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Summer Reading Comparative Essay

Same Story Different Title

There is always more to a story than what meets the eye. Whether it be a simple meal, a symbolic meaning, or the cloudy skies that reside over a city, Thomas C. Foster states that all books share similarities in structure and pattern. To put Foster’s statement to the test, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid and *The Fall* by Albert Camus are compared to his analytical bestseller, *How to Read Literature Like a Professor.*

*The Fall,* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, contain elusive pasts and present sorrows shared through communion. In *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*, Foster says, “Sometimes a meal is just a meal… more often than not, though, it’s not” (Foster 7) and throughout both of the novels the acts of communion represent something more than just tea or gin. For example, in *the Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Hamid places a Pakistani and an American at a cafe located in the capital of Pakistan: Lahore. Throughout the meal Changez, the Pakistani, tells the anonymous American about his experience in the United States. They are able to be open with each other because of what is bringing them together, the meal. A “well run meal portends good things for community and understanding” (11), which could be applied to this situation as they had different values and beliefs but were able to maintain a civilized conversation. Communion is a rather intimate act that you don’t partake in with just anyone. People from different backgrounds can all agree on the fundamentals of eating, which opens up the opportunity to exchange thoughts and feelings. In *the Fall* Jean-Baptiste is able to open up because of the meal being had, the more gin he consumed the more open he became. In the beginning Jean-Baptiste fuels the conversation by observing “the worthy ape” (Camus 4), who runs the bar they are occupying. As he consumes more gin the reader finds that antagonist gradually exposes himself, “with me there is no giving of absolution or blessing” (131), so as their meal continues the more comfortable they become. Though the American sees the world in a different light, and Jean Baptiste may live his life differently than the novel's protagonist, Foster reminds readers that despite many differences, all people have one thing in common, the way we partake in a meal. This prompt highlights the importance of humanity, that at the end of the day we can all find an equilibrium regardless of who we are or what we have done.

Next to communion, weather is a major component in any story given that it often affects the mood, reflects the atmosphere, or resembles characters in a novel. In the *Reluctant Fundamentalist* the audience is presented with a situation in which the rain is not yet ready to fall therefore, “it isn’t quite happening, and we can’t be sure of its effect when it does fall” (Foster 76). Which tells the audience that something might happen soon but not yet. This is relevant to the novel because it gives the reader an idea of where the characters are at in life. Changez isn’t ready to let go of his connections with his past. The caged nostalgia for his lover, Erica, and the lifestyle he left behind when parting with the United States. He obsessively reads the “Princeton Alumni Weekly*”* paying “particular attention to the class notes and obituaries sections” (Hamid 174), indicating that he is still holding on to Erica’s disappearance and is seeking closure. If Mahid wanted Changez to be cleansed of his pain, he could have allowed the rain to fall. Foster says, “if you want a character to be cleansed symbolically let him walk through the rain” (Foster 77). The lack of water represents Changez’s current state of sorrow and emptiness. The novel closes with cloudy, rain suspecting skies. Allowing the reader to infer that Changez is not where he used to be, not yet cleansed but close to the renewing process.

Jean-Baptiste said , “It was an hour past midnight, a fine rain was falling, a drizzle rather, that scattered a few people on the streets” (Camus 69), when describing the night in which the young woman jumped into a nearby river. His illustration of the weather sets the mood for the scene. Though rain can symbolically purify a character it can also be “more mysterious, murkier, more isolating than most other weather conditions” (Foster 76), and since the weather is murkier in this situation the reader can sense a heaviness over the character. In *The Fall* Jean-Baptiste feels the isolating effect of his guilt over not helping the woman, and doesn’t read the papers for several days because of this. Here the rain only represents a more complicated or “muddy” situation. Though weather symbolizes different things, in *The Fall* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* Foster reminds readers that weather can be used in a variety of ways, to convey meaning, create symbols, and enhance the atmosphere of any given scene.

Similar to weather, symbols often have a deeper meaning. In both novels, the use of symbols is common to help further understand the building blocks both authors create. Foster tells his audience that there are “some symbols that work straightforwardly”(98), but often they contain depth that can branch off into a variety of meanings. Erica in, the *Reluctant Fundamentalist*, is presented as Changez’s love interest that he becomes attached to, symbolically Erica represents America and the ties he has with it that he will never be able to let go of. This relationship creates many problems for him down the road. In the beginning of their relationship Erica is interested in learning about Changez life in Pakistan but after the terrorist attack she is only concerned with her problems, disregarding his.

Similarly after 9/11 America’s interests shifted from an open society to one that was closed, representing the start of Changez decline in American society. While in America Changez works for a prestigious, high - end valuation firm called Underwood Samson. The firm symbolizes the economic power that the United States holds, and that this power can hurt others which is supported when Changez says, “Does it trouble you to make your living by disrupting the lives of others” (Hamid 151)? This question was contradicted with the statement that the company couldn’t control who got hurt, they only started the process and what happened after that was out of their hands. Out of the given context, the quote can symbolize America’s state of mind during post 9/11 revenge attacks. This Opened up Changez’s eyes to the selfishness that resided in the place he was living.

Likewise, in *The Fall*  Jean-Baptiste Clemence profession as a judge-penitent is ironic given that throughout his confession he fears being judged. He shares his idea that, “people hasten to judge in order not to be judged themselves”(Camus 77), in saying this he is relating his own issues with judgment to everyone else, claiming that this is a common truth, therefore he can not be judged based on his judgment because he is not the only one. Since Jean feels that there is no way to escape judgment, he becomes an exemplary citizen that few would be quick to judge. Now he judges himself while condemning everyone else. His fear takes over his life and causes him to be consumed by his and others shameful acts and the hypocrisy compels him to share his story. At the end of *The Fall* it is revealed that Jean bought a stolen painting called the “The Just Judges” from a man in Mexico City. The painting is a symbol of how controlling he is. Jean Baptiste enjoys being at the top of the ladder and hiding the painting of the judges from the bar allowed him to be the only judge. Alternately the water mentioned in the novel symbolizes baptism, or lack thereof. Jean-Baptiste knows he cannot escape his sins, one of which was allowing someone to drown. Baptism is as close to becoming clean as he can get, but even that has been poisoned. He chooses to live in a city surrounded by water and fog because there is no where else that he feels he deserves to live. Both his job and place he lives represent his mistakes and fears.

Though not all books are specifically manipulated to fit certain standards, many of them correlate to *How to Read Literature Like a Professor,* whether they intend to or not. There is always a depth to a meal, a meaning behind an item that stands out, and a story behind the weather. Mohsin Hamid and Albert Camus help reinforce this idea in their Foster complying novels, *The Fall* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist.*

Works Cited [rubric](http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson275/compcon_rubric.pdf)

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