



Home Fire

Kamila Shamsie

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

Home Fire

Kamila Shamsie

Home Fire Kamila Shamsie

“Ingenious... Builds to one of the most memorable final scenes I’ve read in a novel this century.” —The New York Times

WINNER OF THE 2018 WOMEN'S PRIZE FOR FICTION

LONGLISTED FOR THE MAN BOOKER PRIZE

The suspenseful and heartbreaking story of an immigrant family driven to pit love against loyalty, with devastating consequences

Isma is free. After years of watching out for her younger siblings in the wake of their mother’s death, she’s accepted an invitation from a mentor in America that allows her to resume a dream long deferred. But she can’t stop worrying about Aneeka, her beautiful, headstrong sister back in London, or their brother, Parvaiz, who’s disappeared in pursuit of his own dream, to prove himself to the dark legacy of the jihadist father he never knew. When he resurfaces half a globe away, Isma’s worst fears are confirmed.

Then Eamonn enters the sisters’ lives. Son of a powerful political figure, he has his own birthright to live up to—or defy. Is he to be a chance at love? The means of Parvaiz’s salvation? Suddenly, two families’ fates are inextricably, devastatingly entwined, in this searing novel that asks: What sacrifices will we make in the name of love?

Home Fire Details

Date : Published August 15th 2017 by Riverhead Books

ISBN : 9780735217683

Author : Kamila Shamsie

Format : Hardcover 276 pages

Genre : Fiction, Contemporary, Literary Fiction

 [Download Home Fire ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Home Fire ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Home Fire Kamila Shamsie

From Reader Review Home Fire for online ebook

Larry H says

Ever since their mother and grandmother died within the period of a year, Isma has cared for her younger twin siblings, Aneeka and Parvaiz. Their well-being has always been her first concern, even if it meant sacrificing her own dreams and ambitions. But now that the twins have turned 18, Isma is finally putting herself first, accepting an invitation from a mentor to travel to America and co-author a paper with her.

That doesn't mean Isma won't worry about her siblings—Aneeka, smart, beautiful, and headstrong, is pursuing studies in law, while Parvaiz has left their London home to try and understand the legacy of their father, who was once a jihadist. Isma does what she believes is right, even as it causes a rift in her family, but she is bound and determined that her brother will not follow in her father's footsteps.

"For girls, becoming women was inevitability; for boys, becoming men was ambition."

When Eamonn, the son of a prominent British politician who has struggled with his own Muslim background in furthering his ambitions, enters the sisters' lives, he, too, causes a rift that he doesn't quite realize at first. Who is he to them? Is he a romantic possibility? A chance to enact revenge? The last hope for a wayward brother? The linchpin of a political crisis? Suddenly many lives hang in the balance, as true intentions are sought to be understood, and emotions are analyzed.

What is stronger, blood or love? Can we ever overcome the obligations of family in order to move on with our lives, and if we can, should we? In *Home Fire*, Kamila Shamsie attempts to answer those questions, as two families deal with the questions of love and loyalty, and how slippery the slope is when we start choosing enemies based on cultural generalizations.

This is a powerful, timely book, and Shamsie does a good job navigating difficult political territory. For the most part, these are interesting characters, and I really became immersed in their stories. I felt, however, the book lost its way in telling Parvaiz's story, for while it was important to the plot, it just wasn't as interesting, and a lot was left unsaid. I also felt that Isma, who plays such a key role at the start of the book, is given short shrift, yet she is fascinating, evidenced by an all-too-short encounter with the politician which seemed like it could have developed into more.

Shamsie is a talented writer, and this book is definitely a thought-provoking one about the ties of family and the immigrant experience. While it didn't resonate for me as much as, say, *Exit West*, it's still a powerful read.

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blo...>

Dem says

A remarkably short Novel that delivers on an epic scale. A story of family ties, loyalty and a story of prejudice in the modern world. A thought provoking and intelligent novel that left me wanting to read more of Kamila Shamsie's work

This is another one of those books upon finishing I can't help regretting I hadn't read this as part of a group read just for the discussion factor as there is so much to discuss.

The Novel has a very powerful opening with Isma a Muslim woman struggling to be admitted to the US on a student visa and her long delay in the interrogation room results in her missing her flight. Isma, Aneeka and Parvaiz have had nothing but each other for a long time, Their father's past rears its ugly head and Parvaiz gets drawn into a world that nightmares are made of.

I loved the structure of this novel as it tells each character's story from his or her point of view in separate chapters. This is a brave novel and certainly makes you think, its well written and the characters are believable and interesting. This is the sort of book that can be read in a couple of sittings and I think would work well for bookclubs.

