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POST-POSTCOLONIAL EXPERIMENTS WITH PERSPECTIVES

Hanji Lee

This chapter looks at a few narratological curiosities among recently published Pakistani anglophone novels. Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013) and Bilal Tanweer's *The Scatter Here is too Great* (2013) are all intriguing novels about Pakistan and its social, economic, and political realities as they are affected and complicated by the global politics. They are noteworthy for their experiments with narrative perspectives. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* presents its main narrative in the form of a dialogue between an American-educated Pakistani resident in Pakistan and his silent American listener. *How to Get Filthy Rich* and a chapter in *The Scatter Here* are told from the unusual second-person perspective and feature authorial characters involved in the act of writing self-help literature. In the course of reading Hamid's and Tanweer's novels, the reader is constantly faced with baffling questions with regard to the narrative points of view: From whose perspective is the narrative being told? To whom is the narrative voice addressing? Are the narratee(s) in the novel and its actual readers the same people? How reliable is the narrative perspective – its assumptions, beliefs, agendas, and judgements – being presented in the novel? How reliable are readers' own assumptions and assessments about the narrative perspectives? The overall effect of radical narrative instability on readers is one of disorientation.

So why disorient readers with narrative instability? To answer this question, I start with the authors' delicate position as Pakistani anglophone novelists who write local stories for a global readership. Paul Jay, in his book *Global Matters*, heralds the emergence of 'post-postcolonial' generation of writers 'whose experiences grow out of the postcolonial condition but are informed even more by the forces of globalization' (2010: 96). There is no doubt that these authors belong to this post-postcolonial generation of writers who deal with the pressing issues of globalisation in the local context in their fiction. But their own relationship to globalisation is a conflicted one. In an immediate practical sense, globalisation has opened doors for them, making their work available to a wide readership in the English-speaking world and perhaps beyond. As they narrate local stories to the global audience, however, they confront the age-old problem of representation. After all, these authors represent only a tiny portion of the whole Pakistani population who have received an elite education and enjoy a marked position of privilege and prestige. No matter how comprehensive their understanding of Pakistan's local issues may be, the narrative point of view they adopt for their fiction is bound to be partial and incomplete. Hamid and Tanweer are acutely conscious of such limitations on their choice of perspective.

Through the fragmentation of perspectives in their fiction, they have chosen to radically dismiss the possibility of privileging one particular perspective over others. Their experiments with narrative perspectives fictionalise multiple points of view in flux and formation. This narrative unsteadiness, in turn, represents the authors' own Pakistani subjectivity caught in a tension between the local and the global. Readers, too, are implicated in the process of this unfolding of new points of view: they are invited to re-examine their own assumptions, beliefs, agendas, and judgements even as they question those of the narrative perspectives.

Narrative perspective as a system of relations

According to Susan Lanser, 'Unlike such textual elements as character, plot, or imagery, point of view is essentially a relationship rather than a concrete entity' (1981: 13). The dictionary entry for 'point of view' includes two main potentially contradicting definitions. The first is 'angle of vision' and denotes an objective position from which one makes observations; the second is 'attitude of a person' and indicates one's subjective mindset. Lanser understands this rather ambiguous dual nature of narrative perspective – both objective and subjective at the same time – in terms of a relationship. She writes, '[the] first designates an "objective" position, the subject's relation to some external reality; the second denotes some "subjective" response or evaluation of that reality' (1981: 16). In short, point of view is the narrating subject's relationship to the external world. Through narration, readers gain access to the external world of the narrator and the changes in the internal world of the narrator as the external world influences it. This is not to say that the narrating subject is the only one being affected by the relationship. A relationship is an interactive process which transforms all parties involved. In the act of perceiving and being perceived, and narrating and being narrated, the narrating subject and the object of narration influence and shape each other. Wrapped up in the concept of narrative perspective is an intimate intermingling of subjectivity and objectivity.

