

The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Mohsin Hamid.
Hamish Hamilton 2007.

For a novel that only runs to 184 pages, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* packs a huge punch. Set in Lahore, over an extended meal in a back street café, the story has one principal character, Changez, a brilliant, US educated Pakistani who has returned home from the States following the 9/11 attacks on New York.

His companion, who never speaks, is an uneasy, jumpy listener, whose purpose is never defined, but who infuses Changez' telling of his personal story with menace and danger. The conclusion is dark in every way, and the fate that awaits Changez as he walks his guest back to his hotel can only be imagined.

Mohsin Hamid seeks to answer, or at least to wrestle with, the conundrum of the radicalisation of so many highly educated and westernised Muslims both before and since the attacks on America in 2001. His character is an intensely sympathetic one and the reader is carried along with him as he is affected by events beyond his control and completely changes his life.

The message contained in this novel is profound, and not to be ignored, and the quality of Hamid's writing is very high.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh