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The Janus and the Janissary: Reading into Camus' La Chute and Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist

> Ah, Sir, a novel is a mirror carried along a high road. At one moment it reflects to your vision the azure skies, at another the mire of the puddles at your feet. And the man who carries this mirror in his pack will be accused by you of being immoral! His mirror shews the mire, and you blame the mirror! Rather blame that high road upon which the puddle lies, still more the inspector of roads who allows the water to gather and the puddle to form.
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> —Stendhal, The Red and the Black

IF FOR STENDHAL and his naturalist project, the mirror harks back to the mimetic aesthetics articulated by Plato's narrator in The Republic, for Hamid, the novel as mirror has a diagnostic quality: "I wanted the novel to be a kind of mirror, to let readers see how they are reading, and, therefore, how they are living and how they are deciding their politics" ("Second-Person Narrative"). Similar narrative aspirations had been articulated some fifty years earlier, although by a first-person narrator rather than an author: "Le réquisitoire est achevé. Mais, du même coup, le portrait que je tends à mes contemporains devient un miroir" (145–46; "The case for the prosecution is over, while at the same time the portrait that I offer my contemporaries becomes a mirror," Camus, Fall 87). The words are those of Jean-Baptiste Clamence, narrator of Camus' La Chute (1956), a text whose influence on The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2007) has been acknowledged by Hamid: "It [The Fall] is written

as a dramatic monologue . . . and it changed how I thought books could work" ("Second-Person Narrative").[1]

Hamid also could have drawn attention to other elements common to the two texts. Both feature first-person narrators telling the tale of a crisis of personal identity. In the case of Camus' Clamence, the crisis arises from the narrator's awareness of his double or duplicitous self, "un charmant Janus" (52; "a charming Janus," Fall 30) and precipitates a move from a career as a defense lawyer in Paris to a new line of work as self-appointed "judge-penitent" in Amsterdam. Hamid's narrator, Changez, loses his position in a global valuation firm and departs New York for Lahore, where he finds a post as a university lecturer and, perhaps, becomes the eponymous fundamentalist. Where Clamence's crisis seems largely apolitical, Changez's malaise is quite the opposite, arising as it does from 9/11 tensions and his fear that he has become a twenty-first century janissary.[2] Both Changez and Clamence are also involved to varying degrees in the failure to prevent a possible suicide: an unknown woman (apparently) jumps into the Seine within earshot of Clamence; Changez's erstwhile girlfriend Erica (also apparently) leaps to her death in the Hudson river. Each of these unwitnessed (non-)events is at least partially linked to the narratorial crises.

The two works have in common other traits, tropes, and motifs, the majority of which cannot be considered here: from references to beggars and to Greece, to episodes of near violence committed by the narrators; from the metaphor of a long-distance run to the symbolic value of islands. The following discussion, however, takes as its starting point the shared trope of the narrative as mirror and sets out to analyze how readers are prompted to read the two texts. Although Hamid has adopted some of Camus' narrative strategies—for instance the one-sided dialogue, degrees of self-reflexivity—his deployment of these devices differs from that of his predecessor, prompting, I will suggest, particular interpretive strategies on the part of critical readers. An examination of the deployment of the one-sided

dialogue and other formal features in The Fall helps explain its reception and a "return of the author" via critics' focus on Camus' other fiction and his non-fiction: this is a form of "reading into" that relies on paratextual material. Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist, by contrast, has been interpreted predominantly in terms of political issues explicitly articulated within the diegesis: what one might call a "reading in" rather than "into." In closing, I offer a reading of Hamid's text that eschews the overt post-9/11 political agenda favored by critics.

The Narrator, His Interlocutor, Their Author, and His Readers

Hamid's narrative debt to Camus is clear from The Reluctant Fundamentalist's very first sentence, which echoes that of The Fall. In each case the narrator offers to deal with an apparently recalcitrant waiter whose language—Dutch in one instance, Urdu in the other—the anonymous fictional interlocutor does not speak: "Puis-je, monsieur, vous proposer mes services, sans risquer d'être importun?" (Chute 7; "My good sir, I wonder if I might venture to offer you some help?" Fall 3); "Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance?" (Reluctant 1). Although Hamid favors the term "dramatic monologue," his and Camus' narrative mode might more usefully be described as an "implied dialogue": the missing words and acts of the fictional interlocutor can be inferred from what is said by the narrator. A great deal has been written on the subject of the implied dialogue in The Fall. Of particular interest to the present discussion is the degree of slippage between, if not outright conflation of, the fictitious interlocutor and the reader, a slippage that runs through a significant proportion of the critical material.[3] Brian Fitch, for instance, suggests that readers start by putting themselves in the place of the fictional interlocutor before taking up that of the narrator ("Une voix" 76–77), while Yves Reuter similarly asserts that the reader will be able to assume the place of the interlocutor, and that at one stage in the reading process "La confusion est à son comble, puisque Clamence et le lecteur se situent au même niveau" (31–32; confusion is at its height,

as Clamence and the reader are now situated on the same plane; my translation). Although Hamid's text has been read less in terms of its narrative modalities and more with a view to its political agenda, when the text's narrative is invoked, some slippage can be identified there as well:

> Written in an extremely unlikely direct address to a listener hailed throughout in the second person, Reluctant positions the reader as an American visitor to Pakistan who, while there, listens to a Pakistani man narrate his memories of America. (Medovoi 645; my emphasis)

The cover blurb of the Penguin paperback edition of The Reluctant Fundamentalist offers an ambiguous use of the second-person pronoun that also hints at a conflation of reader and fictional interlocutor: "Invited to join him [the 'mysterious speaker' or narrator] for tea, you hear his name and what led this speaker of immaculate English to seek you out"; "And as he tells you his story . . . so the night darkens. Then the true reason for your meeting becomes abundantly clear . . . ."