Narrative perspective is a difficult concept to theorise because of its two-way, interactive aspect. Since neither the narrating subject nor the external world is a singular static object, it is furthermore difficult to define the narrator's subjective identity and outline the parameters of her external world. In the real world, numerous factors make up one's subjectivity and external surroundings. This is no less true of fictional subjectivity and objectivity. Just as an individual is subject to the rules and regulations of the society in which she lives, a narrating subject is bound to the larger literary system by which the text operates. Therefore, point of view in narrative opens up a whole web of complex relations. Lanser notes how this relationship between the subject and her objective world in fiction could explode into multiplicities of relations:

If we understand point of view to concern the relations between narrating subjects and the literary system which is the text-in-context, then we confront a complex network of interactions between author, narrator(s), characters, and audiences, both real and implied [...] Even a single narrating subject can be expected to engage in simultaneous multi-leveled relationships with various textual characters, events, and addressees. Moreover, because narrative has the capacity to be multi-discursive – that is, to integrate the discourse of any number of personae within a single text – works of narrative often involve numerous subject/system relationships. In such cases, the textual perspective may become a superstructural synthesis of the various voices and perspectives – points of view – encoded in the discourse.

(1981: 13–14)

Narrative is 'multi-discursive' and simultaneously deals with 'numerous subject/system relationships'. Perspective in narrative represents the development of the interactions between multiple discourses and 'numerous subject/system relationships'. There is no way of stabilising such a complex network of relations, and the unfolding of a perspective will always be an ongoing process. Narrative perspective can, then, be considered as a testing ground for multi-layered interactions between subject and system, or subjectivity and objectivity. Any attempt at constructing a particular narrative perspective would automatically involve an experimentation of some degree.

Who is speaking to whom in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*?

Pakistani anglophone writers actively experiment with narrative perspectives to make sense of their own complex relationships to the nation and the world, and the nation's relationships to the local and the global. In his essay, 'My Reluctant Fundamentalist', Hamid says that he wrote his second novel to 'help [him] understand [his] split self and [his] split world' (2014: 67). Hamid characterises the perspectives with which he wrote his first two novels as follows:

Moth Smoke had for me been a look at Pakistan with a gaze altered by the many years I had spent in America. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, I thought, would be a look at America with a gaze reflecting the part of myself that remained stubbornly Pakistani. (2014: 67)

The novel finds a fitting subject in a secular Pakistani Muslim who undergoes an identity crisis over his failed American dream. From the very beginning, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* was to be an experiment on perspective.

It is interesting to note that Hamid had completed his first draft of the novel before the historic attack on the World Trade Center even took place, although his work is now conveniently referred to as a 'post-9/11 novel' in literary studies. Hamid remembers the response of puzzlement that his first draft incited in his agent, who 'upon reading' the draft asked, 'why would so secular and westernized a Muslim man feel such tension with America?' – to which the author answered, 'there [is] deep resentment in much of the rest of the world towards the sole remaining superpower' (2014: 68). The rest of the world may indeed have resented the unrestrained economic and military power that America exercised on a global scale as a modern-day empire. Such resentment, however, could have been easily dismissed by people like Hamid's agent as a harmless eccentric attitude adopted by some non-Americans.

Things changed when September 11 hit. The traumatic events of the day completely transformed the external and internal worlds of Hamid and his readers. When revising his draft, Hamid concluded that his original idea of setting the events of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* the year before September 11 was no longer possible:

I had initially chosen to keep it set in the year before September 11, so that my characters would not be overwhelmed by an event that spoke so much more loudly than any individual's story could. I grew personally more divided, saddened and dismayed by the heavy-handedness of the Bush administration's conduct abroad [...] Eventually, I realized that, just as in my exterior world, there was no escaping the effects of September 11 in the interior world that was my novel. The story of a Pakistani man in New York who leaves just before that cataclysmic event would inevitably be bathed in the glare of the reader's knowledge of what would happen immediately after. (2014: 68–69)

