A pre-9/11 novel: *Kapitoil* by Teddy Wayne

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Abstract

Kapitoil *is a 2010 novel by American writer Teddy Wayne. In accordance with the author's view that any novel narrated in the first person should be labelled "idiosyncratic," this work certainly offers such a voice. The novel is narrated by a young Muslim man from Qatar who arrives in New York to work as a computer programmer in a major US corporation. His status of an "ultranerd," cultural outsider and ESL learner makes for most of the humour of the book. However, at its core are serious questions concerning cultural clash, capitalism, globalisation and morality, as – set in 1999, and depicting a character with a vision which becomes drastically revised –* Kapitoil *provides a background to the current economic crisis. The author calls it "a pre-9/11 novel." In the paper I examine this new label by locating the novel against the post-9/11 genre and its emergent "second generation," the so-called postcolonial post-9/11 novel exemplified by Mohsin Hamid's* The Reluctant Fundamentalist *(2007).*

Keywords

9/11, post-9/11 novel, Teddy Wayne, *Kapitoil*, Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, cultural clash

Roughly in the middle of the recent Martin Scorsese film *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013), based on a true story, the main character, a corrupt stockbroker, gives a motivational speech to his employees. Jordan Belfort gives many motivational speeches, at which he excels; however, this one is truly a turning point mid-way through the film, as it is going to earn his company, Stratton Oakmont, 22 million dollars in three hours. What makes the speech so effective is the ego-boosting comparison of Belfort's telephone--wielding employees, predominantly testosterone-driven aspiring machos, to Marines armed with M16 riffles. This is what the general leading this army says:

> See, it's the action of a highly trained Marine – a trained killer – that turns an M16 into a deadly weapon. And in the case of the telephone it's the action of you – a highly trained Strattonite, a highly trained killer who won't take no for an answer, who won't hang up the phone until his client either buys or dies, someone who's fully aware that there's a sale being made on every single phone call and that it's only a question of who's selling who.[1]

In other words, business is a zero-sum game, business is war. But war can also be very good business, and this is one of the main problems addressed in the 2010 novel *Kapitoil* by the American writer Teddy Wayne. *Kapitoil* is a very different kind of book from the kind of film that is *The Wolf of Wall Street* and this is exactly why these two works are being juxtaposed in this article. Another evocative piece of advice that Belfort gives to his "Marines" is: "I want you to deal with your problems by becoming rich!"[2] In this paper I will be looking at how *Kapitoil* offers an alternative take on the culture of capitalism in a narrative that is itself an alternative take on the post-9/11 genre. *Kapitoil*'s protagonist Karim Issar grows to realise that becoming rich, the ways in which the

1 Jordan Belfort, *The Wolf of Wall Street*, *bestlibrary.net.*, 2010, accessed February 14, 2014, http://www.bestlibraryspot.net/book/The_Wolf_of_Wall_Street/index_18.html.

2 *The Wolf of Wall Street*, directed by Martin Scorsese (2013).

rich become richer, is a problem, and so he comes to reject an opportunity to become rich himself in order to help other people with their struggles caused by disasters such as war. Karim realizes that "Sometimes you do not truly observe something until you study it in reverse."[3] Wayne's character certainly does apply a different optic to the wolfish world of Wall Street after a number of realisations, the explanation of which requires me to proceed from the conclusion of the novel to its beginning.

Teddy Wayne was born in 1979 in New York, where he still lives. He is a graduate of Harvard and Washington University in St. Louis, where he taught creative writing. His work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, *Vanity Fair*, *Time*, *Esquire* , *McSweeney's*, *USA Today*, and elsewhere. *Kapitoil* is his debut novel, for which he has received several awards. The immediate source of inspiration for the novel was Wayne's post-college work for a website as an editor of graduate-school application essays to American business schools coming mainly from Chinese, Japanese and South Korean candidates.[4] As the author says in an interview: "while their grammar was usually butchered, their techno-financial vocabularies were extensive and all-consuming. […] That planted the seed for a protagonist who had learned English and assimilated American values through the filter of late-capitalist jargon."[5] What is more, the basic idea for shaping this protagonist was that he "was so immersed in the language [...] that he not only wrote and spoke in it, but thought in it" too.[6] What made this character very different from the nascent Jordan Belfort, however, was above all his non-American and non--Western origin. In fact, Karim Issar is a Muslim from Doha, Qatar. He is a computer programmer in his twenties who arrives in New York to work for a major corporation, Schrub Equities. The time of his arrival and sojourn in the US is significant: it covers the last three months of 1999 and thus of the 20th century. The reason for Karim's employment in the equity firm is the Y2K or Millennium Bug scare. On the part of the author, choosing such a setting was motivated by his own wariness: his misgivings about the (post-)9/11 genre.