Although it is self-evident that the fictitious interlocutor should no more be conflated with the reader than the narrator with the author, the recurrence of such critical slippages is worth investigating further. What "gaps" or prompts are generated by the use of the implied dialogue: when and why do we "read in" or "into" The Fall and The Reluctant Fundamentalist? To begin with, the reader is most distanced from the position of addressee (strictly speaking, of narratee) when the narrative focuses on the somatic present of the fictional interlocutory act and stresses the status of the fictional interlocutor as character. This can take various forms, the simplest of which is perhaps physical description. Hamid's narrator, for instance, comments on his interlocutor's Des Moines suit and button-down shirt

before continuing: “your expansive chest—the chest, I would say, of a man who bench-presses regularly . . . are typical of a certain type of American” (1–2). This is similar to the effect of Camus’ physical descriptions of the interlocutor: “Vous avez à peu près mon âge . . . vous êtes à peu près bien habillé, c’est-à-dire comme on l’est chez nous, et vous avez les mains lisses” (12–13; “You are roughly my age . . . ; you’re more or less well dressed, as people are in our country, and you have soft hands,” Fall 6). Hamid’s description of a be-suited bench-presser and a reprise of the opening sentence of each text serve as a reminder that both fictitious interlocutors are clearly characterized as male: “My good sir, I wonder if I might venture to offer you some help?” (Fall 3); “Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance?” (Reluctant 1). This characterization is underlined throughout the two works, from “Mais je me retire, monsieur” (7; “I’m off, Monsieur,” Fall 3) to “Ah, mon cher” (139; “Ah, my dear fellow,” Fall 83; cf. 144–45, Fall 87), or Hamid’s consistent use of the appellation “sir” from the start of The Reluctant Fundamentalist to the very last sentence: “But why are you reaching into your jacket, sir?” (209). Curiously, such gendered characterization does not preclude critical slippage and apparent blind spots. In The Cambridge Companion to Camus, David Ellison states: “When Clamence, in the first sentence of the text, says, ‘May I, Monsieur, offer my services without running the risk of intruding?’ the reader has the impression that he or she is being addressed” (180). Not this reader. Dominick LaCapra, who suggests that gender issues in Camus’ text are worth exploring further (an observation that could usefully be applied to The Reluctant Fundamentalist), inexplicably goes on to remark that “one also tends to assume that Clamence’s interlocutor is a man” (89–90, n. 12).

If the physical characterization of the intradiegetic interlocutor can, it seems, be overlooked—perhaps especially by male readers with suitably manly chests—this may be partly because there is no need for inferential input -- no real readerly “work” is prompted by such descriptions. The same can also be said of implied actions or gestures carried out by the

interlocutor. Here Camus and Hamid differ slightly in the technique each employs. In The Fall, information relating to the somatic movements of the fictional interlocutor is rarely, if ever, redundant to the context of the dialogic present: “L’étonnement que je rencontrais généralement chez mes auditeurs, leur gêne un peu réticente, assez semblable à celle que vous montrez—non, ne protestez pas” (101; “The astonishment that I usually met with in my listeners and their rather reticent embarrassment, a bit like the embarrassment that you are showing me now—no, don’t deny it” Fall 59); “Vous partez déjà?” (14; “Are you leaving already?” Fall 7); “Arrêtons-nous, voulez-vous, sous ce porche. Bon” (59; “Let’s stop, shall we, under this porch? Good,” Fall 34); “Oh! avez-vous bien fermé la porte? Oui?” (133; “Now, have you locked the door properly? Yes?” Fall 80). While Hamid replicates this pattern on some occasions—“Your shrug is inscrutable” (Reluctant 18); “for you, sir, continue to appear ill at ease” (Reluctant 35)—there are other, considerably less adroit, examples: “You prefer that seat, with your back so close to the wall?” (Reluctant 2); “But what is that? Ah, your mobile phone! . . . Will you not answer it? . . . But you are opting to write a text message instead” (Reluctant 34). In such cases, where information is clearly redundant to the diegetic exchange (does the interlocutor really need to be told he is sending a text message?), the reader may well fleetingly assume the position of addressee: not, however, that of the narrator, but rather that of the author, whose shadowy presence is summoned by (what I regard here as) the text’s aesthetic infelicities.

Whereas physical descriptions of the interlocutor elicit minimal readerly input, the reconstruction of unrepresented speech requires a little more effort. Interrogation and implied repetition are used in both texts to suggest what remains unsaid: “How did I know you were American?” (Reluctant 2); “Yes, they are attractive” (Reluctant 18); “no, you are right: I am being dishonest” (Reluctant 26); “Fascinante? Voilà un adjectif que je n’ai pas entendu depuis longtemps” (10; “Fascinating? There’s an adjective I haven’t heard for a long time,”

Fall 5); "Comment? Quel soir? J'y viendrai" (36; "What? Which evening? I'll get to it," Fall 21); "Cette femme? Ah! je ne sais pas vraiment" (76; "The woman? I can't really tell you," Fall 44). Hamid's technique differs little from Camus' in this instance, and, indeed, barring what I regard as the stylistic shortcomings noted above, the characterization of the absent interlocutor in terms of his physical status, acts, gestures, and speech is similar in both texts, and in all cases establishes—or should establish—a clear distance between the reader and the interlocutor. The Reluctant Fundamentalist does, however, differ from its predecessor in three significant respects: the nature of the narrator's retrospective account; the (implied) relations between narrator and interlocutor as marked by the use of first-person plural pronouns; and the extent and degree of self-reflexive or metafictional comment.

