

Refugees and magic realism

BOOK REVIEW

SHAH TAZRIAN ASHRAFI

To be honest, "Exit West" was the first novel I could devour in a day. This book ended up on my TBR list because 1) the hard cover is beautiful, 2) it is one of the 13 listed books for The Man Booker Prize 2017, and 3) this book is an urgent portrait of the current migration issues.

Written by Mohsin Hamid, the novel revolves around a young couple (Saeed and Nadia), who are cosmopolitan city dwellers, working as office clerks. The city is unnamed, and it is "swollen by refugees" as Hamid describes it. Saeed and Nadia meet at an evening class on corporate identity and product branding, which eventually leads to their first date and thus, prompts the start of a hopeful relationship. As the terrorists swarm the city, spreading unrest from the underdeveloped regions to the

government-controlled areas, the citizens are left with no options but to flee.

The most amazing part is the concept of magical doors. Blending fantasy with a rather real issue, Hamid did an excellent job subtly using the concept of doors to provoke the reality of refugees trying out every way there is to find a safe haven. As Saeed and Nadia reach Mykonos through one of the doors, in the second half of the novel, Hamid narrates the unrests that refugee influx triggers in a country.

Digging deeper into the book, its readers can perceive that the story descends into a dystopian setting, where even the strongest of nations are vulnerable. London, for instance, is plagued with constant load shedding and unrest between the natives and migrants.

Besides the horrific chronicles of the couple, as they flee from their country to

Mykonos to London to California, there are other heartbreaking accounts of refugees distributed throughout the book. Though they are not included in the plot, the author safely pulled off a stunt adding them in order to connect the readers with the harsh realities of fleeing a warzone.

All in all, this book is worth a quick read as the story sheds light on migration problems, beautifully mingled with fantasy.

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A tale of hopeless star-crossed lovers

TASNIM ODRIKA

The 22 year old singer, Halsey, rose to fame with the release of her debut studio album, *Badlands*, in 2015. On June 2 of this year she released her second studio album, *Hopeless Fountain Kingdom*. The album hit number 1 on iTunes as soon as it was released and stayed there for the next couple of days.

All this hype surrounding the album after its release (and prior to it as well) raised my expectations a bit too much. Hence, when I first gave it a listen it felt like a bit of a letdown compared to her

previous album. But, as I kept listening to it I grew to like it quite a bit.

Just like her previous album, this one is a concept album as well. According to Halsey, *Hopeless Fountain Kingdom* was inspired by William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. In the opening track "The Prologue", she recites the prologue of the play and then the rest of the album continues to tell the tale of two star-crossed lovers. While *Badlands* touched darker topics and showcased the difficult state of her mind during that time of her life, this one has a much lighter premise and focuses mainly on love and

heartbreaks (in the Halsey way of course).

Musically this album is quite similar to the previous album but with a pinch of hip hop. The songs are also a bit fast paced than her previous works. My absolute favourite tracks from this album are "Bad at Love" (because #relatable) and "Strangers". These are the kind of songs that's perfect for when you're staring out of a rainy window while contemplating where you went wrong with life (and love).

Other memorable songs from the album were "Eyes Closed", "Angel on Fire", "100 Letters", "Now or Never", and

"Alone". A few of the shorter tracks such as "Lie" and "Walls Could Talk" felt like fillers and the album could have easily done without them.

All in all, for me this album did not live up to the previous one but if you're ever stuck in the deadly Dhaka traffic and need some upbeat techno pop to blur out the sounds of car horns, give *Hopeless Fountain Kingdom* a listen.

Tasnim Odrika is having an existential crisis at the moment and doesn't really know who is anymore. Send her compliments at odrika_02@yahoo.com