The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Hosni Hamid (Penguin, 2007), opens with doubt; suspicion and distrust in a cafe in Pakistan when a Pakistani accosts an American and engages him in dialogue or rather a long monologue. But there is no hint of danger, until the very end, when after a measure of familiarity has been attained, danger enters the picture like a dagger exiting its scabbard.

The Pakistani narrator is Changez, an Ivy League educated Pakistani who has abandoned a highflying job in New York for a teaching position at home.

Hosni Hamid employs the dramatic monologue to devastating effect. All through, we have two men in the frame of the narrative as well as a cast of other cameo characters but all we hear is a single voice; that of Changez and others from his past.

His voice is now cajoling, engaging, then angry, worldly wise, regretful and a lot more. Through him, Hamid has created a swarm of characters who speak through one voice. Changez thus functions as a ventriloquist speaking the language of our contemporary times; an epoch fraught with danger foisted by religious, racial and economic fault lines.

The story Changez tells his unnamed listener begins after 911 and unravels swiftly causing him monumental losses:  his job, his girl and his life in the West. He returns home, a bitter young man clawing at fundamentalism.

Changez is a modern day Ancient Mariner who holds his listener in thrall.

The novel is a scathing commentary on religion and race relations, and shows how easy it is for one who has been offered access to subvert a system from within.

**The overall theme**

Alarming, though, is the sympathy that several respectable reviewers have accorded Changez. Is it not rather charitable and misleading of *Kirkus Reviews* to note that the novel is a “grim reminder of the continuing cost of ethnic profiling, miscommunication and confrontation?” These practices may all be questionable undertakings, but they are not the subject of the novel. *The Daily Telegraph*, likewise, notes that the novel is “a microcosm of the cankerous suspicion between East and West.” It isn’t. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is about the twisted, self-righteous, simplistic, and self-serving political path that Changez adopts. He isn’t a “reluctant” fundamentalist. Rather, he is a fairly deliberate and self-deluding one.

Changez’s actions betray, as well, a deep lack of gratitude. It was in America that he received a remarkable education, with financial aid; as he recounts to the American at the Lahore café, “Princeton inspired in me the feeling that my life was a film in which I was the star and everything was possible. I have access to this beautiful campus, I thought, to professors who are titans in their fields…”[***[3]***](http://yris.yira.org/bookreviews/514#_ftn3) It was in America that he was able to earn $80,000 as starting salary. But with 9/11, at a time when America was most vulnerable, he turned on the country that had given him so much. He isn’t, in light of his various shortcomings, a reluctant fundamentalist, as he so luxuriously and conceitedly considers himself. A more accurate appellation, in Chaucer’s chilling words, would be “the smiler with the knife under the cloak.” His English is sweet, he is intelligent, as well as somewhat agreeable; but his unthoughtful assessment of America, his host country, leads him to become unwarrantedly adversarial towards it.

After fourteen years of the September 11 attacks, the international political landscape is still occupied with suspicion, confrontation and distrust. This study intends to explore the trust deficit between east and west as depicted by Mohsin Hamid in his novel The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Mohsin Hamid, and examine how far and how successfully he has portrayed the impact of 9/11 events on the Americans and the Muslims. By comparing the silent American (West) with Changez (East), Hamid has brilliantly discussed the relations between East and West. By revealing the conflicting viewpoints of the Americans and that of the Muslims, Hamid describes how East and West are similar or different in terms of the ideological meanings and sociopolitical situation.

The very beginning lines of the novel reflect that Changez and the silent American do not trust each other. In fact they have doubts against each other, the words “alarmed you” that Changez uses while talking to an American reflect that the American startles to see Changez, while when Changez asks him about the purpose of his visit shows his concern. Yet Changez tries to comfort him by offering his services to him and showing him his affection for America.