As Hamid's narrator recounts the events that took place in his recent past, the present dialogic situation is often understated; on occasion, it is even eclipsed altogether to be replaced by a straightforward retrospective narration from which the fictional interlocutor seems to have been more or less expunged. Changez's account of the job interview that took place some three years previously, for instance, includes both reported and direct speech ("'I'm sure you're smart', he said," 7; "I said I was from Lahore," 8; "Again I said, 'Yes,'" 9), with only the occasional reminder of the present interlocutory context: "I fell silent. I am, as you can see, normally quite happy to chat" (7; my emphasis); "Jim leaned back in his chair and crossed his legs at the knee, just as you are doing now. Then he said . . ." (9; my emphasis). There are more extreme examples: the account of Changez's visit to Erica's family home, which includes a significant amount of dialogue ("'It's done,' she said solemnly. . . . I asked, '"It" being?' 'My manuscript,' she said," 58), runs from page 55 to page 61 with no obtrusive markers of the present interlocutory context. By sharp contrast Clamence's account of his past in The Fall not only returns the reader to the present dialogic

context more frequently, but also includes very little reported or direct speech from the narrator's past.[4]

What are we to make of this difference? Within the terms of the diegetic narrative contract, we could say that Hamid's text implies a markedly greater suspension of disbelief on the part of the fictional interlocutor— who tacitly accepts the premise that Changez recalls details and conversations from the past—than is required of Clamence's dialogic partner. The presence of extended passages of narrative that occlude the present interlocutionary context could also be read in terms of a deliberate strategy adopted by Hamid's narrator: Scheherazade-like, Changez strives to spin as lively a tale as possible, complete with recreated—or invented— direct speech, in order to distract his potentially dangerous interlocutor. Or has Hamid simply failed adequately to integrate the narrative device of the implied dialogue into his work (the reader cannot suspend disbelief), producing an unsatisfactory narrative hybrid? The issue of intentionality is foregrounded whichever reading we choose.

Both narrators obviously attempt to manipulate their fictional interlocutors: Clamence in order to reduce his own burden of guilt by provoking a confession, Changez—we assume— with a view to avoiding, or perhaps instigating, a physical attack. The representation of the relations between narrator and interlocutor, however, differs significantly. From early on in The Fall Clamence constructs complicity and community especially, though not exclusively, via use of first-person pronouns. A shared "you and I"— "notre ami lui-même" (8; "our friend here," Fall 4, referring to the waiter)—opens out to "nos concitoyens" (10; "our fellow citizens," Fall 5) and thence to even broader collective identities: "Je rêve parfois de ce que diront de nous les historiens futurs" (10; "I sometimes try to imagine what future historians will say about us," Fall 5); "Avez-vous remarqué que la mort seule réveille nos sentiments" (36; "Have you observed that only death awakens our

feelings?" Fall 21); "Ah! chère planète! Tout y est clair maintenant. Nous nous connaissons, nous savons ce dont nous sommes capables" (50; "Oh, our dear planet! It's all clear now. We know ourselves, we know what we're capable of," Fall 29). A quite different pattern is established in The Reluctant Fundamentalist. When Changez recounts his pre-crisis days the pronoun "we" designates a number of collective identities: "We international students were sourced from around the globe" (4); "the women among us Princetonians" (26); "We [at the valuation company Samson Underwood] were taught by professors from the most prestigious institutions" (41). When used in the present, the first person plural shifts to designate a transhistorical Pakistani identity: "We locals [of Lahore]" (35); "Perhaps because we currently lack wealth, power, or even sporting glory . . . we Pakistanis . . ." (115); "We built the Royal Mosque and the Shalimar Gardens" (116; Hamid's emphasis). This national identity is, moreover, set against that of the fictional interlocutor: "your country's [America's] constant interference in the affairs of others was insufferable" (177); "You [American society] retreated into myths of your own difference" (190); "little noticed by the media in your country, which was focused . . . on the first anniversary of the attacks on New York and Washington" (202).

Where Clamence seeks to cement a sense of similarity, a shared human condition, Changez on occasion cannot even utter the word "we": "They [bats] are successful urban dwellers, like you and I" (71–72). One might assume that such emphatic characterization—the construction in the dialogic present of the interlocutor as American and the narrator as Pakistani—would create precisely the sort of distancing effect discussed above, preventing a mirroring effect or process of "seeing oneself" in the text. As Neelam Srivastava suggests, however, many American readers seem to have identified with their fictional national counterpart: "It was as if these readers almost unquestioningly inhabited the 'you' of the text's dramatic monologue" (179).[5] This kind of naive reading raises broader questions about

the role of national identity in reader reception: can it be assumed that non-American readers identify much less readily with Changez's interlocutor? And what of gender? As we saw above, two male critics of The Fall either put themselves in the place of the male fictional interlocutor and (wrongly) assumed all readers would do likewise (Ellison), or unaccountably ignored clear textual markers of male gender (LaCapra) while nonetheless "assuming" that Clamence's interlocutor was male. It would be interesting to know whether female American readers assumed the position of Changez's interlocutor as readily as their male counterparts.

