkness*, examines how Hamid complicates Conrad’s imperial romance and reallegorizes “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” into his critique of and hope for the current United States of America.

THE GREAT GATSBY AS A HYPOTEXT FOR NORWEGIAN WOOD

514 Set during the economic boom of the 1920s, *The Great Gatsby* recounts the American Dream in an era when capitalism seemed to be benefitting many Americans. Through its unsympathetic portrayal of those who are on the top of the economic hierarchy, the novel gives a scathing critique of the old establishment's sense of entitlement, the get-rich-quick mentality among the commoners, as well as the pervasive commodification of humanity and cynicism towards morals, ethics, and laws. In a wayward fashion, Jay Gatsby embodies the pragmatism and romanticism that took root in the American psyche before his time. Keener to read success manuals and self-improvement books than to receive a liberal arts education, Gatsby quits St. Olaf College to pursue his fortune—an act in accordance with one of the countless pieces of advice Andrew Carnegie gives in *The Empire of Business*: “college education seems almost fatal to success” (91). Youngsters aspiring to become millionaires, Carnegie argues, would benefit more from actual apprenticeship than from formal schooling. Anti-intellectualism, a byproduct rather than an intrinsic element of pragmatism, erodes imagination and intuition into fantasy and sentimentality. The country boy, lacking interest in humanities, deprives himself of Emily Dickinsonian poetic wisdom while telling a slant emotional truth tilting toward an idealization of the undeserving upper-class lady, Daisy. In the milieu of blue bloods versus upstarts, all wealth is not equal, thereby compelling the newly moneyed Midwesterner to fabricate an inheritance and an Oxford degree. Even in love, Gatsby, just like the uncut books in the library he installs for show but never reads, continues to conceal from himself his ulterior motive to win back Daisy from her brutish husband Tom Buchanan and marry her: laundering his illegitimately acquired fortune through her aristocratic background. Ultimately, it is the narrator Nick's romantic vision of Gatsby, his faith in the human capacity for selfless love, and his insights into the shady aspects of capitalism and the American Dream that influence Murakami's characterization of Toru in *Norwegian Wood*.

A self-proclaimed admirer of Fitzgerald, Murakami translated *The Great Gatsby* into Japanese and made it his protagonist's favorite book. Studying at a university in Tokyo, Toru is a sensitive and imaginative young man with a different taste in literature than his peers: “I wanted to tell people what a wonderful novel it was, but no one around me had read *The Great Gatsby* or was likely to. Urging others to read F. Scott Fitzgerald, if not a reactionary act, was not something one could do in 1968” (30).⁴ Japan in the 1960s saw increases in industrialization, economic growth, and a series of student movements also known as *Zenkyoto*. Along with the ongoing project of nation-rebuilding since the end of World War II came a flourishing of *Nihonjinron* (theories of Japaneseness) and creative writings advocating this essentialist ideology. Novels by nationalist authors such as Yukio Mishima and Kenzaburo Oe were popu-

lar on college campuses, causing Toru a sense of intellectual and emotional isolation. His peers' flamboyant rebellion against the government body of the university irks him, not because he does not share their resentment that the institution of higher education has become a factory producing conformists to serve capital, but because he sees through the discrepancy between their grand rhetoric and their chauvinistic behaviour. Though advocating class and gender equality, the leaders of a Marxist study group nevertheless deem it the female members' responsibility to bring food to their gatherings. The lonely young man pours his emotional energy onto loving Naoko, who suffers from severe depression due to her late boyfriend Kizuki's suicide. Her inability to reciprocate, unfortunately, sentences Toru to constantly gaze at her "in the way Jay Gatsby watched that tiny light on the opposite shore night after night" (Murakami 113).

Norwegian Wood registers a chapter of Japan's history in which youthful idealism lost its battle with the state's economic mandate. Unable to present realistic plans to replace the system that gave no room for individuality, *Zenkyoto* drifted toward nihilism and eventually fell apart. Since the 1960s, no student movement has occurred in Japan, and most former radicals ended up joining corporations and becoming cogs in the machine they had tried to disassemble. Depicting Toru as a romantic soul, Murakami makes his thirtysomething narrator continue to avert the bourgeois aspiration for riches and status, just as Fitzgerald's Nick quits his bond trading profession and returns to Minnesota, having witnessed the insidious impact of money on people's moral character. An individual's private resistance could be self-mitigating, but the system he loathes remains. As Matthew Strecher points out, in today's Japan "an alternative means of defining oneself outside the parameters of ordinary life as a *sarariman* (white collar worker), wife/mother, or some other pre-defined role—becomes highly problematic for those who wish simply to be different" (192). Capitalism, rather than boosting individualism as it does in the United States, reinforces the group-oriented mentality and traditional gender roles in Japan. After neoliberal policies started to accelerate globalization in the 1970s, venture capitalism has mutated into vulture capitalism (see Harvey),⁵ producing thornier economic, ethical, and spiritual challenges for younger generations, of which Hamid's *Changez* is a member.

515

THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST AS A HYPERTEXT OF THE GREAT GATSBY AND NORWEGIAN WOOD

What distinguishes Hamid from Fitzgerald and Murakami in tackling capitalism and heterosexual love is his attention to the coercively homogenizing force of American foreign policy, and his mistrust in the romantic notions of knights in shining armour and damsels in distress. Hamid digs into issues unaddressed or downplayed in the American and Japanese novels but prominent in postcolonial literature, such as

racial, cultural, religious, and political conflicts between the global north and south, and between East and West, whereby exposing the self-destructive impulse and world-annihilating potential in any uncompromising quest for an absolute idea, be it democracy, prosperity, love, justice, or truth.

516 With his cultural hybridity and working experience at McKinsey & Company,⁶ Hamid is keenly aware that every economic system produces multifaceted results. Capitalism, for one, has helped a few developing countries reduce poverty and lift the living standard of a majority of their populace, but it has also helped amass enormous fortunes for the already prosperous in developed countries. Hamid's former employer, whose alumni have gone on to become CEOs of *Google* and *Facebook* as well as government officials, such as Sundar Pinchai, Sheryl Sandberg, and Pete Buttigieg, offers equal services to its clients, ranging from foreign authoritarian regimes to big corporations such as Purdue Pharma to the US Immigration and Customs Enforcements, demonstrating how capitalism can be practiced with an amoral façade but generate egregious consequences. Underwood Samson & Company in *TRF* is an epitome of McKinsey, whose culture has been compared to a religion because of its members' loyalty to its business model as well as their extensive influence on the state apparatuses and other private sectors. Asked by Vietnamese American writer Viet Thanh Nguyen if ordinary people should trust capitalism's capacity to not screw them over, Hamid first points out the pluralism of capitalism, and then emphasizes the crucial role regulations play in maintaining a healthy, competitive form of capitalism, as opposed to the version that has operated in the US since the end of World War II:

Capitalism isn't one thing. If you don't have regulations in capitalism, you have the jungle. There is no capitalism without regulation, and then the question is: how do you regulate this thing? If you are scared of the Soviet Union, you have ninety percent marginal tax rates, and you are developing an increasing protectionism as people in America were doing after the Second World War [...] That kind of capitalism is almost very, very, low taxes, no social protections, very little regulation, as currently exists in the United States. (*Exit West* 20:00-22:33)

Using rules in sports as an analogy, Hamid continues to expound:

Capitalism basically harnesses self-interest and gives us a kind of rule-based system to play in, and tells us people to go out and play, and try to make more money for themselves. And it can be quite brutal. But the regulation, like in any sporting activity determines it; like, if it is boxing, that's brutal, but not half as brutal as knifing somebody or gouging somebody's eyes out. And boxing is more brutal than soccer, which is more brutal than pool. How you regulate the thing matters. I am not opposed, I suppose, to capitalism. But I do think that there are incredibly different ways of regulating what we call the market. And at the moment, we have disastrous ways of doing it. (*Exit West* 20:00-22:33)

It is no coincidence that the variations of such metaphors as "the jungle" and "sporting activity" Hamid uses in this conversation to explain capitalism without regulations and capitalism with moderate or relatively strict regulations can be found in *The Great Gatsby* and *TRF*, not to mention the Congolese jungle in *Heart of Darkness*.

Tom Buchanan is a former college football star and now an enthusiastic polo player, with an imposing frame, well-trained muscles, and belligerent temperament that can readily crush any adversaries standing in his way. Gatsby's desire to appear chummy with the old money leads him to call Nick "old sport." Manhattan is the place where bankers, stockbrokers, and bond traders work in the daytime and rich people go to carouse, seek pleasure, and display their indifference to society's rules and laws at night. The center of New York City is hence, metaphorically, a jungle, and the capitalists in it presumably contribute to the Great Depression later. Even so, the social and personal damages correlated to capitalism that Fitzgerald depicts in *The Great Gatsby* are relatively small-scale and arguably less brutal than those portrayed by Hamid, for the US in the 1920s was merely a midlevel global power, rather than the only superpower, as it has since become. In *TRF*, the US-led global capitalism has gone cosmic, as suggested by the business case Jim wants Changez to solve during the interview test: "Like a transporter on *Star Trek*. Got it? Good. Let's go" (*TRF* 12), and by the line from *Star Wars* his Caribbean colleague Wainwright quotes: "Beware the dark side, young Skywalker" (*TRF* 38). Other metaphors anticipate bloodshed as well. While a hospitable "carnivorous feast" of "*predatory* delicacies" is peppered with threats of manhunting (*TRF* 101), the combative images of Underwood Samson & Company haunt the American Dream. Collectively they look like soldiers "dressed in battle fatigues"; the head of the company, alternately creates the impressions of "a seasoned army officer" (*TRF* 6), of "a batsman" (*TRF* 96), and of a lord knighting his favourite "warrior," Changez (*TRF* 44). In the neoliberal jungle dominated by the omnipresent Uncle Sam, only bloodsucking "bats" and their sort can survive (*TRF* 63).

