

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Mohsin Hamid is the author of four novels -- *Moth Smoke*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, and *Exit West* -- and a book of essays, *Discontent and Its Civilizations*.

His writing has been translated into forty languages, featured on bestseller lists, and adapted for the cinema.

Born in Lahore, he has spent about half his life there and much of the rest in London, New York, and California.

- [Author's website.](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. “Exit West” begins with two people meeting in a city “swollen by refugees but still mostly at peace, or at least not yet openly at war” — setting the scene for what’s to come. Throughout the book, as the city descends into war, Hamid never mentions the place’s name. Why?
2. As the book follows its two main characters, Nadia and Saeed, readers also meet a thief in Australia, a suited man targeting women in Tokyo and an old man whose house is being surrounded by military men in San Diego, among others. We never meet these characters again. What do you think is the purpose of these interludes?
3. We learn early on that Nadia wears flowing black robes but is not religious. She says she does it so that men won’t disturb her. When she goes to withdraw money from a bank, she is groped in a crowd with “incredible force.” What are we supposed to take away from the scenes about the ways women have to survive in a period of instability?
4. Even as the city descends into war, and events become increasingly scary, Hamid rarely tells us that the characters feel fear. Instead, the reader is left to decipher how the people in the book must be feeling. Why do you think that is?

5. Hamid describes windows in people's houses as a "border through which death was possibly most likely to come," and the many ways a house has to be rearranged during war to ensure it's safe. How is the feeling of home as a secure place challenged in this book?
6. After discussing the windows, Hamid introduces the rumors about doors "that could take you elsewhere." What do we learn about the dangers and promises of these passageways?
7. The militants who take over the city do not allow music, do not approve of unmarried lovers like Nadia and Saeed, and come looking to kill people of a particular sect. Does this book feel representative of the unrest of our present time, of our past, or both?
8. When Nadia and Saeed learn that the magical doors do exist, and can in fact take them away from the violence of their city, they are excited and immediately pursue an agent to help them leave. Saeed's father, on the other hand, only says of the doors: "Let us see." Does this feel resonant to you of the experience of different generations of migrants?
9. Chapter Five ends with Nadia making Saeed's father a promise to take care of his son, and the line: "That is the way of things, for when we migrate, we murder from our lives those we leave behind." Is Hamid referring to Saeed's father and the people we leave behind, or something more?
10. As migrants move through the magical doors to other places, trying to escape war and chaos, the passage they take is described as: "both like dying and like being born." Does this description feel representative of the experience of people who migrate today?
11. We never hear, though, about what actually happens as people migrate through these doors. Why do you think the migration itself is absent from the narrative?
12. As Nadia and Saeed escape through the doors, we learn that not just their city, but much of the wider world, is in turmoil. Refugees are on the move to Mykonos in Greece and Marin County, near San Francisco. Riots are starting over migrants in Vienna and in London. What do you think Hamid wants us to understand about this global instability?
13. As these cities become more unstable, they also come under greater surveillance, at the hands of unseen authorities. These authorities also control the electricity network and internet connectivity. How do these changes impact the people in the book? How does it feel relevant to today's world?
14. In the cities to which migrants flee, Hamid writes that people began to reassemble with others of their own kind, "like superficially with like." At one point, even Saeed wants him and Nadia to relocate to live with others like them, though Nadia resists. What do you think is behind this human impulse?
15. As Nadia and Saeed continue to move locations, their relationship becomes increasingly unstable, and the way they speak to each other not as kind. By the end of the book, Hamid writes that they begin "slipping away" from

each other, as people all over the world are “slipping away from where they had been.” What does Hamid want us to learn here?

16. And yet at the same time in Amsterdam, two older men fall in love. What do you take away from his interlude?
17. The book ends in the city of Nadia and Saeed’s birth, which Hamid writes seems to them both familiar and unfamiliar. How did you feel about this book’s ending?

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/07/books/discussion-questions-exit-west.html>.

BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

/ Starred Review */* In an unnamed city with strict social mores, young Nadia is a rebel, an atheist who chooses to live and work independently. In religious and unassuming Saeed she finds the perfect companion. As the two fall in love, their romance is tinged with a sense of urgency and inevitability as the city falls to militia, and basic freedoms and food quickly become rarities. When the situation turns dire, Saeed and Nadia decide to migrate as thousands already have and cobble together every last bit of their savings to find safe passage out. Caught in the whirlpool of refugees from around the world, Saeed and Nadia are tossed around like flotsam, the necessity of survival binding them together more than any starry-eyed notion of romance ever could. If at times the story of refugees facing no easy choice feels derivative, Hamid (*How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, 2013) smooths over such wrinkles with spellbinding writing and a story of a relationship that sucks its own marrow dry for sustenance. The concept of the door is a powerful, double-edged metaphor here, representing a portal leading to a promised land that when closed, however, condemns one to fates from which there is no escape. -- Apte, Poornima (Reviewed 12/15/2016) (Booklist, vol 113, number 8, p14)

Publisher’s Weekly

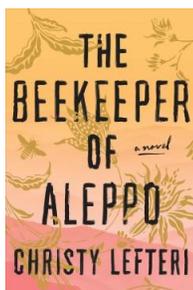
Hamid’s (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*) trim yet poignant fourth novel addresses similar themes as his previous work and presents a unique perspective on the global refugee crisis. In an unidentified country, young Saeed and burqa-wearing Nadia flee their home after Saeed’s mother is killed by a stray bullet and their city turns increasingly dangerous due to worsening violent clashes between the government and guerillas. The couple joins other migrants traveling to safer havens via carefully guarded doors. Through one door, they wind up in a crowded camp on the Greek Island of Mykonos. Through another, they secure a private room in an abandoned London mansion populated mostly by displaced Nigerians. A third door takes them to California’s Marin County. In each location, their relationship is by turns strengthened and tested by their struggle to find food, adequate shelter, and a sense of belonging among emigrant communities. Hamid’s storytelling is stripped down, and the book’s sweeping allegory is timely and resonant. Of particular importance is the contrast between the migrants’ tenuous daily reality and that of the privileged second- or third-generation native population who’d prefer their new alien neighbors to simply disappear. Agent: Jay Mandel, WME Entertainment. (Mar.) --Staff (Reviewed 01/02/2017) (Publishers Weekly, vol 264, issue 01, p)

Library Journal

/ Starred Review */* "We are all migrants through time," observes Man Booker Prize short-lister Hamid (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*). The impulses driving such a movement, especially when rooted in violent conflict, is at

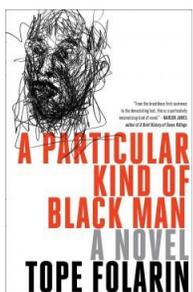
the core of Hamid's exceptional fourth novel. In an unnamed city (not unlike the author's native Lahore, Pakistan), Saeed and Nadia meet, find love, and expect to share a future, but a militant takeover forces them to flee their homeland. Hamid reveals their tenuous journey from a dreamlike distance that perfectly blends reality with fablelike parable. For example, escape happens through "doors" only accessible via the right contact at the right price. While focusing the narrative spotlight on his lovers-on-the-run, Hamid regularly interrupts the couple's peregrinations with snapshot interludes—a potential murder in Tokyo, a woman threatened in Vienna, an aging grandmother in Palo Alto—that serve as reminders that life (and death) continues for everyone else, everywhere else, every which way. Both mellifluous and jarring, this novel is a profound meditation on the unpredictable temporality of human existence and the immeasurable cost of widespread enmity. VERDICT Libraries would do well to acquire this and all of Hamid's extraordinary titles. [See Prepub Alert, 9/12/16.]—Terry Hong, Smithsonian BookDragon, Washington, DC --Terry Hong (Reviewed 02/01/2017) (Library Journal, vol 142, issue 1, p70)

READALIKES



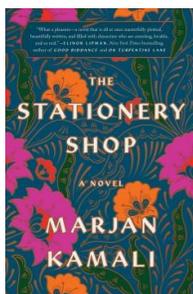
***The Beekeeper of Aleppo* by Christy Lefteri**

A beekeeper and his artist wife have their lives upended and must flee after war destroys their home in Aleppo, Syria, and they set off on a dangerous journey through Turkey and Greece, towards an uncertain future in England.



***A Particular Kind of Man* by Tope Folarin**

A Rhodes Scholar and winner of the Caine Prize for African Writing offers a novel about a Nigerian family living in Utah and their uncomfortable assimilation into American life.



***The Stationery Shop* by Marjan Kamali**

A young couple who meet and fall in love at a neighborhood stationery shop in 1953 Tehran are separated by a violent coup d'etat on the eve of their marriage and reunite by chance after more than half a century.