"The main strategy" – said the author in an interview – "was not to write a '9/11 novel,' by setting it in 1999."[7] In Wayne's diagnosis of most Western popular literary responses to the aftermath of 9/11,[8] "we've exhausted the conceits of these novels, which either restate the obvious (New Yorkers felt anxious after September 11; Muslims were and still are persecuted) or, worse, predatorily use 9/11 as a device to add dimension and weight to slight stories."[9] Setting the novel "well before the attacks" the author

3 Teddy Wayne, *Kapitoil* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010), 11.

4 Teddy Wayne, "A Pre-9/11 Novel," in *Kapitoil*, by Teddy Wayne (New York: Harper Perrenial, 2010), 8.

5 Jason Chen, "The First Funny Novel about Oil," *gq.com*, April 13, 2010, accessed February 10, 2014, http://www.gq.com/blogs/the-q/2010/04/the-first-funny-novel-about-oil.html.

6 Teddy Wayne, "How Business Jargon Inspired a New Novel," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 18, 2010, accessed February 10, 2014, http://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2010/05/18/how-business-jargon-inspired-a-new-novel/.

7 Matthew Love, "Teddy Wayne," *Timeout*, May 17, 2010, http://www.timeout.com/newyork/books/teddy-wayne (February 10, 2014)

8 For more on the subject, see Ewa Kowal, *The Image-Event in the Early Post-9/11 Novel: Literary Representations of Terror After September 11, 2001* (Kraków: Jagiellonian Press, 2012).

9 Love, "Teddy Wayne."

managed to "avoid these traps,"[10] and perhaps much more: he calls *Kapitoil* a "pre-9/11 novel,"[11] which may have initiated a new "(sub-)genre" in the post-9/11 literary discourse.

However, critical opinion on this kind of nomenclature is divided. Several reviews show that the new term has not caught on, as critics still, observing the novel's publication date rather than its temporal setting, include *Kapitoil* in the *post*-9/11 genre; responses range from either praising it profusely[12] to misguidedly condemning it for the collective shortcomings of such novels as Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) and Joseph O'Neil's *Netherland* (2008).[13] At the same time, the novel has also been included in the non-9/11-related genre of "Wall Street novel" or "immigrant novel."[14] In fact, Wayne himself has asserted that "what [he] was going for overall" was

> an immigrant novel for the age of globalization, in which a foreigner coming to America to send money back home may now be here on a three--month work visa, work a high-skill white-collar job in a corner office, and make far more money than his literary creator.[15]

This last term, the "immigrant novel," may correspond with "the new kind of narrative called the global, planetary, international or simply 'world' novel" which, apparently, "ambitious writers have been imagining" "since at least the late 1980s."[16] Interestingly, all but one of the above types of novel applied to *Kapitoil*, i.e. "post-9/11," "Wall Street," "immigrant" and "world,"[17] come together in another work, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007). Hamid's novel has also been discussed[18] as the most prominent example thus far of yet another subgenre, the so-called postcolonial post-9/11 novel. As I will show below, this is not the only reason why Hamid's work might serve as a useful point of reference for *Kapitoil*, as juxtaposing the two novels reveals illuminating similarities *and* differences between them.

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10 Mike Sacks, "With *Kapitoil*, Teddy Wayne Invents – and Perfects! – the Pre-9/11 Novel," *Vanity* Fair, April 12, 2010, accessed February 10, 2014, http://www.vanityfair.com/online/daily/2010/04/with-kapitoil-teddy-wayne-inventsand-perfectspre-911-novel.

11 Wayne, "A Pre-9/11 Novel."

12 Anis Shivani, "The Best Post-9/11 Novel: Huffington Post Interviews Teddy Wayne, Author of 'Kapitoil'," *Vanity Fair*, June 7, 2010, accessed February 14, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/anis-shivani/the-best-post-911-novel-i_b_602522.html.

13 Malreddy Pavan Kumar, "Orientalism and Terrorism: Theory, Text and Images after 9/11," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* Vol. 48, No. 3 (July 2012): 7.

14 Anis Shivani, "Stranger in a Strange Land," boston.com, April 25, 2010, accessed February 10, 2014, http://www.boston.com/ae/books/articles/2010/04/25/stranger_in_a_strange_land/.

15 Shivani, "The Best."

16 Caren Irr, "Toward the World Novel: Genre Shifts in Twenty-First-Century Expatriate Fiction," *American Literary History* Vol. 23, No. 3 (2011): 660.

17 As it seems, what "world" usually means is a relationship between the US and the *rest* of the world in the form of whichever other country. An even more USA-centric reading of the word "world" is discussed in Richard Gray's essay ("Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis," *American Literary History* 21.1 (2009): 128-148). Gray cites Ishmael Reed's "America: The Multinational Society," in which Reed refers to America saying "The world is here." As Gray explains, Reed was right "for two seminal reasons. The first is that particular ethnic groups that have been here for centuries have gained additional presence and prominence. [...] The second has to do with that perennial seedbed of change in America, immigration" (Gray, "Open Doors," 128-129).

18 See Hartnell and Sigh as well as my own forthcoming essay "The Hidden Dialogue(s) in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*."

Both novels' main characters are outsiders in New York; both are Muslim, however, Hamid's character, Changez, just like the author, comes from Pakistan. Both young men are well-educated and ambitious; Karim, however, comes from a poorer background than Changez, and is even more of a self-made man. Both protagonists work for huge US corporations and they meet their bosses, two "masters of the universe," who mentor them, although partly because of a larger age difference Derek Schrub acts almost as a father figure for Karim. Both Karim and Changez are compelled to revise their views on the Western economic system, reject America, and return home, having each experienced love affairs with American women. In the case of Changez, his affair with Erica, usually read symbolically by critics as AM-Erica, ended unhappily, probably even tragically. For Karim his relationship with his Jewish co-worker Rebecca Goldman was happy and may even continue, although it is not likely to due to geographical distance.

The final and major similarity between the two works is that they both are novels of voices: their protagonists speak their own very idiosyncratic kinds of English, each of which constantly underscores the character's outsider status in the Western world. Changez's mastery of language is a confident display of control and defiance: his multi-syllable vocabulary, complex syntax and perfect grammar stem from his "quasi--Victorian, elite, private schooling" in Lahore.[19] In contrast, Karim is an autodidactic ESL learner whose knowledge of English prior to his visit to America came predominantly from *The International Business Person's Guide to English*, and his "nighttime classes in programming and mathematics and economics."[20] As the author decided, "a character with such a mathematically precise mind would [...] use nearly impeccable grammar,"[21] and Karim is indeed hypercorrect in this area, often to great comic effect, as he never fails to apply his formal register even in the most informal situations. What makes for most of the humour of the book, however, is the *combination* of Karim's limited and often contextually inappropriate vocabulary, his foreignness (coming from a different culture) and his nerdiness, all of which in his environment makes him sound like someone from a different planet. As the author said about him, "he's nearly a machine."[22] This is e.g. how Karim describes a glass of wine: "the wine centripetally orbited around the interior."[23] About Rebecca he observes: "Her smile deletes. [...] she leaves so quickly for the restroom that her chair makes a 270-degree rotation afterward."[24] About himself he observes, "I can converse merely in one mode, which is a skill set I must enhance to grow as a business leader."[25] This "one mode" of conversing may be a sign of Asperger's syndrome, of Karim's single-minded genius, or, as one of his colleagues puts it, may simply be "Karim-esque."[26] Karim does constantly enhance his linguistic "skill set" by always carrying with him a voice recorder so that he can record and re-listen to all the conversations he engages in, later listing new words and phrases in alphabetical order.

