

## Is There Any Way Out? A Phenomenological Hermeneutic Reading of Escapism in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) and *The Last White Man* (2022)

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### Abstract:

Via a qualitative methodological approach, this article uses hermeneutic phenomenology to study how the two narratives *Exit West* and *The Last White Man* reflect and reinforce the way an alienated non-white literary man can escape his suffering and humiliation in a white Western society. It interprets what forces this colored man to imagine inanities as the only way to escape. It explores how these fictional texts help the reader understand many key issues like escapism, racism, migration and alienation throughout narrative hermeneutics. It elaborates on how the British Pakistani novelist Mohsin Hamid's ordinary routine and personal interest and concern affect his understanding and interpretation of society and how these understanding and interpretation are also related to the reader's daily experiences and responses. In addition, this study shows how the rhetorical triangle as well as the hermeneutic circle are necessary to interpret and understand the meaning of the text.

**Keywords: Phenomenological Hermeneutics, escapism, alienation, racism, migration, Mohsin Hamid**

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## Introduction:

“An unexamined life is not worth living” – Socrates

This paper presents a phenomenological hermeneutic reading of the two narratives *Exit West* (2017) and *The Last White Man* (2022) written by Mohsin Hamid (1971- ) to interpret and reinforce how a black migrant has interpreted and portrayed his escapism of migration, alienation and racism. I begin the analysis with the conceptualization of Hermeneutic Phenomenology and escapism then shed light on Mohsin Hamid’s personal history and finally move on to interpret how Hamid can escape his suffering using magic throughout his two narratives.

The article follows some structured patterns of managing hermeneutic phenomenological research claimed by Thomas Groenwald’s 2004 article ‘A Phenomenological Research Design Illustrated’. Thus, the researcher presents some systematic steps; starting with detecting the research elements, data collection strategies, data storing techniques and data interpretation methods then ending with proving and veracity. Therefore, the methodology of this research takes a qualitative phenomenological-hermeneutic approach, a technique of interpreting texts, which enables the researcher to study how traditions, experiences and culture shape ordinary, everyday routines. As will be discussed later, hermeneutics is a methodology used to unveil the invisible world of lived experiences (Oerther 293-98). Moreover, meanings are best

interpreted by inspecting real events using this method because the hermeneutic approach claims that a person's background offers the basis for understanding. So, the article sheds light on how Mohsin Hamid's life history affects his interpretation and our understanding of the text.

The hermeneutic phenomenological researcher has to explain deeply what the analyzed texts are supposed to disclose. The researcher as a reader of the texts is claimed to engage in them as if he converses with both the author and the text (Sharkey16-37). Therefore, this paper aims to invite the reader to get into the world that the narrative texts would portray and disclose and participate in this understanding and interpretation.

This study tries to answer the following multivalent questions: Can we consider the phenomenological hermeneutic approach as the most relevant category to interpret this genre of literary thought; using the theory and strategy of interpretation, where interpretation entails an understanding that can be justified? Why do people imagine inanities? Is escapism a characteristic of weakness? How are these studied phenomena conceptualized and interpreted, and what constitutes evidence for or against them? Can we apply New Criticism to this genre of fiction? In other words, does Hamid's ordinary routine affect his understanding and interpretations of society or the researcher can ignore the author's personal history? What follows is a set of the qualitative phenomenological

hermeneutic approach to answering these questions via interpreting Mohsin Hamid's last two narratives.

### **Hermeneutic phenomenology**

There are two points here: phenomenology and hermeneutics. As for the philosophy of phenomenology, it has formally begun with Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) who is known as the father of phenomenology. Phenomenology means the study of phenomena: their nature and meanings. Therefore, the focus is on how the phenomenological reader or critic understands lived experiences and interprets them. Darren Langdridge, a professor of phenomenological psychology, argues that phenomenology is a strategy that interprets "people's perceptions of the world in which they live in and what it means to them; a focus on people's lived experience" (4). He further declares that phenomenology as a qualitative method elaborates on the meaning of human experiences. Phenomenology is an approach to understanding the hidden meanings and the essences of any experience. Max van Manen, a Canadian phenomenological philosopher, shows phenomenology as a reaction to how one adapts to and interprets lived experiences. These definitions of phenomenology presented by different scholars show that it is phenomenology that can deeply penetrate the human experience, then understand and interpret the essence of a phenomenon as experienced by the individuals (78).

The phenomenological tradition can be classified under three main categories: Transcendental Phenomenology, Existential Phenomenology and Hermeneutic Phenomenology. The primary aim of Transcendental Phenomenology is to reveal and interpret the 'lived world'. Epoche and bracketing are the terminologies that are connected to this technique of reduction. Existential phenomenology focuses on the interpretation of everyday experience, as it is understood by the consciousness of the individuals. A sharp departure is observed by hermeneutic phenomenology that rejects the idea of excluding personal opinions and turns to the interpretive narration of the description. The publication of *History of Concept of Time* (1925) and *Being and Time* (1927) by Martin Heidegger paved the foundation for this school. Later it was elevated by prominent figures in the history of hermeneutics like Hans George Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, Max van Manen, Friedrich Daniel Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey and Rudolf Bultmann. Based on the premise that reduction is difficult and the adoption of limitless interpretations, this school of phenomenology tries to uncover subjective experiences and get the genuine objective nature of these experiences as recognized by individuals. Hence, hermeneutic phenomenology concentrates on the subjective experience of human beings. It attempts to reveal the daily routine as experienced by the individuals throughout their life-world narrations. This school believes that narration, description and understanding form this interpretive process.

Clarifying the common ‘hermeneutical circle,’ Hans-Georg Gadamer argues that: “The anticipated meaning of a whole is understood through its parts, while it is in light of the whole that the parts take on their illuminating function” (146). This function is a fallible one; anyone can constantly carry out “the risk that the anticipations which he has prepared may not conform to what the thing is.” Thereupon, “the constant task of understanding lies in the elaboration of projects that are authentic and more proportionate to its object” (149). Gadamer follows a specific methodology arguing that one has to be a careful reader and unfold the otherness of the text through interpretation. The text exists as “an authentically different being.” Referring to this attitude, one can initiate the interpretive technique from part to whole and whole to part and back again to get the text’s “own truth” (Gadamer 152). Using the hermeneutic circle that consists of reading, reflective writing and interpretation is the best technique to achieve the best-ever interpretation of a phenomenon (Lavery 21). The role of this circle is to declare that understanding any part of a text is achieved by the initial understanding of the whole of it. Simultaneously, however, understanding that whole is frequently modified by our understanding of its parts. We understand the whole in terms of the parts, but still, we get the meaning of those parts just in the light of the whole.

In *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962), the French phenomenological philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty has

classified four characteristics common to the different schools of phenomenology. These characteristics are description, reduction, essence and intentionality. He argues that the goal of phenomenology is the description of phenomena. Reduction is the practice of bracketing or suspending the phenomena so that ‘things themselves’ can be reinstated. Likewise, the essence is the intended meaning of an individual’s experience that facilitates interpretation. The researcher’s understanding of this essence is constantly “on the way,” according to how the interpretations of these specific experiences were formed. Thus, phenomenology is quietly “the study of essences” (vii). The essence of a phenomenon is described by Heidegger as “the way in which it remains through time as what it is” (*The Question* 3). Van Manen thinks that essence reflects the core meanings of a phenomenon that makes an entity or matter what it is. He is convinced that a perfect phenomenological interpretation that forms “the essence of something is construed so that the structure of a lived experience is revealed to us in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way” (39). Ultimately, intentionality is related to consciousness since human beings are regularly conscious of a phenomenon. Hence, intentionality is the entire meaning of experiences or the idea which is constantly more than what is given in the exploration of a specific viewpoint.

