The Representation of Two Different World- Views Through the Use of Dramatic Monologue: An Analysis of Mohsin Hamid's Reluctant Fundamentalist

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Abstract:

This paper examines the relationship between two cultures, two world views and two civilizations, and how they feel towards one a nother through discussing the Pakstani writer, Mohsin Hamid's Reluctunt Fundamentalist which was nominated in 2007. This novel goes into the heart of what may be the most important issue of the time, the clash of civilizations. Hamid's use of dramatic monologue is a unique achievement, and it makes the novel one of the most prolific and successful novels written after sep 11. I will examine through this technique the transformation of a Muslim Pakistani man from an initial infatuation, identification with America to a gradual estrangement and disenchantment with it.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist demonstrates Hamid's own aggressive view of the West in a smart cover of fiction...It's aim is to present the reader with a well-oriented explanation and details of an Eastern immigrant in the West with all the difficulties he goes through. It poses many questions some of which are not answered. They are left for the readers to interpret them according to the way he /she reads the novel.

Mohsin Hamid adopts the device of a dramatic monologue to describe the conflicting views of the East and West. Dramatic monologue is a person talking to another person whose speech is not recorded but inferred from the speech of the first narrator. The speaker is talking and talking and the listener only listens . In this novel the listener is as important and central as the speaker. We never hear his voice but we know he speaks . We infer his reactions from the speech of the speaker.

In the novel, America is proficiently made silent as a non-speaking American is made to listen to the 184-page monologue of a 25 year-old Pakistani1. The American is lost in a bazaar in old Anarkali in Lahore, the second largest city in Pakistan. Changez, a Pakistani man goes to the American and invites him to a cup of tea. We immediately ask ourselves what makes Changez go and invite the American to the café ? Why is American in Old Anarkali ? And why is he willing to listen to Changez go on and on and on ?

The first sentence in the novel carries even more questions:

Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you? Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America.... Come; tell me, what were you looking for? Surely, at this time of day, only one thing could have brought you to the district of Old Anarkali — named, as you may be aware, after a courtesan immured for loving a prince—and that is the quest for the perfect of cup tea. Have I guessed correctly? Then allow me, sir, to suggest my favorite among these many establishments2.

We realize that these two men represent two different cultures. Chngez adds : "I noticed that you were looking for something, in fact you seemed to be on a mission."3

On going to the café Changez notices that the American insists to sit with the his back to the wall out of security consideration . Changez says: " Oh you want to sit with your back to the wall?"4 The American is afraid because he is an American in a Muslim country . Andrew Anthony argues that this is an indication that the American suspects all Muslims to be terrorists, therefore; he does not want any Muslim to sit behind his back.5

His feeling of fear continues when the waiter brings them tea .

Changez says "Ah, our tea has arrived! Do not look sosuspicious. I assure you, sir, nothing untoward will happen to you, not even a runnystomach. After all, it is not as if it has been poisoned. "6

The American is nervous and careful – as a stranger in a foreign country often is. Changez, with his apparent polite and hospitable manners towards the American stranger at the Lahore cafe, seems to try hard to eliminate the fear of the potential danger of the American for the later suffers from this greatly. Changez assures him ,"if it makes you more comfortable I'll switch my cup with yours."7

Similarly, Changez suspects the American to hide something under his jacket. He suspects that he may be carrying a gun. When Changez first brings it up he is still relatively cautious: "You seem worried. Do not be; this burly fellow is merely our waiter, and there is no need to reach under your jacket, I assume to grasp your wallet, as we will pay him later, when we are done."8

Chnagez 's suspition is made even clearer when he addreses the silent American:

When you sit in that fashion, sir, with your arm curved around the back of the empty chair beside you, a bulge manifests itself through the lightweight fabric of your suit, precisely at that point

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parallel to the sternum where the undercover security agents of our country -- and indeed, one assumes, of all countries -- tend to favor wearing an armpit holster for their side arms9.

Hamid shows how both are uneasy about each other's motives. This further reflects the atmosphere of suspicion and the complexity which exists between individuals belonging to two cultures. It is unclear throughout the monologue whether or not the American stranger is a possible undercover agent who comes to Lahore to kill Changez..