517

The notion that Changez's employer Underwood Samson symbolizes Uncle Sam, articulated first by early critics of *TRF* such as Peter Morey (140), has become a consensus view. The name of the company continues to generate elaborations. For instance, Neelam Srivastava observes that the name indicates "both the cut-throat business policies of the US, and emasculation" (178). Mohamed Salah-Eddine Madiou argues that *Underwood*, sounding like *Underworld*, signifies "the underbelly of corporate America that unreservedly holds the reins of political and economic power" (307). To these interpretations, I add that Underwood Samson & Company, like its real-life counterpart McKinsey & Company, plays the role of Uncle Sam's son(s) and epitomizes not only his military and financial industrial complexes, whose symbiosis is a given under imperialism, but, in a subtler way, his education industrial complex as well.

Waving the sword in one hand and the almighty dollar bill in the other,⁷ the self-proclaimed heirs of the biblical hero Samson, instead of fighting contemporary philistines, entice foreign (usually nonwhite) countries to execute capitalism while promising military intervention should they resist. A softer approach used by the US Samsons to universalize neoliberal economic practices is conducting global leadership summits while influencing policies of the IMF, the World Bank, and the like. Domestic policy correlates with foreign policy, resulting in the collusion between

the arms industry and Wall Street, in revolving doors for governmental officials and corporate executive officers,⁸ and in frequent company mergers and job losses, all of which have made competitions hollow and free market nominal. The gist of these phenomena is reflected in the speech the head of Underwood Samson makes about the economy. Employing the rhetoric of evolutionary biology, Jim delivers a sermon of social Darwinism, justifying the cannibalistic practice of his company's business model as the law of natural growth and decay:

The economy's an animal [...] It evolves. First it needed muscle. Now all the blood it could spare was rushing to its brain. That's where I want to be. In finance. In the coordination of business. And that's where *you* are. You are blood brought from some part of the body that the species doesn't need anymore. The tailbone. Like me. We came from places that were wasting away [...] Most people don't recognize that, kid [...] They try to resist change. Power comes from *becoming* change. (TRF 97)

518 The deteriorating cable company Changez is assigned to assess, in Jim's theory, has failed to keep abreast with technological development and hence has no way to survive but to be consolidated, just as the tailbone of an animal is bound to degenerate when the creature adapts to its environment and evolves to a more advanced entity. The fourth industrial revolution Jim hints at is not helping the economy evolve from an animal to a human; rather, it is becoming a big-headed monster that sucks all the blood in its system to the brain and leaves nothing for the rest of its body. This grotesque edification incidentally sheds lights on the exponential growth of wealth among the upper echelon of the big-tech and high-finance industries, in contrast to the stagnant wages and layoffs of ordinary workers. Because power lies in becoming change, those who want to dominate the globe had better make themselves part of the ever-transformative economic leviathan, abandoning places and people that could drag them down. The implication of Jim's reasoning is that Changez should not hesitate to leave behind his debt-ridden homeland, and that, as Surbhi Malik observes, "no one could be held responsible or culpable for the ruins," all of which betrays "a colonialist attitude that sustains American exceptionalism" (242).

The mentor-mentee relationship between the head of Underwood Samson and his golden boy constitutes a component of Uncle Sam's education industrial complex. Teacher-student interactions and any activities organized by or taking place in education institutions, including student recruitments, scholarships, and job fairs, are conducive to ideology infiltration and expansion. Underwood Samson, by conducting annual recruitments on Ivy League campuses, signals that the knowledge and skills of neoliberal economics pave the way to career success, thus indirectly holding sway over certain curriculum of higher education. The rigorous continual education, professional training, and networking in which the company requires its employees to participate, furthermore, propel them to the US ruling class and global power. Collaborating with Underwood Samson, Princeton, as Changez implies, succumbs to Uncle Sam's political and economic agendas, thereby degrading itself to the status of a brothel (madame), and its students (her body parts), whores in training with the

veneer of ladies in waiting:⁹

Every fall, Princeton raised her skirt for the corporate recruiters who came onto campus and—as you say in America—show them some skin. The skin Princeton showed was good skin, of course—young, eloquent, and clever as can be—but even among all that skin, I knew in my senior year that I was something special. I was a perfect breast, if you will, tan, succulent, seemingly defiant of gravity—and I was confident of getting any job I wanted. (TRF 4-5)

The idea that success must be achieved at the expense of the integrity of the body, mind, and soul is embedded in this comically obscene depiction. Every fall Princeton/brothel madame/Delilah cannot hide her eagerness to sell her nearly polished whores/Changez and other graduating students to the highest bidder/head of Underwood Samson. By then the natural masculine edges of Samson wannabes would have already been blunted to meet corporate expectations: “the systematic pragmatism” and “*professionalism*” that sustains America’s “success in so many fields” (TRF 36-37); their creativity, “ceded its primacy to *efficiency*,” and their whole being, “dematerialized” and “recomposed” in the way that a transporter on *Star Trek* would do to whomever is “willing to step into a machine” (TRF 14). Those who survive such stringently transformative refinement will emerge as perfect yet fragmented body parts, each of them having one specialty, and Changez, the perfect breast, stands out, ready to be milked. The four-year Ivy League education is, namely, a process of self-alienation besides institutionalized emasculation and dehumanization: “‘Sell yourself,’ and ‘What make you special?’” (TRF 6). The style of job interviews that Jim conducts confirms that the profit-oriented neoliberal selfhood which Changez and his fellow learners have been taught to cultivate dictates that, individual agency should be exercised like a self-advertising agency, and that personal uniqueness and autonomy possess no intrinsic worth but market value. Thus, the meritocracy that propels him to Princeton and Underwood Samson, the former beneficiary concludes, is nothing but Uncle Sam’s tool of global homogenization and cosmic hegemony.

519

Changez’s suspicion of American meritocracy compels the reader to inquire into what this policy means to the nameless characters epitomizing ordinary Americans who are neither moneyed nor well-connected but still strive to reach the American Dream, such as the workers at the cable company, the doorman at the building where Erica resides with her parents, and the two men puncturing Changez’s tire and calling him “Fucking Arab” (TRF 117). Beneath the multilayered story lies Hamid’s skepticism of the myth of the self-made man, a predominant theme in *The Great Gatsby*. In the popular imagination, heirs of riches are enviable while makers of fortune are admirable, especially if they are self-made, because their success gives average people a hope that they can likewise strike gold. Whereas Fitzgerald is more focused on confronting the dark and pathetic sides of the self-made millionaire romanticized in the populace’s American Dream, Hamid is more interested in unravelling how American meritocracy consolidates the myth of the self-made man into a master narrative that obscures the unfair aspects of its operation. The ideology of meritoc-

racy has been so effectively implanted in the American mind that many believers in the American Dream, pursuers and achievers alike, are oblivious to the inner workings of the system that have helped perpetuate cycles of racial, economic, and social inequalities.¹⁰

In the process of textual transformation, Gatsby obviously functions as a prototype for Changez, Erica, and Jim in varied ways. Although Changez is not from a poor family as is Gatsby, both have no inheritance and an insiders' social network. The pre-9/11 Changez shares Gatsby's sense of class exclusion and naive belief that prosperity would be the best social equalizer and guarantee of love and happiness: "I wouldn't mind having a place out in the Hamptons myself one day" (TRF 44); "I thought even *she* might be impressed." Gatsby, Changez, and Erica all suffer from obsessions with their idealized first love, "a past all the more potent for its being imaginary" (TRF 114). As for Jim, he has a "*fashionable*" and "perfectly curated" flat in TriBeCa (TRF 119), indicating his status as the new money as opposed to the old money like Erica's family living "in the heart of the Upper-East side" (TRF 48). "The novel thus strongly suggests that the supposedly meritocratic society represented by Underwood Samson is edged with an unspoken elitism that condemns outsiders like Jim and Changez to its fringes," as Anna Hartnell points out (342). But it is Tom Buchanan's literary mutations—the native-born Princeton "princes" with whom Changez takes the Greek trip, and Erica's father, presumably a former Princeton prince and now "a man of consequence in the corporate world"—whose demeanour hint toward the hidden impact of meritocracy on average Joes and Janes (TRF 53).

A glimpse at higher education in Buchanan's time is necessary here. Ivy League schools, prior to employing legacy admissions to discourage Jewish applicants in the early 1920s, had already gained reputations as "upper-class-ascribing institutions" (qtd. in Coe and Davison 238), and a large proportion of their student body were already composed of gentile alumni sons. Accordingly, even though Buchanan's admission to Yale is not through legacy preferences (because he graduated in 1915), still, his opportunity to be educated there definitely comes from his privileged background rather than from his individual merits; without the former, his athletic talent would not have mattered. But as custom dictates, his Ivy League diploma turns out to be as much a decoration as the Oxford degree Gatsby pretends to have. The name brand only strengthens Buchanan's class and racial snobbism but weakens his humanity, a phenomenon Hamid recreates in the Princeton graduates whose sense of entitlement and rude attitude toward an old Greek waiter receives Changez's disapproval while triggering the reader's suspicion that they are trust-fund kids admitted to the prestigious institution under its legacy preference policies. Although some of the rich kids might be genuine high achievers, the fact that legacy admissions remain a legal practice today is sufficient to debunk the myth of American meritocracy. Hamid, by making the group of Princeton "princes" Buchanan's literary descendants, suggests that it would not be unlikely that they would act like him, who denounces immigration and champions white supremacy, should their privileges be threatened

by a brown foreign national like Changez, who might want more than a piece of the American pie, given his consistent capacity to “do better than the Americans” (TRF 4).