There may be severe possible viewpoints on a phenomenon. Hermeneutic Phenomenology is meant to be a research methodology

that aims at “producing rich textual descriptions of the experiencing of selected phenomena in the life world of individuals that are able to connect with the experience of all of us collectively” (Smith 80). The researcher always searches for a deeper understanding of the meaning of that experience. A text is no more than written communication. Writing assists in transforming life experiences and views from one to the other. Therefore, certainly, the written is a form of speaking; it is a device for transferring what we understand in a living form of speech. This is widely achieved through the use of rich descriptive language. We have indeed continuous conversations among individuals. These conversations are between a sender of information and a receiver of it thus the process of communication lasts without interruption whether through speaking or reading a written text. In addition, the art of writing literary texts needs a much higher criterion of use of language and structure of ideas, thus the text acquires its unity and life only by linguistic techniques. Consequently, the text is interpreted when the meaning of these whole ideas is understood by the reader. The old Platonic perception claims that the user is more efficient than the maker and that texts should be parted from their maker. The maker should not be privileged as an interpreter of his text. However, this text is a closed structure that is embedded in the ongoing world tracing the passing of time.

Humans, as the Canadian hermeneutic thinker Charles Taylor believes, are “self-interpreting animals” (1985). They inherently

interpret themselves and the world they inhabit according to their culture and daily experiences. According to the hermeneutic approach, different fields and theoretical perspectives relying on different ways of interpreting everyday experiences, originate different procedures of knowledge, because they ask various kinds of questions and use distinctive vocabularies. Therefore, the novelist, here, interprets anti-black racism and migration in a different way through escapism. His understanding of the world around him is influenced primarily by genetic and social impacts that are interpreted for us through writings. The hermeneutic approach follows Heidegger in thinking of human existence as a “happening” or a “becoming” (“Being and Time” 426) that can be narrated. According to Shotter and Billig’s scheme of a ‘Bakhtinian psychology,’ our deeds are constantly a complicated mix of “influences both from within ourselves and from elsewhere. They are never wholly our own” (22-3). Human understanding is “permeated by otherness” (Dunne 143).

Hermeneutic phenomenological research is embedded in hermeneutics; the method of interpretation of philosophical text. At first, the term hermeneutics was used to refer to the interpretation and understanding of written texts. However, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), used hermeneutics to clarify a philosophy of human sciences. He perceives hermeneutics as a methodology that can unveil the unseen world of lived experiences. It is parallel with rhetoric.

Pointedly, Philosophical hermeneutics has appeared as its domain in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the publication of the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1960); subtitled 'Fundamental contours of a hermeneutic philosophy.'

The word 'hermeneutics' derives from the ancient Greek *hermeneuein*, which means to explain, to utter, or to translate. It was first used to discuss how mental ideas or divine messages are reported in human language. For example, the ancient Greek philosopher Plato used the term 'hermeneutics' to refer to poets as 'hermeneuts of the divine.' In addition, Plato's student Aristotle wrote the first lasting study on hermeneutics, *De Interpretatione* (350 BCE) to show how spoken and written words demonstrate inner feelings. Hence, from its very first beginning, the term 'hermeneuein', together with its later Latin equivalent 'interpretari', is connected to the mission of understanding spoken and written communication (Zimmermann 2-3). However, the term 'hermeneutics' has another meaning. It describes the philosophical discipline that analyzes the conditions for understanding. For example, hermeneutic philosophers explore how our language, cultural traditions, and nature as historical beings help us understand the world around us.

Now let's wonder what is meant by understanding. Hermeneutic philosophers believe that understanding is the interpretive act of combining particular things such as signs, incidents, and terms into a meaningful whole. We understand this whole when it corresponds to

our own life experiences and talks to us meaningfully. When we understand texts, items, or affairs in this way, they become part of our inner thoughts thus we can manifest them again in our terms (Zimmermann 7). Understanding occurs unconsciously, as we already live in a sociable cultural habitat. Hermeneutic philosophers assert that the way we view the world as meaningful reflects our experiences. We constantly confront the present moment within the sphere of experience formed by our previous experiences and by our cultural beliefs and routine of life in which we have grown into who we are. All our understanding occurs within a historical matrix. Since this matrix is a continuous inflow, every act of understanding is unique. Undoubtedly, there are no identical understandings. This alone challenges all cognitive universalism. According to Gadamer, philosophical hermeneutics cares for ‘understanding understanding’. Hermeneutics, as a philosophical field, explores and describes what occurs when understanding any matter happens. Hermeneutic philosophers affirm that our main practice of perception is not theoretical but practical, and relies on our prevalent interests and desires. Hence, this hermeneutic phenomenological research is interested in how and under what condition understanding occurs.

Being a black alienated man in a Western white community, the author of the narratives in this article interprets his experience and suffering throughout his narrative texts according to his own point of view and understanding. Interpretations not only have a stance on how we act and interact, founding structures of intelligibility and

action; they equally are actions themselves, interferences that alter the world in which we live. Thus, the novelist, here, hopes through his writings to change the Western look of disdain towards alienated others.

Finally, one should be cautious not to confuse the phenomenological hermeneutic approach with the biographical/historical approach. The biographical approach claims that the author employs writing to reflect his personal life. The Historical approach looks at the historical context in which the work was produced, including the social, cultural, and intellectual milieu of the time. Therefore, this biographical/historical approach differs from the phenomenological hermeneutic one in that the first focuses mainly on the biography of the author and the history of the age in which the work is written as if narrating this life or autobiography, while the latter claims that to understand and interpret a text you just have to understand the background of the author and age as any text analysis is a relation between the author, text and the reader.

### **Escapism and Hope Through Magic**

‘There is nothing better than imagining other worlds to forget the painful one we live in...imagining other worlds, you end up changing this one.’ – Umberto Eco

The term escapism first emerged in the 1933 *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* to define a person who seeks a diversion from reality or routine. However, the initial use of the term ‘escapist’, to depict an individual who searches for distraction from reality, has been attributed in 1930 to the founder of the Southern New Criticism School, John Crowe Ransom (Ayto 34). Ransom condemns his contemporaries as escapist thinkers motivated by progressivism and industrial power. He likens them to “defeated and escapist people...afraid of the fullness of the inner life and prefers to rush into violent action...takes its work as an anesthetic - an impotent people building up a legend of power” (184). Referring to Freudian psychoanalysis, Ransom describes escapism as a mixture of fantasy, anesthetic, and pathological infantilism.

One should be careful not to confuse ‘escapism’ with ‘escapology’. Escapology means escaping from restraints, traps, or confinements. Whereas, an “escapist” could be either an individual who escapes from captivity or one who yields to a mental process to hide or retreat from troublesome or unacceptable facts. T.S. Eliot admits that poetry is not “a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality...only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things” (42). Literature plays a role to escape reality. Therefore, fiction can be understood as a way of escape. Escapism is a ubiquitous, inescapable, unqualifiable and unquantifiable act. Any written text is

somewhat a way of escape from the unwritten world to a written world. Characters in these texts appear as so preoccupied with the means of their escape. They forget specifically where the margins of their world start. Richard Gerrig's *Experiencing Narrative Worlds* (1993) explains how a fictional statement can undoubtedly shift the mind of the reader, on a cognitive level, to an alternative world, to the extent of perplexing their established beliefs about historical culture and real life. Linda Hutcheon affirms what Gerrig has claimed when she states: "All reading is a kind of 'escape' in that it involves a temporary transfer of consciousness from the reader's empirical surroundings to things imagined rather than perceived" (76-7).