I look forward to checking out more books by this author.

Diane S ? says

There are so many timely subjects right now, world concerns and threats, and authors have responded in kind. This novel features two Muslim families in Britain, two families that have very different opinions on family and how to show or display their Muslim beliefs. It moves the themes in Sophocles, Antigone to present times. I remember very little about Antigone, refreshed my memory on Wiki, but I cannot really knowledgeably comment on the adequacy of the comparison.

The novel starts out slowly paced, rather innocuously, as a young Muslim woman, who has spent many years raising her two twin siblings. Now that they are old enough, Isma decides it is time to complete her interrupted education. The family of three has long been under the surveillance of the British Security service as their father was a known jihadist, who died on the way to Guantanamo.

We learn about the methods used to recruit young people, usually 18 or 19, to the Islamic terrorist cause. The novel is narrated in alternating chapters by the five main characters. Each succeeding chapter is more intense, and by the time we hear from Aneeka, this story had radically changed, become super charged, very intense. The novel displays a confidence not only in prose but in how the story is related, which I found extremely effective. Complex issues. Love of family, youthful mistakes, how much can be forgiven. Government stances versus family, fear versus love, and the difficulties of Muslims, how they must act to fit in with society.

Long listed for the Booker, I find it a very worthy addition. Unforgettable, some of the visuals displaying a sister's love I don't think I will forget.

ARC from edelweiss.

Trish says

Shamsie's novel was long-listed for the Man Booker Prize for 2017. It is topical: two British families with Muslim religious roots and Pakistani backgrounds come together in a doomed *pas de deux*. The author

Shamsie, according to cover copy, grew up in Karachi, and yet in her picture she has the round eyes of a Westerner. The cultural difficulties she writes of may not be too difficult for her to imagine, I'm guessing.

I read this novel very fast—it has a strange, porous density to it. The meaning of sentences are all on the surface. The detail in the opening chapter is a blind, leading nowhere except providing an excuse for a meeting of the two families. The girl's family is orphaned. The boy's family needs no introduction, being daily in the news for British political leadership and therefore on display. The disconnect between the two is wide, and should be difficult to overcome. We are not entirely convinced at any time.

Love—what is it after all—and who can lay claim to it? The just-past teenage son of a British minister? Not so fast. The beauty of the girl—is it enough when one is feted by the most desirable creatures in one's class? Not so fast. And jihad—it is brought in clumsily, inauthentically, casually. It may be just like those things, but I doubt it.

In the end this struck me as an early attempt by a sort-of-promising author except that there was no weight to any of it. I felt no responsibility for what the characters learned or hadn't learned, and the young people's insistence upon their own desires was disturbing to me and unlike everything I have known of Southeastern Asian society.

I got no sense of the enormously consequential decision in Sophocles' *Antigone*, despite the epigraph quoting Seamus Heaney's translation of the play. Instead, the book could more easily be read as a reworking of *Romeo & Juliet*. I felt no grandeur in this novel, however. Alas.

Paul Fulcher says

Deservedly the winner of the 2018 Women's Prize for Fiction:

'What do you say to your father when he makes a speech like that? Do you say, Dad, you're making it OK to stigmatise people for the way they dress? Do you say, what kind of idiot stands in front of a group of teenagers and tells them to conform? Do you say, why didn't you mention that among the things this country will let you achieve if you're Muslim is torture, rendition, detention without trial, airport interrogations, spies in your mosques, teachers reporting your children to the authorities for wanting a world without British injustice?'

[...]

'If you're nineteen and female you'll get some version of a hard time for whatever you wear. Mostly it's the kind of thing that's easy to shrug off. Sometimes things happen that make people more hostile. Terrorist attacks involving European victims. Home Secretaries talking about people setting themselves apart in the way they dress. That kind of thing.'

Aneeka (Antigone) to Eamonn (Haemon)

'We're in no position to let the state question our loyalties. Don't you understand that?'

Isma (Ismene) to Aneeka (Antigone)

Khamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* is a 21st Century rewrite of Sophocles's *Antigone*. It perhaps wasn't the best book on the 2017 Man Booker longlist, if measured by pure literary merit, it was the most important and thought provoking.

Studying Antigone in preparation for Home Fire I was struck, as I imagine Shamsie was, by the contemporary relevance of three key Greek concepts, left untranslated in the version I read.

1) the ambiguous use of the word *nomos* - which to Antigone denotes customs and values, but to King Creon the laws of the land (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/nomo...>)

2) Antigone's prioritisation of *philia* (obligations to friends, family: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philia>) over obligations to the state, and Creon's explicit rejection of that stance, (*Whoever deems a philos more important than a fatherland, this man I say is nowhere.*) or, as in Seamus Heaney's rewrite of the play, which forms the epigraph for Home Fire:

The ones we love . . . are enemies of the state.

3) and most strikingly in a 2016-7 context Antigone's lament that she is a "*metic*, not among the living nor among the dead" (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metic>). In modern day parlance, she is essentially proclaiming herself a citizen of nowhere, to use the accusatory phrase used in 2016 by the newly appointed British Prime Minister towards those who would call themselves citizens of the world.

Shamsie relocates Antigone to Britain in the 2nd half of the 2010s, and her conflict is not just between family and state, but between one's religious and cultural beliefs, particularly for British Muslims, and both family and state. And she also addresses the troubling question of why young people are, despite the well documented excesses of the regime, attracted to leave their country of residence and their families and journey to Islamic State,

In her retelling Creon becomes Karamat Lone, newly appointed British Home Secretary (one of the four great offices of state) and with his sights on even higher office:

The accompanying article described the newly elevated minister as a man 'from a Muslim background', which is what they always said about him, as though Muslimness was something he had boldly stridden away from. Inevitably, the sentence went on to use the phrase 'strong on security'.

In the real world. 2017 Britain is a country where, on the one hand, London has (since the first draft of Home Fire was written) elected an openly Muslim mayor despite a 'dog whistle' campaign by his opponent to try to link him to Islam extremism, but on the other hand, where someone running to be a new Member of Parliament in 2010 – and now a senior Cabinet minister - felt obliged to announce at the hustings:

My own family's heritage is Muslim. Myself and my four brothers were brought up to believe in God, but I do not practise any religion. My wife is a practising Christian and the only religion practised in my house is Christianity. I think we should recognise that Christianity is the religion of our country.

And also where, in 2014, the then Home Secretary – now in 2017 the Prime Minister of the 'Citizens of Nowhere' speech – introduced powers to strip dual citizens suspected of involvement in terrorism of their British nationality. In the novel, Karamat Lone, goes further:

The day I assumed office I revoked the citizenship of all dual nationals who have left Britain to join our enemies. My predecessor only used these powers selectively which, as I have said repeatedly, was a mistake.

Home Fire - as with Preti Taneja's recent wonderful retelling of King Lear, *We That Are Young* - is told in five sections, in the third person from the perspectives of the key characters:

- Isma (Ismene), a young woman and LSE trained sociologist
- Eamonn (Haemon), son of the Home Secretary
- Parvaiz (Polyneices), Isma's 19 year-old younger brother
- Aneeka (Antigone), Parvaiz's twin sister, studying law at LSE, and
- Karamat (Creon), whose Irish wife Terri fills the role of the prophet Teiresias

The novel opens with Isma at Heathrow undergoing an interview from British immigration authorities, although she is actually leaving the country to start a PhD in America. In the 21st Century security state any Muslim leaving the country, particularly with Isma's family background (see below) is potentially open to suspicion as to whether their ultimate route might be Islamic State: indeed, unknown to anyone but his very close family, Isma's brother, Parvaiz, has done precisely that.

'Do you consider yourself British?' the man said.

'I am British.'

'But do you consider yourself British?'

'I've lived here all my life.' She meant that there was no other country of which she could feel herself a part, but the words came out sounding evasive.

The interrogation continued for nearly two hours. He wanted to know her thoughts on Shias, homosexuals, the Queen, democracy, The Great British Bake Off, the invasion of Iraq, Israel, suicide bombers, dating websites. After that early slip regarding her Britishness, she settled into the manner that she'd practiced with Aneeka playing the role of the interrogating officer, Isma responding to her sister as though she were a customer of dubious political opinions whose business Isma didn't want to lose by voicing strenuously opposing views, but to whom she didn't see the need to lie either. ("When people talk about the enmity between Shias and Sunni, it usually centers around some political imbalance of power, such as in Iraq or Syria—as a Brit, I don't distinguish between one Muslim and another." "Occupying other people's territory generally causes more problems than it solves"—this served for both Iraq and Israel. "Killing civilians is sinful—~~that's~~ that's equally true if the manner of killing is a suicide bombing or aerial bombardments or drone strikes.")

There were long intervals of silence between each answer and the next question as the man clicked keys on her laptop, examining her browser history. He knew that she was interested in the marital status of an actor from a popular TV series; that wearing a hijab didn't stop her from buying expensive products to tame her frizzy hair; that she had searched for "how to make small talk with Americans."

The dangers of 'Googling while Muslim' feature frequently in the novel, fears which Shamsie admits dogged her when researching the novel.

I was very aware of Googling while Muslim while writing this book. When I started to research, I would do stupid things, like look at three relevant websites, then go look at some really trashy celebrity stuff for a while. There was a part of my brain that was saying, what will I say if intelligence agencies come to my door and want to know why I'm looking up this stuff?

Most strikingly, from the same interview:

Q: Would you have published Home Fire before you had the security of knowing you were a British citizen?

A: No, absolutely not.

<http://www.vogue.com/article/kamila-s...>

In America, Isma suddenly encounters a handsome youth, in a rather Mills and Boonesque moment.

By mid-afternoon the temperature had passed the 50° F mark, which sounded, and felt, far warmer than 11° C, and a bout of spring madness had largely emptied out the café basement. Isma tilted her post-lunch mug of coffee towards herself, touched the tip of her finger to the liquid, considered how much of a faux pas it might be to ask to have it microwaved. She had just decided she would risk the opprobrium when the door opened and the scent of cigarettes curled in from the smoking area outside, followed by a young man of startling looks.

She soon recognises him as Karamat Lone's son:

Eamonn, that was his name. How they'd laughed in Wembley when the newspaper article accompanying the family picture revealed this detail, an Irish spelling to disguise a Muslim name – Ayman became Eamonn so that people would know the father had integrated. (His Irish-American wife was seen as another indicator of this integrationist posing rather than an explanation for the son's name.)

There is history between the two families. Isme, Aneeka and Parvaiz's father Adil Pasha had been a jihadi himself: their last contact with him a phone call from Afghanistan in late 2001. In 2004 they found out, from a fellow prisoner, now released that their father had been captured in early 2002, imprisoned and tortured in the Bagram Theater Internment Facility and then died on route to Guantanamo. A friend of the family contacted a cousin, now the local MP - one Karamat Lone, then at the start of his political career - for help in finding where his body might be, but he refused

They're better off without him

One issue Shamsie faced in re-writing Antigone was how to incorporate the incest/father murder of Oedipus, Polyneices and his sister's father: changing this so that father and son are both jihadis, was a very neat solution, and does away with the fourth sibling Eteocles (killed by Polyneices in the play) as Parvaiz's unpardonable sin, rendering him a non-person in Karamat's eyes, is joining Islamic State.

The destiny of sons's to follow their father is a key theme of the novel, albeit one that I struggled a little with as so manifest in a 21st Century context. As Eamonn tries to explain to one of the sisters:

For girls, becoming women was inevitability; for boys, becoming men was ambition. He must have seen her look of incomprehension because he tried again. 'We want to be like them; we want to be better than them. We want to be the only people in the world who are allowed to be better than them.'

And incomprehension cuts both ways: Eamonn tries, and fails, to understand how it might feel to be Parvaiz or his sisters:

He tried to imagine growing up knowing your father to be a fanatic, his death a mystery open to terrible speculation, but the attempt was defeated by his simple inability to know how such a man as Adil Pasha could have existed in Britain to begin with.

I won't spoil what happens in the rest of the novel. Shamsie is to be credited for managing to:

- adhere faithfully to the original - even incorporating nods to signature elements such as the dust storm that appears at one crucial moment, yet
- maintain narrative tension - it is typically only afterwards that one recognises how the action follows the play, and
- update the play's themes for a 21st Century setting - for example the role of Coryphaeus and the chorus is taken by the press - and highly topical issues.

The novel has some powerful things to say about dual nationality and identity - and the approach of allowing each character their perspective provides a relatively balanced view, albeit it is clear that Shamsie's sympathy's are not with Karamat Lone's approach to stripping those joining Islamic State of their citizenship and their right to return, even for burial when dead, to the UK.

She also, through Parvaiz, provides insight into what draws young people to Islamic State, drawing on the interviews in Gillian Slovo's verbatim play *Another World: Losing our Children to Islamic State*. She describes a recruitment video for Islamic State - note the dissonant images of violence interspersed with the idyllic scenes:

Men fishing together against the backdrop of a beautiful sunrise; children on swings in a playground; a man riding through a city on the back of a beautiful stallion, carts of fresh vegetables lining the street; an elderly but powerful-looking man beneath a canopy of green grapes, reaching up to pluck a bunch; young men of different ethnicities sitting together on a carpet laid out in a field; standing men pointing their guns at the heads of kneeling men; an aerial night-time view of a street thrumming with life, car headlights and electric lights blazing; men and boys in a large swimming pool; boys and girls queuing up outside a bouncy castle at an amusement park; a blood donation clinic; smiling men sweeping an already clean street; a bird sanctuary; the bloodied corpse of a child.

or as Parvaiz puts it rather more simply when he arrives in Raqqa:

Despite his disquiet at the spiked heads and veiled women, the blue skies and the camaraderie of the men slumped in beanbags promised the better world he'd come in search of.

