

Available at Bogue Banks Library

Exit West, by Mohsin Hamid
Riverhead Books, 2017

Reviewed by Charlotte Hamilton

Bill and Joan Flexman donated this book to the Bogue Banks Library in memory of Daniel Hamilton Andreotti, 1998-2017, grandson of Bob and Charlotte Hamilton.

In an unidentified Muslim country, Nadia and Saeed, both professionally employed, meet in a night class, “Corporate Identity and Product Branding.” Nadia, an independent woman who does not pray, wears a black robe covering her from jugular to shoe to “resist the claims and expectations of the world.” Saeed, who lives with his parents and does pray, wears an attractive stubble and is “certain” he is in love, whereas Nadia is “not certain what exactly she was feeling, but she was certain it had force.” Both are devoted to their phones, “portals to each other and to the world.” The romance progresses in modest ways, given the local restraints of religion, propriety and survival, as their city descends into terror, violence and government collapse.

For the young, the strong and the wealthy, there is a way out of the destroyed city. Like the ubiquitous phones that “have the innate power of distancing one from one’s physical surroundings,” there are black doors through which one can pass and be immediately in a country away from the chaos of the city. These doors magically erase what is normally the refugees’ harrowing journey to hoped-for safety.

Nadia and Saeed flee through a door to Mykonos where they survive in a camp “with hundreds of tents and lean-tos and people of many colors and hues . . . mostly falling within a band of brown that ranged from dark chocolate to milky tea.” Fear drives them to go through another door where they step into a beautiful, empty

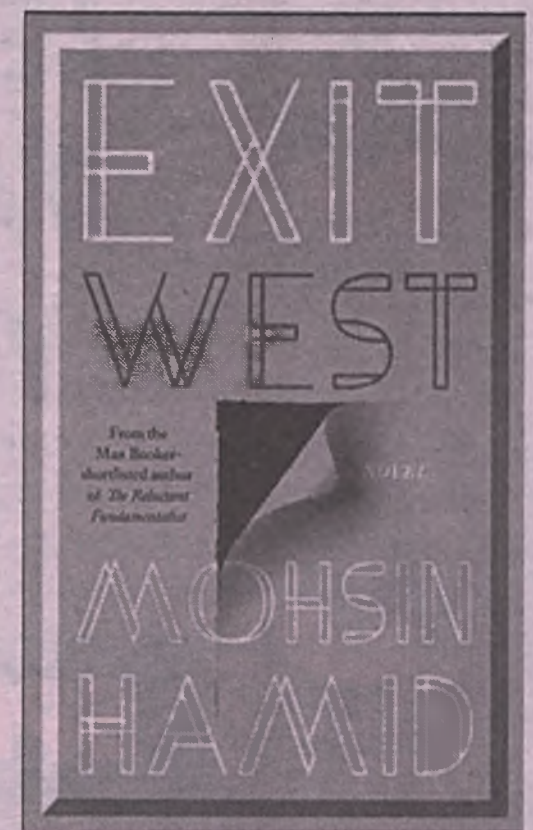
house in London, near Kensington Palace, one of many houses owned by absent, rich foreign nationals. The house and neighborhood fill as more arrive through the doors, and they meet the flood of refugees who overwhelm the border defenses of well-off countries. The refugee neighborhood becomes surrounded by a threatening military with wartime equipment. When the encircled migrants consider violence of their own, they bravely persuade one another to refrain from attacking out of fear.

The military backs down without violence. The city sets up a “halo” area circling London. The refugees, with help from local citizens and their earth-moving equipment, begin building a city of homes for the displaced. Nadia and Saeed work construction jobs in exchange for a future 40 square meters and a pipe through which “would run the lifeblood and thoughts of the new city, all those things that connect people without requiring them to move.”

Gradually, and with sorrow, Nadia and Saeed begin to come apart. Hoping to continue loving one another, they go through another door, this time to Marin in California. Even moving to a place more accommodating than the camps doesn’t stop the “spoilage [that] had begun to manifest.” But “Saeed and Nadia were loyal . . . each in their own way believed it required them to protect the other.” Years later, decades away from Marin, both return to their own city and encounter one another as “former lovers [who] had not wounded each other so deeply as to have lost their ability to find a rhythm together.”

The novel enlivens an intense love story in a world of displacement and indifference. There is empathy, not pity. According to a *New York Times* review, there is optimism in the story, no utopia but “a near future and the dim future shapes of strangers that we can see through a distant doorway. All we have to do is step through and meet them.” Though homogeneity is threatened and upended, the story moves from violation to living with and solving problems. A review of this work on National Public Radio included the following:

It’s a breathtaking novel by one of the world’s most fascinating young writers, and it arrives at an urgent time. Hamid encourages us to put ourselves in the shoes of others, even when they’ve lived lives much harder than anything we’ve endured. We have nothing in common except the most essential things, the things that make us human.



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Last Month’s Puzzle Solutions

S	C	O	P	E	A	V	I	D	I	D	E	A		
H	O	N	O	R	M	E	N	U	N	U	M	B		
U	N	C	O	N	F	I	N	E	D	T	R	A	Y	
T	E	E	P	E	E	E	R	E	E	R	I	S		
			S	W	E	E	T	O	R	A	L	S		
S	A	P	S			B	R	I	D	A	L			
P	E	R	T	U	R	B		A	U	T	A	R	K	Y
A	R	O	U	S	E			R	E	C	O	I	L	
T	O	P	P	I	N	G		B	E	R	E	A	V	E
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C	O	L	D		G	A	S		S	E	V	E	R	E
U	N	I	O		O	V	E	R	S	H	A	D	O	W
B	E	A	U		R	E	L	Y		A	R	I	S	E
A	R	C	S		E	S	S	E		B	Y	T	E	S

4	3	8	9	2	6	5	1	7
5	6	7	3	1	8	4	9	2
9	2	1	5	4	7	8	3	6
3	9	5	4	7	1	2	6	8
7	8	6	2	5	9	3	4	1
1	4	2	8	6	3	7	5	9
2	1	3	6	8	4	9	7	5
6	5	9	7	3	2	1	8	4
8	7	4	1	9	5	6	2	3

Due to a production error, the correct puzzle solutions were not printed in the May issue of *The Shoreline*. We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused.—The Editors