After drinking their tea Changez immediately offers personal details of his life. The story of Changez begins when he first arrived in Princeton. He tells his silent listner : "I spent four years in your country. Where? In New York". We realize that The American becomes even more nervous when Changez says : "Do not t be alarmed ...Do not be frightened by my beard I love America. "10.

For any westerner , Andrew clarifies further , the Muslim beard is a symbols of fundamentalism or extremism. Therefore; the American suspects Changez to be a terrorist11 .

Changez continues telling the nervous American that he lost all his money in Pakistan, and he could not pursue his education ,but America gave him the chance to pursue his education . He got full scholarship in America. For him a "dream come true"12.

To earn his living he started to work in three jobs in his University. The first job he got was in library of the eastern studies where no one went. James Lasdun points out that the Americans were not interested in reading on the east or Islam or Arabs before the sep 11. They had no interest in studying cultures other than their own13.

He did exceptionally well there, and was hired by Underwood Samson & Company. The man who hires him is also something like a mentor: Jim is an American who rose from poor circumstances to become a very successful man, and he sees a similar hunger in Changez -- though Changez doesn't think they are that similar. The fundamental motivation is slightly different:

I did not grow up in poverty. But I did grow up with a poor boy's sense of longing, in my case not for what my family never had, but for what we had had and lost. Some of my memories held onto imagined memories the way homeless people hold onto lottery tickets. Nostalgia was their crack cocaine, if you will, and my childhood was littered with the consequences of their addiction: unserviceable debts, squabbles over inheritances, the odd

alcoholic or suicide. In this, Jim and I were indeed similar: he had grown up outside the candy store, and I had grown up on its threshold as its door was being shut.14

Between graduating and beginning his position at Underwood Samson , he falls in love with a bothered young American woman, Erica. When she returned back to her house ,she

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introduces Changez to her prosperous family . However, Erica is shocked by the loss of her childhood sweetie, Chris; although she feels fondness for Changez, but the later is unable to replace her dead boyfriend. Unable to commit herself to a new relationship, she becomes more and more withdrawn and disheartened. Erica's parents lived in a penthouse in New York. Her father offered Changez a drink. He also offered this remark, "I had a Pakistani working for me once, never drank."15 Changez tells him he does drink and thanks him. The American is surprised that Changez admits that he drinks alcohol, because he assumes from his beard that he would be a strict fundamental Muslim. Chngez notices the American's exclamation , he adds: "Perhaps you misconstrue the significance of my beard, which I should in any case make clear. In truth, many Pakistanis drink."16 In this case, Hamid seeks to challenge the stranger's assumptions, mainly those connecting to Muslim traditions, practices and attitudes .Hamid also seems to suggest that the focus on stereotypical differences which creates suspicion and fear can lead to aggression and violence.17

After they complete their dinner Erica and Changez attended an exclusive gathering in Chelsea. Here he watched Erica's beauty crystallizes and shines, and he is possessed by a strong desire to have intimate relationship with her but Erica was still holding on to Chris. Her whole life was about Chris, and she was determined on holding on to the past and not letting go of Chris. She gave Changez bits and pieces of herself, and he grasped and held on to these minuscule scrapes and savored every single morsel. When Changez feels that she is not fully engaged in the act of sex because of Chris ,he whispers to her : "Then pretend, pretend I am him."18 Changez gives himself away to meet Erica's needs. The moment he uttered these words was the moment his identity became totally on stake . later, Changez recalled, "I felt at once both satiated and ashamed" 19. Changez desired Erica to love him; he was ready to give up his identity to please her even though he realizes that she could never love him the way she loved her ex-boyfriend , Chris . Changez examines his actions, "Perhaps by taking on the persona of another; I had diminished myself in my own eyes; perhaps I was humiliated by the continuing dominance..."20 He was powerless to go into her sphere, and this affected his identity. Changez declared, "I lacked a stable core. I was not certain where I belonged – in New York, in Lahore, in both, in neither. "21

