

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A few years ago, I was introduced to Mohsin Hamid, when he was last here for an event organised by the John Adams. I will never forget the astonishment on his face when we first met. He had just learnt that, like him, I was of Pakistani descent, that like him, I was a lawyer, and most significantly, that I too was a writer, a novelist who wrote about the Pakistani immigrant experience. He wondered why he hadn't ever heard of me? So, we came to talk about my books. And he soon found out I wrote in Dutch. Then he just looked at me and simply asked 'Why don't you write in English?'

I had been asked that question before, by many others.

But somehow when Mohsin Hamid asked me, it stuck.

And over the years, as I admired more of his work, and as I also started admiring the role he plays in literature, I came to understand why that question stuck.

Mohsin Hamid is an author who challenges people to imagine new futures for themselves, better futures. I guess he challenged me to imagine a new authorship for myself, so that more people could read what I write, and so that my writing, through that reading, might benefit.

Mohsin Hamid challenges many others. He is an author who not only has a great following of readers but also a great following of writers and potential writers, especially in his home country of Pakistan - young people who are maybe expected to become lawyers or doctors –because that is what Pakistani parents mostly want for their children - but these young people, inspired hugely by authors like Hamid, are imagining new futures for themselves. A future of telling stories, stories that shape our thinking of ourselves and of the other.

And this is exactly what Mohsin Hamid does with his stories. He invites us to imagine new futures, better futures, a better humanity, a better equality, for ourselves, for others.

And tonight, I will invite the author to share his views on these topics.

First, let me tell you a little about his background.

Mohsin Hamid spent his childhood in Pakistan and the US, he studied at Princeton University and Harvard Law School, he practised as a corporate lawyer and a management consultant, in the US and the UK.

His first novel, *Moth Smoke* was published in 2000. It is a compelling story of the struggles of an ex-banker in modern day Lahore, an imaginative, rich and daring novel which showed Hamid's literary talents – it was selected as finalist for the PEN/Hemingway Award.

Seven years later came *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, an experimental and inventive book, now about a young Pakistani man with a successful career in New York, who starts feeling strongly out of place in a post 9/11 America. Besides receiving several awards, the novel was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, was a New York Times bestseller and was adapted into a beautiful film by director Mira Nair.

Next, in 2013 came *How to Become Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. Again Mohsin Hamid connects to world affairs, this time to the 'new rich' in Asia. And again he is not shy to experiment, as this novel has the structure of a self-help book, engaging the reader as if he is reading a self-help book. Soon after, the book *Discontent and its Civilizations* was published, which in the words of the Guardian has 'moving

and beautifully spare essays.’ The book covers some major topics of our times, from literary techniques to terrorism, from humanity to hybridity, calling all humans ‘migrants through time.’

And his fans will be happy that he is writing his novels quicker: this year has seen the launch of *Exit West*, a tale of migration, emerging in the midst of the refugee and migrant crisis. Hamid, who believes in the right to migration, tells the story of two young people migrating to safe places through magic doors. There is even a wonderful scene featuring the Prinsengracht in this highly praised novel.

So, ladies and gentlemen, here on the Prinsengracht, please join me in welcoming Mohsin Hamid!