19 Harleen Singh, "Deconstructing Terror: Interview with Mohsin Hamid on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007). Conducted via telephone on November 12, 2007," *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* Vol. 42, No. 2 (2012): 154.

20 Wayne, *Kapitoil*, 5.

21 Wayne, "A Pre-9/11 Novel," 9.

22 Shivani, "The Best."

23 Wayne, *Kapitoil*, 164.

24 Wayne, *Kapitoil*, 16.

25 Wayne, *Kapitoil*, 31.

26 Wayne, *Kapitoil*, 26.

The lists are an important element of the structure of the novel, which takes the form of Karim's personal journal. It covers three months and contains thirty entries, starting on October 3rd and ending on December 31st 1999.

This 1st-person narrative mode is the major formal difference between *Kapitoil* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which is written in the rare 2nd-person narrative of a dramatic monologue. However, to both texts we could apply the Russian formalist term of *ostranenie* or defamiliarisation. In Wayne's work, the carrier of the technique is language expressing a unique optic. In Hamid's novel, defamiliarisation is achieved also through language, but mainly through the unusual, challenging and strongly engaging narrative form. Another difference is that the more radical form of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* conveys a more radical message. Hamid's novel is set in the post-9/11 world, with flashbacks to Changez's arrival and first experiences in America ca. 2000 and 2001. These recollections are, however, at the moment of his speaking seen entirely through the prism of what came next. In *Kapitoil*, we see only what had come before, in what many in the Western world are now tempted to perceive as a more innocent and benevolent time. This is precisely what Teddy Wayne is reluctant to do, noting that "our innocence was, in fact, closer to ignorance, and our prosperity was a castle built on sand and false promises."[27]

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* the castle has already collapsed, spilling debris across the world. While Wayne's Karim left the US *before* he could witness the post-9/11 treatment of all Muslims in America, Changez *did* witness it. Karim left the US disillusioned and disappointed; Changez left the US disgusted and determined to "disengage" Pakistan from the US.[28] We can only imagine how Karim would have reacted to the aftermath of 9/11; we know, on the other hand, that Changez grew a beard[29] and became a university lecturer in Lahore, telling his students "among other things that no country inflicts death so readily upon the inhabitants of other countries, frightens so many people so far away, as America,"[30] and persuading his students to participate in demonstrations "that the foreign press would later [...] come to label anti-American."[31] Although, as he claims, he is "a believer in non-violence,"[32] one of his students plotted to assassinate a US diplomat,[33] which is probably why, in the frame story of the novel, Changez is talking to "an American" who appears to be a CIA agent.

To conclude the comparison between Wayne's and Hamid's novels, although they both address capitalism and the basis of the current economic crisis, only *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* goes so far as to draw an analogy between capitalism and Islamist fundamentalism. Accordingly, there is a significant difference in tone: while *Kapitoil* is pre-9/11 humorous, Hamid's narrator is post-9/11 ironic. It is probably quite relevant to again stress here that Mohsin Hamid is Pakistani-born and now again Pakistani-based; he is also a US-educated (Princeton and Harvard) holder of a British passport. In contrast, Teddy Wayne is an American living in New York. As one reviewer of *Kapitoil* has said,

27 Love, "Teddy Wayne."

28 Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2007), 179.

29 In a contrary view, Wayne sees this reaction of an innocent Muslim character in a post-9/11 novel as a cliché and one of the traps he hoped to avoid (Sacks, "With *Kapitoil*").

30 Hamid, *The Reluctant*, 182.

31 Hamid, *The Reluctant*, 179.

32 Hamid, *The Reluctant*, 181.

33 Hamid, *The Reluctant*, 181.

"I would love to read a review of this book written by a Qatari programmer";[34] I would love to read such a review by anyone from Qatar. We can probably trust the Pakistani Hamid's representation of his Pakistani protagonist (who shares with him several important autobiographical characteristics). But would a Qatari reader find in Karim a convincing portrayal of a Qatari (admittedly quirky and nerdy) man's likely response to America?

