THE ARTIST’S WAY: MOHSIN HAMID
CONFESSES AN ARTISTIC TRAUMA IN HIS
NON-FICTION

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Abstract: While critics take a particular interest in discussing Mohsin Hamid as a novelist of globalization, migration, war, politics, economics, and capitalism, I contend that Hamid manifests a strong interest in, even obsession with, art in his fiction and non-fiction, which also makes him a novelist of art. Relying on his own words in his non-fiction, I argue that Hamid expresses a direct, often indirect concern about his artistic life, which includes his artistic experiences, ways, pursuits, and struggles in the globalized world of art. This article aims to ground my obstinate claim that Hamid symbolically exposes his own artistic life in his fiction in reality; it does this by focusing on Hamid’s non-fiction where his personal confessions can be said to be the most pronounced in contrast to his fiction where these are symbolic and, therefore, less definite. It establishes the basis on which my subsequent claim that Hamid speaks about his artistic experiences in his fiction can stand and, by extension, the claim that his fiction, besides being metafictional, can also be considered autobiographical.

Keywords: Mohsin Hamid, non-fiction, art, artistic trauma, production, publication

The worlds I was creating, and the stories in them, were a starting point for what would become my present profession. I began my first novel 25 years ago [30 years now], when I was not yet 22. I have been writing novels for more than half my lifetime. (Hamid, 2017b)

Writing stories, as Mohsin Hamid tells us, is creating worlds, yet these stories, I suggest, can never be fully impersonal in that they often, and in some way, contain the voice and, by implication, the author who creates them. Art, for the most part, is a place of personal experience, and most of the events and situations told therein are inspired by daily life. Detaching oneself from the artistic work one creates, be it fictional or non-fictional, is not fully possible because we are—whether
we want to face it or not—and to a certain extent, the very product that we produce. We are in our writing and, therefore, subject to our own self-representation, be it consciously or unconsciously. Just like “the political [which] is personal” (Singh, 2012: 152; Hamid, 2014: xviii)—as Hamid reiterates in almost all his non-fiction—the artistic is, to varying degrees, personal, at times intimately so.

In this article, I lay the basis for the claim that Hamid is not detached from his fictional works, stories, characters, and from the situations and experiences he tells us about, but somehow attached to them. To do so, I rely on his non-fiction; I contend that Hamid, in his essays and interviews, expresses a direct, often indirect concern about his own artistic experiences, ways, pursuits, and struggles. I focus on his non-fiction here because, unlike fiction, it is a form of writing that is more rooted in reality and in the personal and can give us less unclear details about Hamid’s artistic life than fiction can. While fiction, I submit, is personal, non-fiction can be more personal in that it can less unclearly acknowledge the influence of personal experiences that are generally exceedingly disguised in fiction. Hamid’s words in his non-fiction can serve as evidence for an artistic situation I believe to be disguised in his fiction and lay the basis on which my subsequent claim can be based, that Hamid, in his fiction, discusses his own artistic experiences through symbols.