Escapism can be considered a sub-genre of science fiction. The Marxist critic Darko Suvin shows science fiction as that which has the ability to either manage new instructions for imagining the social order of the community or to inspire subjugated people to revolt against hegemonic power. He claims that fantasy, myth, and science fantasy have to be considered escapism (142). Escapism is claimed to be a strategy to rearrange rules and modify the world. Escapism is a worldwide criticism of any fiction that includes magic characteristics. Consequently, it represents a broad criticism of any form of fantastic genre or cultural articles. Had Sigmund Freud used the term escapism, he would have claimed that each artistic expression is the outcome of neurosis, thus any form of artistic expression is, consequently, escapist (Stapledon). While Freud never

used the term escapism, it has yet been massively used by Freudian literary critics. Murray Krieger manifests that:

one can simply dwell upon the once-upon-a-time element in fiction and justify it as an escape from the world around us. Fiction's made-up, make-believe character is the very feature which the escapist celebrates. Freud justified literature precisely on such escapist grounds, as a necessary sublimation for the frustrated poet who, as a daydreamer, provided daydreams for the rest of us. (335)

In 1939, the British science fiction writer, Olaf Stapledon (1886-1950), wrote an article entitled 'Escapism in Literature.' He says we yield to "withdraw attention from inner life and to seek escape from individual moral responsibility by constructing a fictitious world in which individuals are wholly product of external forces, physical or social" (308). He classifies literature into four genres: creative, propaganda, release, and escape, and claims that escape literature creates a dream world that saves the mind of the reader from a terrible reality by creating a more enticing and real imaginary world. According to him, any genre of literature can be seen as escapism: the more authentic it appears, the more convincing the magical world is. Escapism is the trial of any person to escape the traumas he finds himself in; a trial to furnish himself with a personal utopia. Ursula K. Le Guin states: "Fake realism is the escapist literature of our time. And probably the ultimate escapist reading is that masterpiece of total unreality" (42).

Hope is closely connected to escapism. In *The Principle of Hope*, Ernest Bloch argues that “the forward dawning” of the “Not Yet Become” (137), evokes a modification in temporal prospect. Bloch states firmly that the “Not Yet” shows how independent upcoming possibilities are germinative within the present across a utopian hermeneutics of hope, fancy, expectation and aspiration. Bloch’s notion of the ‘Not Yet’ is thus prominently rooted in a philosophical belief of flexible, coincident utopian temporalities; instantly exposing invisible possibilities that act within the present. These coincident subjective daydreams and utopian hoping emotions provide a structure in which the future and the past are echoed in the present utopian world that is suffused with hope. Hope is superior to fear. Hope is neither inactive like fear nor blocked into nothingness. Hope helps people be broad rather than restricting them. People have constantly dreamed of a better life that might be possible. Everybody’s life is filled with daydreams: those who escape are hopeful and provocative and cannot accept the bad or renunciation. As long as human beings face tyranny, they surround themselves with daydreams; dreams of a better life than that which has been granted to them. Dreaming is completely harmless. It can even support and reinforce man’s power to resist.

### **The Life History of the Author**

The interpretive approach should facilitate the analysis of a text. Thus, the researcher should collect data to provide a deep

understanding of the complex lives of the intended novelist and his community. Analysis assists the researcher in understanding the practical lived experiences of the author and his needs. Therefore, the researcher should hint at Hamid's personal history in this section of this interpretive study. This section may contain demographics; key experiences of the novelist; early ideas, feelings, or opinions about something or someone based on interviews, field notes, and survey data from participants; the researcher's reactions to the author and texts that may have shaped his understanding; and interpretive comments and analyses.

Taylor marks the inaccurate self-contained consciousness as a 'disengaged self' because outside impacts are realized only by conscious choice. Nevertheless, hermeneutic thinkers believe in an 'engaged self' that is mainly combined with the world and with other people. They claim that the way in which we inhabit the world forms our consciousness. The universal human experiences of birth, death, hunger, and the need for shelter shape our view and understanding of the world. Additionally, culture, language, and upbringing form our attitudes long before we make conscious decisions. Each individual sees the world through the community or tradition to which he belongs.

Mohsin Hamid was born in Lahore, Pakistan. About half his life is spent there, while much of the rest is in New York, London and California. He received his early education from Lahore American School in Pakistan. At the age of 18, he migrated to the USA to

pursue higher studies. He occasionally kept flying back and forth to Pakistan. Finally, he gained dual nationality in Pakistan and the UK. He used to travel a lot and divide his time between Lahore, London, New York, Greece and Italy.

Hamid is mentored by contemporary literary figures such as Joyce Carol Oates and Toni Morrison. Some critics call him a Pakistani novelist, others call him a Pakistani Anglophone and his novels are born in Pakistani literature. However, referring to several interviews with Hamid, the doctor of philosophy Barirah Nazir assumes that Hamid rarely describes himself as a “Pakistani writer” and hates to be labeled as such (212-13). He refuses to be attached to a weak community like Pakistan. Recently, he has manufactured an identity of what he calls ‘a hybridized mongrel’ companion and assures that he is “an immigrant everywhere. Even in Lahore” (171). Although Hamid has spent a lot of time in several American cities, he has never been an American national and is never considered an American novelist. He also shows a “reduced degree of Britishness” and notices that his “Britishness is suspect” (Hamid “Interview” 155). He is one of the very few writers who are attributed for revolutionizing contemporary Pakistani Literature and having it perceived around the world.

All his five novels revolve around Pakistan and his life experiences. Starting from *Moth Smoke* (2000) which is narrated in Pakistan by Pakistani characters to enlighten and depict remarkable themes: desire, class division in society, decadence, death, power,

unemployment, greed and lust. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) shows post-9/11 America and how the tragic happenings negatively affected a Pakistani living in the USA. The terrorist attacks force him to depart to his homeland in a hopeless state. *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013) develops in an unnamed country that mirrors Hamid's home country, Pakistan, which is portrayed as facing various socioeconomic problems which have profoundly destroyed the social constitution and the reliability of several institutions. Unjust diffusion of wealth, inappropriate usage of the country's resources and unrestrained rise in population have aroused several problems concerning living standards, education and health. Poverty forcefully destroys the already misused and crushed lot that successively causes various social ills in Pakistan. Most of the population is portrayed as living below the poverty line and deprived of economic and social benefits. *Exit West* (2017) focuses on the agonies of migration. Finally, *The Last White Man* (2022) exposes anti-black racism in western countries. In addition to a book of essays, *Discontent and Its Civilizations: Dispatches from Lahore, New York and London* (2016).

Hamid insists that there are so many political writings emerging from Pakistan because many of them are offended by what happens there. Thus, he confesses that he is outraged by what is happening in his home country. He declares that one of the causes for having no names in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* is that "in Pakistan, effectively, there is a prohibition on saying so many different things.

You can't say anything about Pakistan, you can't say anything about religion" (173). Thus, anonymization as a narrative tool is Hamid's attempt "to speak as honestly as possible." However, this may also mean that he is "not allowed to speak freely" (Hamid "Interview" 173). Pakistan, thus, is present in his narratives just through its absence. Consequently, place in Hamid's writings is not fully delocalized but rather gets defined through the rhetorical triangle between the author, text and the reader. Therefore, Hamid's novels portray relocatable delocalized settings and the collaborative approach of relocalization between the author and the reader.

Sadaf Mehmood and Fauzia Janjua, two professors at Islamabad's International Islamic University, judge Hamid as a neo-orientalist with English morals and tastes. Hamid depicts Pakistan as an uncivilized community and is incapable of finding any sample of "cultural bliss" in the country (10). Moreover, Masood Ashraf Raja states that Pakistan-born literary men like Hamid "see themselves as cultural critics and tend to highlight the darkest and the most troubling aspects of Pakistani culture" (3). Hamid admits that there is no responsibility that authors have which emits from the outside. As an author, the only responsibility is what you feel and you might also feel the responsibility for the world around you and then write to address those concerns.

I do feel the connection to the world around me and I am politically engaged...The world is changing very rapidly and that creates a fear in people... They are frightened of

the world. Technology is changing, the economy is changing, society is changing, politics is changing, culture is changing, and all these things are changing very rapidly everywhere...The speed of change is getting much more rapid and that creates anxiety in everyone. (Hamid “Self-Censorship”)

He portrays not only troubles in Pakistan but also what he faces in America as an alienated Other. He admits that in America, numerous people are executed by fellow Americans and very rare are murdered by terrorism, and most of the terrorism is committed by American natives and not by foreigners. He claims that it is very easy to persuade people that Muslims represent a great threat and they are going to kill you. We can understand through his dialogue how humiliated he feels in Western society. He claims that the reason that one should be afraid is the other group.