Already this question signals the central theme of *Kapitoil*: the contrast and relationship between the margin and the centre. One aspect of this dichotomy is the relationship between the American author and his Middle-Eastern character; another is the one between the USA, which will remain at least for the next few decades "the world's superpower,"[35] and Qatar, a wealthy but small and "young" country, having gained independence from Britain only in 1971. As one critic has noticed,

> the text is about the relation of the centre to the margin at a time when those relations are eroding. Juxtaposed with Karim's move to the centre of the global finance is the novel's dramatization of how it might be possible to see the world as all margin, with no center.[36]

Interestingly, this fresh perspective is introduced in the book via Jackson Pollock's abstract expressionist paintings. Thanks to his famous technique of "drip" or "action" painting, Pollock could move around his large canvas, which was spread out on the floor, and as the artist described it, "literally be in the painting."[37] In this way, "[t]here is no inside or outside to Pollock's line or to the space through which it moves."[38] This is exactly what Karim realises when shortly after his arrival in New York he visits the Museum of Modern Art. Next to a painting by Pollock, he reads a quote from the artist: "My paintings do not have a center, but depend on the same amount of interest throughout."[39] As Karim realises that he and Pollock share a similar philosophy, "which is that life is ultimately predictable" (Pollock affirmed: "I don't use the accident – I deny the accident"),[40] Karim is inspired by the art to create his own stock market programme. He decides to take advantage of the fact that as a non-Westerner and a non-native speaker of English, he is more likely to devote "the same amount of interest throughout" his object of interest, "the centre of the global finance" and the stock market, instead of concentrating on the usual "most central variables";[41] furthermore, he is likely to pay attention to variables "that no one else observes because they seem tangential."[42] In other words, those from the centre focus on the centre; those who arrive in the centre from the margins come with a fresh, peripheral perspective which can prove profitable.

Outsiders' points of view have often been "profitable" for authors and readers in the history of literature. Karim profits from his outsider's perspective by creating

34 Wendy M. Grossman, Review of *Kapitoil*, by Teddy Wayne, *ZDNet*, August 11, 2011, accessed February 10, 2014, http://www.zdnet.com/book-review-kapitoil-4010024182/.

35 Jonathan Adelman, "Why The U.S. Remains The World's Unchallenged Superpower," *forbes.com*, November 24, 2013, accessed February 22, 2014, http://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2013/11/24/why-the-u-s-remains-the-worlds-unchallenged-superpower/.

36 Daniel Worden, "Oil Abstractions," *American Book Review* Vol. 33, No 3 (March-April 2012): 16.

37 Jackson Pollock, in *Jackson Pollock*, by Kirk Varnedoe (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 48.

38 Michael Fried, "Jackson Pollock" in *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, by Pepe Karmel (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 98.

39 Wayne, *Kapitoil*, 19.

40 Wayne, *Kapitoil*, 17.

41 Wayne, *Kapitoil*, 19.

42 Wayne, *Kapitoil*, 19.

an algorithmic programme in which phrases appearing in the media such us "Middle East," "Iraq," "terrorist attack," "war," but also expressions which are not always directly associated with violence e.g. "government leaders' meeting," are correlated to the prices of crude oil futures in order to predict them. Importantly, right before Karim completes his Pollock-inspired programme, which he calls Kapitoil, he has the following reflection:

> only when I am nearly finished and my cursor is on the word 'casualties' do I evaluate the big picture of what I am creating. When violence occurs, especially in the Middle East, my programme will attempt to leverage it for financial gain. But this violence will happen with or without my programme. Therefore, by making money, the programme produces at least some positives from a very negative situation. It turns the violence into a zero-sum game, because the money and violence cancel each other out, instead of producing exclusively a negative game.[43]

At this very early stage, before the programme has actually earned any money, it suddenly does occur to Karim that there is a moral or ethical "big picture" behind what he is trying to do, just as in a few years' time there will be a literal "big picture" behind a cursor – this time not on the word "casualties" but on the image of casualties on a different kind of computer screen. However, Karim's approach to this intuited "big picture" resembles his analysis of Pollock's picture – in other words, it is an entirely logical and detached-from-reality take on a pure abstraction. The broad and somewhat vague word "violence" that Karim uses instead of "war" or "attack" indicates both a pre-9/11 "innocence" and Karim's naďve rationalisation, which is most visible in his blithely simplistic equation: war (-) + money (+) = 0, which is *better* than just (-). He fails to realise yet that the (-) that is war can be created deliberately so that there is the (+) that is money, and that the supposed 0 does not exist because those from whom a quantity is subtracted are not the same people as those to whom a quantity is added.

This realisation comes to Karim when the notional, impersonal words "casualties" and a "terrorist attack" in the "Middle East" become an actual event involving a person who is very close to him: his beloved sister Zahira. Tellingly, the terrorist attack in this simultaneously post- and pre-9/11 American novel happens in December 1999 in Doha, Qatar, not in September 2001 in New York, USA. The bomb is small and "explode[s] in a trash bin in the Mall,"[44] not in the massive World Trade Center, where Karim works. The protagonist's sister is mildly injured in the attack, yet the monitor displaying news headlines in the American company Karim is employed at does not even register the incident. What Karim, however, registers immediately after making this observation is the change in his perception of the Schrub Equities logo: hitherto he had seen it as "a flying black hawk transporting the letters S and E in its two feet" or "setting them down."[45] Now the hawk looks "as if it were picking them up in its talons"[46] like a bird of prey.[47] Indeed, the first time the World Trade Center itself is mentioned in the novel, the logo is mentioned too: Karim touches the three-dimensional hawk attached to the wall and "a sharp corner of its wing slightly pains [his] finger."[48] Another foreshadowing

43 Wayne, *Kapitoil*, 42.

44 Wayne, *Kapitoil*, 266.

45 Wayne, *Kapitoil*, 10, 267.

46 Wayne, *Kapitoil*, 267.

47 The Black Hawk is also widely known as the name of a helicopter used by the US army since 1979, including in the Middle East.

48 Wayne, *Kapitoil*, 13.

of future events occurs when Karim meets Derek Schrub himself: his boss's "tie is dark red like blood that has dried."[49] It is also no coincidence that a homophone of the name Schrub is a synonym for Bush.[50]

The consequence of the terrorist attack affecting Karim's sister in his native country and of the shift it brings about in Karim's perception is that it leads to his final decision about Kapitoil. Karim decides not to sign the contract that Schrub has been trying to manipulate him into signing by offering him a large sum of money for the ownership of his intellectual property. Karim resolves to rewrite his programme so that it would use similar variables and phrases in the media headlines such as "political unrest," "poverty" and "sanitation," this time, however, not to profit from predicting the prices of oil futures, but to predict the spread of diseases.[51] He then intends to make the code available on the open market,[52] which "might have a significant impact on health in developing countries."[53] By removing his financial gain from the equation, by financially "losing," Karim prevents another type of loss, and in fact promotes gain in the other side in the equation. By this point, on his last day in America Karim has come to the conclusion that "one party's victory always causes another party's defeat," and Schrub "was driven only by winning."[54]

The simple metaphor that illustrates this formula, and accompanies the scene of Karim's saying good-bye to Schrub and to Wall Street on New Year's Eve 1999, involves dozens of ants, a pigeon and a small piece of bread in Central Park. At first the ants were, in Karim-esque parlance, "aggregating" around the bread, and, as Karim wrote in his journal, "it made me happy that such a small piece of food was sufficient for so many ants."[55] It is not difficult to see here a barely veiled comment on the distribution of wealth in the world; we could even paraphrase Pollock's line quoted earlier to express this: the piece of bread has no centre, but offers the same amount of distribution throughout. However, suddenly, into this scene the abovementioned pigeon "rapidly descended": "It stabbed the piece of bread with its beak and in a second it was deleted, and just as quickly the pigeon vibrated its wings and left behind the ants."[56]