This is not to say that the truths non-fiction offers are crystal-clear and reliable. They can be to a certain degree, but like the truths of fiction, they are to be taken with a grain of salt as an artist, even in their non-fiction space, indulges in disguise and misdirection—as already shown in my latest article (Madiou, 2021). However, non-fiction remains more straightforward and clearer in terms of personal truths and, therefore, can help confirm the claim that Hamid is preoccupied with his artistic experiences. Hamid’s non-fiction, because it is more personal, can establish my claim that his fiction, apart from having a metafictional potential (as already discussed in Madiou, 2019) can be considered autobiographical. By autobiography, I do not mean that Hamid’s fiction is autobiographical in the conventional sense of the term, which is defined by the COD as “a personal account of one’s own life” (89), but autobiographical on another plane, meaning Hamid’s fiction gives us, through symbols, snippets and moments of his own experiences. I choose to confine myself to Hamid’s artistic experiences, which, it seems to me, the novelist tends to describe in terms of difficulties. Let us take an example; in addition to describing the publishing world as “nois[y]” in his non-fiction book Discontent and its Civilisations (DC) (2014: 74)—which appears to mean a world of unbearable obstacles—Hamid says, “I do not think that being a novelist is a good profession for anyone’s mental health” (Preston, 2018). Here, Hamid, if taken at his word, describes being a novelist as toxic to one’s health, which implies that being a novelist was difficult for him.
We all go through artistic difficulties. But these are sometimes so prominent in the life of the artist that they find, consciously or unconsciously, expression in the artist’s words and works. This I call artistic trauma (Madiou, 2021: 313), which refers to a direct or indirect expression of the difficulties the artist goes through in their artistic career, projects, pursuits, and endeavors, such as the difficulty of composing their work because, for instance, of writer’s block, and of completing and publishing it because, for instance, of severe editorial and publishing demands, and other constraints, which—depending on the artist’s endurance—can slow down the artist’s progress, even stop the realization of their work. These difficulties are often so severe and so psychologically demoralizing that they also affect the body, its strength, its appearance, its chemicals (such as its smell), and its reactions.

While we often do our utmost to resist trauma, its presence is there. It is expressed even when we claim we have not expressed it and is present even when we claim to have cleansed ourselves of it. The same goes for artistic trauma. The latter manifests itself as diligently as trauma does and, just like trauma, does not show itself clearly; it rather does in the form of symptoms, suggestions, or, in a fictional context, symbols. One of the aims of this article is to try to gather those symptoms and suggestions in Hamid’s non-fiction writings to construct a mock-up of the world of art that he, I believe, symbolically creates in his fiction to express his own artistic trauma. But before tackling Hamid’s fiction, let us focus on his non-fiction where the novelist sometimes appears to quite plainly share with his readers his artistic hard times—although still indirectly at other times. Hamid’s non-fiction offers the chance to prove that Hamid is preoccupied with artistic obstacles, such as writer’s block and the severe demands imposed by the world of publishing. This will later serve as foundation and evidence for the claim that Hamid gives symbolic expression to these obstacles in his fiction.

The Artist and the Intimacies of Creation

It is not easy to know what an artist personally thinks in their fiction or thought during its composition. While some writers take responsibility for their personal declarations and revelations, most writers prefer to hide them from view by way of disguise, which is—it is commonly believed—what makes a work an artistic one. Disguise is resorted to, as Freud teaches us in his essay “Creative Writers and Daydreaming” (1908), because the author fears the reader might discover intimacies about them and use those intimacies against them. The artist, Freud explains, cherishes certain secrets “as his most intimate possessions, and as a rule he would rather confess his misdeeds than tell [them to] anyone” (1908: 422).

An artist’s reputation, for example, and also a work’s, can be threatened by the artist’s revelation of their intimacies—inside or outside their work—or by the
reader discovering them. When learning about those intimacies, the reader not only learns about the artist’s weaknesses, but also about the weaknesses of the work, which may affect its reception, financial stakes, and even the career of the artist who created it. These fears are generally what makes the artist hide the intimate elements of their work, by which I mean the recipe followed in the creation of the work, how the artist survived writer’s block, how they struggled to find inspiration, how they appropriated from other artists, how they patched their work together, how they revised it before publication, what that work looked like before publication, and how it was received by agents, editors, reviewers, and publishers. But fear is not the only factor that makes an artist hide their intimacies; there is that one element, which is hard to define, that needs mention here: the feeling of embarrassment.