In *The Story of My Life* (1988), Helen Keller admits: “I cannot be quite sure of the boundary line between my ideas and those I find in books”. Maybe “because so many of my impressions come to me through the medium of others’ eyes and ears” (48). Actually, “It is certain that I cannot always distinguish my own thoughts from those I read, because what I read becomes the very substance and texture of my mind” (53). Likewise, Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is claimed to be modeled on Albert Camus’s *The Fall*. In addition, *Exit West* is said to have quite a few Sartrean traces, particularly the title, which is thought to mimic the title of

Sartre's play *No Exit*. Hamid claims that he didn't intend to imitate Sartre but maybe he is influenced. Furthermore, characters in *Exit West* are afraid of Others. Natives are afraid of migrants and one kind of migrant (Saeed) is scared of another type of migrant (Nigerians). All humans are migrants. Every time we see one group of people or an individual terrified of another, we are viewing one migrant as frightened of another migrant. As such, Hamid assures that Sartre's "Hell is other people" in *No Exit* is contradictory to what he intends to tell the reader about. Hamid insists that we are always worried about other people. Sartre believes that excluding that fear and achieving meaningful communication with the other seems to be very difficult, while Hamid thinks that the only hope we have is to eliminate that fear and perceive a way of communication despite that fear (Hamid "Self-Censorship").

B. F. Skinner insists that: "A person is not an originating agent" but is instead "a locus, a point at which many genetic and environmental conditions come together in a joint effect" (185). Therefore, Hamid chooses the names of his fictional characters relating to his country and culture like Oona, Nadia, Saeed, etc. Additionally, his setting of place is mostly Pakistan or he yields to leave the countries anonymous but we can infer and conclude that it is also Pakistan. Asked in an interview about using a monologue about a Pakistani's experiences in America after the 9/11 attacks in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, he said, "The form of the novel, with the narrator and his audience both acting as characters, allowed me

to mirror the mutual suspicion with which America and Pakistan (or the Muslim world) look at one another” (Hamid “Hamish Hamilton”). Hamid has, evidently, shown and discussed since his first novel the miseries and sufferings of Pakistan and Easterners, merely to justify his escape in his last two narratives.

### **Hermeneutic Reading of Escapism in Hamid’s Last Two Narratives**

There is no vision from nowhere, so there is an interpretive context to any such encounter. This vision is likely to be a narrative of one sort or another, a story that connects some set of life incidents in a more or less coherent text. Antoine Roquentin, the protagonist of Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Nausea* says that a man is always a narrator of tales. Man lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others, he notices life experiences through these stories; and he attempts to live his own life as if he were narrating a story. These stories resemble surveying one’s history via memory through narratives. These stories are frequently supposed to tell truth. So, novels could be real stories. Roquentin exposes, “Things happen one way and we tell about them in the opposite sense” (39). One can gain full access to feelings and thoughts only through oral or written expressions. As the German hermeneutic philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) says, “Only his actions, his formulated expressions of life and the effects of these actions on others, teach man about himself. Thus, he comes to know himself only by the circuitous route of

understanding” (176). The meaningful expressions as they appear in the full context of life reflect the inner or mental feelings. Dilthey also argues, “The gesture and the terror are not two separate things but a unity” (221).

The hermeneutic turn of phenomenology, as claimed by the professor of psychology Darren Langdrige, derived from the belief that our experiences can be best understood through narration. To understand the life world, we need to delve into the stories people narrate of their experiences, with the assistance of some specific hermeneutic or strategy of interpretation. Mohsin Hamid believes that writing tales resembles creating worlds. These tales are supposed to be completely personal as they often, somehow, reflect the voice of the author who creates them. To a large extent, art is a place of personal experience, and most of the incidents and affairs told therein are triggered by daily life. Consequently, isolating oneself from the fiction one creates is hard because we are, almost, the very product that we produce. Writers are in their writings and, hence, consciously or unconsciously, subject to their self-representation. Just as “the political which is personal” (Hamid *Discontent* xviii).

Unconsciously, any fictional author expresses his trauma of the world and interprets his own experiences through a fictional context, in the form of symbols. In his essay ‘Creative Writers and Daydreaming’ (1908), Freud explains that the artist cherishes certain secrets “as his most intimate possessions, and as a rule, he would

rather confess his misdeeds than tell them to anyone” (422). Hamid is attached to his fiction, stories, characters, and the incidents and experiences he narrates to us. Some critics consider his literary works as metafiction. Hamid follows Ernest Bloch’s principle of hope. He believes that when no hope is left, one has to follow one’s principles. Thus, he decides to escape what does not suit him and imagines inanities.

As for Julia Kristeva, the work becomes “abject” because it intimately expresses our inner self and secrets and is such an exposition of ourselves that it leads to embarrassment; abjection. Psychologically, the embarrassment that is caused by the nakedness of the authors throughout their works is analogous to persons finding themselves naked in front of others (82). It is assumed that a plain work is not an artistic one as it folds no secrets, does not involve curiosity and, thus, does not motivate interest. This does not apply to a literary work that narrates a dark secret about life. It does not tell all the details and preserves the mystery so as not to lose all its ornament and the reader loses curiosity. Throughout his literary works, Hamid has engaged in disguise, immersing in symbols, interfering with words, making things vague, and leaving the reader’s thirst for details unquenched. Throughout the writing, this disguise has many techniques, such as symbolism, which includes metaphors, puns, allegories, metonymies, the creation of personae, and other techniques, such as the authorial scheme of authorial lying, hiding, misleading, twisting words, and so on.

However, the more a literary man tries to repress his own experiences, the more they are liable to come to the surface, as Derrida explains in *Specters of Marx*. He believes that what is buried ultimately comes to the surface like a specter definitely because it is brutally buried and excluded when it is entitled to being free ( ). Hamid confirms what Derrida claims and stresses this repression. He says, “For me, writing a novel is like solving a puzzle” (69). Though, he sometimes reveals his secrets and confesses in his interviews that he prefers to write smaller books because it is “easier to get nonreaders to read, and most people I know in Pakistan are non-readers of literary fiction” (Ali). Thus, he admits that he writes to the Pakistani about their misery. Readers notice easily the stylistic use of Hamid’s long sentences that may extend to one whole paragraph as if he does not like to end his conversation or complaint to them as well as to justify his weak escape.

Fantasy presents new methods of understanding our real world. It offers an alternative to real life. Hamid says, “I write novels because I need to. I think I would be very sad if I was not creating a universe in my head” (“Hamish”). He states, “Writing a novel is sort of self-help for me, being more comfortable with my life and the world” (“In Sly Self-Help”). He further says, “Stories have the power to liberate us from the tyranny of what was and is” (“Mohsin Hamid”). He also declares that, in “literary fiction,” “you are trying to help yourself” (Ali). Hamid speaks to us, readers, who are drawn into the literary text that tells us something about our present human

condition, with feelings and situations that are already familiar to us. *Exit West* and *The Last White Man* show the ability to escape into imagination granted by fiction. These texts examine how we can escape our ontological confusion or fate throughout fictional worlds. Lacking power, the means to escape the refugee crisis depicted in *Exit West* are magical doors that intentionally fabricate a specific estrangement and narrative objectivity from the real-life dilemma. Likewise, the way to escape anti-black racism in *The Last White Man* is a magical disease through changing skin color into black putting an end to the white race.

### ***Exit West* (2017)**

Hamid tells Mushtaq Bilal how did he have the idea to envisage these magic doors in *Exit West*:

I was talking to somebody on Skype in a different part of the world and I thought it's almost like a window between us...my phone takes me to the news and entertainment and all over the world. And how you get on an airplane and fly to New York or London or Dubai or Bangkok. You step through this door and almost magically, within a few hours, you are in a different world. I had this idea of a novel where these doors open.

Hamid has a lot of gates in *Exit West*. He portrays cell phones as magic gates that enable people to see the invisible world, "antennas sniffed out an invisible world, as if by magic" (21). He, also,

portrays windows as a gate to death contrary to the doors that are portrayed as gates to life. “Windows now changed in the city. A window was the border through which death was possibly most likely to come”. Citizens were so terrified. The protagonist’s family “placed bookshelves full of books flush against the windows in their bedrooms...leaned Saeed’s bed over the tall windows in their sitting room...Nadia taped the inside of her windows with beige packing tape” (Hamid “Exit” 39).

The text narrates the story of the protagonists, Saeed and Nadia, who live in an anonymous city in an undefined country. As they fall in love, militants blockade their city. Hamid strips this unnamed city of almost all of its social, cultural, and geographical characteristics and depicts it in idioms that are so generic as to be meaningless. The unnamed city in an unnamed country is understood and interpreted in terms of apartment buildings, billboards, cafes, green median strips between roads, and a stock exchange building. This severe delocalization of the anonymous city in Hamid’s narrative grants an opportunity to the readers to relocalize it due to their perspectives and understanding.

What helps the reader to understand and interpret a narrative text is the time in which this text is written. At the height of the European migrant plight in 2017, *Exit West* is published. At that time news of enormous migrants from war-torn countries like Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq fleeing to Europe was ubiquitous. Many readers and interpreters relocalized this unnamed city, which he

keeps a secret, as Mosul or Aleppo. Others relocalized the anonymous city as “certainly a non-Western city,” or a “West Asian city (you can insert any name)”, or that it might be a city in Pakistan, Syria, or Libya (Bilal). Others relocalized it somewhere in the Muslim world. Each reader interprets and understands according to his history and culture.

The phenomenon of free migration of humans, which is rooted in the development of globalization, has aroused anxieties in the Global North that are integral to what scholars have entitled “neo-nationalism.” US President Donald Trump’s 2016 campaign promise of building a wall on the Mexico-US border known as the Trump Wall and Brexit, and the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union following a 2016 referendum, are two of the most remarkable examples of this neo-nationalism. This neo-nationalism highlights a fundamental inconsistency between freedom of movement, which is believed to be a universal human right and democracy, which is regarded as a universal value. Hamid believes that

migration poses a challenge for democracy...a citizen living in Syria is faced with death and flees to Europe, but (what if) a European country has democratically voted to not let this Syrian in. What about the rights of this person who wants to come in? They were not involved in that democratic process...national democracy...is a limited democracy...if we are serious about democracy we will

have to start thinking increasingly about democracy at the global level. (“Self-Censorship”)

Hamid wants to escape his factual and real life to another envisaged one that suits his needs. At the end of Ch. 2, Hamid foreshadows the magic doors. “Through an open door, a young soldier looked down upon their city, a city not overly familiar to him, for he had grown up in the countryside, and was struck by how big it was, how grand its towers and lush its parks” (19). Lacking power, Hamid fabricates magical black doors that cancel the dangerous trips that refugees like Saeed and Nadia undertake. He uses these magical black doors to bypass national borders and also to offer the interconnection of life in a globalized world. Saeed and Nadia migrate from the Global South to the Global North. Protagonists not only escape freely from one country to another but also Nadia chooses to escape from aggressive men. “She was always clad from the tips of her toes to the bottom of her jugular notch in a flowing black robe” (2). “She learned how to dress for self-protection” (12), so men do not abuse her. She may also lie to escape from some situations. As if, Hamid’s fictional weak characters always choose easy solutions.

*Exit West* shows a conscious trial to narrate the world through a survey and portrayal of the Global North-South divide. The most remarkable way that Hamid follows to portray this divide is by juxtaposing the delocalized anonymous city in the Global South with explicitly named cities in the Global North such as Sydney, Latin

America, Tokyo, Ireland, San Diego, California, New York, Paris, Vienna, Germany, Sweden, London, Thailand, Amsterdam, San Francisco, etc. Early in the exposition, Hamid justifies the cause for escape and hints that the anonymous city he mentions is “swollen by refugees...experience any major fighting, just some shootings and the odd car bombing” (2). Natives live in constant unrest. The country they live in changed to the extent that they feel no more at home. Saeed, like other easterners who suffer in their countries, imagines that a comfortable prospered future is in the West. “The Atacama Desert. The air is so dry, so clear, and there’s so few people...you can lie on your back and look up and see the Milky Way...you feel like you’re lying on a giant spinning ball in space” (13). Contrary to the daily lives of most people in the world, others, in poor countries, go to sleep unfed whereas watching on screens people in other lands preparing, consuming and even organizing food fights in luxurious feasts of such opulence.

Hamid describes those who can migrate as successful persons. Narrating what these citizens suffer from, he depicts some of the problems facing easterners like reduced wages that mean poor income and race discrimination focusing on the difference of color skin between characters in the text. Hating to be characterized as black as opposed to white, he uses the terms: dark skin, brown skin and pale skinned. He, also, portrays the curfew’s commencement and how they used to pray for peace, and how Saeed’s mother prays not to miss “a single one of her devotions” (28). As the city

witnesses continuous crises, Saeed's mum develops difficulties sleeping and starts to take secretly a sedative before bed.

The reader can understand the cause of escapism through Hamid's interpretations of how these people feel entrapped and imprisoned. One day the signal to all mobile phones in the city vanishes and internet connectivity is interrupted as well. Thus, Nadia, Saeed and "countless others, felt marooned and alone and much more afraid" (31). They yield to escape the lack of supplies and government policies that instituted that no one person could buy more than a certain amount per day, in addition to standing in a line that is quite long to get their needs. People start to vanish and it becomes difficult to tell whether those who vanish are alive or dead. For example, Nadia's family vanishes then she finds their home destroyed by the force of a bomb. Many residents have no income and "people left with what they could carry" (38). They suffer from cold nights in winter as they live with no gas or electricity. Some families had to bury their dead in a courtyard or at the sheltered margin of a road, it becomes difficult to get a convenient graveyard. "Since visas, which had long been near-impossible, were now truly impossible for non-wealthy people" (28), it is difficult to have an easy way out of the city except magic.

International channels say that the unprecedented flow of migrants is hitting the rich countries thus natives start to build walls and fences and strengthen their borders. Consequently, magic doors appear in Ch. 4 as the only solution:

doors that could take you elsewhere, often to places far away, well removed from this death trap of a country... people who had been through such doors. A normal door, they said, could become a special door, and it could happen without warning, to any door at all...most people began to gaze at their own doors...every morning, when she woke, Nadia looked over at her front door, and at the doors to her bathroom, her closet, her terrace. Every morning, in his room, Saeed did much the same. (39)

These societies now witness “activities of drones and aircraft that bombed from the heavens...and by the public and private executions that now took place almost continuously, bodies hanging from streetlamps and billboards” (47). Therefore, Nadia and Saeed dedicate themselves to finding a way out of the city. “Doors were everywhere but finding one the militants had not yet found, a door not yet guarded, that was the trick” (49). They were keen to depart their city. However, Nadia “was haunted by worries too, revolving around dependence...going abroad and leaving their country she and Saeed and Saeed’s father might be at the mercy of strangers, subsistent on handouts, caged in pens like vermin” (51). Whatever their anxieties, both of them would migrate if given the chance. Only death awaits them in their city. They decide to leave and come back one day when things become better but this is said that will not happen. One of the bad effects of migration on them is that when they migrate, they murder from their lives those they leave behind.

Finally, they pass through a black door in a dentist's office. They find themselves in Mykonos. Passing the magical door "was both like dying and like being born" (56). Killing the past and being born in the future. To let the reader hope and imagine that migration is going to be easy, Hamid portrays his fictional characters using normal doors each time.