This love story could be seen as an allegory if Erica is seen as contraction of America. Changez says, "it seemed to me that America, too, was increasingly giving itself over to a dangerous nostalgia at that time."22 Erica's beauty, Changez' fruitless love for her and his irritated attempts at intimacy, his attempt to get close to her by pretending to be someone he never was, her alienating obsession with her dead boyfriend and her inexplicable end – all these appear to carry out quasi-analogical functions. For this young Pakistani, for instance, is captivated by the beauty and splendor of New York, has a period in which he is hungry for a warm relationship with American financial success and power, becomes disappointed and disenchanted with America when it gave itself over to a perilous melancholy and hints at the end to which America is connecting , particularly through the backdrop relationship between the silent American and a remaining, antagonistic waiter.

Hamid is conscious in being able to link America and Erica together in Changez's mind. For Hamid, the battle for love and justice are one in the same, residing both in the realms of the personal and the political:

I am a strong believer in the intertwined nature of the personal and the political; I think they move together. In the case of Changez, his political situation as a Pakistani immigrant fuels his love for Erica, and his abandonment by Erica fuels his political break with America.23

For Hamid, it becomes indispensable to detail this personal side with the political. I think that Hamid uses the allegory of the personal in the political setting to bring about a new measurement to the current discussion of fundamentalism. Hamid is pointing out that there is a reason that people hold fundamentalism. Hamid makes it plain that

to understand the change in Changez, one has to understand how the political and personal feed one another: Which is stronger, politics or love, is like asking which is stronger, exhaling or inhaling. They are two sides of the same thing.24

While Changez was attracted to Erica's royal narcissism and material attributes, he realized that she needed a continuous instigation, and he provided her insistent attention and reassurances. Changez tried to combine his existence into hers when he pretended to be someone she very much liked to see. America wants them to absorb and accept American nationalism. America holds on to old traditions and values and had no desire to adopt new-fangled convictions, just like Erica holds on to Chris. No matter how hard Changez tried in this relationship with Erica, he was not met with the same quantity of energy and concern.25.

In Changez second job he was taken to new York and there he sow technology human mind could not imagine. Everything in New York was inspiring and fascinating

Changez is resentful because he thinks that America is the reason behind the destruction in the middle east. For him, it is hard to look back at the glory that would never come again. America now is the new majestic power. It asks too much of human nature to expect an old civilization to welcome a new civilization that had replaced the first . .

Changez is indignant whenever he thinks of the past glory of Muslim Civilization. Looking down on New York from his office 41-42 storey high, Changez is fully aware that he is standing in a different world from Pakistan with his feet supported by "the most technologically advanced civilization our species had ever known." 26

He demonstrates to the silent American his disappointment with the unpleasant difference in scientific and industrial progression between America and Pakistan. This makes him call to mind, with certain degree of sentimental nostalgia, the past glory and pride of the land that would be Pakistan:

Often, during my stay in your country, suchcomparisonstroubledme. In fact, they did more thantrouble me: they made me resentful. Four thousandyears ago, we, the people of the Indus River basin,had cities that were laidout on grids and boastedunderground sewers, while the ancestors of those

who would invade and colonize America wereilliteratebarbarians. Now our cities were largelyunplanned, unsanitary affairs, andAmerica haduniversities with individual endowments greater than

our national budget for education. To be reminded of this vast disparity was, for me, to be ashamed.27

Changez's pleasure could be seen when the security of the American lifestyle is terribly shaken by the attacks of September 11, 2001, when two hijacked aircrafts crashed into the World Trade Centre– known as the 'Twin Towers' – in New York City, causing the towers to fall down and resulting in the death of almost three thousands victims. A third hijacked airliner destroyed the Pentagon in Arlington. The American mainstream media's reply to 9/11 and the following War on Terror is basically "simplistic and invidious, and has left its disastrous impact on Muslims"28.

When Chnagez saw the attacks on American TV. channels he expressed his pleasant state :

The following evening was supposed to be our last in Manila. I was in my room, packing my things. I turned on the television and saw what at first I took to be a film. But as I continued to watch, I realized that it was not fiction but news. I stared as one and then the other of the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center collapsed. And then I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased.29

Though his reaction is unpleasant, but it leads us to inspect the real motivation behind it.