Significantly, the conscious manipulation of pronouns is a practice acknowledged by only one of the two narrators:

> Couvert de cendres, m'arrachant lentement les cheveux, le visage labouré par les ongles, mais le regard perçant, je me tiens devant l'humanité entière, récapitulant mes hontes, sans perdre de vue l'effet que je produis, et disant: "J'étais le dernier des derniers." Alors, insensiblement, je passe, dans mon discours, du "je" au "nous." (146)

> In sackcloth and ashes, slowly tearing out my hair, my face ploughed with scratches, but sharp-eyed, I stand before the whole of humankind, going over my shameful actions, ever-conscious of the effect I am having and saying: 'I was the lowest of the low'. Then, imperceptibly, my speech slips from 'I' to 'we'. (Fall 87)

A degree of self-reflexivity is, however, a feature of both texts (and here too Hamid's debt to Camus is evident, although rarely commented upon). Both narrators, for instance, acknowledge a capacity to adopt other identities. Changez notes that he played the part of a wealthy Princeton student—"Most people I met were taken in by my public persona" (12)—and informs his interlocutor that his training at Underwood Samson involved "role-playing

real-life situations" (41).[6] Clamence, too, flaunts his thespian credentials, from his self-portrait as "Jean-Baptiste Clamence, comédien" (52; "Jean-Baptiste Clamence, actor," Fall 30) to the teasing suggestion that even his feverish rants are part of an act: "Ne vous fiez pas trop d'ailleurs à mes attendrissements, ni à les délires. Ils sont dirigés" (151; "And don't put too much trust in my emotional outpourings, or my wild outbursts: they're contrived," Fall 91). Both narrators also toy with their interlocutor over the veracity of their accounts. Changez notes: "everything I have told you thus far happened, for all intents and purposes, more or less as I have described" (135); and, "I am not in the habit of inventing untruths! And moreover, even if I were, there is no reason this incident would be more likely to be false than any of the others I have related to you" (172–73).[7] Clamence asks: "Les mensonges ne mettent-ils pas finalement sur la voie de la vérité? Et mes histoires, vraies ou fausses, ne tendent-elles pas toutes à la même fin . . . ?" (125–26; "Don't lies in the end put us on the path to truth? And don't my stories, true or false, point to the same conclusion?" Fall 75).

Although both Changez and Clamence thus gesture towards their potential unreliability as narrators, there is a difference in the type and degree of self-reflexivity in the two texts that is crucial to the act of reading them. Only in The Fall do we find extensive metanarration—defined here as "the narrator's comments on the discourse or the process of narration"—more specifically, "proprio-metanarration" or "autoreferential comments on the narrator's own act of narrating" (Nünning 16, 30). Clamence's observation regarding his knowing use of pronouns forms part of a longer metanarrative explanation that his entire narrative is a trap, his confession a lure individually tailored to a succession of interlocutors. The act of narrating is self-consciously instrumentalized: "Plus je m'accuse et plus j'ai le droit de vous juger. Mieux, je vous provoque à vous juger vous-même, ce qui me soulage d'autant" (146; "The more I accuse myself, the more I have a right to judge you. Better still: I incite you to judge yourself, which relieves me by that much more," Fall 88). In fact,

metanarrative becomes meta-metanarrative. Explaining that the narrative is a trap becomes itself part of the trap: "Les intelligents, il faut y mettre le temps. Il suffit de leur expliquer la méthode à fond. Ils ne l'oublient pas, ils réfléchissent. Un jour ou l'autre, moitié par jeu, moitié par désarroi, ils se mettent à table" (147; "With intelligent people, you have to spend more time. You have to explain your system to them in depth. They don't forget about it, they mull it over. One day or another, partly in play, partly through confusion, they spill the beans," Fall 88). Similar remarks appear in The Reluctant Fundamentalist, but at a quite different diegetic level. Where Clamence tells his interlocutor: "je navigue souplement, je multiplie les nuances, les digressions aussi, j'adapte enfin mon discours à l'auditeur" (145; "I go subtly, with lots of nuance and digressions, adapting what I say to my listener," Fall 88), Changez comments on a similar process taking place not in the interlocutory present, but during his Samson Underwood training: "We were taught to recognize another person's style of thought, harness their agenda, and redirect it to achieve our desired outcome" (41). The notion of the confession as a potential trap also features in The Reluctant Fundamentalist, but with Changez in the role of silent interlocutor: "It was not the first time Jim had spoken to me in this fashion; I was always uncertain of how to respond. The confession that implicates its audience is—as we say in cricket—a devilishly difficult ball to play" (80).

If Clamence's narrative aspires to be a mirror held up to his interlocutor, the meta-metanarrative instead makes of it a series of facing mirrors toppling us into a dizzying infinite regress. Given the degree of knowingness that saturates the closing pages of the text one can better appreciate why readers may equate Clamence with the author and step, if only fleetingly, into the shoes of the beleaguered interlocutor. Changez's remarks, by contrast, which are self-reflexive or metafictional rather than metanarrative, invite the reader to seek meaning within the diegesis, "reading in" the gaps: should we assume, for instance, that, like his mentor Jim, Changez is bowling his interlocutor a devilish delivery by telling him his