Let us take as an example an artistic situation common to all of us. When composing a work, we can become embarrassed about it—mostly when we reread it, after some time not reading it. This embarrassment is generally due to the composition being not well-developed, to the idea not being full-fledged, to the choice of words not being mature enough, to the creator’s declarations being naively expressed and thus unpleasantly clear. It is also due to certain intimate elements being clear in the composition in question and, therefore, still felt by the author, and hence also subject to being felt by the reader. As a result of the awareness that our work is immature, we experience a curious feeling of embarrassment, so much so we may stop, abandon, or decide to resume the (reading of the) composition in question another day as if disgusted by it. The work becomes, to echo Julia Kristeva, “abject” (1982) because it is so intimately expressive of our inner self and secrets and, as it were, is such a denuding of ourselves that it causes embarrassment, abjection. The embarrassment that results from the nakedness of the artist or their exposure in their work is, psychologically speaking, analogous to a person finding themselves naked in front of other people. The subject not wanting other people to see their naked body is due to them not being comfortable with their body and its details, but more importantly to the subject being concerned about the reaction of others. The same applies to the artist’s work; an artist not wanting others to see them naked in their work speaks quite plainly about the artist not being comfortable with their work, but far more importantly about the artist being preoccupied with the reaction of others to their work and its details.

A work that is abject to its artist is a work that is not well-elaborated; that is to say, a work that is not disguised enough and, therefore, expressive of intimacies. A work of this nature can, however, become less abject if the artist disguises it more and makes it less intimate. Disguise happens, for instance, by making a simple declaration convoluted and mysterious and by raising the level of symbolism. A clear work, it is usually believed, is not artistic work because it holds no secret,
does not entertain curiosity and, therefore, does not inspire interest. The same applies when someone tells us a dark secret about their life. If they yield all the details and do not keep up the mystery, the secret in question loses all its charm; in the process, curiosity vanishes and with it the interest in the secret and in the person sharing it with us.

To prevent this threatening situation from unfolding, the artist generally engages in disguise, in dabbling in the symbolic, in tampering with words, in making things unclear, in leaving the audience’s thirst for details unquenched. In writing, this disguise takes many forms, such as symbolism, which includes puns, metaphors, metonymies, allegories, the creation of personae, and other tricks and techniques, such as authorial manipulation which (as discussed in Madiou, 2021) may take the form of authorial lying, misleading, hiding, twisting words, and so on. However, even after such disguise, the feeling of embarrassment may still prevail because the artist is conscious of what they have done and where they have done it. Hence, most writers do not like to read their works after publication; the published work still has residues of those dark secrets and still has the potential to make its creator embarrassed.

One undeniable truth about disguise is that it is translucent, meaning, even if it is deployed, we can still see through it and thus translate it back to its original nature. Disguise does not erase; it simply covers by standing in the way of the clear, the said, the true, and makes it falsely unclear, unsaid, untrue. Trauma, for instance, or in this case artistic trauma, is more often than not disguised in a work. But disguise is paradoxical in that, despite its desire not to show, it shows, despite its desire not to tell, it tells, and despite its desire not to share, it shares. Often, what we want to delete becomes more present and threatening than it was before that attempt at deletion. And often, what we want to delete expresses itself more forcefully. When a bad experience happens to us, for instance, we strive to put it aside and exclude it from our thoughts and reality, yet, in so doing, its force doubles and its presence becomes starker.

This condition applies to the artist and their intimacies; the more the artist tries to hide their intimacies, the clearer these become in their work, or at least the closer they come to being noticed. The same applies to trauma as an intimacy; the more an artist tries to repress it, the more it is liable to come to view, which Derrida explains best in *Specters of Marx*. For Derrida, what is buried winds up coming to the surface like a specter precisely because it is unjustly buried, imprisoned, excluded when it is fully entitled to being free (1994). But let us take an example that is more relevant to the topic at issue. Hamid’s fear that his texts might reveal something intimate and thus extremely personal is (as shown previously in Madiou, 2021) expressed in the various defence mechanisms he uses in his non-fiction. While they protect Hamid as an artist, these mechanisms also
reveal that Hamid strives to keep and protect a secret in his fiction. In this article, I argue that Hamid expresses an artistic trauma in his non-fiction, which will serve at a later stage as evidence for the claim that Hamid symbolically expresses this trauma in his fiction. This artistic trauma, I shall later reveal in more detail, is Hamid’s very secret.