Hamid does not claim that he imagines a solution for all their suffering. He just hopes to have the right to migrate easily. Nevertheless, powerlessly, he just finds a magical solution to escape this trouble through magic doors that enable migrants in and out. However, they still suffer as migrants and alienated blacks. Inside those small tents, they suffer from cold and sleep fully dressed, huddled and wrapped inside their blankets.

Desperation they saw in the camps, the fear in people's eyes that they would be trapped here forever, or until hunger forced them back through one of the doors that led to undesirable places, the doors that were left unguarded, what people in the camps referred to as mousetraps, but which, in resignation, some people were nonetheless trying, especially those who had exhausted their resources, venturing through them to the same place from which they had come, or to another unknown place when they thought anything would be better than where they had been. (62-3)

Hoping for a better life, Nadia and Saeed step through another door and left Mykonos behind. They meet migrants from all over the world Nigerians, Somalis, etc. “dark and medium and even light-skinned people” (71) who talk in various languages. There, London houses, parks and disused lots are being peopled in by so many migrants. It is overflown with tents and hard shelters. Legal citizens and natives are vanishingly few. Migrants inhabit homes that are not theirs. Their number exceeds fifty dwellers in a single residence. Moreover, vaccinations are doubtful. Their life seems miserable even after migration.

All the food...very quickly consumed. Some residents had money to buy more, but most had to spend their time foraging, which involved going to the depots and stalls where various groups were giving out rations or serving free soup and bread. The daily supplies at each of these were exhausted within hours, sometimes within minutes, and the only option then was to barter with one’s neighbors or kin or acquaintances, and since most people had little to barter with, they usually bartered with a promise of something to eat tomorrow or the next day in exchange for something to eat today, a bartering not so much of different goods, exactly, but of time. (73-4)

Hoping for emancipation, Hamid imagines these magic doors to be as available as one can “step through the door, just once, to see

what was on the other side” (72). Hamid calls for open access to the world and sets these doors to act as a release.

The news...was full of war and migrants and nativists...Without borders nations appeared to be becoming somewhat illusory...the nation was like a person with multiple personalities, some insisting on union and some on disintegration, and that this person with multiple personalities was furthermore a person whose skin appeared to be dissolving as they swam in a soup full of other people whose skins were likewise dissolving. (87)

Racism is in each community even among the migrated residents. Migrants yield to “reassembling themselves in suits and runs of their own kind, like with like, or rather superficially like with superficially like, all the hearts together, all the clubs together, all the Sudanese, all the Hondurans” (81). Saeed wonders if the natives will kill them, and Nadia says that they are very terrified so they can do anything. She says, “Imagine if you lived here. And millions of people from all over the world suddenly arrived.” However, Saeed argues, “Millions arrived in our country when there were wars nearby.” But Nadia tells him “That was different. Our country was poor. We didn’t feel we had as much to lose” (90).

They wish that the doors are never closed and that new doors will continuously be opened. The whole planet appears to be on the move. It seems like remodeling the Earth itself.

much of the global south headed to the global north, southerners moving to other southern places and northerners moving to other northern places. In the formerly protected greenbelt around London a ring of new cities was being built, cities that would be able to accommodate more people again than London itself. This development was called the London Halo...some migrants and some nativists too continued to detonate bombs and carry out knifings and shootings. (94)

Hamid hopes to find an escape from being trapped in a destroyed country without having an opportunity to try another place. However, he hints at the disasters that they could face, “disabled machinery or destroyed dwelling units nearing...severe beating of some workers...the knifing of a native foreman by a migrant or a fight among rival groups of migrants...No natives lived in the dormitories”. Migrants suffer from race discrimination as “natives did labor alongside migrants on the work sites, usually as supervisors or as operators of heavy machinery, giant vehicles” (98). They wish they could reliably find a meal. They no longer enjoy a private life. “They could hear breathing and coughing and a child crying and the struggling sound of quiet sex” (100).

In this new place, Nadia and Saeed find themselves changed in each other’s eyes. It seems that the farther Saeed moves from the city of their birth, through space and through time, the more he seeks to reinforce his connection to it, contrary to Nadia whose connection

to this era and her country seems to be gone. Nadia avoids speaking their language and avoids their people but continues to wear her black robes. Nearing the resolution, Hamid assures 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” (116). Such as Nadia is departing away from Saeed, and vice versa, “all over the world people were slipping away from where they had Been” (118).

The text outlines its denouement into the future, half a century after Saeed and Nadia flee their homeland, settle somewhere else, leave each other and have independent lives. It seems that the doors remain and the world has no borders. Nadia and Saeed are easily able to return to their homeland to meet at a cafe and think about other countries they can migrate to. Ultimately, Hamid seems to be founding a new utopian country to live in.

The apocalypse appeared to have arrived and yet it was not apocalyptic, which is to say that while the changes were jarring they were not the end, and life went on, and people found things to do and ways to be and people to be with, and plausible desirable futures began to emerge. ...Some were calling this a new jazz age, and one could walk around Marin and see all kinds of ensembles, humans with humans, humans with electronics, dark skin with light skin with gleaming metal with matte plastic, computerized music and unamplified music and even

people who wore masks or hid themselves from view.  
(120)

### ***The Last White Man (2022)***

Using the omniscient point of view, the author narrates the story of Anders, a white man, who wakes up to find himself had turned a deep and clear brown. The author aims to attract attention to the Dichotomy of “us” and “them” and to find a way to escape this traumatic discrimination. However, sometimes, he uses the first POV during narration as if he tells the reader that it is his trauma; “if we, writing or reading this, were to find *ourselves* indulging in a kind of voyeuristic pleasure at their coupling, we could perhaps be forgiven” (Hamid “The Last” 8).

Hamid admits in an interview that “one of the most important things that we can do as individuals at the moment is to break down this concept of the Other. There is no Other” (Bilal). In *Exit West* which precedes *The Last White Man*, Hamid depicts the protagonists as successful in not ‘othering’ other people, but they are humans after all, and with Saeed, the Nigerians become his Others, and he still wants to be with people whom he thinks are his own. But Hamid, finally, tells us that Saeed and Nadia get to a place where even if they might feel a sense of the Other, it is no longer the dominant force in how they behave. Hamid sheds light on this problem of discrimination in *Exit West*, however, five years later he

finds no solution except putting an end to this white race in order to live peacefully without any discrimination.

In 2018, four years before the publication of *The Last White Man*, Hamid claims that the need to imagine that there is an Other is so severe. He wonders if we will ever be absolutely free of an instinct to imagine this Other.

the most potent way of resisting it is to recognise that the people we think of as the Other actually have a great deal in common with us and we have a great deal in common with them. That way resisting begins to break down the Other. Will we completely escape from the Other? Maybe not. But could it be a much weaker and less dangerous form than it is today? I think, yes. (“Self-Censorship”)

*The Last White Man* portrays an anonymous U.S. town in which white people ambiguously convert into dark-skinned. This transformation later spreads not only all over the country but also all over the world. At first, Anders, the protagonist, thinks that this transformation is a temporary appearance; he reports being sick, hoping that this dark color will disappear before getting back to work again. His father enfolds a muted dislike for him because his skin has unexpectedly ceased to be white. Father no longer embraces him and the battling tension in his eyes before welcoming him is too obvious to ignore. Anders notices the absence of specific advantages ranging from cashiers’ dealings in shopping centers to making indisputable cuts in driving. He and those like him start to

experience personally what it means to live nominally as a dark-skinned man.

The face replacing his filled him with an unexpected murderous rage. Well acquainted with how the black is hegemonically tyrannized, Anders “wanted to kill the colored man...to leave nothing standing but himself, as he was before” (2). Anders lies for a long while, hiding and hoping to wake up as a white man again. He is shocked to the extent that he loses his appetite, considering this change as the damage that will be fixed and waiting to change back. On the contrary, if the protagonist is a black man who converts into white, he is supposed to be happy with his new elevated position in society.