story? Perhaps the Samson Underwood training is paying off and he is successfully harnessing his interlocutor's agenda to his own ends. This process typifies how one reads Hamid's text. Gaps and potential connections of varying degrees of subtlety invite us to judge the narrator and his apparent inconsistencies (cf. Srivastava 174--175). What, for instance, should we make of Changez's criticism of Erica's and America's nostalgia—"she was disappearing into a powerful nostalgia" (129; Hamid's emphasis); ". . . America, too, was increasingly giving itself over to a dangerous nostalgia" 130)—alongside his apparent failure to recognize his own repeated appeals to the past glories of Pakistan? Changez insists on his pacifist credentials— "I can assure you that I am a believer in nonviolence; the spilling of blood is abhorrent to me, save in self-defence" (206)—yet his account makes his propensity for violence clear.[8] Clamence also airs his views on violence—"La vérité est que tout homme intelligent, vous le savez bien, rêve d'être un gangster et de régner sur la société par la seule violence" (60; "The truth is that every intelligent man . . . dreams of being a gangster and ruling over society by violence alone," Fall 35)—but it is hard to see what readers could make of such a claim, since all possible judgments are preempted by the closed circuit of Clamence's extensive self-critique and metanarrative.

Although The Reluctant Fundamentalist deals with the aftermath of terrorism, it is Camus' ostensibly more apolitical Fall—more precisely, Clamence's narrative—that has been labeled a "terroristic narrative." In its relentless imposition of the monologic, Clamence's narration, suggests Debarati Sanyal, is "both a symptom and a critique of the disincarnated logic of terror", "a narrative that "erases all traces of contestation" (186–87). In a chapter entitled "Violence and Ethics in Camus," Colin Davis highlights the author's imperious use of rhetoric, a verbal bludgeoning that amounts to an "assault on the reader" (112). Davis focuses primarily on Camus' L'Homme révolté, avoiding the more obviously rhetorically merciless Fall. Perhaps this is just as well, for, true to the text's capacity to

deflect or short-circuit interpretation, Davis's critique, like Sanyal's, is already inscribed and preempted within (it is tempting to say "by") the text itself. The erasure of "traces of contestation" is itself a process identified by Clamence: "Il faut bien que quelqu'un ait le dernier mot. Sinon, à toute raison peut s'opposer une autre: on n'en finirait plus" (50; "Someone has to have the last word. Otherwise every point of view would give rise to its opposite and there'd be no end to it all. Power, on the other hand, settles everything," Fall 29), and, "Nous avons remplacé le dialogue par le communiqué" (50; "dialogue has been replaced by communiqués," Fall 29).

It was not just The Fall which was to be linked metaphorically to terrorism. In the infamous public falling out between Camus and Sartre laid bare in the pages of Les Temps modernes in 1952, Sartre leveled the following accusation: "La Terreur est une violence abstraite. Vous êtes devenu terroriste et violent quand l'histoire—que vous rejetiez—vous a rejeté à son tour: c'est que vous n'étiez plus qu'une abstraction de révolté" (353; Terror is an abstract violence. You became a terrorist, and violent, when history—which you rejected—rejected you in turn: for you were no more than a rebel in abstract form; my translation). Sartre's belief that Camus had withdrawn from the historical process seems to be borne out in The Fall, which, with its minimalist referencing of historical events, appears rather to figure Clamence as a modern day Everyman, the Janus rather than the janissary turned fundamentalist we find in Hamid's novel. Paradoxically—or, rather, symptomatically, given what I have suggested about the closed circuitry of the text—reception of The Fall has linked the novel both to history and to politics, although to do so one must look beyond the pages of the text itself in order to read paratextual material "into" it.

The Return of the Author: Texts and Paratexts

In a review article charting the reception of The Fall since 1962, Brian Fitch observes that “la forme de la confession fictive semble se prêter à une erreur d’interprétation qui attribuerait à la confession des intentions non-fictives et autobiographiques de la part de son auteur” (La Chute et ses lecteurs, 29; the form of the fictional confession seems to lend itself to the interpretive error of attributing to the confession non-fictional, autobiographical intentions on the part of its author; my translation). Fitch’s remit is not to inquire further into what might provoke such “interpretive error,” but another early reader of The Fall traces the tendency back to its unreliable narrator. In his Rhetoric of Irony Wayne Booth concludes that “the affirmative side of his [Clamence’s] author’s message is something else again. It is so far buried beneath Clamence’s confusions and negations that one does well to seek it outside the novel, in other works by Camus, and then import it back again” (296). Decades after Booth’s comments and Fitch’s criticism, readers of The Fall continue to look to the author—mostly via their recourse to other works by Camus—in their interpretive gambits. In the process of this “reading into” they re-historicize and re-politicize the text in accordance with their own preoccupations, thereby actualizing another version of the narrative-as-mirror trope.

For example, in Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History Shoshana Felman reads both the Shoah and the labor camps of the Soviet Union into The Fall (165–203). Unsurprisingly, Felman refers in the course of her exposition to the text’s only brief mention of the Shoah, which comes in the form of Clamence’s reference to the location of his home: “Moi, j’habite le quartier juif, ou ce qui s’appelait ainsi jusqu’au moment où nos frères hitlériens y ont fait de la place. Quel lessivage! Soixante-quinze mille juifs déportés ou assassinés, c’est le nettoyage par le vide” (15; “I live in the Jewish quarter, or what they called the Jewish quarter until our Hitlerite brethren cleared a space in it. What a clean-up! Seventy-five thousand Jews deported or murdered: that’s vacuum cleaning” Fall 7–