In fact, even before the 9/11 attacks, Erica’s father, an ideal future self whom the Princeton youths presumably aspire to realize, already gives Changez a taste of white supremacy. Out of habitual condescension, the gentleman of the old boys’ club takes a jab at Pakistani politics and economy while perfunctorily expressing his fondness of the ordinary people from the Islamic republic: “I like Pakistanis. But the elite has raped that place well and good, right? And fundamentalism. You guys have got some serious problems with fundamentalism” (TRF 55). In the way Tom Buchanan repeats the racist messages from *The Rise of the Colored Empires*, Erica’s father sounds “much like the short news on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal*.” So used to exercising authority and power as an important figure in corporate America, Erica’s father fails to see that he himself, with the help of Uncle Sam’s preferential meritocracy—ranging from legacy admissions to tax codes favoring capital holders over workers and the rich over the commoners—has done his share of what he says about the Pakistani ruling class. According to Nashat Haider, fundamentalism means “a dogmatic attitude to the inviolability of a particular attitude or practice” (qtd. in Jayasuriya 257). The white-Americentric worldview held by Erica’s father hence is, by its very nature, a form of fundamentalism. Conceivably well-educated and well-travelled, he is notwithstanding intellectually timid and dishonest, and would deny that US foreign policy, privileging arms (bombs) over tongues (diplomacy) when dealing with international conflicts, heralds military fundamentalism. Furthermore, as Liliana Naydan mentions, he “ignores fundamentalism’s American Protestant roots and America’s problems with fundamentalism of non-Islamic varieties” (29). Indeed, White Christian nationalism, staunchly supportive of US militarism,¹¹ forms an American version of Islamic fundamentalism, and their growing merger is jeopardizing the separation of church and state in the American constitution.

The mental block in Erica’s father proves that “a wall against the East” remains (TRF 23), and that this wall divides not just the old and new monies as does the valley of ashes between East Egg and West Egg; it reinforces the barriers between races, religions, nationalities, and so on. Yet, it is people of his standing who, through lobbying and campaign finance donations, have strong influence on the federal and state governments’ policymaking. Through church membership and/or town hall meetings, they, in addition, hold sway over public opinions. Enjoying more social advantages than what meritocracy affords average Americans, this entitled group would keep telling the populace that meritocracy, fair and square, makes America great, and that people only have themselves to blame should they fail to reach the American Dream. Ismael Hossein-Zadeh’s “Parasitic Imperialism,” delivered in *Global Policy Forum* in 2007, might not be directly about the working poor’s despair, but gives some clues to it. According to Hossein-Zadeh, the ruling elites of past empires shared with their citizens the profits gained from the immoral military adventures abroad by improv-

ing domestic economies; yet this pattern has ceased

in the context of the recent US imperial wars of choice, especially in the post-Cold War period. [...] operations of late are not justifiable even on economic grounds. Indeed, escalating US military expansions and aggressions have become ever more wasteful, cost-inefficient, and burdensome to the overwhelming majority of its citizens.

Unsurprisingly, some of the American precariat, having never benefitted from meritocracy nor from any generous tax breaks, would hunt for scapegoats among whomever they perceive as not belonging in America, of whom Changez becomes one after the 9/11 attacks.

522 From the earliest to the latest literary criticisms of *TRF*, Changez's romance with Erica has been, by and large, read as an allegory of the troubled relationships between Pakistan and America, between the Muslim world and the Christian world, and between the Third World and the First World. The symbolic meanings of such names as Erica being America, Chris being Christ or Christopher Columbus, and Underwood Samson being Uncle Sam, buttressed by Changez's constant comparison of his failed romance with Erica to his ambivalence toward the US, simply make allegorical readings inevitable, to the point of becoming orthodox, and perhaps rightly so, because they have generated many great insights and arguably seemed to correspond to the authorial intentions. For instance, Neelam Srivastava notes that *TRF* "collapses the distinction between the personal and the political" (176), and that Hamid, by holding a mirror up to America while reflecting a third-world person's perception of it rather than its own ideal image, makes *TRF* a first-world allegory, different from the third-world allegories assumed by other postcolonial novels in which formerly colonized countries take the centre stage. Anna Hartnell perceives Erica's rejection of Changez as an indication that "America is locked in a nostalgic embrace with Europe, an embrace that refuses to be transformed by the postcolonial moment that Changez potentially represents" (343). Lilianna Naydan remarks that Chris, who occupies Erica's obsessive imagination, might function as a representation of the death of the kind of fundamentally Christian nation that Christopher Columbus envisioned in his efforts to expand Christendom" (30). Surbhi Malik argues that "[b]y destining Erica and Changez's romance for failure and doom, Hamid rearticulates the very idea of intimacy as a sign not of the bourgeois liberal domestic order but of the global colonial processes that underwrite its possibility," thus supplying "a model and a code of ethics for emergent affinities between the global margins and the center" (253). Mohamed Salah-Eddine Madiou adds that Erica's resistance to Changez and ultimate disappearance symbolizes the illusive American Dream sold to the world by the US: "Erica, as the multicultural America, may just be Changez's vision, just as Chris, as the nativist America, is Erica's" (309).

My reading of Changez's romance with Erica takes a comparative approach, juxtaposing it with its source/counterpart in Murakami's *Norwegian Wood*, whose major characters are not allegorized as symbols of Japan's struggle to rise from its defeat in

WWII but portrayed as ordinary young people trying to make sense of their lives in a country that puts its economic growth ahead of its citizens' physical and mental health.¹² Reading Changez and Erica as regular youths like their Japanese doubles releases them momentarily from the burden of the political allegory they always carry. The complexity of their humanity, especially Changez's, is thus allowed to emerge; so are certain intricacies of Hamid's artistry previously unnoticed. Zooming in the personal while letting the political loom in the background, I examine Changez's relationship with Erica as a *Bildungsroman*—as a journey of a mongrelized young man grappling with his sexual drive, his idea of love, his career, his morals, ethics, and spirituality, while intensely worrying about the impact of American foreign policy on the wellbeing of his homeland.

But first, a close look at Murakami's depiction of young people's confusion about love and his usage of the trope of the firefly will help us decipher the transformation Hamid makes of his Japanese source. A rebel against Japanese culture's overemphasis on conformity and denigration of individuality, Murakami wrote *Norwegian Wood* as an elegy for many youths of his generation who had taken their own lives due to the pressure of rigid gender norms and socially-prescribed-turned-self-oriented perfectionism. Having shown no suicidal symptoms, Kizuki, an academic high achiever, ends his own life without leaving a note of explanation. From what Naoko says to Toru—"He struggled to keep his weakness hidden"—the reader gathers that his inability to believe in Naoko's love for him despite his imperfection caused him to kill himself (Murakami 126). Naoko, in an old-fashioned feminine way, turns inward her anger of being unfairly abandoned, becoming obsessed with being fair to everyone but herself and unable to move on. Toru, with mixed memories of Kizuki, his best friend in high school, and compassion for Naoko's grief, makes love to her. But she baffles him by becoming incommunicado afterwards. The letter she finally writes from a mental asylum is full of measured rhetoric but perplexing logic:

523

Girls my age *never* use the word *fair*. Ordinary girls as young as I am are basically indifferent to whether things are fair or not. The central question for them is not whether something is fair but whether or not it's beautiful or will make them happy. *Fair* is a man's word, finally, but I can't help feeling that it is also exactly the right word for me now. And because questions of beauty and happiness have become such difficult and convoluted propositions for me now, I suspect, I find myself clinging instead to other standards—like whether or not something is fair or honest or universally true. (Murakami 85)

Naoko's internalization of gender binarism, her alliance with androcentric definitions of universal truth and ethics, and her contempt of other young women's preoccupations, are the exact causes of her psychiatric disorder and inconsistent arguments. Immediately after privileging rationality and fairness over beauty and happiness, she makes an irrational and unfair demand of Toru: "Still, you shouldn't feel that I am a burden to you. The one thing I don't want to be is a burden to anyone" (Murakami 88). Ignoring her own criticism of other young women's vanity and self-regard, she behaves likewise: "I can sense the good feelings you have for me. They make me very

happy. All I am doing in this letter is trying to convey that happiness to you. Those good feelings of yours are probably just what I need at this point in my life.” Two opposite inner forces are at work here. The logocentric side of her denies the validity of her need for moral support, which she thinks would make her a burden to others, and of her desire to be happy, which to her signifies selfishness. Yet, her need for love and understanding as a human being drives her to hold on to Toru’s kindness, which she claims makes her happy. While keeping him at bay and not wanting him to hope for more than friendship, she contemplates the chances for them to change their past and future: “I sometimes wonder: IF you and I had met under absolutely ordinary circumstances [...] and there had been no Kizuki, what would have happened? Of course, this ‘IF’ is way too big. I am trying hard at least to be fair and honest!” (Murakami 89). By so doing, Naoko accomplishes exactly what she says she does not wish to do—leading him and herself around in circles.

524 The unhealthy relationship between these characters, incidentally, exposes the battle between Shinto and Victorianism over Japanese attitudes toward human sexuality. In Shinto, sex is not a taboo but a celebrated life force.¹³ Emperor Meiji’s modernization of Japan imported Western technologies, economic and political systems, along with a dose of the Victorian dichotomy between body and soul. Although most women of Naoko’s generation kept abreast with the West’s sexual revolution and regained the liberal view of premarital sex rooted in their native culture, she, coming from an upper-middle-class family and having gone to “a refined girls’ high school run by one of the Christian missions” (Murakami 22), continues to be affected by the angel-versus-whore binarism, as shown in the fact that she was always “too dry” when she and Kizuki tried to eat the forbidden fruit (Murakami 112). It distresses her that it is Toru rather than Kizuki who stimulates her sexual desire. Naoko explains to Toru why she cannot love him:

Kizuki and I had a very special relationship. We had been together from the time we were three. It’s how we grew up: always together, always talking, understanding each other perfectly. The first time we kissed--it was in sixth grade--was just wonderful. The first time I had my period, I ran to him and cried like a baby. We were that close.

Naoko’s Victorian Christian values propel her to read Kizuki’s *kami* in a counter-productive way. The dead’s *kami* in traditional Japanese belief can exert felicitous or malicious power, depending on the treatment it receives from the living. In Naoko’s view, her soul is forever intertwined with Kizuki’s. Therefore, making amends for her “unfaithfulness” to him is essential to her recovery, and further physical pleasure with Toru would only perpetuate the spiritual pain she senses during their first and last intercourse. By contrast, the nineteen-year-old Toru thought that making love with Naoko would help heal the wound that Kizuki’s suicide had inflicted on them both, and that creating new love together would be the best way to commemorate the dead.