The 9/11 attacks and America's war on terror which followed exacerbated sentiments of racial division among the general public. The sociopolitical changes which took place during this period deepened the author's inherent sense of alienation living as a Muslim Easterner in the West. His readers' perspectives on Muslim Americans, Islam, Afghanistan, and Pakistan were fundamentally altered too. The forceful intermingling between the internal and external worlds of the author led him to rethink the novel's narrative perspective. He had written his first draft in the style 'of a fable, of a parable, the kind of folk or religious story one looks to for guidance' (2014: 68). A few years after the 9/11 attacks, Hamid returned to his draft and went through several rounds of trial and error to find the most incisive narrative voice for the novel. He tried 'variations of minimalism in the third person, with voices ranging from fable to noir'. He also experimented with 'the comforting oral cadences of an American-accented first person'. The problem with the American voice was that 'there was not enough of Pakistan' in it, and 'it felt wrong somehow both to [his] ear, in its sound, and to [his] eye, in its architecture' (2014: 69–70). The novel's perspective had to be perfect in both its subjective *voice* and objective *structure*.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist eventually took on 'the frame of a dramatic monologue in which the Pakistani protagonist speaks to an American listener, and a voice born of the British colonial inflections taught in elite Pakistani schools and coloured by an anachronistic, courtly menace that resonates well with popular Western preconceptions of Islam' (2014: 70). Hamid's arrangement consciously invokes the multiple dimensions of communication involved in his narrative act: the interactions between the narrator, the narratee, and the reader with their respective cultural backgrounds, political attitudes, and national loyalties. The novel's Pakistani narrator is perfectly bilingual and has a unique perspective developed through his Pakistani upbringing and years of living in the West. He is also a savvy communicator who adjusts his approach to narration and representation according to his understanding of the narratee's American sensibilities. The motivations behind the two parties' engagement in the conversation are deliberately made unclear, which leaves enough room for readers to project their own assessments and expectations of the narrative situation in the course of their reading. This intricate dramatic setup of the narration seeks to maximise the narrative's potential to be multi-discursive by embodying the complex context of the production and consumption of the novel within the novel's own narrative structure.

Hamid opens *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by having the Pakistani protagonist locate and address an American visitor in Lahore. The narrator immediately recognises the narratee as an American disoriented in a foreign city and offers his assistance:

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. I noticed that you were looking for something; more than looking, in fact you seemed to be on a *mission*, and since I am both a native of this city and a speaker of your language, I thought I might offer you my services.

(2007: 1)

The narrator's injunction to not be 'frightened by [his] beard' invokes the common Western stereotype of what an Islamic fundamentalist looks like. Unlike the stereotype, however, he is a fluent speaker of the English language and a lover of America. Interestingly, the narrator's injunction is not just directed to the fictional narratee but also to the readers as they find themselves implicated in the narrator's address to the silent 'you' – albeit a very specified 'you'. Having invoked the cultural prejudices of the narratee (and readers) against bearded Muslims, the narrator starts playing a complex stereotyping game with his American companion. How

does the narrator know that the narratee is an American? It is not his 'skin colour' although he is white. It is not his suit although the 'single vent' on his jacket is characteristic of American suits. It is not his broad chest although such a chest is 'typical of a certain *type* of American' who 'maxes out well above two-twenty-five' (2007: 1). 'Instead', it is his '*bearing*' that gives his nationality away, which means that there is something distinctively American in the narratee that people like the narrator can pick up on right away. The narrator sees that the narratee's face 'harden[s]' at the word '*bearing*' to express his displeasure at being a target of stereotyping. He does not mean it as an 'insult' though; it is a mere 'observation'. Whereas both readers and the narratee are encouraged to hold off their prejudices and biases before properly getting to know the narrator, the latter himself objectifies and characterises his American listener based on his initial observations of him. In this narrative setup, an interesting reversal of cultural othering occurs. A strange Pakistani native, who looks like a religious fanatic, claims to know intimately and love America. America, more than Pakistan, is going to be the object of his scrutinising gaze.

The narrator of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* tells his American interlocutor that 'a certain familiarity with the recent history of our surroundings [...] allows us to put the present into much better perspective' (2007: 45). As a Pakistani Muslim with an intimate knowledge of America, the narrator, Changez, appoints himself as a mediator between the two conflicting world views and perspectives, and presents an alternative 9/11 narrative from an outsider's point of view. He reflects on the American reaction to the 9/11 attacks:

As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you. You retreated into myths of your own difference, assumptions of your own superiority. And you acted out these beliefs on the stage of the world, so that the entire planet was rocked by the repercussions of your tantrums, not least my family, now facing war thousands of miles away.