As an alienated black man, Hamid is successful to interpret the experience and suffering of living as black among those whites hoping the white race to disappear forever and be replaced by one colored race which is black as the easiest way to escape his traumas. Hamid narrates some features of this type of humiliation:

the woman behind him swerved to overtake, and cursed him, furious, cursed good and hard and sped off, and he did nothing, nothing, not shout back, not smile to disarm her, nothing, like he was mentally deficient...he wondered how he would have reacted, how he could have reacted, if there had only been some way for her to know he was white. (4)

The white treats the black as “a different kind of person” (8). Westerners divide human beings into two races, each one “was stalking the other, which of them stalking and which of them being stalked unclear, maybe both doing both, in a way” (8).

Hamid informs the reader that he wants to escape from a world that does not care and is getting worse all the time, and more and more dangerous. Crimes and potholes in the streets and weird people are everywhere. Moreover, black men are treated as strangers and animals. Hamid describes those nonwhites as “dark, waiting at a bus stop or wielding a mop or sitting in a group at the back of a pickup truck, sitting in a group that was...like a group of animals, not like humans” (12). Because of this disaster, Anders’s father weeps like a shudder when he sees Anders black. Although he does not disown him, Anders’ father’s initial stubborn looks and passionless attitude when he observes his son’s converted skin highlights the extent to which racism degrades human sensibilities. Aware of the hazards of being seen as black, Anders wears a hoodie, keeps his face invisible, wears gloves, and keeps his hands in his pockets to stay hidden. His color transformation causes a sense of unease and forms a distance and difference in elevation between Andres and Oona. Blackness acts as a border between the black Anders and his white girlfriend Oona.

Anders does not go to work for almost a week and keeps looking for his whiteness. When Anders ultimately goes back to work, his boss arrogantly supposes that he should take his own life because of

this transformation. The following week a man in the town kills himself in front of his house. Not witnessing the shooting, neighbors assure it to be a practice of home defense, “the *dark* body lying there an *intruder*, shot with his own gun after a struggle...the sum of it all was clear...a *white man had indeed shot a dark man, but also that the dark man and the white man were the same*” (23).

Those white who change into black are the most well-informed about how blacks are treated as they are themselves the tyrants, so when they convert, they become so furious to leave home and face the other race. White people used to grant jobs of cleaning, farming, serving, etc. to the blacks as if they are slaves and inferior to them. The cleaning guy in the text is a dark-skinned character and reports that he is the only one who never exercises at the gym. They treat him as “a puppy, a dog, that you give a couple of pats to, and call out good boy” (27). When Anders was white, he neither had the cleaning guy’s phone number nor even asked him about his last name.

Over time, more white people face the same conversion. Consequently, the roads are more abandoned at night. However, Anders “had not yet lost all hope that a return to his old role was possible, to his old centrality...at least to a role better than this peripheral one” (23). Inhabitants consider this color change into black as a storm or disaster that they should be ready to face because we do not live in isolation. To interpret that we are affected by people around us and by how people look at us and when we feel

weak and powerless, we yield to escape, the author uses the second POV to speak directly to the reader, “[the] way people act around *you*, it changes what *you* are, who *you* are” (26).

Hoping to eliminate any kind of discrimination or superiority of one race over the other, Hamid wants the white and the nonwhite to look the same. He seems to be happy to disturb a white society. Riots disturb the delivery of primary needs such as supplying supermarkets, electrical power and telephone service.

There were flare-ups of violence in town, a brawl here, a shooting there, and the mayor repeatedly called for calm, but militants had begun to appear on the streets, pale-skinned militants, some dressed almost like soldiers in combat uniform, or halfway like soldiers...and others dressed like hunters...all the militants, whatever their attire, visibly armed, and the police made no real effort to stop them. (30)

On the contrary, “the militants did not confront Oona because she was white” (30). Militants of the city start to kill dark people. They start to clear dark people out of the town. He shows how blacks are frightened by whites. Out of fear, Anders has to capture a rifle and a box of shells. He no longer strays far from his rifle to the extent that he takes it with him to the bathroom. The rifle makes him feel secure. He is ready to use it either to defend himself or to end his life. He does not venture out. Oona’s mother narrates that there are paid aggressors who “were trying to kill both *our* defenders and

*our* people...sometimes killing *their own kind*, to make *us* look bad... the *dark* people could have *their own places*, and...do *their own* dark things” (43). Using *us* and *our* as opposed to *them* and *their* clarifies the dichotomy of ‘us’ and ‘other’ and assures that, hopelessly, the only way to end this suffering is to escape through magic hoping not to see the white race anymore. Being alone is better, in order to be non-confrontational and avoid trouble.

The service of cell towers had been cut off and they have no access to the online world now. Because of the continuous change of color and violence that bursts in town, streets are no longer safe. Escapism is portrayed not only through Anders’s magic change of color but also through his escape from the white militants after changing into black. His father takes him inside and draws the tattered curtains. He parks his son’s car behind the house in order not to be visible. They are afraid that someone may show up and demand Anders be given over. White society is hegemonic and unjust. Considering themselves regularly superior to blacks, white people tyrannize Anders who is portrayed as “doubly, triply imprisoned, in his skin, in this house, in his town” (53). He feels proud to communicate with whites after his conversion. When they open their bags and have lunch together, he feels that they are equal. As a white man, Hamid is not ignorant about how tyrannically whites treat blacks. Feeling that blacks spread all over the country, he is not pleased as a black man now instead he is afraid and spreads the curtains wide to hide. Anders notices “how many dark faces

there were, and how the town was a different town now, a town in a different place, a different country, with all these dark people around, more dark people than white” (57).

Moreover, Anders’s father feels discomfort at seeing an intimate relationship between the white girl Oona and the black man Anders, he does not like the fact that “this white girl kiss this dark man, even though the dark man was not a dark man” (54) and is his son. The same happened to Oona’s mum who is frightened and frustrated to see her white daughter making love with a black man. Even after Oona’s conversion into black, upon finding Oona making love with Anders, Oona’s mother bokes in disgust. She cannot comprehend that her now black daughter is mating with another black person, ignoring Oona’s or Anders’ previous history or their loyalty to each other.

Although Oona is shocked to observe how Anders has converted, she adapts to the new personality more fluently than his father. Oona was not able to make love with Anders after his color conversion, however starting to be accustomed to Anders’s black color,

when they had sex it was as though it was the first time...she was looking only *within*, and the first time they had sex after Anders changed, it had not been Anders and Oona having sex, it had been other than that, others, but this time Anders saw Oona, and Oona saw Anders...and if they were performing, their performance was an

attempt at naturalness, and in their attempt they came close, closer than they had come before. (34)

Curiously Oona puts on makeup to try out blackness during the lockdown. Tragically, Oona's racist mum finds the trial degrading, however, a few weeks later, Oona faces this transformation. She feels

no pain, and yes there was surprise, but Oona had known it was coming, and was already somewhat perplexed it was this delayed, and so she lay in her bed taking it all in with her heart beating fast but without panic, looking at her arm, touching her skin, feeling her stomach and her legs...Oona went to the mirror and saw a stranger...Oona and this *dark* woman together...a feeling of melancholy touched her, a sadness at the losing of...the face she had known. (59-60)

Blacks feel ashamed of their color and behave as inferior to the superior whites. After washing the dishes, Oona's fingers do not look drained of blood as she used to when she was white. Instead, they

looked gray, like chalk had been dusted on them, or like salt had come up from within waterlogged soil, and Oona took some cream and she rubbed and rubbed her fingers, rubbed and rubbed them until they were supple and glowing again, the brown rich and restored to its vitality. (64)

Oona's mother is so sad for her daughter. She believes "this must be difficult for Oona, so difficult for her poor, once-beautiful daughter, to be like that now, look like that now, that, to have everything taken from her" (64).