Corresponding to Toru’s Shinto-informed sexuality is the message of love carried

by the firefly. In the episode following Naoko's good-bye letter to Toru, his roommate, Storm Trooper, gives him a firefly in an instant coffee jar, saying: "You could give this to your girlfriend" (Murakami 45), and "I'm sure she'd love it." According to Namiko Abe's "Why the Firefly (Hotaru) Is Important in Japan?" the firefly has been a metaphor for passionate love in literature since the *Manyōshū*, the first Japanese poetry anthology, compiled in the eighth century (see Abe). When the Japanese empire was rising near the end of the nineteenth century, the patriotic/nationalistic song "The Light of the Firefly" (*Hotaru no Hikari*) was set to the tune of the Scottish folk song "Auld Lang Syne."¹⁴ The bugs' eerie lights represent "the altered form of the souls of soldiers who have died in war." That "The Light of the Firefly" is still often sung at graduation ceremonies and year-end parties attests to its significance to the Japanese. Murakami appropriates the firefly to suggest Toru's passionate love for Naoko and their transient romance: "Long after the firefly had disappeared, the trail of its light remained inside me, its pale, faint glow hovering on and on in the thick darkness behind my eyelid like a lost soul" (Murakami 46). Besides, this gift from his room-

525

mate turns out to be the gifter's subtle farewell to the giftee. Storm Trooper, diligently following the regiment set by the authorities in order to succeed in Japanese society, does not rank high in Toru's eyes. His everyday routines, such as taking the flag-raising ceremony as a morning wakeup call and doing Radio Calisthenics with the rest of the nation, make him a butt of jokes among his peers. Yet, just as his lack of interest in politics seems at odds with his career plan to make maps for the Geographical Survey Institute, his thoughtful present contradicts his image as someone lacking imagination. When Toru is wallowing in self-pity, Storm Trooper, having just finished a special training session, is leaving for home for the summer break, which results in a total disappearance. Toru never finds any answer to this mystery, hence nudging the reader to ask the questions on his mind. What caused Storm Trooper to withdraw from the university? Did he find that mapmaking no longer suited him and decided to quit school altogether? Or did he get imprisoned for violating some serious national security laws during the training? Could it be simply that he was recruited to work for the Intelligence under the cover of a cartographer with a changed identity? Or did he, like the soldiers in the song "The Light of the Firefly," die in the line of duty? These multiple possibilities of Storm Trooper's fate parallel the layered meanings of the firefly, all of which are reflected in *TRF*.

Changez's statement, "I had, in my own manner, issued a firefly's glow bright enough to transcend the boundaries of continents and civilizations" (*TRF* 182), connotes the Pakistani returnee's ambition to enlighten the world about the American empire's hypocrisies, in addition to his undying love for Erica.¹⁵ Incidentally, this remark also reflects the transnational and transcultural nature of Murakami's influence on Hamid, as well as Fitzgerald's on them. The lights on the East Egg at which Gatsby stares frequently, and the firefly disappearing under Toru's watch in the darkness against the "lights of Shinjuku" to the right, and "Ikebukuro to the left" (Murakami 45), mutate under the pen of Hamid into the lights of the Empire

State Building to which a firefly is drawn, voiced in Erica's seemingly innocent words: "It's trying to compete with the buildings!" (*TRF* 165). The grandeur of the United States of America, represented by the Empire State Building, both attracts and repels Changez, as indicated in the firefly's initial attempt to fly into the edifice and ultimate retreat to the south. The "expressive beauty of the Empire State Building, illuminated green for St. Patrick's Day, or pale blue on the evening of Frank Sinatra's death" (*TRF* 48), making New York by night "one of the greatest sights in the world," relies on electricity, which in the US is generated largely from fossil fuels. Many wars the US wages under the pretext of promoting democracy in the Middle East and Latin America are to gain these natural resources, one of the consequences of which is electricity load-shedding in countries such as Pakistan. The scar on Changez's arm, a burn from melted candle wax, serves as an indictment of America's excessive consumption of the world's energy. The trope of electric lights here has a geopolitical dimension that is nonexistent in its American and Japanese prototypes. But the farewell message the firefly carries in Japanese culture is embedded in Hamid's portrayal of Changez's reaction to Erica's disappearance. Shortly after the nurse in the mental institution tells him that Erica had been saying good-bye to everyone, his memories of their observations of the firefly emerge. Just like that insect, she vanished: "Do you think he made it?" (*TRF* 166). The question she asked then now sounds like a foreshadowing of the uncertainty of his fate as a Pakistani nationalist, and of the doom of their romance.

Many issues that Hamid's characters experience correspond to those of Murakami's: the morbid merger of identities between two lovers who grew up together, to the extent that when he dies, her selfhood also expires; the new boyfriend's endeavour to help liberate his beloved from the grip of the dead; and the gallant's obsessive regret of his failure to save her, resulting in living her malady himself. A striking resemblance between the two works is their respective sex scenes: the first time Changez tries to touch Erica intimately, her body involuntarily rejects him. Her doleful words, "I just can't get wet. I don't know what's wrong with me" (*TRF* 90), echo almost verbatim Naoko's painful memories of her difficulty with Kizuki: "I couldn't get wet." "I never opened to him. So it always hurt" (Murakami 112). Although Naoko's body accepts Toru, her virginity and emotional uncertainty cause awkward tensions. Toru recalls: "as she began to seem more calm, I allowed myself to move inside her [...] with slow, gentle movements [...] Her cry was the saddest orgasm I had ever heard" (Murakami 40). Similarly, although Erica later manages to have intercourse with Changez, her body trembles "grievously, almost mortally" throughout, "despite of the gentleness" of his movement (*TRF* 106). Neither Toru nor Changez is certain whether the love-making did their lovers more harm than good. In any case, their rescuer personality and imperfectly executed romantic devotion echo Gatsby's; together, they form a line of modern knights in blemished armours.

Hamid, nevertheless, departs from his predecessors' tendency to poeticize without a tinge of irony their romantic characters' self-destructive commitment to their love

objects and nostalgia for the bygones. In response to a female reader's question as to why Erica is portrayed like a mad woman in the attic, Hamid says: "All I would offer as an explanation is that it is a sort of 'mad people' book. Changez (in my measure) is no less mad than Erica actually" ("Slaying" 234). The "mad people book" comment calls to mind such classics as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Layla and Majnun*, *Khosrow and Shirin*, and, especially, *Orlando Furioso*, whose protagonist, the Christian paladin Orlando, is so tormented by his unrequited love for a Saracen (Muslim) princess Angelica that only a medicine from the Moon can cure him of his insanity, a phenomenon turned even more inward in the lovelorn Changez:

waves of mourning washed over me, sadness and regret prompted at times by an external stimulus, and at others by an internal cycle that was almost tidal [...] I responded to the gravity of an invisible moon at my core, and I undertook journeys I had not expected to take. (TRF 172)

The erotic melancholia Hamid's characters suffer proves to have a long literary tradition. But for him, the ailments of lovers' desire embody "a certain notion of fundamentalism," underlying the urge to conquer the world, or to correct the world's wrongs at all costs. Referring to the sex scene in his novel, Hamid states: "there is something of a tragically perverted romance at the core. In other words, I think of somebody who flies an aircraft into a building as [...] a kind of knight errant [...] somebody who has set out to kill dragons, somebody who has this enormous romantic quest." The militant images and religious allusions interspersed in Changez's troubled romance with Erica thus suggest the crossroads among heroic mania, erotic melancholy, spiritual conundrums, and actual terrorism.

Although race and nationality are no longer reliable indicators of an individual's religion or lack of it, a Pakistani man dating a white American woman could still lead to an assumption that theirs is a Muslim-Christian romance. Changez may look like "a representative of Islam" but he could be "spiritually not a Muslim" (Hamid, "Slaying" 236). Playing on this idea, Hamid evokes certain distinctly Christian imagery to depict Changez's enchantment by Erica while subtly poking fun at his inclination to spiritualize the unremarkable. Filtered through the lens of this ardent suitor, Erica appears to bear an inscription of the passion of Christ. A bruise she receives at a taekwondo practice, "dark and angry at the top of her rib cage" (TRF 89), is elevated by her gazer to a sign of her hurt by the demise of Chris—a wound that, given its proximity to the heart, is reminiscent of the last of Christ's Five Holy Wounds, pierced through the side of his chest by the Lance of Longinus in the crucifixion. Her invitation to Changez to take a look at the bruise is exaggerated as a baring of the soul: "I had seen her topless—but as she sat on my futon in her bra I felt I had never seen her so naked." The solemnity of his take on the situation gets slightly comical when the glow of the television makes her look bluish: "She seemed otherworldly; she could have sprung from the pages of a graphic novel." The mundane image of the television and the literary genre associated with the comics somewhat

undercut the magic he is spinning; even he himself is distracted by this thought and finds it necessary to return to the mood: "I commanded myself to focus on her bruise." Hamid's humour leaks through Changez's narrative slippage. Yet, Changez's confusion by Erica's mixed signals engenders an aborted lovemaking, which in turn helps his previously exerted "focus on her bruise" develop into a fixation. As shown in his sentiment about a contusion caused by a scooter collision years later, Changez continues to conflate a healable physical bruise with a permanent stigma of spiritual value: "a livid bruise on my rib cage, where hers had once been. I stared at myself in the mirror and touched my skin with my fingers and hoped that the mark would not soon fade, as it inevitably did" (*TRF* 173). Lovesickness begets a fetish out of a bruise on the rib cage, the absurdity of which makes Changez's conversationalist gaze at him as if he were "a raving madman" (*TRF* 174).