The Reluctant Novelist

It is unusual for a novelist to produce a novel every six or seven years, yet Hamid identifies himself as a follower of this tradition. In the interview “Mohsin Hamid on the Art of Writing,” Hamid says, “I spend about six or seven years on my novels. And they are pretty short novels. Six or seven years each” (Booktopia TV, n.d.: 1:47). In the same interview, Hamid gives us a reason to legitimize this long composition period; he says, “I am always figuring out how to tell the story” (1:47). In another interview, he adds, “I think there’s an appropriate voice for each story, and it takes me years to find it” (Reed, 2013). While “figuring out how to tell a story” and “finding an appropriate voice for each” may take some time, it cannot take six or seven years, which is a bit of an exaggeration.

It is in another interview that Hamid touches on what I believe to be the real reason for this long period. He says, “I stumble around, you know, for years trying to figure out how to do it. . . . The first couple of drafts of this thing [How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia] weren’t a self-help book at all” (Inskeep, 2013). Hamid repeats here the phrase “trying to figure out how to do it,” but what is more important is the word “stumble” which yields, I argue, the true reason why Hamid takes so long to produce his novels. In art, “stumbling” not only refers to artistic stagnation, or writer’s block, but also to other obstacles, such as harsh editorial and publishing requirements, which can legitimately make a work take six/seven years to be completed and published. While “stumbling” has been broached when talking about How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia (HTG), it is, I believe, relevant to Hamid’s other novels, namely Moth Smoke (MS), The Reluctant Fundamentalist (TRF), and Exit West (EW) as he seems to have had a similar production methodology for all of them—which is expressed above when he says, “I spend about six or seven years on my novels” (emphasis added).

In “Mohsin Hamid on the Art of Writing,” Hamid elaborates further on this “stumbling;” he says, “They [his novels] are so short and take so long that my agent sometimes calls me ‘the reluctant novelist’” (Booktopia TV, n.d.: 1:47). The agent here humorously plays with the title of Hamid’s bestseller TRF; “reluctant,” as I understand it in this context of writing, is another word for “prosaic” and alludes to that unproductiveness and procrastination caused by writer’s block. Despite the topic tackled being blatantly about this condition, Hamid does not
mention it at all. In his *Granta Magazine* interview, he once more alludes to it without naming it, “I quite like something that I think Amos Oz once said about the job of being a writer, which is that he goes out in the morning and he opens his store and then he sits there and waits, and some days no customers come, and he sits there and waits, and then he shutters the store and goes home. And that’s a day of writing” (0:32). Here, Hamid tells us—not clearly but through symbols—that writer’s block and shortage of inspiration are routine in the life of the artist, which is granted. However, not mentioning these in clear terms in a context where they must be named makes it a problem. A bad experience, for instance, is generally not called by its name; this unnaming is generally thought to be necessary for the subject to recover from it. The same is true of this artistic situation; Hamid does not call writer’s block by its name because, I argue, this experience has been traumatic to him and also because it is intimate, as shall be explained shortly.

In his non-fiction book, *DC*, Hamid still speaks implicitly about writer’s block, which, he tells us, he experienced during the composition process of his third novel *HTG*. He says, “I was stuck. My third novel was going nowhere” (75). Another example: “Being stuck comes as naturally to me as running is to [Haruki] Murakami” (75). Another one: “I needed to get unstuck. And, nearing the age of forty, I’d already used up many of the usual tricks writers before me had employed to shake things up when they were in a rut” (75). “Stuck” here—as “stumbling” previously—refers indirectly to writer’s block, but as can be noticed once again, Hamid does not name this condition. The reason may be: naming something traumatic can make it more real and its presence more harmful than it already is and, in the process, hamper the artist’s convalescence. Another instance of this tacit concern about writer’s block is found in another interview where Hamid says, “I spend a lot of time sitting in my study procrastinating and staring at my screen and doing nothing” (*PBS NewsHour*, n.d.: 11:20). This passage speaks volumes about Hamid going through writer’s block, which apparently has happened on a number of occasions in his artistic life—a frequency implied in the phrase “spending a lot of time.” In art, “procrastinating” is generally associated with an inability to find a suitable beginning for an artistic project and also with the fear of starting it. “Staring at my screen” implies boredom or, in this case, the writerly boredom caused by writer’s block. As can be seen here again, Hamid alludes to this condition without naming it, which is not only characteristic of a traumatic but also post-traumatic experience of an artistic type.