He is happy not because people were killed but because America's greatness and pride are shaken at last. He realizes that, "someone had so visibly brought America to her knees."30

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Something like saying , America is suffering from the very destruction that it inflicts upon its enemies .

Margaret Scanlan argues that Changez is rather bit confused. Part of him desired harm to a country that had educated and supported him.31

Rober J Young shows that not only the characters in the novel are effected by the attack but all of America was thrown back into " nostalgia " of the old America .32

Changez comes back to be angry again because the attacks have been ascribed to Al-Qaeda, an Islamist group which is believed to have been formed in Pakistan and Afghanistan in the late 1980s. Therefore; as a part of their plan to fight the peril of terrorism ,America invaded Afghanistan under the pretext of fighting the terrorists and chasing Osama bin laden who resided in Afghanistan. This makes him more angry because he sees the American invasion of Afghanistan as an encouragement of India to invade the weaker neighbor, Pakistan. For Changez, Afghanistan is Pakistan's friend, a neighbor, and a fellow Muslim nation.. Changez and his family experience increasing uncertainty about their larger, more powerful neighbor, fearing the possibility of a full-scale invasion. Lasdon argues that Changez's initial infatuation with America was transformed into disillusionment.33

When Changez e went back to Pakistan ,he saw hunger, poverty and corruption. But he preferred staying in his destructed country . For him it was better than serving the

"wrong master."34

Changez's personal development also coincides with the World Trade Centre Attack after which racism increases. America's internal responses to September 11 saw an increase of national security, a limitation of immigration laws and greater restriction. When Changez returned to America, he was searched separately from everyone else."Pakistani cabdrivers were being beaten ... the FBI was raiding mosques, shops, and even people's houses"34. In the parking lot, he becomes the butt of racist sentiments when one offender deliberately seeks to intimidate him with racist, derogatory language. "Fucking Arab". Indeed in America after 2001 there was an increase in suspicion, verbal abuse and attacks against people and institutions believed to be Muslim.

Karen Olsson states that the American media has extensively promoted the culture of fear and suspicion among the Americans. It makes it easy to create a phenomenon of a hidden and abstract enemy called terror. The Americans anticipate that once America is attacked, it will be hit again by terrorists .35

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Changez found he could no more live in the same way he used to live before the attack , therefore; he went back to New York only to say goodbye to his friends and his beloved Erica .

Changez searched his soul and thought if he stayed in America he would be " a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country faced the threat of war."36 The term janissary refers to someone who is erasing their own culture. That term had been taken from the fourteenth century Ottoman empire. The Ottomans took Christian children and brainwashed them with the teachings of Islam . Whenever the Ottoman empire invaded a Christian nation like Italy , France, Germany, the first troops were those Christian children . They were janissaries from the perspective of Islam. Janissaries are important because they fight for Islam against their religion and Islam strengthens without losing its people and the enemies weakens with killing kinship being unaware of it. Changez is determined to reject a system that he believes is harming his cultural and racial identity. "All I knew was that my days of focusing on fundamentals were done". 37

Paula Bock in The Seattle Times (April 10, 2007) blames America and its culture for promoting hatred and prejudice in Changez when it holds all Muslims responsible for the fall of the twin towers. Bock rightly terms this portrayal as a "seething commentary on America's reputation in the non-western world today."38

It is true that Changez came from a nation plentiful with Islamic fundamentals. He entered a new life in America that is plentiful with Christian fundamentals. He experienced the fundamentals of an Ivy League education and learned the fundamentals of Underwood Samson. His romantic experience with Erica had a mysterious set of fundamentals as does each personal relationship. Bock adds fundamentalism does not necessarily has to be religious. She adds that fundamentals are the building blocks of human existence; rules and limits are declared and measured.39

Changez is insulted and many times suspected after these attacks. He expresses this in the novel: "I lacked a stable core. I was not certain where I belonged--in New York, in Lahore, in both, in neither."40