8). This passage is, however, granted little space in Felman's exposition. After all, as with all of Clamence's pronouncements, it is difficult to know just what to make of—what to read into— the narrator's ambiguous nonchalance (cf. Ungar 29). Faced with the text's impenetrability, Felman was obliged to look elsewhere to reinforce her reading of The Fall both as "an allegory of the deafness and the muteness of the world facing the extermination of the Jews" and as a work about "how massacres historically repeat themselves," notably in the form of the Soviet labor camps (189 and 184). Her principal source was the Temps modernes exchange between Camus and Sartre, which furnished her with the necessary interpretive keys—silence, knowing, and betrayal—all of which are woven back into her reading of The Fall.[9]

Although it draws heavily on paratextual material, Felman's reading of The Fall as (primarily) an allegory of the Shoah is at least premised in part on a brief intratextual reference to the historical event, although the same cannot be said of the elaboration of her argument and its extension to the Soviet labor camps. Reading The Fall in terms of the Algerian War (1954–62) requires an even greater movement beyond the confines of the text. Thus, Conor Cruise O'Brien's insistence that, although The Fall is the only one of Camus' novels not set in Algeria, "[it] is the one in which Algeria is most painfully present" is rooted in the notion that the text plays out Camus' tortured personal position vis-à-vis the Algerian situation (82). Felman reads the bridge scene in The Fall through the Sartre / Camus quarrel as one of impossible or failed witnessing (198–203). O'Brien's claim —"Clamence's paralysis on the bridge corresponds to that of his creator, before the conflicting call of what he had thought of as his country [i.e., Algeria]" (83)—relies both on the Temps modernes exchange and a discussion of Camus' L'Exil et le Royaume (O'Brien 60–72). Writing nearly thirty years later, LaCapra, like O'Brien, admits that Camus "at most alluded very indirectly to Algeria in The Fall" (74). His reading of the text as "Camus' portrait of the colonized,

preceded by the portrait of the colonizer," relies on readings from Actuelles III, particularly L'Avenir Algérien (1955) and Algérie 58 (1956), which, in LaCapra's words, frame The Fall and "provide some sense of how it might be read" (91).

It is not my intention to discuss these readings further or to multiply examples; my aim has rather been to link The Fall's formal properties to its (re)historicized and (re)politicized reception and to provide a point of comparison with Hamid's text. As noted above, readings of The Reluctant Fundamentalist, with its self-reflexive rather than metanarrative qualities, have arisen from the gaps and inconsistencies within the diegesis. Given the ample intratextual material, critics have made Hamid's text a work "about" a post-9/11 or post-"War on Terror" world, or "about" the problematic negotiation of hybrid national and political identities, "reading in," we might say, rather than "into" the text. In what follows I would like to sketch out a reading that moves away from these agendas. As was the case with the reception of The Fall, which saw the return of the author via paratextual material, this reading will also invoke the figure of the author, albeit in different ways.

Crises are not just the preserve of narrators like Clamence and Changez. As Sarah Brouillette observes, "the author as a figure we attach to literary production seems to be experiencing something of an identity crisis" (11). Theoretical paradigms announced the "death of the author" quite some time ago, but the author has returned thanks to the critical turn to material culture, the study of the acquisition and distribution of economic and symbolic capital in the global cultural field. And if authors in general are increasingly implicated, for instance, as "brands" in sales and marketing campaigns, certain writers, suggests Brouillette, face particular pressures: "Those writing from or about the developing world, and situating their narratives within an often violent political history, are expected to act as interpreters of locations they are connected to through personal biography" (70). Faced with such expectations—with their being politicized perhaps against their will (or

intention)—writers may, suggests Brouillette, wittingly or unwittingly feed back into their works something of the authorial tensions and self-divisions arising from their positioning in the field of global publishing. The success of The Reluctant Fundamentalist has been well rehearsed, but what is the cost of this success? Can something of the tensions behind the writing process be identified via a different reading of Hamid's text—one which decenters the usual emphasis on post 9/11 geopolitics?

The self-reflexive device of the fictional interlocutor most clearly lends itself to the sort of reading practiced by Brouillette. The relationship between the interlocutor and Changez, ex-New Yorker turned local guide to Pakistan, can readily be interpreted in terms of the playing out of the possible misunderstandings, presuppositions, and antagonisms faced by a teller of tales (or author) speaking (or writing) of post-9/11 US-Pakistan relations for a largely American audience. So much is obvious—if rarely commented on—but other relationships in the book are equally open to a reading that foregrounds the travails of authorship.[10] Critical analyses of relations between Hamid's narrator and the character Juan-Bautista have focused on the part played by the latter in Changez's American / Pakistani identity crisis: it is Juan-Bautista, after all, who introduces Changez to the concept of the janissary. But what of Juan-Bautista's views of authorship? The character's name has a familiar ring: Camus' Clamence too is a Jean-Baptiste. But whereas Camus' narrator has banished books from his home and tells his interlocutor "j'ai cessé de lire depuis longtemps" (126; "I gave up reading long ago," Fall 75), Changez's Juan-Bautista runs the trade arm of a publishing company. The business Changez is sent to value is to be split into "the loss-making trade division" and "the profitable educational and professional publishing arms" (161). Trade, we are told, means "literary—defined for all practical purposes as commercially unviable—authors" (161). Exchanges among the characters during scenes involving Juan-Bautista set up clear oppositions:

