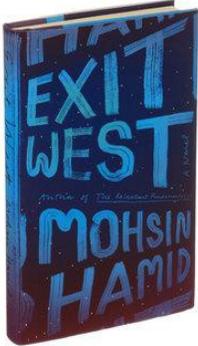


Exit West

Discussion Questions



Author: Mohsin Hamid
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Books

1. In what way does war distort everyday life for those who live in its midst? How does Mohsin Hamid convey the fear of truck bombs and snipers, armed checkpoints and surveillance drones? What effect does it have on the people who live through it? Have you ever lived in a war zone?
2. Describe Nadia and Saeed's outward personalities and inner thoughts. Nadia is more driven, perhaps, while Saeed is more introspective. What attracts them to one another?
3. After the two leave home, they end up in a makeshift refugee camp. Talk about what that was like.
4. In the couple's attempts to immigrate to other countries and other continents, Hamid writes, "It was said in those days that the passage was both like dying and like being born." What do you think he means?
5. Why do you think the author uses the device of a magical door, recalling C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*? In what way is crossing territories, always under threat of thirst, punishing heat and sun, or frigid nights, comparable to stepping through a magic door?
6. Saeed continues to pray. What is he praying for? What does he believe prayer is about?
7. How does the hardship of exile change Saeed? How does it change Nadia, who seems more adaptable? Most of all, how does it test—and ultimately change—their relationship?
8. The primary story of Nadia and Saeed is interrupted with stories of threats and travails in other corners of the world. For what purpose might Hamid have interjected those brief scenarios?
9. How does each new home that Nadia and Saeed settle in receive the couple? How are they made to feel? How well do they blend in to the existing cultures and population?
10. What does one of the book's final declarations mean: "We are all migrants through time."

Author Bio

- Birth: 1971; Lahore, Pakistan
- Education: B.A., Princeton University; J.D., Harvard University
- Currently: Divides his time between Lahore, London, and New York City

Mohsin Hamid is a Pakistani novelist and writer. His novels are *Moth Smoke* (2000), *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013), and *Exit West* (2017).

Early life and education

Hamid spent part of his childhood in the United States, where he stayed from the age of 3 to 9 while his father, a university professor, was enrolled in a Ph.D. program at Stanford University. He then moved with his family back to Lahore, Pakistan, and attended the Lahore American School.

He received his B.A. from Princeton University, graduating summa cum laude in 1993. While there, he studied under the writers Joyce Carol Oates and Toni Morrison, and wrote a draft of his first novel for a fiction workshop taught by Morrison. After college, he returned to Pakistan to continue his work on the book.

Hamid then attended Harvard Law School, graduating in 1997. Finding corporate law unfulfilling, he repaid his student loans by working for several years as a management consultant at McKinsey & Company in New York City. He was allowed to take three months off each year to write, and he used this time to complete his first novel *Moth Smoke*.

Hamid moved to London in the summer of 2001, initially intending to stay only one year. Although he frequently returned to Pakistan to write, he continued to live in London for eight years, becoming a dual citizen of the United Kingdom in 2006.

Writing and awards

Moth Smoke tells the story of a marijuana-smoking ex-banker in post-nuclear-test Lahore who falls in love with his best friend's wife and becomes a heroin addict. Published in 2000, it quickly became a cult hit in Pakistan and India. It was also a finalist for the PEN/Hemingway Award given to the best first novel in the US, and was adapted for television in Pakistan and as an operetta in Italy.

Hamid's second novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, told the story of a Pakistani man who decides to leave his high-flying life in America after a failed love affair and the terrorist attacks of September 11. It was published in 2007 and became a million-copy international best seller, reaching No.4 on *The New York Times Best Seller* list. The novel was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, won several awards including the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award and the Asian American Literary Award, and was translated into over 25 languages. *The Guardian* selected it as one of the books that defined the decade.

Like *Moth Smoke*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is formally experimental. The novel uses the unusual device of a dramatic monologue in which the Pakistani protagonist continually addresses an American listener who is never heard from directly. Hamid has said Albert Camus' *The Fall* served as his model.

His third novel, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, was excerpted by *The New Yorker* in their September 24, 2012 issue and by *Granta* in their Spring 2013 issue. As with his previous books, it bends conventions of both genre and form. Narrated in the second person, it tells the story of the protagonist's ("your") journey from impoverished rural boy to tycoon in an unnamed contemporary city in "rising Asia," and of his pursuit of the nameless "pretty girl" whose path continually crosses but never quite converges with his. Stealing its shape from the self-help books devoured by ambitious youths all over "rising Asia," the novel is playful but also quite profound in its portrayal of the thirst for ambition and love in a time of shattering economic and social upheaval. In her *New York Times* review of the novel, Michiko Kakutani called it "deeply moving," writing that *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* "reaffirms [Hamid's] place as one of his generation's most inventive and gifted writers."

Hamid's 2017 novel, *Exit West*, is about a young couple, Nadia and Saeed, and their relationship in a time when rampant migration has unsettled life on earth.

Hamid has also written on politics, art, literature, travel, and other topics. Most recently he has covered the topic of Pakistan's internal division and extremism in an op-ed for *The New York Times*. His journalism, essays, and stories have appeared in *Time*, *The Guardian*, *Dawn*, *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The International Herald Tribune*, *The Paris Review*, and other publications. In 2013, he was named one of the world's 100 Leading Global Thinkers by *Foreign Policy* magazine.

Personal life

Hamid has lived in Lahore with his wife Zahra and their daughter Dina since 2009. He divides his time between Pakistan and abroad, living between Lahore, New York, London, and Mediterranean countries including Italy and Greece. Hamid has described himself as a "mongrel" and has said of his own writing that "a novel can often be a divided man's conversation with himself." (Adapted from Wikipedia. Retrieved 3/17/2017)