Another example of Hamid’s opaque allusion to writer’s block can be found in “Mohsin Hamid on the Art of Writing;” he says, “[T]he numerous disasters that occur in the first one, two, three, four years—those are, you know, part of the process of finding the story” (Booktopia TV, n.d.: 2:42). He adds in the same interview, “I understood some of the pitfalls I would face. I’ve now come to not be
so frightened or frustrated about it. I’m still frustrated by them, but I recognize that it is just an essential part of telling stories” (Grant Magazine, n.d.: 2:50). Here, Hamid indirectly talks about writer’s block as one pitfall among many in the artist’s life but, once again, does not refer to it specifically. Hamid rather uses symbols (as seen previously above through Oz’s anecdote) and cryptic comments to talk about it. This, I argue, is an example of disguise; writer’s block being disguised and avoided by Hamid reveals that writer’s block is an issue to him, which is what makes it significant to examine.

While Hamid refrains from mentioning writer’s block, he does not shy away from sharing his difficult experiences with agents, editors, and publishers. The reason is simple: experiences with agents, editors and publishers are not intimate experiences, at least not as intimate as writer’s block. In this context of editing and publishing, I am reminded of TRF. Hamid started writing this novel in the summer of 2000 (mark the season here), which was at that time “an utterly minimalist account of a Pakistani valuation expert who decides to return to Pakistan despite loving New York” (Hamid, 2007a). Because it was judged brief, Hamid went through seven drafts to complete it, yet the artistic project did not start with the seven-draft idea, which is originally the methodology he followed in the production process of his debut novel MS. Hamid in fact wrote just one draft of TRF and submitted it for publication, hoping it could be published as it initially was, but the reviews were negative. Hamid tells us about this in DC (as also glanced at in Madiou, 2021), saying, “[U]pon reading it, my agent told me he was puzzled by the protagonist’s inner conflict: why would so secular and Westernized a Muslim man feel such tension with America?” (68).

Hamid repeats this experience in DC; his first draft, he says, “did not entirely work, unfortunately, as [his] agent and a former editor made clear to [him] when they read it” (69). What should be noticed here is that Hamid, contrary to writer’s block which renders him silent, repeats this agent-editor experience in his non-fiction and almost in similar terms, which also gives away an exhausting, traumatic experience. This exhaustion is expressed in an interview, where the novelist Kamila Shamsie, a friend of Hamid’s, is quoted speaking about her encounter with the novelist shortly after 9/11, on September 12, 2001. She asked him, “‘Mohsin, your novel. . . ?’ […] ‘I don’t know,’ he replied. ‘I think I have to go on writing it’” (quoted in Preston, 2018). Hamid was then writing his first draft of TRF, and his response to Shamsie suggests that he is caught in an insupportable loop of revisions. Even a tinge of artistic fatigue can strangely be felt in his phrase “going on writing it,” which suggests a burden rather than a pleasant experience.