> "What do you know of books?" he [Juan-Bautista] asked us. "I specialize in the media industry," Jim replied. "I've valued a dozen publishers over two decades." "That is finance," Juan-Bautista retorted. "I asked what you knew of books." "My father's uncle was a poet," I found myself saying. "He was well known in the Punjab. Books are loved in my family." (161)

Hamid's narrator sides with Juan-Baustista; both value an Art unsullied by financial considerations. After all, Changez's relative produced not just prose but poetry, the genre most readily associated with so-called high literature and notions of artistic autonomy (cf. Rushdie, Shame 158). But if Juan-Bautista represents a (nostalgic) desire for authorship untouched by commerce, he is, fittingly enough, crying in the wilderness. As James English reminds us, binary conceptions of the cultural field are no longer viable; artistic and economic capital "are actually caught up in the process of intraconversion, of exchange or translation from form to form, at every point of the field simultaneously" ("Winning" 126).[11] Hamid's narrator may well turn away from the "officer class of global business," from his Sansom Underwood colleagues with their "extraterritorial" smiles (74) and empire building aspirations, but authors like Hamid may have little option but to avail themselves of the services of a global publisher. Coincidentally or otherwise, 2007, the year in which The Reluctant Fundamentalist was first published in the US by Harcourt, was also the year in which Harcourt's owner, Reed Elsevier, sold its education arm—which included Harcourt Trade—to the Houghton Mifflin Riverdeep Group.[12]

If the figure of Juan-Bautista and his interactions with Changez can be read in terms of authorial anxieties about selling out to the commercially-driven global publishing industry (being a janissary of a different sort), then what of Changez's love interest, Erica, the other

character in the text most obviously associated with authorship? Critical interpretations have, again, hinged on politicized readings of the text, with Erica featuring as a cipher for Am(erica). Srivastava, for instance, states: “Like America, which has discarded any possible solidarity with other societies suffering from violence and terror, Erica (and here again, the allegory is deliberately overstated) has chosen to write a story without Changez in it, seeing her own trajectory as unique” (182).[13] David Gay’s interpretation is not dissimilar: “Her [Erica’s] inaccessibility in her fictional narrative, an isolated fantasy, parallels, on the level of allegory her name implies, the inaccessibility of Am-erica as a future home for Changez in the wake of 9/11” (68).

But what if the national allegory is put aside and we refocus on Hamid’s self-reflexive device of the novelist within the novel? First, it can be argued that relations between Erica and Changez represent more than a sorrowful tale of thwarted love. Early in the text selling out is feminized via the familiar trope of prostitution: “Every fall, Princeton raised her skirt for the corporate recruiters who came onto campus and—as you say in America—showed them some skin” (5). In a bizarre extension to this metaphor Changez figures himself in fragmented female form: “even among all that skin, I knew in my senior year that I was something special. I was a perfect breast, if you will” (5). Doubtless intended to be taken light-heartedly (and perhaps an allusion to Roth’s novella The Breast), the reference to breasts will later be associated with Erica (sunbathing topless in Greece), while the feminization of Changez recurs towards the close of the text. Back in Lahore and apparently “in the grip of an unhealthy melancholy” (199), Changez acts out the traits of his former lover, Erica, renouncing other love interests, dwelling in the past, even, it seems, responding to lunar cycles in stereotypical female manner: “I responded to the gravity of an invisible moon at my core” (185). The Reluctant Fundamentalist thus stages an authorial death in the

form of Erica's supposed jump into the Hudson river, but at least partly restores the diegetic novelist via her incorporation into the figure of the narrator, Changez.

This is all well and good, but what can be made of this reading, which takes us away from the usual focus on hybrid national identities and international politics? As was the case with The Fall, interpretation now becomes a highly speculative "reading into" rather than "reading in." First, setting aside qualms about invoking biographical authors, it seems that there is something of Hamid not just in Changez (attending Princeton, working for a global firm, assuming a "mongrel" identity)[14] but also in his aspiring novelist, Erica. We learn of the latter that "her creative thesis had been a work of long fiction that had won an award at Princeton" (33). Hamid took creative writing classes at Princeton, where he wrote the first draft of his novel Moth Smoke for a fiction workshop (Greenwood). Erica's writing is represented as a mode of therapy ("I used to turn to it, my writing, when I needed to get something out that was stuck inside" 127), a notion apparently not unfamiliar to Hamid: "Writing the book—his second—was a form of therapy, the author says. It allowed him to explore the issues with which he is grappling in his personal life, including his relationship with the United States and Pakistan" (Greenwood). Based on this paratextual information one might hazard that the dispatching of the character Erica in Camus-esque manner and her subsequent incorporation into Changez represent the subsumption of both early authorial writings and, perhaps, a moving beyond the notion of writing as therapy or, pace Clamence, confession.

This tentative autobiographical reading, which relies on paratextual material relating to Hamid, represents an approach attempted by another, diegetic, reader. Faced with Erica's manuscript Changez, seeks but fails utterly to find her in her writing: "her novel was no tortured, obviously autobiographical affair. It was simply a tale of adventure, of a girl on an island who learns to make do. . . . I could not locate Erica in the rhythms or sounds of what

she had written; it seemed a mistake, offered me no clues" (188–89). Changez's aim and disappointment seems to signal a warning to the reader seeking simplistic autobiographical interpretations. Or is Hamid's narrator just a poor reader who fails to grasp the autobiographical resonances in Erica's work? Perhaps he too might have considered a turn to the paratextual in the form of another artistic representation, a line drawing produced by Erica's deceased former partner, Chris: "It depicted . . . a tropical island . . .; nestled in the caldera of the volcano was a lake with another, smaller island in it—an island on an island" (Reluctant 60). Read alongside the drawing, Erica's solitary island tale of "making do" does take on an autobiographical hue.[15]