It is clear that when Chnagez comes to America he is happy and he adopts America, particularly New York, as a new home for himself. His love for America is obvious enough at the beginning of the novel. But with the fall of the Twin towers he starts to think if his new 'home' is no more willing to accept him or if it will cast him out after a long time of mutual embrace. He feels uneasy. He undergoes another shock when the strict woman officer at the airport is not

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satisfied with his response to her question as to what his purpose is to travel to the United States. She expects another explanation rather than just he lives there. She cannot accept his first response therefore she repeats her question again waiting for another and different answer . This indicates that he is no more accepted in America and he begins to be treated as an outsider . Hamid also explains the psychology after the events pathetically through Changez's character again who is unable to live normally as nothing happened now; he feels as if plagued by paranoia, as he himself puts it: "by an intermittent sense that I am being observed."41 . Trevor Lewis in the Sunday Times also contends that discrimination and suspicions increases Changez' hatred and estrangement, and as he frees himself from the influence of the West, he questions the injustices done by America abroad. "We have been led to believe that we live in a world where terrorism is as likely to kill us as cancer or cholesterol," he adds, "the ability to engage in dispassionate, impersonal, politically-motivated homicide is not an aberration but rather natural. We have been encouraged to lose a sense of perspective."42

When Erica's father asks him how things are back home and he replies as quite good. The father comments :

Economy is falling apart though, no? Corruption, dictatorship, the rich living like princes while everyone else suffers. Solid people, don't get me wrong. I like Pakistanis. But the elite has raped that place well and good, right? And fundamentalism. You guys have got some serious problems with fundamentalism43.

Chngez was hurt by this description but he finally realized the what that American man said was what all American thought of:

There was nothing overtly objectionable in what he had said; indeed, his was a summary with some knowledge, much like the short news items on the front page of The Wall Street Journal, which I had recently begun to read. But his tone--with, if you will forgive me, its typically American undercurrent of condescension--struck a negative chord with me, and it was only out of politeness that I limited my response to, 'Yes, there are challenges, sir, but my family is there, and I can assure you it is not as bad as that'.44

It is clear that Changez in this passage criticizes the American because of his tone saying that he has little knowledge of the things he talks about even though Changez knows that what the American says about Pakistan is true .. Changez turns his back on the West once he witnesses the falling down of the 'American dream' after 9/11. He relates:"an American dream turning to dust in the rubble of the twin towers"45. He goes further to add:

America was engaged only in posturing. As a societyyouare unwilling toreflect upon the shared painthat unitedyou with those who attacked you. Youretreatedinto mythsof your owndifference, assumptions of your ownsuperiority.[...]had to be stopped in theinterests not only of the rest of humanity, but also inyourown.46

He goes back to his country where he becomes a lecturer in a university. And he bears the responsibility of pushing his students to call for entire independence in Pakistan - That is why he is regarded as an anti- American rebel. He makes an interview about Pakistan's independence, which is played and played again on the channels of the American TV. All the Americans regards Changez now as an anti- American, or a terrorist .Now we probably know why Changez feels annoyed and he suspects the silent American with whom he talks to be a man on a mission .

He is fully aware of what the American thinks of him. Therefore; whenever the American listener puts his hand over his heart. Changez suspects he is hiding a gun under his jacket and he has come to kill him. He thinks that the American is a secret agent.

Towards the end, when his relationship to Erica proves unsuccessful and Changez tries in vain to discover the reason of her disappearance, he comments:

It is not 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 us47.

Hamid in an interview says :

All Muslims are suspect to a certain extent. We're all fundamentalists until we prove otherwise, until we order that beer, or our girlfriend shows up in a miniskirt. I think we've all felt it. Second, even though he's not particularly religious, Changez begins to act in ways we think of as fundamentalist. Reluctantly, he starts following a fundamentalist

path, though he's a secular guy — a good yuppie. He's becoming a Muslim nationalist, and that's a term we don't hear48.