528 Erotic melancholia could be passively endured and by turns aggressively expressed. The pathos and violence of Changez's zeal to achieve an absolute union with his beloved are evident of a thin line between chivalry and tyranny. Sexual frustration, compounded by his fury at the American invasion of Afghanistan, transforms him from an empathetic courter to a coercive lover. Behaving like the dark joke he made to his fellow travellers in Greece that one day he would like to become "a dictator of an Islamic republic with nuclear capacity" (*TRF* 29), Changez ignores Erica's reluctance and insists that she come up with him to his apartment. As per his directive, she pretends he is Chris; consequently, although her body accepts him, emotionally and spiritually they struggle to meet: "I watched her shut eyes, and her shut eyes watched *him*" (*TRF* 105). The poignancy of such a union prompts Changez to wonder whether she is silently accusing him of violating her:

The entrance between her legs was wet and dilated, but was at the same time oddly rigid; it reminded me—unwillingly—of a wound, giving our sex a violent undertone despite of the gentleness with which I attempted to move. More than once I thought I smelled what I thought to be blood, but when I reached down to ascertain with my fingers whether it was her time of month, I found them unstained. She shuddered toward the end—grievously, almost mortally; her shuddering called forth my own. (*TRF* 105-06)

The illusion that her arousal by him opens an old wound (their recent failure) and that his penetration causes her to bleed nonetheless carries certain emotional truth, bespeaking his guilt of turning their lovemaking into a battlefield, on which he hijacks her body to combat the spirit of Chris. Such words as "blood," "fingers," "shuddered," and "mortally"—which also appear in W.B. Yeats's "Leda and the Swan"—reinforce the image of a helpless damsel but shatters that of a dashing knight. A rescuing mission thus degrades to a dishonourable conquest, ironically mirroring the American invasion of Afghanistan that disgusts him.

In addition to blood, other images associated with the Holy Communion—bread, chalice, and wine—alternatively punctuate this sex scene and the one in which their attempt fails, indicating a sacrilegious streak in Changez's erotic passion. Bodily love based on mutuality, according to Incarnational theology, may function as an expres-

sion of God's presence: "At its best, sex is a positive, empowering, joyful, creative, life-giving force wherein the grace of God is revealed and embodied in human affection. In this context, sexuality takes on a sacramental quality, a quality of bringing God, spirit, and grace into human relationship" (Stoltzfus n.p.). Changez's ideal of love, in essence, corresponds to this view. The problem is that he projects this ideal onto a woman whose heart he has yet to win and, in the name of helping her to heal, rushes her to consummate their relationship before she is ready. Just as the rite of transubstantiation requires the presence of both wine and bread besides a clergyman, the achievement of transcendence through sexual intimacy demands the presence of both body and soul. Hamid displays the lovers' mismatch by absenting one of the necessary elements from the rite in both episodes. In their first try, wine is present—they drink champagne to celebrate her success in acquiring a literary agent—but bread is missing; her body rejects him. The graduation present from his uncle, a pair of "ornate silver cups" he saves for special occasions like this, ironically sets a prelude to the graduation of their relationship (*TRF* 88). With Chris's spirit hovering over their naked bodies—one of which is eager while the other, resistant—the "threesome" ends up deconsecrating the Communion. In their second try, the presence of bread is embodied in their sexual union whereas blood exists only in his imagination. The absence of Erica's emotional and spiritual reciprocity depletes Changez of energy, leaving him literally hungry, which he eases with a diluted version of the Lord's Supper: "I ate only bread and drank only water, a tasteless meal" (*TRF* 107).

529

The Christian symbols pervading Changez's romance do not necessarily signify his religious identity, just as his skin colour and national origin give no guarantee that he is a follower of Islam. Inherited or imposed identity markers may or may not have anything to do with personal values and beliefs. The Pakistani Changez, having grown up "in an environment too thoroughly permeated with a tradition of shared mysticism to accept that conditions of the spirit could not be influenced by the care, affection and desire of others" (*TRF* 140-41), conceivably leans toward Sufism. But his sincerity in living a life with soul, and his interest in finding a common ground among world religions and their applicability to mundane activities are displayed in his juxtaposition of Sufis, Zen practitioners, sportsmen, and warriors. Christian elements colour his perception of and interaction with Erica, presumably because of his acculturation to America. Examined closely, his ideal of love parallels not only Incarnational Christians' views of sexuality and the Eucharist, but also a longstanding Sufi mystic idea that sexual union with one's beloved is conducive to as well as reflective of one's unity with God, an idea made popular in the thirteenth century by Ibn Arabi and Rumi (see Shaikh, esp. ch. 3, 6, and 7). Exposure to varied doctrines and faiths could result either in spiritual eclecticism and religious tolerance, or in epistemological confusion, anxiety and, at worst, reactionary fundamentalism. In different degrees, Changez, a cultural-spiritual mongrel, has experienced them all.

THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST AS A HYPERTEXT OF THE *GITA*, *HEART OF DARKNESS*, AND “THE LEGEND OF SLEEPY HOLLOW”

530

Changez's decision to receive higher education and pursue a career in the United States cannot be separated from Pakistan's postcolonial conditions. For most postcolonial countries, despite being legally and judicially independent from their former colonizers, the possibility of owning a full political and economic sovereignty remains elusive, as geopolitics and international trade law continue to render them susceptible to global powers' manipulations and exploitations. Some individuals opt to seek opportunities to better their lives elsewhere, and the United States is an obvious choice. The events of 9/11 force the young business valuation specialist to confront if his American Dream must be achieved at the expense of his soul. In portraying Changez's ethical and spiritual conundrums, Hamid alludes to the *Gita*, echoing, questioning, and revising Krishna's teaching of dharma and reincarnation to Arjuna. Harking back to *Heart of Darkness*, Hamid draws attention to the historicity of Changez's postcoloniality and to the affinity among all empires, be it Belgian, Ottoman, British, Spanish, or American. While Ichabod Crane and the Headless Horseman from Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" are turned into a metaphor for all the interchangeable roles assumed by Changez and the American, the gothic story itself calls out a corresponding phenomenon prevalent in the contemporary US, in which both the government and a majority of the citizens have a short-term memory of history and lack concern for the rest of the world.

More than once, Changez's faith in his other "religion"—the Underwood Samson style of capitalism—receives tests, subjecting him to the kind of dilemma faced by Arjuna: duty versus compassion; responsibility for oneself versus responsibility to one's kith and kin; preservation of the material versus care for the soul. Confiding in Wainwright, Changez expresses his unease with their job indirectly causing layoffs: "There were older people among the workers of the cable company [...] and I imagined many of them had children my age. If English had a respectful form of the word *you*—as we do in Urdu—I would have used it to address them without the slightest hesitation" (TRF 98). In Pakistani society, old age implies experience and wisdom and hence stimulates respect. Changez involuntarily sees senior folks of his homeland in these people, pitying them both for their being "condemned to atrophy" in the evolution of economy (TRF 97). Given the trend of automation and low success rates of job retraining, neither the eliminated jobs nor the aging workers will have a chance for "reincarnation," the gravity of which to the unwanted employees is akin to death. Changez's empathy in this scene evokes Arjuna's reluctance to kill his kinsmen who have become his enemies in their dispute of royal succession. And, like Krishna to Arjuna, Wainwright promptly reminds Changez of his professional obligations and points out to whom he should be loyal: "You are working for the *man*, buddy" (TRF

98); “Just remember your deals would go through whether you work on them or not. And focus on the fundamentals.” The Barbadian’s suggestion of acting in accordance with one’s dharma while refraining from thinking about the human costs resulting from one’s deeds sounds similar to Krishna’s advice at first glance: “Unattached to action’s fruits / the yoked one comes to final peace” (Flood and Martin 5, 12-13). But the spirit behind differs from each other: one abides by the guiding principle of Underwood Samson and aims for maximum profit, whereas the other dictates that the ultimate ownership of the earthly kingdom belong to the Divine.

If Changez’s doubts about his profession signify a burgeoning mental decolonization, then his relapses to the pragmatic fundamentalism show the arduousness of its process: “I had chosen a field of endeavor that would be of ever-greater importance to humanity and would be likely, therefore, to provide me with ever-increasing returns” (TRF 97). A grandiose and measured phrasing as such reveals, on the one hand, an old soul that still believes in doing good for the world, and on the other, the osmosis of high finance. Placing the benefits of humanity before personal rewards, he nonetheless asserts unabashedly his contribution to the former and his worthiness of the latter. The young man in a quandary, simply put, wants to have his cake (legally sanctioned wealth), and eat it too (the moral high ground). This rationale proves too fragile to withstand Juan-Bautista’s repeated challenge. No remark better displays Changez’s distortion of the teaching of the *Gita* than his response to the old man’s inquiry if it troubles him to make a living by “disrupting the lives of others” (TRF 151). The accused party equivocates: “We do not decide whether to buy or to sell, or indeed what happens to a company after we have valued it.” Instead of expounding the sanctimonious theory of advancing humanity through economic revolution and financial manipulation, he resorts to sophistry, disguising a moral evasion as a spiritual detachment from action’s fruits, thus betraying a lack of conviction in his profession.

531

In essence, Juan-Bautista’s contribution to Changez’s “inflective journey” accords with Krishna’s guidance of Arjuna (TRF 146). The Hindu god instructs the warrior-prince to not only act like one but also understand why he must fight the war. For, without understanding the meaning of one’s actions, one loses touch with one’s soul and reverence for the Divine. Likewise, the bookstore manager pushes the corporate warrior to examine his own soul—to find out whether he has a total faith in what he does and whether he is willing to hold himself accountable for the damages his job could directly or indirectly do to humanity. The Hindu concepts of dharma, reincarnation, and guru-disciple relationship, when removed from their religiosity, are applicable to various ethical and spiritual learnings outside Hinduism. By the same token, although Juan-Bautista’s name derives from John’s baptism of Christ, its symbolic value here has nothing to do with religious faith but with a senior’s assistance of a junior to transition from a liminal state to an authentic selfhood, which alone constitutes a spiritual act.