(2007: 168)

America's parochial retreat 'into myths of [her] own difference' and assumptions of her 'own superiority' are allegorised by the character of Erica, who has an unhealthy relationship to her past. Erica represents the emotional dimension of Changez's tension with America. Martin Randall notes the close proximity of her name to 'America' in his book *9/11 and the Literature of Terror* (2011: 142). Despite Changez's ardent courtship, Erica continues to pine after her dead lover, Chris, whom she describes as 'a good-looking boy' with an '*Old World* appeal' (2007: 27; emphasis original). Anna Hartnell suggests that Chris' name not only represents 'Europe's Christian roots' but also 'Christopher Columbus' encounter with the Americas, and the continent's status in the European imagination as an object of its own discovery'. Subsequently the memory of Chris, which Erica dearly holds onto, represents a form of 'American nationalism that looks back to a European past, a past that [in reality] only partially captures the nation's roots and the make-up of contemporary America' (Hartnell 2010: 343). In the end, Erica disappears and is suspected to have committed suicide. After her disappearance, Changez obtains the manuscript of Erica's novel and is puzzled to find it to be 'no tortured [...] autobiographical affair' (Hamid 2007: 166). Instead he finds 'a tale of adventure of a girl on an island who learns to make do' (2007: 188) – a kind of a female Robinson Crusoe! Her manuscript makes it clear that there is no part for Changez to play in her narrative. With no hopes of uniting with Erica or returning to his former work in finance with the same passion as before, Changez's personal American dream reaches its inevitable ending.

The frame narrative, however, does not conclude with the ending of Changez's American narrative. Readers are yet to decide what to make of the narrator's and the narratee's identities

and their relationship. The narrator tells his American listener that he has become a sort of rallying point for political activists on his university campus where he works as a finance professor. The demonstrations his students organise to advocate 'greater independence in Pakistan's domestic and international affairs' have descended into violent scuffles and been labelled 'anti-American' by the foreign press (2007: 179). One of his activist students has recently been 'arrested for planning to assassinate a coordinator of [America's] effort to deliver development assistance to [Pakistan's] rural poor' (2007: 181). The narrator denies any connection to the supposed plot, and disapproves of such a violent plan. He is also 'certain that the boy in question had been implicated by mistake' (2007: 181). 'But how "could he be so certain?" his American interlocutor asks'. The narrator senses 'a decidedly unfriendly and accusatory tone' in his voice and reassures him that 'you should not imagine that we Pakistanis are all potential terrorists, just as we should not imagine that you Americans are all undercover assassins' (2007: 183).

But what do *readers* make of it? Do they think that the narrator is an anti-American terrorist? Is his American interlocutor an undercover agent on a mission to assassinate the narrator? On their way to the hotel where the American is staying, a group of men ominously closes in on them. Are they just coming to 'say goodbye' or about to jump on the narratee? Is the 'glint of metal' the narrator detects in the narratee's jacket a gun or 'from the holder of [his] business cards'? Hamid writes in a later essay that he wanted to 'push the boundaries of what [he knew] how to do with "you" with his second novel'. He wanted to experiment with 'how feelings already present inside a reader – fear, anger, suspicion, loyalty – could colour a narrative so that the reader, as much as or even more than the writer, is deciding what is really going on'. He wanted the novel to act as a 'mirror, to let readers see they are reading, and, therefore, how they are living and how they are deciding their politics' (2014: 78). Would it even be possible that readers might change their views on post-9/11 politics and Pakistani Muslims after reading the novel? Would the experience of reading bind readers to the perspective of the novel 'by a certain shared intimacy' (Hamid 2007: 184)?

'Who are you?' in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* and *The Scatter Here Is too Great*

As evident in Hamid's detailed profiling of the American listener in his novel, Pakistani anglo-phone novelists are all too aware of the unique positioning of their global audience attempting to relate to the local context. They work with Pakistani raw materials for their fiction, but a substantial number of their readers live in the English-speaking world outside Pakistan. Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* and Tanweer's *The Scatter Here is too Great* seek to bridge readers' distance from the local Pakistani context by adopting the second-person point of view as their narrative voice. The direct address to readers in the second-person voice involves readers as active participants in the creation of the story and thus challenges the cultural differences between readers and the writer 'as a barrier of [their] communication'¹ (Paul 2003: 364).

Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich* is written in the form of a self-help book and directly addresses the reader as 'you'. An interesting conflation of identities occurs in the novel as the second-person voice blurs the distinctions between the subject positions of author, narrator, protagonist, and reader. Is the narrator the same person as the protagonist? Is the person addressing the 'you' in the novel, in fact, the 'I' of the 'you'? The key to understanding this conflation lies in what the narrator calls the 'slippery' nature of the self, associated with the self-help genre. Taken literally, the name of the genre 'self-help' conveys an oxymoronic message that problematises the divide between the self (reader) and the other (author). How can a book be called a 'self-help' book when the person who is actually helping you is the author, not you yourself? According

to the narrator, this means that ‘the idea of self in the land of self-help is a slippery one. And slippery can be good. Slippery can be pleasurable. Slippery can provide access to what would chafe if entered dry’ (Hamid 2013: 3–4). The sexual undertone used in the passage is a direct nod towards Roland Barthes’ idea of *Jouissance* – the sexual-like pleasure that arises from reading a text that defies literary conventions and thus challenges the stable subject position occupied by readers (Abrams 2005: 311). There is also a nod to Hamid’s deliberate engagement with formal play. The text’s genre-bending playfulness invites the self of the reader to temporarily mingle with the self of the ‘you’ in the narrative as in a romantic affair.

Thus begins Hamid’s tale of the nameless ‘you’ who rises to obscene wealth through entrepreneurship from a humble rural beginning in a nameless country that looks much like Pakistan. On the one hand, the power of the second-person pronoun draws the readers into the narrative and fills the void of the protagonist’s subjecthood left by his namelessness. On the other hand, the highly specified and narrativitised position of the nameless protagonist alienates readers from their efforts to identify with the protagonist. As the plot advances, readers begin to read the story more like a third-person narration which focalises on one character. In fact, throughout the novel, the narrator actively reminds readers of their material alienation from the protagonist and his world. At the beginning of the narrative, the narrator finds ‘you huddled, shivering, on the packed earth under your mother’s cot one cold, dewy morning’ (Hamid 2013: 4). He compares ‘Your anguish’ to that of ‘a boy whose chocolate has been thrown away, whose remote controls are out of batteries, whose scooter is busted, whose new sneakers have been stolen’. All these comparisons are vaguely helpful but completely misplaced as ‘you’ve never in your life seen any of these things’ (Hamid 2013: 4) and highlight the disparity between the economic situations of the impoverished protagonist and the readers. The narrator would also make reference to the physical process of writing and reading that is involved in the production and consumption of the text. In the beginning of Chapter 10, the narrator says, ‘As my writer’s fingers key and your reader’s eyes flick, you stand at the cusp of the eighth decade of your life’ (2013: 179). Even as he tells readers to fast forward their clock and picture themselves as the protagonist who is approaching his seventies, he reminds them of their physical position as readers and jerks them out of their immersion in the assumed role. These reminders about the extra-textual world disturb readers’ stable positioning from the fictional role of the protagonist. Readers’ position remains unsettled either in identification with or in distancing from the ‘you’ of the protagonist.

Readers’ unsettling relationship to the narrative’s second-person voice opens up interesting ways of thinking about connections between people who are utterly unrelated, dissimilar, and foreign to each other. In thinking about such connections, the narrator makes an appeal to our common humanity and does so by using the discourse of science and technology:

We are all information, all of us, whether readers or writers, you or I. The DNA in our cells, the bioelectric currents in our nerves, the chemical emotions in our brains, the configurations of atoms within us and of subatomic particles within them, the galaxies and whirling constellations we perceive not only when looking outward but also when looking in, it’s all, every last bit and byte of it, information.

(Hamid 2013: 159)

The narrator veers away from his usual second-person voice and uses ‘we’ in this passage. He first recognises the distinctive identities of the subjects involved in the narrative act – readers, writers, or you or I. Despite ‘our’ distinctiveness, ‘we’ are made up of the same building blocks that constitute each other in our world and ‘the galaxies and whirling constellations’ in the universe. From the smallest unit of the matter that makes up your person to the entire expanse

of the universe, it is ‘information’ and every ‘bit and byte’ of it governs the arrangements and behaviours of life and matters. What is outside is in you, and what is inside of you is outside. There is internality in externality, and externality in internality.