Trivor argues that until the novel finishes no violence can occur and" the reader is thus left in doubt, left alone to find his way in a house of mirrors full of stereotypes that represents well the modern world."49

This is a story about two extremes. On the one hand is the religious fundamentalism which drives people to kill for the sake of dogma and blind obedience to a book whilst on the other hand lies

the financial fundamentalism which drives people to gamble the livelihoods of others for the sake of individual profit maximisation and wealth accumulation. The former type of extremism is well noted and condemned, whilst the latter is noted but not so openly condemned although it is possible that it is causing more damage than religious fundamentalism. Regardless where one stands on such issues this novel puts a young man in the middle of two extremes.

Conclusion

Mohsin Hamid explores the constant battle between the two sides of the world. This battle is found within the reader who is forced to decide who to believe in . The novel ends and readers continue to ask themselves :Who is the bad guy?

Changez, the protagonist of the novel, poses a serious question to the audience: —Why does everyone hate us? This quite correctly points to the themes of fear and suffering of the Muslims as well as the Americans. It points to the institutionalization of racism in the era of globalization, where nations and races are still made subaltern by the superior and the mighty. Quite interestingly, it is Hamid's marginalized protagonist, Changez who does all the speaking throughout the novel, and makes the American listen to him. It is through this freedom of speech granted to Changez, that he undermines the American's opinion about Pakistan, and underpins the advancing face of Muslims. A single event, with a chain of events that followed caused him to question :Is hatred the response to hatred, or extremism the cure to extremism [§]

When Hamid is asked why he gave a voice to the Pakistani man and he silenced the American , he answered that it is time the voice of the east is heard; it is time the other should speak and tell his part in the story .

In these two different cultures or civilizations both sides are afraid. In the east Muslims look at the Americans and wonder: Are they regular people with families and kids with no real desire to invade our country? Similarly, in the west Americans look at Muslims and wonder : Are they regular people with families and kids with no real desire to harm or explode us ⁹.

Notes

¹Karen Olsson, "I Pledge Allegiance." Rev. of The Reluctant Fundamentalist, by Mohsin Hamid. The New York Times Sunday Review of Books (22 Apr. 2007),p.34

۲ Muhsin Hamid , The Reluctant Fundamentalist (Karachi: Oxford University Press.2007),p. 1

۳Ibid .p,3

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۲Muhsin Hamid,p. 2

^VIbid.p,2

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۱۰Ibid.p, 3

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۲ Muhsin Hamid ,p, 3

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۱٤Muhsin Hamid.p, 5

۱°Ibid.p, 53

ויז Ibid.p, 61

\VKaren Olsson,p.33

1^ Hamidp,. 105

۱۹lbid.p, 105

۲۰lbid.p, 106

148 Nibid.p, 148

^۲ Vibid.p, 128

۲۳ Mohsin Hamid , Mohson Hamid on Writing to Reluctunt Fundamentalist" The Guardian .(Gardian News and Medai, May 2011), p.16

۲٤lbid.p, 67

YoPual Bock,. Rev. of The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Mohsin Hamid. The Seattle Times. (10April, 2007)p, 19.

۲٦Muhsin Hamid,p. 177

۲^vIbid.p, 34

۲۸James Lasdun،

۲۹ Muhsin Hamid,p. 83

۳**۰** Ibid.p, 83

۳۱ Margaret Scanlan ,p.23

۳۲ Robert J. Young Postcolonialism: A Short In troduction. (New York: Oxford Up, 2003

۳۳James Lasdun

۳^٤Muhsin Hamid,p. 107

۳°Robert J. Young

۳٦Muhsin Hamid,p. 151

^{wv}Ibid.p, 153

۳۸Pual Bock,p.34

^{۳۹}lbid.p, 88

^٤ • Muhsin Hamid, p. 168

٤ Ibid,p.208

[£]^YTrevor Lewis, Ripe for the Picking The Sunday Times.(18March,2007),p.28.

٤٣Ibid.63

^٤ ٤ Ibid, p. 63

٤°Ibid,p. 76

٤٦lbid.p, 190

^٤ Vlbid.p, 197

٤^Muhsin Hamid,p.177

^{٤ ۹}Trivor, p. 44

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