Apart from its universality, Changez and Juan-Bautista’s relationship sets a para-

digm for nonsectarian transnational coalitions among postcolonial subjects.¹⁶ It is no random choice that Hamid makes Changez's mental decolonization happen in Valparaíso, Chile. As Albert Braz points out, Hamid is one of the few writers who avoids adopting "apocalyptic or religious explanations for what likely has geopolitical roots" (241). Regardless of its independence as a nation-state, Chile is the first foreign territory on which the United States imposed neoliberal economic policies, following Augusto Pinochet's overthrow of the democratically elected President Salvador Allende on September 11, 1973, a coup d'état backed by the CIA, also known as Chile's 9/11 event.¹⁷ The subtext that Chile shares Pakistan's colonial wounds and postcolonial woes is embedded in Changez's observation that the vicissitudes of Valparaíso are akin to those of Lahore: "I read online about its history [...] I was reminded of Lahore" (*TRF* 144). His feeling of betrayal by the American government's decision to maintain "a strict neutrality" over India's threat to invade Pakistan, a long-term American ally then (*TRF* 143), recalls the betrayal of Allende by the same hegemon that prides itself on being a beacon of democracy, because his democratic socialism would have inconvenienced global capitalism. The expediency of American interventionism never fails to set off a domino effect: Pablo Neruda, Allende's ally, died twelve days after the coup, allegedly from assassination by poison at the hands of Pinochet's minion. Juan-Bautista's purposeful suggestion that Changez pay a visit to the former house of the Nobel Prize winner endows the side trip with the significance of a pilgrimage. The convex mirror that Neruda set to convince his guests of their drunkenness, while symbolizing the national poet's belief in his own clear vision for Chile in contrast to the blurry views many of his compatriots held, foreshadows Juan-Bautista's success in helping Changez recognize himself in the brainwashed janissaries and realize the fundamental nature of all empires: colonization and exploitation in any shapes and forms. Through the trope of mirror, Hamid allows historical events and figures to find their present doubles and vice versa, illuminating layers and dimensions of Changez's interiority while pointing to his ultimate dharma: engaging in Pakistani nationalism and transnational anti-imperialism.

Nationalism, however, can turn tribalistic, and so can corporate patriotism. Linking tribal nationalism to corporate nationalism, Hamid satirizes them both in Jim's attempt to dissuade Changez from resigning. In the language of war, the seasoned financial officer compares Underwood Samson & Company to a country, one to which Changez should show loyalty by proving his comradeship with other Underwood Samsons: "I know you have stuff on your mind. But if you walk out on this now you undermine our firm. You hurt your team. In wartime soldiers don't really fight for their flags, Changez. They fight for their friends, their buddies. Their team. Well, right now your team is asking you to stay" (*TRF* 153). Though acknowledging Changez's distress, Jim ignores its root cause: American imperialism. Astonishingly, the overall well-being of the American populace is not even Jim's primary concern; rather, his mind is occupied by the maximum profit Underwood Samson can reap out of each business deal, from which he will receive a large share of

returns. His logic renders national flags mere objects impertinent to soldiers' morale and allegiance, and countries, convenient institutions existing only to serve businesses, thus inadvertently divulging that all workers of Underwood Samson, despite their national origins, are mercenaries fighting proxy wars for the monetary interests of the multinational corporations that give economic directives to Uncle Sam. The newly enlightened Pakistani, by contrast, thinks that in such an asymmetrical war as the one waged by global capitalists against individuals with limited resources, or the one waged by the American empire against poor countries like his homeland, he who is righteous should be with those who are underprivileged: "I knew from my experience as a Pakistani—of alternating periods of American aid and sanctions—that finance was a primary means by which the American empire exercised its power. It was right for me to refuse to participate any longer in facilitating this project of domination" (*TRF* 156). His resignation from the firm is, therefore, a denunciation of imperialism rather than, as Jim's tribalistic corporate nationalism suggests, a renunciation of his dharma.

533

Hamid's most radical revision of the caste-related concept of dharma appears in Changez's cab ride after he returns from Chile. Racial profiling and extra inspections at the airport customs strengthen Changez's determination to fight against injustice. Mentally assigning Krishna's combat role of charioteer to the cab driver, Changez notwithstanding deems his own status as humble as that of his hire: "once admitted I hired a charioteer who belonged to a serf class lacking the requisite permissions to abide legally and forced therefore to accept work at lower pay; I myself was a form of indentured servant whose right to remain was dependent upon the continued benevolence of my employer" (*TRF* 157). Legal status and education level aside, foreign-born American Dreamers from the global south are forever vulnerable to the institutional racism built into US immigration law and foreign policy. Two lowly equals replacing an all-knowing deity incarnate and an aristocratic demigod, the "charioteer" in the context of Changez's pursuit of social justice represents a conceptual herald leading the way to rectify the egregious inequalities between the privileged (old and new monies) and the masses (the working poor and the shrinking middle class)—a growing global phenomenon also known as neo-feudalism (see Kotkin). For Changez, deterring the development of global serfdom must start at home, thus his return to Pakistan and dedication to decolonizing the young minds.

The trajectory of Changez's growth, viewed with sympathy toward postcolonial subjectivity, appears upward and hopeful; nevertheless, the young man's determination to correct the world's wrongs, to paraphrase a previously quoted comment by Hamid himself, might turn him into a knight-errant who pilots an airplane into a building. Changez's track record shows that he has the tendency to elevate mundane experiences to a cosmic level. Intense, idealistic, and goal-oriented, Changez cuts a fundamentalist figure of a sort in his romance with Erica, in his loyalty to Pakistan, and in his bipolar love-hate relationship with America. But nothing in *TRF* implies that Islam is a cause of his obsessive-compulsive personality; nor is his political activ-

ism rooted in this religion. As Claudia Perner observes:

If we take our clues from Hamid, we come to the conclusion that fundamentalism can also be inspired by commitment to one's country, to one's own dreams, to one's career, to one's failures or to one's very personal disappointment. We have to start distinguishing between religious fundamentalism proper and a feeling that can clearly be related but is in no way the same: a reactive aggression born out of an inability to govern one's own life and to make one's own rules. (30)

In other words, attributing terrorism to Islam is like blaming Christianity for imperialism and disaster capitalism, the premise of which ignores the pluralism of both faiths and the multiple impetuses behind globe-destroying actions. Religion in this type of simplistic and inflammatory argument prevalent in the media apparently functions as a political tool, as it often does in domestic and world politics regardless of East or West. The final chapter of *TRF* does suggest that Changez, "to stop America" (168), might take into account the realities on the ground and ally himself politically with hardcore Islamists. Arguably, it is this problematic strategy that causes him tremendous mental stress, palpable in his double-voiced narrative, leading to the confounding statement: "I have felt rather like a Kurtz waiting for his Marlowe" (*TRF* 183).

This explicit reference to Conrad's characters in *Heart of Darkness* prompts the reader to examine how Hamid, in depicting the empire outside and inside Changez, reworks the earlier novella's frame narrative and complicates its motif of the double. Two narrative streams with contrary values dominate Changez's disjointed self-presentation. One is his opposition to American imperialism—a result of his journey into the American empire's heart of darkness like "a modern-day Conradian Marlow" (Madiou 307).¹⁸ The other is his fascination with imperial romance—with the "technologically advanced civilization" as well as the grand cultural currency and heritage resulting from or correlated to various forms of violence enacted by any empires, present or past (*TRF* 34).¹⁹ This fascination does not stop at mere appreciation but gradually assumes a life of its own, culminating in his out-of-hand decolonizing project. Thus, the second narrative stream is Changez's Kurtzian journey into the darkness of his own heart, where an unconscious empire is located. During this journey he erects such defense mechanisms as confirmation bias, denial, repression, projection, rationalization, and passive-aggressiveness to avoid confronting the possibility that, despite his anti-American imperialism, he may not be against all imperialisms. To accentuate this cognitive dissonance in Changez, Hamid replaces Conrad's frame narrative with these two clashing narrative streams while spinning the notion of Marlow and Kurtz as each other's double/foil into the dynamics between Changez and the American, as shown in the unstable and at times interchangeable roles they play, such as hunter and prey, host and guest, insider and outsider, in addition to the nationalist and the imperialist.

The US invasion of Afghanistan confirms Changez's aversion to American imperialism, but this confirmation creates biases and blinders, blocking him from seeing

his own affinity for imperial romance and propelling him to conflate virtues with vices so long as it is the American government and media that are commending the good qualities:

There was something undeniably retro about the flags and uniforms, about generals addressing cameras in war rooms and newspaper headlines featuring such words as *duty* and *honor*. I had always thought of America as a nation that looked forward; for the first time I was struck by its determination to look *back*. (TRF 115; emphasis in original)

All the post-9/11 displays of American patriotism indeed contain a sense of self-righteousness and longing for “a time of unquestioned dominance,” “safety,” and “moral certainty.” But *duty*, *honour*, and *back*, words Hamid italicizes to emphasize Changez’s contempt for the American empire’s claim on exceptionalism and self-deception, are the very emotions that trigger him to defend Pakistan’s sovereignty, to play a knight to Erica, and to lament the meteoric glories of Lahore and Valparaiso: “it had been in decline for over a century; once a great port fought over by rivals [...] it had been bypassed and rendered peripheral by the Panama Canal. In this—Valparaiso’s former aspirations to grandeur—I was reminded of Lahore and of that saying, so evocative in our language: *the ruins proclaimed the building was beautiful*” (TRF 144). The aesthetic aspect of the city, noteworthy, plays a less important role than its political-economic history in evoking in him this poetic, nostalgic sentiment, suggesting that a part of him still clings to imperialistic values. While criticizing others’ nostalgia, including his relatives’ holding on to “imagined memories the way homeless people hold on to lottery tickets” (TRF 71), he is unaware of his own: “We built the Royal Mosque and the Shalimar Gardens [...] when your country was still a collection of thirteen small colonies, gnawing away at the edge of a continent” (TRF 102). It is through remarks as such that Hamid invites the reader to consider these questions: to what extent would Changez’s commitment to anti-American imperialism be undercut by his Pakistani nationalism? At what point would his Pakistani nationalism be undercut by transnational Islamism? Feeling proud of the long civilization from which one originates certainly helps reinforce one’s sense of belonging; using it to disparage a current superpower because of its short history and former status as a small colonial force, however, only shows one’s jealousy rather than indignation. Aside from subjective emotional attachment and arbitrarily defined legal rights, on what ground can one take credit for the accomplishments of one’s ancestors? The Royal Mosque and the Shalimar Gardens, Changez seems to forget, are products of the Mughal empire, built with the sweat and blood of many people of low social spectrum whose offspring’s minds he is trying to help deimperialize.

