

Advanced English: The Reluctant Fundamentalist - An introduction to 9/11 Literature

Laurence Torre

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This course is meant for students of the advanced C1 and C2 levels. Theme-based language classes aim at developing written and oral skills through the study of a specific topic.

Course Objectives

This is a 12-week course that will primarily explore Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, as an example of post 9/11 Literature. We will also study Simon Armitage's poem *Out of the Blue* and an excerpt from Karan Mahajan's novel *The Association of Small Bombs*.

The main objectives of this course are:

- Introducing *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* while reflecting on the themes of identity and belonging. We will dive into the novel to better understand how Hamid depicts cultural hybridity and American imperialism in the early years of the 21st century
- Guiding students through the process of literary analysis while providing them with the opportunity to offer their personal appreciation of the works on the syllabus
- Expanding the students' knowledge of the cultural and historical contexts of the works on the syllabus.

Background

While its early drafts were written before the September 11 attacks, it took Hamid seven years to finish revising *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Published in 2007, the novel remains one of the most thought-provoking and absorbing books about 9/11. Set in the early mid 2000s in Lahore, Pakistan, the story is told by Changez (a Pakistani) to an American, while the two of them are sitting at a café in the Old Anarkali market. The dramatic monologue and its one-sided perspective prove to be a challenging read, which questions the nature of fundamentalism in sometimes subtle and sometimes obvious ways. The many layers of the novel allow the reader to reflect on numerous issues such as identity and its flux, cultural hybridity and American imperialism. As the author once said in a 2011 BBC interview: '9/11 changed the world because symbolically it was able to activate fractures that already existed.'

Course Description

Our in-depth study of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* will follow a linear chronology, comparing and contrasting Hamid's depiction of 9/11 with Armitage's and Mahajan's. Students will be given analytical tools to delve into the meaning of Hamid's writing every week and there will be additional required reading of

press articles and viewing of documentaries. While remaining academic with lectures and presentations led by students, the approach will also allow the practice of creative writing on several occasions.

Organization

Activities will cover the four language skills, with an emphasis on speaking, reading and writing:

- Reading: students will be asked to provide their own personal appreciation of key moments from the works on the syllabus. Added material such as press articles will serve as contextual background
- Writing: students will be asked to submit an essay at the end of the semester to show understanding of the meaning and sensitivity to the language of the studied books
- Listening: audio and video extracts relevant to the course will be given as additional resources
- Speaking: students will be asked to share their views. Discussions will cover the style, themes, characters and structure of the works. There will be time for debates to develop critical understanding and thinking.

Please acquire and read *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* before the first lesson. You may buy a paper or digital edition. The Penguin Book 2018 edition will be used to reference excerpts and pages (ISBN 978-0-141-02954-2).