Finally, returning to Camus' The Fall leads us to another island, with different associations. If for Hamid's diegetic novelist, Erica, the island space seems to symbolize a resigned living with loss, for Camus' terroristic narrator Clamence, the symbolic space is one of absolute control: "D'une manière générale, j'aime toutes les îles. Il est plus facile d'y régner" (49; "In general, I love all islands: it's easier to dominate them," Fall 28). For Camus the author, the island as a typical "closed universe" symbolized man's aesthetic rebellion over the absurdity of the human condition via the creation of a transcendent unity: "Sur ces mondes fermés, l'homme peut régner et connaître enfin" (Essais 659; Man can reign over these closed off worlds and finally have knowledge; my translation): authorship rather than authoritarianism. But perhaps that is to read too much into it.

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[1] See also "Mohsin Hamid on writing The Reluctant Fundamentalist": "I looked to Camus for inspiration," and "I also arrived at what I hoped was an appropriately permeable form, a dramatic monologue, a half-conversation spoken to 'you' that leaves it to the reader to supply its missing context."

[2] "'They [the janissaries] were Christian boys,' he explained, 'captured by the Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in a Muslim army'" (Reluctant 172); "There really could be no doubt: I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine" (Reluctant 173).

[3] I use the term "reader" (and occasionally an equally, if not more, problematic "we") throughout in full knowledge that other terms such as "implied reader," "ideal reader," or "virtual reader" might have been used at various stages of the discussion. I do this because such readers are in any event the construction of "real" readers and I do not wish to add an unnecessary layer of narratological complexity to what I have to say.

[4] There are fewer than a dozen instances of direct speech in La Chute, the majority in the form of single short sentences, and none incorporated into what might be called "scenes," the function of anecdotes from Clamence's past being exemplary rather than merely representational.

[5] Srivastava bases her remarks on reviews left by readers on the Amazon.com website. For another useful piece on reception that includes analysis of readers' Amazon reviews see Timothy Aubry, "Afghanistan Meets the Amazon: Reading The Kite Runner in America."

[6] Some critics have seized upon the homophony "Changez" / "changes" to point to the narrator's political transformation, others have indicated that Changez is Urdu for "Ghengis" (e.g., Gay 58), while Waterman further notes Salman Rushdie's reference to the same name in his The Enchantress of Florence (2008): "'Ghengis, Changez, Jenghis or Chinggis Qan',

the greatest in a long line of marauding warriors" (Rushdie 34; cited in Waterman 126). Hamid himself reports that he had not thought of the "Changez / changes" connection; however, his use of the Urdu form of Ghengis was indeed intentional, "the famous Ghengis" having attacked "the largest Muslim empire of its time." The name operates, says Hamid, as a warning not to make assumptions about bearded Pakistanis (Slaying dragons 236–37).

[7] Hamid's text resonates with another work set in Pakistran: Salman Rushdie's Shame. Note, for instance, Changez's unexpected use of the word "history" to describe his possibly unreliable version of his own past: "surely it is the gist that matters; I am, after all, telling you a history" (Reluctant 135). The same term is used in Rushdie's text: "This was when Bilquis knew that she become a member of the family; in the sanctification of her tale lay initiation, kinship, blood. 'The recounting of histories', Raza told his wife, 'is for us a rite of blood'" (77).

[8] In addition to the incident of near violence in a carpark (133–34), note the (too?) obvious lexical recurrences: "I stared back at him, getting angry" (76); "caused me to tremble with fury" (114); "My fury had ebbed" (114); "there were in me . . . elements of the anger and hurt vanity that characterize a spurned lover" (130); "I was angry at our weakness" (145); "I was deeply angry" (148); ". . . provided a ready and constant fuel for my anger" (190); "I found myself filled with rage" (207). Recurring expressions of shame —on one occasion highlighted: "I felt at once both satiated and ashamed" (121)—provide another link to Rushdie's Shame with its explicit reference to "the hidden path that links sharam [shame] to violence" (139).

[9] Felman also bases her interpretation on Camus' The Plague, reading The Fall as a "transformation" of the latter (Felman 168).

[10] Note, as a point of interest, Camus' pronouncement: "Un personnage n'est jamais le romancier qui l'a créé. Il y a des chances, cependant, pour que le romancier soit tous ses

personnages à la fois" (Essais 448; A character is never the novelist who invented him. It may be, however, that the novelist is all his characters at once; my translation).

[11] See also English's The Economy of Prestige. Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value, especially his analysis of the Booker Prize, for which The Reluctant Fundamentalist was shortlisted in 2007 (197–210).

[12] Reed Elsevier's education arm was deemed to be insufficiently profitable compared to other market areas—for example, legal, medical, and scientific online publishing. See Haycock and Merced.

[13] This seems to be something of a misreading, since we are told that Erica's manuscript was completed prior to the trip to Greece during which Changez and Erica met: "It's [the manuscript] been lying in this envelope since before we went to Greece" (Reluctant 59).

[14] Hamid uses the term "mongrel" to describe his own hybrid national identity. See, for example, Singh.

[15] Although we are told that Chris was inspired by Tintin's adventure Flight 714 to Sydney, Hergé's island tale does not feature "an island on an island": the mise en abyme is, appropriately enough for a text favoring the self-reflexive, Hamid's addition.

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