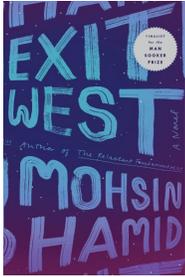


# Books by the Stack



## **Exit West by Mohsin Hamid**

Presents the story of two young lovers whose furtive affair is shaped by local unrest on the eve of a civil war that erupts in a cataclysmic bombing attack, forcing them to abandon their previous home and lives.

**Why you'll like it:** *Literary. Love story. Political. War story.*

**About the Author:** Mohsin Hamid grew up in Lahore, attended Princeton University and Harvard Law School and worked for several years as a management consultant in New York. His first novel, *Moth Smoke*, was published in ten languages, won a Betty Trask Award, and was a finalist for the PEN/Hemingway Award. His essays and journalism have appeared in *Time*, the *New York Times* and the *Guardian*, among others. His latest novel is *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) published by Penguin. He was featured at the Ubud Writers and Readers Festival 2015 program. (Bowker Author Biography)

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. "It might seem odd that in cities teetering at the edge of the abyss young people still go to class...but that is the way of things, with cities as with life," the narrator states at the beginning of *Exit West*. In what ways do Saeed and Nadia preserve a semblance of daily routine throughout the novel? Why do you think this – and pleasures like weed, records, sex and the rare hot shower – becomes so important?
2. "Location, location, location, the realtors say. Geography is destiny, respond the historians." What do you think the narrator means by this? Does he take a side? What about the novel as a whole?
3. Early in *Exit West*, Saeed's family spends a pleasant evening outside with their telescope, until "the sound of automatic gunfire, flat cracks that were not loud and yet carried to them cleanly. They sat a little longer. Then Saeed's mother suggested they return inside." How do we see the city changing around Saeed and his family? What effect does the subtle acceleration of violence have on the reader? On the novel itself?
4. What function to the doors serve, physically and emotionally, in the novel? Why do you think Hamid chose to include this speculative, fantastical element in an otherwise very "realistic" world?
5. In an interview with *Paste* magazine, Hamid says, "It's strange to say, but I really believe in these doors....I think the doors exist in our world, just not the physical manifestation that I've given them [in the novel]." What do you think he means?
6. When it becomes clear that Nadia and Saeed will need to flee their city, Saeed is most fearful over leaving behind his family, his friends, the only home he's ever known, while Nadia is most concerned about the possibility of losing her autonomy, of being forced to rely on the uncertain mercy of others, of being "caged in pens like vermin." What do you think their respective fears are so radically different? What do these fears say about them as characters, an in relation to each other?

7. The city where Nadia and Saeed live and from which they flee is unnamed, the only unnamed location in the book. Why do you think that is? What effect does this omission have on the reader?
8. “War in Saeed and Nadia’s city revealed itself to be an intimate experience,” the narrator states. In what ways are violence and intimacy linked throughout the novel? How does violence bring Saeed and Nadia together? How do you think their relationship might have evolved if their city had never been under siege?
9. Saeed tells Nadia, “The end of the world can be cozy at times.” She laughed. “Yes. Like a cave.” What purpose does humor serve in a book like this?
10. With regard to her changing neighborhood, the old woman in Palo Alto muses, “When she went out it seemed to her that she too had migrated, that everyone migrates, even if we stay in the same houses our whole lives, because we can’t help it. We are all migrants through time.” What do you think she means?
11. Do you think *Exit West* is a hopeful book? Why or why not?
12. The book ends in the city a Nadia and Saeed’s birth, which Hamid writes seems to them both familiar and unfamiliar. How did you feel about this book’s ending?

*(Questions provided by the publisher)*



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