This language of information technology resonates closely with the narrator’s discussion of globalisation. In the age of global finance, the protagonist’s business becomes ‘quantified, digitized, and jacked into a global network of finance, your activities subsumed with barely a ripple in a collective mathematical pool of ever-changing current and future cash flows’ (Hamid 2013: 183). When the protagonist is hospitalised in his old age over shock and stress, his body, not just his business, is jacked into a global network of industries and people: ‘To be a man whose life requires being plugged into machines, multiple machines, in your case interfaces electrical, gaseous, and liquid, is to experience the shock of an unseen network suddenly made physical, as a fly experiences a cobweb’ (Hamid 2013: 185). The protagonist finds his consciousness connected to his body and life, which are connected to a cobweb of electrical strands connected to the hospital’s power system, ‘informational technology infrastructure’, and ‘the unit that produces oxygen’, which are connected to the people who labour to make the systems work and supply them with necessary materials and medications, which are connected to the factories where they are made, which are connected to the mines where raw materials are dug up (185–186). According to Angelia Poon, who analyses the same passage, the realisation of one’s dependency on the interconnectedness between people and machineries is ‘part of the moral transformation of the protagonist and the reader’; what they learn from this interconnectedness is ‘sympathy, the ability to feel for someone else’ (2017: 146–147). The interior system of the body, both mental and physical, is connected to a complex external system of interconnected people, industries, and machines. It is a picture of how subjectivity relates to objectivity, and the local to the global, and readers to the nameless protagonist in a nameless country. Brian Richardson posits that the ‘hypothetical you’, the kind used in *How to Get Filthy Rich*, is a ‘protean one’ and prone to ‘ontological slippage’. And ‘This “you” can embrace almost all of us’ (2006: 30).

Interconnectedness is also an important theme for Tanweer’s *The Scatter Here is too Great*. The novel is a web of interconnected stories of characters whose lives are collectively affected by bombings at a train station in Karachi, Pakistan. The fourth story, ‘Lying Low’, is written in the second-person voice and tells a story of a successful entrepreneur in the game industry, a self-made man who is much like the nameless protagonist in *How to Get Filthy Rich*. Unlike Hamid’s novel, however, the story is not written in the form of a self-help book although the protagonist is in the process of writing one and frequently makes references to lines from his work in progress. The story opens right after the bombing. The protagonist is at his mother’s apartment with his mother and another elderly woman. The force of the explosion has shaken the house, shattered the windows, and banged open the door of the fifth-floor apartment. In a state of shock, the protagonist panics over what he should do to protect himself and the women in the house in case of further terrorist attacks. The external and internal shock of experiencing the bombing puts the protagonist in a rather self-reflective mood in which he thinks about his estranged son and his own father, a communist poet, who has abandoned him for political activism.

Unlike Hamid’s novel, which is downright playful and transgressive in its use of the second-person voice, Tanweer’s narrative perspective faithfully sticks to the protagonist’s viewpoint without any direct address to the reader or intrusion by a narrator. In other words, the ‘you’ in ‘Lying Low’ could be replaced by a third-person pronoun. So what effects does Tanweer’s use of the second-person voice achieve in this narrative? I find a clue in Richardson’s discussion on

the 'rich ideological possibilities' of second-person narration when it is used to make sense of the coexistence of multiple conflicting discourses in one's consciousness. The second-person voice 'helps dramatize the mental battles of an individual struggling against the internalized discourse of an oppressive authority'. It also opens up a philosophical discussion on the idea of selfhood and '[expresses] the unstable nature and intersubjective constitution of the self' (Richardson 2006: 36). Richardson's discussion is highly relevant to the second-person narration of 'Lying Low', which portrays the main protagonist's conversation between his split selves.