The closer Changez comes to sense the discrepancy between his pronounced beliefs and his hidden values, the harder he tries to conceal it, and, ironically, the more he reveals his psychological discomfort. The story of the janissaries, though a key inducement of Changez’s project of decolonization, has certain elements that could lead to contrasting interpretations, but he seems attempting to suppress them

when the American shows disbelief in the message he draws out of the allegory:

But your expression, sir, tells me that you think something is amiss. Did this conversation really happen, you ask? [...] did this so-called Juan-Bautista even exist? I assure you, sir: I am not in the habit of inventing untruths! And moreover, even if I were, there is no reason why this incident would be more likely to be false than any of the others I have related to you. (*TRF* 151-52)

536 The American presumably finds it off-kilter that Changez considers his former self a modern janissary, because the boys subjected to the Ottoman empire's *devshirme* (blood tax or child levy) were victims of Christian origins, whereas Changez is, with or without a religious faith, a Muslim descendant who went to America as an adult by free choice and under the auspice of its meritocracy. Depending on which aspects of the allegory the storyteller and the listener choose to emphasize, the meaning comes out differently. By defensively philosophizing truths and make-believes, Changez obscures the fact that the forced apostasy and destruction of infidels' civilizations integral to the story of the janissaries can be used by contemporary Christian fundamentalists to justify their aggression against Muslims, and in an opposite way, by Islamic fundamentalists to stir up a collective nostalgia for their forebears' imperial dominance, to recruit ardent new blood, and to incite jihads. Either way perpetuates the feud between Christian and Muslim countries. How the university lecturer enlightens his mentees with this story, and how they receive it, are left for speculation.

But considering that Kurtz sinks into savagery and madness while pursuing his idealized enterprise of civilizing the Africans, Changez's decolonization initiative may, over time, come too close to fire—to Islamic fundamentalists. A clue to this possibility lies in the waiter coming from the Pashtun tribe that produced many members of the Taliban. Since the Taliban have received assistance from Al Qaeda—the perpetrators of the 9/11 event—as well as from the Pakistani anti-imperialism camp with which Changez is associated, a suspicion of his entanglement with the extremists is not unfounded. His remark of feeling like Kurtz also suggests that he may have become more radical than he cares to admit. Metaphorically reversing his identity from a postcolonial subject to a deified colonial, Changez could be subconsciously expressing his guilt of letting his students treat him like an idol, and of conniving at their xenophobic violence for their shared vision of Pakistan. Heroic mania and love sickness converge again when Changez puns on Kurtz's intended, explaining that his TV comment on America's readiness to inflict deaths on other countries came out more strongly than he "intended" (*TRF* 182), and that Erica was an impetus: "I was possibly trying to attract attention to myself [...] If Erica was watching [...] she might have seen me and been moved to correspond. I was tugged at by an undercurrent of loss when she did not do so." One wonders whether it was encouragement or discouragement from Erica that Changez was hoping to receive after taking the risk of being portrayed as an anti-American extremist by the international media. Sounding as if he has indeed gone crazy like Kurtz, Changez nonetheless knows his intended audience at present is the American. "The horror, the horror" could not be the moral

lesson he wants his Marlow to transmit, could it?²⁰

A Marlow who can understand and convey the importance of mutualism is the kind of Marlow Changez hopes to awaken in the American. Manipulating the motif of the double, Hamid has been preparing the reader for this message throughout Changez's narrative. Changez's alternately friendly and threatening words always have double meanings. When he offers to switch his cup with his guest's so that the latter would feel "more comfortable" (*TRF* 11), the host is hinting at their mutual uncertainty about "whether it is predator or prey" they are playing (*TRF* 31). Taking advantage of his role as a native of the land, he informs the foreigner of the cultural meaning of receiving a free meal from a Pakistani: "it is a mark of friendship when someone treats you to a meal" (*TRF* 40), but what starts out free monetarily would not end up free ethically, because "a relationship of mutual generosity" is expected even if not articulated. The postcolonial subject then accuses the representative of the American empire of failing to abide by the code of hospitality: "the mighty host I had expected of your country was duly raised and dispatched—but homeward toward my family in Pakistan" (*TRF* 94). "The mighty host" on the surface means the powerful US military, but it implies that the guests/foreign invaders flip the table and usurp the hosts' position, turning the natives into strangers of their homeland. Frank O'Connor's "Guests of the Nation" (1931) and Albert Camus's "The Guest" (1957) might have lurked in the back of Hamid's mind when he applied these classic tropes of the unstable relationship between the colonizer and the colonized to the American and Changez. But it is through Changez's reference to Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" that Hamid gives clues to how the American could become a Marlow with the ability to awaken his country from the darkness of its Kurtzian heart.

537

When Changez reveals something about himself, the American is usually implicated in it: "One cannot but join in the terror of Ichabod Crane, alone on his horse, in that moment when he first perceived the presence of the Headless Horseman. I must admit, I am sometimes reminded of the sound of those spectral clip-clops when I go for nocturnal walks by myself. How they make my heart pound" (*TRF* 171-73). The chaser, looking "decidedly anxious," knows that he has probably been chased too and might get killed before he makes a move at his target. Certainly, an opposite reading is also valid, as Mike Marais states, "this intertextual reference casts doubt on whether the narrator and the stranger are in fact being followed in Hamid's novel [...] Rather than clarifying anything, the novel's ending inscribes further uncertainty" (100). Notwithstanding, Irving's story is not mentioned just to connote these simple messages. The relationship between Ichabod and the Headless Horseman in the context of *TRF* fittingly encapsulates all the fluid positions Changez and the American embody, including being each other's Kurtz and Marlow.

A quick look at the original story is hence necessary. Ichabod, an outsider from Connecticut, tries to ingratiate himself to the natives of Sleepy Hollow for acceptance as well as for extra meals to feed his huge appetite that his meagre income as a

schoolteacher cannot. While heading for home from a dinner party where he fails to win the hand of a rich farmer's daughter, the crestfallen Ichabod feels as though he is being chased by the ghost of the rumoured Headless Horseman, a hired Hessian soldier from Germany whose head was blown off by an American cannonball when he was fighting on the British side during the American Revolutionary War. When Ichabod turns around, he is hit by a pumpkin and falls off his horse. Humiliated by the experience, he leaves Sleepy Hollow and embarks on a study of law. Before being made a justice of the Ten Pound Court, he worked as an attorney, contributed to news magazines, and engaged in electioneering. The standard moral lessons the reader is supposed to learn from this story are: do not let superstitions and fantasies control your head and cloud your judgement; do not look back and let the past drag you down; the republic has been established, so move on with the new country. The Headless Horseman is often interpreted as the wrong past that keeps trying to stop the present from progressing, and his restless pursuit of substitutes to replace his lost head, as a vindictive gesture signifying his inability to awaken from his false belief that he was wrongly decapitated. The villagers of Sleepy Hollow, contentedly oblivious to the happenings outside their small world, continue to live the life of what the ghost symbolizes.

538

A new dimension of the relationship between Ichabod and the Headless Horseman emerges when both characters are juxtaposed with Changez and the American. The former pair becomes more similar than contrasting to each other. Before their encounter, they already share two traits: both are outsiders of the village and headless; one physically, but both intellectually. In his return, the Headless Horseman functions psychologically as Ichabod's better conscience, chasing after him to warn him not to lose his head over things that insult his intelligence and damage his integrity. The hat Ichabod leaves behind symbolizes his casting out the silly old head that was responsible for his captivation by supernatural stories and for his false dream to live a rich life by marrying the heiress. The subsequent careers he pursues, whether it be law, journalism, or politics, require an exercise of both reason and imagination to produce sound results. Wearing various new hats/heads, he enhances the public good in a burgeoning democracy while rectifying his past wrongs. His role as a justice of Ten Pound Court, or Small Claims Court in modern terminology, looks like a direct amendment to his previous greed and folly. Personifying such an abstract idea as better conscience, the Headless Horseman does not just reappear suddenly but after a period of cultivating critical thinking through trial and error. His eternal returns signify his deep regret of having been on the wrong side of history, as well as his determination to help individuals willing and able to learn from his past. The old hearsay about his perpetual avarice to get new heads from his victims should hence be understood as his tireless pursuit of new knowledge, and of his constant revision of his worldview when confronted with new information and evidence. It is this kind of mutually receptive and dynamic relationship between Ichabod and the Headless Horseman that Hamid indicates Changez and the American could be developing.

Given that Changez consciously labels himself as an ex-modern janissary, he must see his former self in the mercenary Hessian soldier in the actual history of the American Revolutionary War, as well as in the Headless Horseman in Irving's story, despite his identification with Ichabod in the statement he makes to spook the American. But the Pakistani is as much an awakened Ichabod as he is a wiser Marlow, because based on his experience in America, the country is as much a neoliberal capitalist jungle as it is a contemporary Sleepy Hollow, where the government is indifferent to how its hawkish foreign policy inflicts suffering on other countries and hurts itself in the long run, and where a majority of its people, working breathlessly to pay their bills, have no time and energy to care about what happens in the rest of the world. The American, coming from the United States of Sleepy Hollow, is like a pre-enlightened Ichabod until he journeys into the Kurtzian heart of darkness of the Pakistani patriot/former janissary/reformed Headless Horseman. Paradoxically, the American also represents his country's superpower, and his presence may trigger Changez to confront the danger of collaborating with Islamic jihadists if this is what he has allowed himself to do. The postcolonial subject's story may inspire the alleged imperialist to look back at American history, comparing the principles on which the US was founded with the endless military and economic warfares it has initiated since the end of World War II, and ask himself if he is willing to live his life like one of the villagers in Sleepy Hollow, like a pre-reformed Ichabod, and like the Hessian soldier allying with the wrong side of history. A deimperialized Marlow would understand that he and Changez "are now bound by a certain shared intimacy" (*TRF* 184),²¹ and that, just as his immediate survival depends on the good will of his native host, the "mighty host" of the US empire cannot keep overstaying its welcome as a voracious guest without inviting its own humiliating expulsion (94).