Let us proceed with how TRF was received by Hamid’s editors and publishers to better understand Hamid’s artistic trauma. The fifth draft of TRF was also received negatively by his agent and also by his former editors and publishers. In the Hamish Hamilton interview, Hamid says,
I got an honest reaction to my fifth draft from my agent, Jay Mandel, and from the editor of *Moth Smoke*, Becky Saletan. They said it was a good idea poorly executed. And they were right. I also got an extremely supportive rejection letter from Jonathan Galassi at Farrar Straus & Giroux, who had been a big supporter of *Moth Smoke* and told me he was surprised by my failure to deliver something he could love as much. (2007b)

It is as a result of these negative responses and the obstacles entailed by them that Hamid “resumed [himself] to a process of writing that would mirror that of [his] first novel [MS], which took some seven drafts and seven years to complete” (*DC* 68), hoping *TRF* would be as well-received and published. The novel was started in 2000 and finally published on March 1, 2007, a period which Hamid ironically associates in the Hamish Hamilton interview with “a gestation period” (2007a), which connotes something long and challenging. In an interview titled “The Creative Process,” Hamid sums up the difficulties involved in this “gestation period,” saying that “there was a lengthy process between the first draft of a novel and the final publication. [. . .] The basic plot had remained the same, but various story ideas had evolved with each draft” (Shaukat, 2012). Although long, the production and publication process was a tad positive for the novelist as it gave him enough time to find his inspiration and make his stories more interesting and appealing.

While Hamid followed in the footsteps of the seven-year period of MS to complete and publish *TRF* and also *HTG*, *MS* is not to be taken as an example of artistic relaxation. Hamid started this novel in the summer of 1993 (mark the season again) and was then as a “reluctant novelist” as he was when writing *TRF*. *MS* was initially a work that was submitted to Toni Morison’s undergraduate class of creative writing at Princeton University and became his MA thesis at Harvard Law School, supervised by Richard Parker. Before it became the *MS* we know, it went through many drafts and revisions and, like *TRF*, it was not uncritically received. For instance, Hamid showed the second draft of *MS* to his mother; she said: “Mmm. . . I don’t like this much” (quoted in Preston, 2018). Hamid’s mother, editors, agents, and publishers appear to have all shared an almost similar reaction to his first drafts; this speaks volumes about Hamid’s works not having been good in their initial form, which is understandable given that no work is good at the outset and requires rounds of revision before it becomes so.

While it took six or seven years for *MS*, *TRF*, and *HTG* to be completed and published, it took Hamid less than this period to complete and publish *EW*—if Hamid started this novel after the publication date of *HTG*, which is February 27, 2013. There is an explanation for this short period: *EW* is shorter than Hamid’s other novels and is even described as “a slim novel” (Onyebuchi, 2017), but it does not look slim because of its font, which is bigger than the font of his other
novels. A big font can in fact make a novella look like a novel and a short story like a long one—which is another example of disguise, but this one may have involved the publisher too. This is not to say that Hamid’s other novels are long; they are all short. While it is the font that makes *EW* seem long, it is spacing that makes *MS*, *TRF*, and *HTG* seem so.

In “Mohsin Hamid Comes Home to Roost in Pakistan,” Hamid comments on the shortness of *HTG*, “I wanted to write a big, sprawling, 19th-century, 800-page book, but I didn’t want it to be much longer than 200 pages” (Reed, 2013). Given the long period of time Hamid took to write his first three novels, because, I argue, of writer’s block and editing and publishing obstacles, writing an 800-page book, as I see it, would prove a hard task for the novelist and might take decades. Psychologically speaking, the hypothetical situation sensed in the above passage, which says “I could have done that,” is generally the same we employ when we do not want others to judge or prejudge our capacity, when we want to protect ourselves from hasty impressions others might have of our skills. Creating an alternative situation such as this one can allow one to prove to others that they could have been as skillful in other situations and thus preempt criticism. In another interview, Hamid maintains a similar hedging, “I didn’t want to write a huge book in part because it’s not my inclination and also smaller books are easier to get non-readers to read, and most people I know in Pakistan are non-readers of literary fiction” (Ali, 2013). Here again, Hamid employs disguise and tries to mislead the reader into thinking that his writing short novels is an artistic choice and that it is not due to artistic obstacles, such as writer’s block, but to an authorial decision over which he is in full control.