The protagonist admits to having started working on his autobiography 'out of a desperation' to 'make sense of [his] life'. This book was going to be a kind of self-help book about his 'successful career' and his 'humble beginnings' and the ways in which he 'faced those challenges and rose to where [he was] now' (Tanweer 2014: 47). The protagonist has been successful with his game business since he has lived his life like he played the game of Pac-Man: 'get the dots, avoid the ghosts, move up one level at a time. no shortcuts, no exits, and absolutely no pauses whatsoever' (2014: 49). He has believed in 'a relentless cutting down of the unnecessary – thoughts, imagination, ideas – which had been the reason of your success' (2014: 49), the kind of American financial fundamentalism with which Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is disillusioned. In writing, however, the protagonist starts to notice the presence of different voices within himself. Before writing, he 'had clear ideas', but 'what made it onto paper was circular and loopy and joined at the wrong ends with everything else. It messed up the whole picture' (2014: 51–52). The second-person voice effectively expresses the process through which he is distancing himself from the two-dimensional economic discourse that used to dominate his consciousness.

The external shock of the explosion further breaks the firm grasp which the restrictive economic discourse previously had on the protagonist's consciousness. The shattered windows in his mother's apartment are a great metaphor for the changes taking place in his perspective. In the aftermath of the explosion, his usual self-absorbed inward-looking glance shifts its focus to the outward reality and other people's pains. Towards the end of the story, the protagonist 'peep[s] through the side of the [broken] windows and see[s] a lot of fire and dispersing men' (2014: 58). Observing the mayhem caused by the explosion, the protagonist becomes conscious of his own internal wounds and experiences an epiphany regarding the true reason of his estrangement from his father:

[Y]ou have suddenly become conscious of wounds you carried but could not see. Now looking out this broken window at people rushing toward sources of smoke, throwing water over burning cars and buses, you realize that what you had felt for your father was much worse than hate: it was a kind of love where it's impossible to know what you want, and where every act of reaching out lacerates you more deeply, and expression is impossible because no matter how hard you try you'll inevitably fall at odd angles to each other's needs.

(Tanweer 2014: 59)

He used to hate his father's poetry since it epitomised for him his father's selfish idealism. He realises now that 'your father wrote poetry to find a language for his wounds. Yes: you in your own way have become your father' (2014: 59). In a moment of great communal ordeal, he becomes aware of others' pains, which allows him to put his own internal suffering into perspective. At the end of the story, he hears another crash. This completely smashes the

remaining glass of the windows, and they make ‘a huge mess on the floor’. In the meanwhile, he notices that ‘the door is still open’. The complete destruction of the windows signals to the protagonist that it is time for his book to be ‘rewritten’ (2014: 61). As the windows go missing and the door remains open, the boundary between the self and his objective world becomes porous and permeable. Something of him is now outside, and something of the outside is now inside of him. The newly found interconnectedness between him and others forces him to open up, expand, and transform his perspective. In the narrative, all of this is happening not to the third-person ‘him’ but to the second-person ‘you’. The second-person voice draws the readers both internally into the subjective side of the broken window and externally to others’ sufferings in the real world. Readers are invited to feel the pain of the protagonist and to empathise with those who suffer the violence which breaks out all too often in the author’s beloved city of Karachi, which he describes as ‘broken, beautiful, and born of tremendous violence’ (2014: 1).

Conclusion: an open invitation to an ongoing conversation

No scientist goes into an experiment knowing exactly what the outcome will be. Writers start from a similar position of uncertainty when they engage in a creative project. Hamid and Tanweer experiment with narrative perspectives in their fiction to make better sense of the connection and tension between the local and the global, and their subjectivity and the world outside. Through experimenting with perspectives, they start a conversation between their own split selves and a world marred by corruption and violence. Writing in itself is not an end to the experiment though. Readers play an important part in the complex system of relations that is narrative perspective. The novels examined in this chapter seek to meaningfully implicate readers in the construction of their perspectives. As such, the conversation remains open and ongoing, and the novels’ points of view still in flux.

Note

- 1 This quotation is taken from Premila Paul’s essay ‘The Master’s Language and its Indian Uses’, where she discusses the mature reception of Arundhati Roy’s novel among the English-speaking readership: ‘Readers both in India and abroad also have come a long way in their relationship with English. There is growth towards maturity in this relationship. A practitioner of English is no longer dubbed a traitor to the Indian cause. Roy’s novel has shown that the basic difference between the culture of the writer and the culture of the reader is no barrier to communication’ (2003: 364).

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