The metaphor may seem cliché, but it is refreshing to find what it is suggesting in an American example of the post-9/11 popular novel as a genre, since, prior to *Kapitoil*, other American works belonging to the genre tended to be entirely self-centred, too focused on American grief and trauma to engage in any geopolitical reflection. While some commentators[57] still in 2009 hoped to find a "de-centering of political and literary narrative"[58] in the American novel after September 11, it was "already available"[59] in 2007 in examples like *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. As one critic has said, Hamid's book

49 Wayne, *Kapitoil*, 69.

50 Teddy Wayne, e-mail message to Ewa Kowal, April 29, 2014.

51 Wayne, *Kapitoil*, 198.

52 Wayne, *Kapitoil*, 281.

53 Wayne, *Kapitoil*, 273.

54 Wayne, *Kapitoil*, 285.

55 Wayne, *Kapitoil*, 282.

56 Wayne, *Kapitoil*, 285.

57 Gray, "Open Doors," 128-148; Michael Rothberg, "A Failure of the Imagination: Diagnosing the Post-9/11 Novel," *American Literary History* 21.1 (2009): 152–58.

58 Harleen Singh, "Insurgent Metaphors: Decentering 9/11 in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*," *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* Vol. 43, No. 1 (2012): 25.

59 Singh, "Insurgent Metaphors," 25.

"subjects the insular tendencies of the American '9/11 novel' to a postcolonial gaze, and in so doing makes manifest the repressed political content of the genre."[60] In 2010 a similar and long-awaited "de-centering" in a mainstream American post-9/11 novel arrived in the form of Teddy Wayne's *Kapitoil*.

It is interesting, however, that for this "de-centering" to take place it was still necessary for the native American novelist to employ two kinds of displacement: temporal and partly spatial. The former consists in setting the book two years before 9/11. The latter distance-forming device is the use of the cultural "Other": the device of a foreigner – a foreigner's eyes and mouth and language. Admittedly, Wayne did state that he was interested in an immigrant experience – and the immigrant experience is an archetypical American topos. Nevertheless, perhaps an analogy could be drawn between this "American-made pseudo-Qatari" introduced into the environment of the "American post-9/11 genre" and the concept of pseudotranslation used in Translation Studies. As Gideon Toury says,

> From the point of view of cultural evolution, the most significant aspect of the production and distribution of texts as if they were translations is the fact that this constitutes a convenient way of introducing novelties into a culture. In fact, it has often been one of the only ways open to a writer to do so without arousing too much antagonism, especially in cultures reluctant to deviate from sanctioned models and norms.[61]

To further paraphrase Toury, texts (assumed to have been) translated from a foreign culture introduce a difference and thus "fill in a gap" or meet a need in the target culture; they change this culture in the process – and they do so more easily and with less resistance than an equally innovative text coming from the same culture would; this is because texts assumed to be translations, coming from the outside, are treated much more welcomingly.[62] It may be said that, by analogy, *Kapitoil* begins to "fill in a gap" in the "American post-9/11 novel" as a genre. And perhaps the novel's two forms of displacement, which somewhat assuage its "de-centering" of America in this genre, could be read as the text's (subconscious) safety measure against charges of anti-capitalist, and thus anti--American, radicalism.

In light of the ongoing economic crisis, it would be interesting to see the next such "de-centering" figured in a post-9/11 popular novel – but this time coming directly from an American born and raised character who engages in contemplating ants,[63] a pigeon and a global piece of bread.

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60 Anna Hartnell, "Moving through America: Race, Place and Resistance in Mohsin Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* Vol. 46, Nos. 3-4 (July/September 2010): 336.

61 Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1995), 41.

62 Toury, *Descriptive Translation*, 27-28, 41-42.

63 In the reprinted version of *Kapitoil* the author felt compelled to replace ants (regrettably, as they "worked better as a symbol of industry") with sparrows, since it had been pointed out to him that ants hibernate in winter (Teddy Wayne, e-mail message to Ewa Kowal, June 29, 2014.) This change, though correcting an entomological error, indeed regrettably results in loss of scale and difference: ants "worked" very well symbolically also because they are a different species from the pigeon.

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