Given that Hamid alludes repeatedly to writer’s block and that he repeatedly refers to his grueling experiences with the “noisy” world of publishing, I argue that the simple reason Hamid takes so long to complete and publish his novels is *artistic trauma*. Hamid could not complete and publish his works in a short period of time because of the traumatic experiences he has gone through, such as “stumbling,” “being stuck,” and the hard-to-satisfy demands of the capitalist world of publishing. The reiteration of the “gestation period” in all his interviews, like in the Harcourt interview, where he says one more time that his “novel [TRF] was written over seven years and with as many drafts. Then again, so was my first novel, *Moth Smoke*, so it may just be that this is how I write” (Hamid, 2007b), confirms that he has been somehow traumatized by this “period,” which may have involved exhausting efforts. A trauma is characterized by its repetitive performance and by the subject who suffers from it being stuck in the time when the traumatic event happened and *clinging* to it by repeating it non-stop. Another more powerful reason is that a once-lived traumatic experience prevents the subject from being productive in their subsequent experiences. Suppose a novelist, for
example, goes through an artistic trauma in the writing of their first novel; the writing of their second novel will likely prove more difficult on a psychological level. That is, the first traumatic experience can slow down the production of the second one because the trauma of the first mentally affects the artist’s abilities. The beginning of the project will be thwarted by fear and, consequently, by a great deal of procrastination. These reasons can take a work several years to be completed and published; in fact, works, because of traumatic experiences, such as writer’s block, may not even see the light of day.

A solution to artistic trauma is usually cathartic treatment which, in psychoanalysis, takes the shape of talking, called by Freud “talking cure” or “chimney sweeping” (1995: 8-9). In art, this therapy can take the shape of writing. Hamid says it himself in the Hamish Hamilton interview, “I write novels because I need to—I think I would be very sad if I was not creating a universe in my head” (2007a). In a different interview he says, “[W]riting a novel is sort of self-help for me, being more comfortable with my life and the world” (NPR, 2013). He also says: “Stories have the power to liberate us from the tyranny of what was and is” (2017b). In another interview, he also explains that, in “literary fiction,” “you are trying to help yourself” (Ali, 2013).

In conclusion, this article argues that Hamid expresses an artistic trauma in his non-fiction. As explained, artistic trauma designates those severely exhausting experiences in the life of the artist, such as writer’s block, editorial and publishing difficulties, and other artistic pitfalls that are sometimes so intense that they are expressed, consciously or unconsciously, in the artist’s work. As shown in this article, Hamid goes through arduous experiences in his artistic life, such as being “stuck,” which alludes to writer’s block, and “stumbling,” which may refer to this block as well as other pitfalls pertaining to the world of publishing. Bringing these experiences and how they are expressed in Hamid’s non-fiction to the reader’s attention is, I believe, vital to understanding Hamid’s fiction. As I shall demonstrate in my subsequent articles, Hamid, in his fiction, discusses these artistic experiences at length through symbols, which are complex and carefully constructed. The construction of these symbols is, I shall argue, another reason why Hamid takes so long in the production and publication of his fiction.

If the details have been missed, Hamid apparently started most of his works in summer. Summer is a motif in Hamid’s fiction and an exaggeratedly repeated symbol. One simple reason for the obsessive use of this symbol suggests itself: while “breeze” stereotypically symbolizes inspiration, absence of breeze—read Summer—symbolizes shortage of inspiration or writer’s block. Hamid’s use of “summer” as a symbol not only reflects on the time when he began his projects but also on how he fared during the process of composition, a process which is, as it were, as laboriously hot as the heat of summer. Hamid says, “For me, writing a novel is like solving a
puzzle” (DC 69); it is, therefore, with the vision of a puzzle in mind that I shall approach his fiction and its symbols. While it is not possible to put the whole puzzle together, we can at least put a few pieces together, which can help us have a glimpse of the world of art Hamid creates in his fiction and through it his artistic trauma.

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