Oona's mother is a severe racist. When one of her favorite radio personalities has changed color, she believes that he has changed his brain too and she becomes no longer able to listen to him. The online conversations move on to search for a cure. These conversations

were trying to retreat, to find places unaffected, convinced the calamity was infectious, and talked about islands and hills and forests far away, Oona's mother could not go, and most others could not either, and so the general buzz was about progress towards discovering a way to undo the horror, but for every story of a miracle drug or concoction that made you white again, there were three or four of someone who had grown terribly sick from imbibing it, or had even died. (54)

Oona's mum is among the last in town to convert. Ultimately, she also faces what is now a worldwide miracle. She does not speak much and stares ceaselessly at her hands. She is dreadfully broken and might be reluctant to stay. Oona fears that her mum may harm herself. Nevertheless, she adapts to the new dark color and her terror starts to diminish because most of the people surrounding her transform into black.

Nearing the denouement, people all over the world change into black. Anders is unable to know who is who and which is which, not until they introduce themselves. “Men who had known each other for years now acted like they did not know each other, or worse, disliked each other” (35). Hamid portrays white and black as mingling to the extent that you cannot tell whether “the woman had always been dark, or if the woman had changed” (38). White people start to feel that they live “a life where none of the old rules any longer applied” (55). Anders’s father is the only and last white man who does not alter into black, however, he finally dies and is “committed to the soil, the last white man, and after that, after him, there were none” (73). His impending death harmonizes the son and father relationship and strengthens the union of Anders and Oona by marriage. Hamid imagines that the old rules of race discrimination vanish forever. Powerlessly and unable to change real life, Hamid chooses to escape through his daydreams in his fictional characters to have a utopian world free from racial conflicts or, in other words, completely free from whites. Therefore, the gothic style of imagining inanities has achieved its goal. Race discrimination starts to vanish. They care no more for colors but for souls, for what is within.

Hamid sheds light on the false claims of whites which are reversed at the end of the novel. Oona’s mother claims that she read of the savagery the dark people have from the beginning, and has manifested itself throughout history, and cannot be denied, and she

reads the examples of when groups of whites had fallen, and the rapes, slaughters and tortures they have been subjected to, and how that is the way of the dark people, whenever they seize the upper hand, and she is frightened by what she reads. TV and social media talk about

the end of the world. The final chaos was approaching...crime and anarchy, and cannibalism out of hunger, and, worse, out of vengeance, and blood would flow, and all should prepare for the end, gather with the like-minded or barricade themselves in their homes, ready for the last stand, the last stand before we were overrun, because we were no safer for being dark, they could tell the difference, they still knew who we were, what we were, and they would come for us now, now that we were blind, and could not see one another, could not see which of us was actually us, and they would come for us like predators in the night, taking their prey when their prey was defenseless. (74)

Contrary to this news and claims, Hamid earnestly hopes and imagines that America can forsake its racism and attendant societal sovereignty. Both Anders and Oona no longer feel weird. The difference is gone. Whiteness has become just a memory or history. They start to speak of whiteness and what it had been. Oona's mother has posted her picture as a black woman to her social media account. She "missed being white...she missed her daughter being

white, and she wondered at times if her grandchildren might be white, if there was still a chance for them...she knew they probably would not be, and this saddened her” (79). Free of racism, as it seems, with the burial of the last white man, Hamid closes the narrative text on who is accustomed to being its most racist character, Oona’s mum, appreciating Anders and Oona’s marriage and telling the couple’s teenage daughter about how the family used to be white. She tries “to impart a sense of how it had been, of what they had really come from, of the whiteness that could no longer be seen but was still a part of them” (87). Finally, the agitations fade because the white race no longer remains. Anders, who was so frightened at the beginning of the narration, now enjoys his life with his family. He accepts his “brown hand...brown face...brown daughter” (88).

Hamid presents an important vision of how racism prevents people from noticing the needed humanity in themselves and others, causing an alienation that destroys individuals and society. Hamid does not set the novel on a plain role reversal. Otherwise, the plot interprets the tension happening between the contradiction of the new self against the old one inside the same character. As the novel provokes the results of racism, Hamid’s readers understand that the daydream of whiteness is an alienation that is anchored on a void. Subsequently, whiteness arouses only depression and turmoil. Hamid interestingly operates dialectics: darkened skin shifts from being a type of pandemic at the exposition of the narrative to a social

equalizer at the resolution. Ultimately, readers can understand the wickedness of race discrimination that has been maintained for decades. Hamid has successfully used inanities to interpret that we are all humans under the skin and that discrimination stands between us and what it means to be human to emerge.

### **Conclusion:**

Using the phenomenological hermeneutic approach; the theory and practice of interpretation, where interpretation involves an understanding that can be justified, seems to be the most relevant category to interpret and understand Mohsin Hami's escapist narrative texts. Hamid skillfully applies the dynamics and manifestations of escapism to his narratives. Throughout his texts, Hamid seems to claim that only magic can save the planet. People have no way out except to imagine inanities. Hamid is able to convince the reader that there is a way out by trying continuously to change and adapt. However, escapism seems to be a characteristic of weakness. Hamid is best described, here, as a frustrated novelist who, as a daydreamer, provides daydreams for the reader.

New criticism claims that we are not only exposed to the author's life experiences but are also exposed to the meaning of the text in itself. However, even though the writer is anonymous and we can nevertheless understand the text, the real problem, from a hermeneutic point of view is the continuation of this interaction between the questioner and the answerer. We would never

understand the text we read without immediately presupposing: Why does the author write it? What is the question he answers? Therefore, the researcher cannot ignore the author's personal history. The author's understanding as well as the reader's interpretation are motivated by personal interest and concern. The researcher applies the hermeneutic circle as well as the rhetorical triangle to be able to understand and interpret the narrative texts. Moreover, interpretive profiles facilitate the writing of this article since the data is systematically archived and easily retrievable.

As all understanding is ultimately self-understanding, following the qualitative phenomenological hermeneutic approach and prospecting Hamid's life history act as an agent to clearly understand why and what the author escapes in his narratives. Finally, this study proves that the British Pakistani novelist Mohsin Hamid is clearly affected by his own experiences that affect his understanding and interpretation of society, but lacking power he has no way out except imagining inanities.

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هل هناك أى طريقة للخروج؟ قراءة فينومينولوجية هرمنيوطيقية للهروب فى "الخروج

غربا" (٢٠١٧) و "آخر رجل أبيض" (٢٠٢٢) للروائى محسن حامد

### ملخص

عن طريق اتباع المنهجية النوعية، يقوم هذا المقال فى سياق هرمنيوطيقا الفينومينولوجيا بتحليل النصين الروائيين "الخروج غربا" و "آخر رجل أبيض" لتوضيح كيف لرجل مغترب غير أبيض القدرة على الهروب من معاناته و محاولات إذلاله فى مجتمع غربى يقطنه البيض. تقوم الدراسة بتفسير و توضيح ما الذى يجبر رجل أسود على تخيل شىء غير عقلانى على أنه السبيل الوحيد للهروب. كما تقوم الدراسة بتوضيح قدرة الهيرمونيطيقا السردية على مساعدة القارئ فى فهم العديد من القضايا الرئيسية مثل الهروب و العنصرية و الهجرة و الاغتراب من خلال نصين روائيين. تقوم الورقة البحثية بتوضيح كيف للروتين اليومى للروائى البريطانى الباكستانى محسن حامد و اهتماماته و شؤونه الشخصية أن يكون لها دور فى تفسير و تأويل أمور المجتمع من حوله. كما تناقش الدراسة أيضا مدى ارتباط هذه التأويلات و التفسيرات بتجارب الحياة و ردود الأفعال اليومية لقارئ النصوص. بالإضافة الى ذلك فان المقال يوضح أهمية المثلث البلاغى و دائرة التأويل فى تفسير و فهم المعنى.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الفينومينولوجيا الهرمنيوطيقية - الهروب - الاغتراب -

العنصرية - الهجرة - محسن حامد