539

Changez's grievance and remonstrance might at times sound like a madman suffering from heroic mania and erotic melancholia, but it is also an "offering" of another way of knowing (*TRF* 168),²² which has its own sense and sensibility but can be easily accessed by all who care to connect their reason with their imagination as does an enlightened Ichabod:

Such journeys have convinced me that it is not always possible to restore one's boundaries after they have been blurred and made permeable by a relationship: try as we might, 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.

Changez's lyrical speech sums up a powerful epistemological message that the entire novella tries to deliver: whether it be interpersonal relations or international politics, autonomy and intimacy, pragmatism and romanticism, national security and human security are fluidly interconnected rather than rigidly binary. By extension, a globalization without mutualism is a perpetuation of parasitic imperialism and a road to world annihilation. It is such a message that is the thrust of Hamid's writing and the gist of his novella. The suspense of the fate of Changez and the American is thus the

suspense of that of all living humans, whose acts as individuals or as representatives of any political/economic/social entities will determine the fate of themselves as well as that of the globe.

CONCLUSION

In her essay “World Music, World Literature: A Geopolitical View,” Katie Trumpener points out “the quasi-theological role of literature in mediating ideological shifts and moments of historical crisis, enacting conversion and convergence” (196). Hamid fills Changez’s self-narrative with references and allusions to world literatures and religions not just to characterize him as a mongrelized young man whose equal affinity for America and Pakistan, for modern technology and antique artifacts, and for Eastern and Western civilizations is profoundly shaken by the 9/11 attacks. More importantly, by subjecting the American interlocutor as well as readers of *TRF* to Changez’s penchant for book-name-dropping, Hamid hopes to reintroduce a contextualized way of knowing, to motivate cross-cultural and historical perspectives, and to help achieve intercultural communication plus a few moments of “conversion and convergence.” The deceptively simple narrative lures the general reader into Changez’s world, but the complexity of the text demands a reset of one’s relationship with the traditions from which one originates, as well as a refrain from casting a quick value judgement on those with which one is unfamiliar.

Reading *The Great Gatsby* together with *TRF*, one sees the worsening discrepancy between the ideology of equal opportunities in the American Dream and its classist-racist implementation; more alarmingly, the reader is confronted with the globally hegemonic and domestically oppressive aspects of American meritocracy, and with the façade of prosperity and the reality of precarity caused by neoliberal practices of capitalism. Conrad’s Kurtz and Marlow help direct one’s attention to Changez’s imperial romance, to the inner workings of historical and current global powers, as well as to Hamid’s critique of imperialism as a double-edged sword capable of hurting both the epicentre and the periphery of an empire. Irving’s “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” helps zoom in on the detrimental ethos of oblivion and self-centeredness pervasive in the past and present America, and the relationship between Ichabod Crane and the Headless Horseman, symbolic of the fluidity of all positions one may assume simultaneously or respectively in different time and space, be it outsider or insider, host countries or guest workers, natives or aliens, facilitate our understanding of the benefit of mutualism.

The imprints from *Norwegian Wood* and the *Gita* prove that the routes one has been through and the roots one stems from play an equal part in shaping one’s worldview, bringing into relief that *TRF*, widely known as a piece of Anglophone literature in the mode of self-consciously global writing, also occupies an important position in Asian literature. Like a firefly’s glow, the influenced work casts a light back

on its source, urging those who have read Murakami's Japanese *Bildungsroman* to reexamine how the country's gender role expectations and education industrial complex contribute to Naoko's suicide and Storm Trooper's mysterious disappearance. Likewise, that the concepts of dharma and reincarnation in the *Gita* afford Hamid touchstones by which to gauge the impact of neoliberalism on individual morals and collective ethics indicates that, although conflicts between Judeo-Christianity and Islam dominate current world news cycles, all religious traditions, when removed from their respective religiosity, have a larger common ground than fundamentalist believers allow them to. More often than not, it is the practitioners' own dogmatism rather than external forces that strips their belief system of its vitality.

Moderate in length, *TRF* nevertheless has very intricate relationships with texts from various cultures, nations, and religions. Although Hamid, being a novelist himself, has not gone so far as Roland Barthes to announce the death of the author, his famous statement that readers of novels, without the help of "soundtrack or casting directors" ("Enduring" 104), possessed "more of the source code—the abstract symbols we call letters and words—and assembled more of the story themselves" might sound undisciplined by the standards of any critical approaches. We literary critics could still take his comment as a reminder of not falling into the mire of scholarly fundamentalism—straightjacketed by jargons while privileging the global over the local, the political over the personal, the public over the domestic, or vice versa, regardless of our awareness that one cannot exist without the other.

541

NOTES

1. This quotation is from a podcast of Hamid's conversation with Viet Thanh Nguyen about *Exit West*. The event was organized by the *Los Angeles Times* and took place at the LA Central Library on 2 April 2018. The newspaper only published an excerpt of their conversation.
2. In the rest of this article, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* will be referred to as *TRF*, and all quotations from the novella are taken from the first American edition.
3. The other four types are intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, and architextuality. For their definitions, see *Palimpsests* (1-7). Though Julia Kristeva coined the word *intertextuality*, Genette thinks her definition of intertextuality too broad and unnuanced. Therefore, he replaces her jargon with his own term, *transtextuality*, under which he further names five types of transtextual relationships.
4. All quotations from *Norwegian Wood* are taken from Jay Rubin's English translation.
5. For definitions of vulture capitalists and venture capitalists, see Ganti and Liberto, respectively.
6. For quick information about this influential firm, see *Wikipedia*. Although the content this online encyclopedia provides is collaborated on by anonymous authors and sometimes has errors, extensive bibliographies are always attached for further scholarly inquiries.
7. The phrase is appropriated from the title of Michael Parenti's book, *The Sword and the Dollar: Imperialism, Revolution, and the Arms Race*, which diagnoses the economic incentives behind the US military adventures abroad.

8. For example, the seventy-seventh US Secretary of the Treasury, Steven Mnuchin, worked for Goldman Sachs; Jerome Powell, the sixteenth chair of the Federal Reserve, worked for Dillon, Reed & Co.; and General Lloyd Austin, the Secretary of Defence under President Joe Biden, was on the board of a military contractor, Raytheon Technologies.
9. In *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, Hamid's narrator similarly mocks higher education by comparing textbooks to prostitutes: "Textbooks, those whores, are particularly explicit in acknowledging this" (20).
10. For a detailed documentation of American meritocracy, see McNamee and Miller.
11. See, for example, Williams et al.; also see Du Mez, especially chapter 11, "Holy Balls."
12. The fact that the characters are not allegorized by Murakami himself does not, however, mean that the novel itself cannot be read as an allegory of a post-WWII Japan trying to build its economy by the standards of capitalist America. Some Western critics have done so.
13. For more information of sexuality and gender in Japan from ancient times to the twenty-first century, see Hatano and Shimazaki.
14. For a version of the English translation of the song, see "Glow of the Fireflies/Hotaru no hikari (蛍の光) [+English translation]."
15. Rather than addressing the symbolism of the firefly, Mahmutović links this statement to the worm-hole theory and argue for the likelihood of Changez's becoming a terrorist.
16. Surbhi Malik, as noted above, points out that Changez's romance with Erica creates a model for 'Third-World countries' coalition. Her reading of the ruins of Valparaíso follows the same line of thought, but mine is different. See the third section of this essay for my reading of the ruins.
17. The role of the CIA in Chile's 9/11 is a declassified piece of information now, which can be found on *Wikipedia*. In his lectures on neoliberalism and in his book *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey also mentions the economic incentives of the US involvement in the overthrow of Allende's government.
18. In the same article, Madiou provides a good summary of critics who have addressed Hamid's narrative strategies in *TRF* (see esp. Madiou 307-10). Rather than following their line of thought and pondering if the novella is strategically dialogic or monologic in disguise as dialogic, for my own analytical purposes, I opt for a simpler term like clashing narrative streams, while applying such a psychological concept as cognitive dissonance from Leon Festinger's classic *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*.
19. In many critics' allegorical readings of Changez and Erica's romance, Erica is seen as a part of his American Dream, which she surely is. But since in his eyes she is "regal" (17), "a lioness" (22), and "an empress-in-waiting" (80), I consider their relationship a part of his imperial romance, of which he is quite aware. Here I focus on the imperial components bubbling in his unconsciousness.
20. In her essay "Pitfalls of Ambiguity in the Contexts of Islamophobia: Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*," Ambreen Hai argues that Changez's double voices only perpetuate the untrustworthy stereotypes suffered by Muslims rather than changing the mindset of the biased readers. Her issue with *TRF* is similar to Chinua Achebe's with *Heart of Darkness*, as well as to Frank Chin's issue with Maxine Hong Kingston's portrayal of Asian American men. While Hai's polemical argument is valid, the "duck and rabbit" metaphor she uses to describe the polarized readings among her students and other general readers conflates humans' visual limitation, which is a given, with their cognitive (in)capacity, which is fluid. The images that the physical eye cannot see at the same time can actually be seen by the mind's eye. Otherwise, humans would not have the mental stress caused by cognitive dissonance.
21. Examples of deimperialized Marlows include investigative journalists such as Max Blumenthal, Ben Norton, and Aaron Mate, who hold opposite views to mainstream American media's reports

after their respective investigations of the wars in Syria and Venezuela, and of the alleged Russian interference with the 2016 presidential election. Their truth-seeking swagger, unfortunately, creates an impression that they are far-left fundamentalists.

22. Changez leaves his jacket on the curb as “a wish of warmth for Erica” but causes a security alert at JFK.

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