And the book also doesn't spare those who make life more difficult for their fellows by their own actions. As a Pakistani relative of Aneeka tells her when she arrives in the country as the novel reaches its dramatic climax:

Did you or your bhenchod brother stop to think about those of us with passports that look like toilet paper to the rest of the world, who spend our whole lives being so careful we don't give anyone a reason to reject our visa applications. Don't stand next to this guy, don't follow that guy on Twitter, don't download that Noam Chomsky book. And then first your brother uses us as a cover to join some psycho killers, and then your government thinks this country can be a dumping ground for its unwanted corpses and your family just expects us to jump up and organise a funeral for this week's face of terrorism.

And now you've come along, Miss Hojabi Knickers, and I have to pull strings I don't want to pull to get you out of the airport without the whole world's press seeing you, and it turns out you're here to try some stunt, I don't even know what, but my family will have nothing to do with it, nothing to do with you.'

I said at the review's start that this wasn't perhaps the best book on the Booker shortlist measured by literary

merit alone. As per the example quote above, the Isme section has tinges of a Mills and Boon romance and that focusing on Parvaiz elements of a cheap Clive Cussler thriller (per Gumble's Yard's excellent review <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>).

However the writing becomes more powerful in the latter two sections, as it move on to both the highly personal and yet public anguish of Aneeka, interspersed with excerpts from tabloid newspapers (who rename Aneeka 'Knickers' and Parvaiz 'Pervy' as they seize with glee on the sex scandals in the story) and then the political machinations of the Home Secretary. And it struck me that the style choices in the first sections may have been that: choices, with Shamsie using the character's own worldviews to colour her third-person narration.

Overall - a novel I would be happy to see win the Booker, albeit there are many other strong books on the exceptional 2017 list: Autumn, Reservoir 13 (my personal favourite), Solar Bones, Exit West and Lincoln in the Bardo would form the rest of my personal shortlist.

Hannah Greendale says

Click here to watch a video review of this book on my channel, *From Beginning to Bookend*.

Gumble's Yard says

Winner of the 2018 Women's Prize. And a book which seems uncanningly prescient given the recent change in Home Secretary.

A book I originally read due to its longlisting for the 2017 Booker prize and by an author whose previous works I have not read.

In the stories of wicked tyrants men and women are punished with exile, bodies are kept from their families –their heads impaled on spikes, their corpses thrown into unmarked graves. All these things happen according to the law, but not according to justice. I am here to ask for justice

The book is a retelling of Antigone – a classical play with which I was unfamiliar, but which I read in preparation for reading this novel.

The main characters of Home Fire and their Antigone equivalents are in two main families:

Three siblings from an Anglo-Pakistani family – the studious and serious Isma (Isemene), her beautiful and more impetuous and younger-by-9-years sister Aneeka (Antigone), and Aneeka's impressionable twin brother Parvaiz (Polyneices);

A high profile Conservative politician Karamat Lone “Wolf” (Creon), his son Eamonn (Haimon) and his rich Irish interior designer wife Terri (effectively the prophet Tiresias).

The book is told in 5 third party point of view sections told in turn from the viewpoint of Isma. Eamonn, Parvaiz, Aneeka and Karamat – four of these proceed in turn in chronological order but Parvaiz’s section jumps around in time including sections which predate all the other sections.

The three siblings father was largely absent from their lives, instead fighting across the world as an Islamic freedom fighter in areas like Bosnia, then relabelled as an Islamic terrorist after 9-11 and his family eventually find out dying on his way to Guantánamo. When their mother died also, Isma at 21 has to give up her successful sociological studies to act as a full time carer for the twins.

The siblings family hold a long term grudge against Karamat- as, when a young MP, he refused to help them find out about their father and retrieve his body. Over time Karamat has moved away from his Muslim background, after a scandal when he was seen entering a mosque believed to be terrorist-sponsoring, and now stands as a fully British anti-terrorist hardliner.

The book is set when the twins are 19, Aneeka studying law. Isma now free from her responsibilities taking a research place in America with her previous academic supervisor and Parvaiz (radicalised by some family friends and IS recruiters who play on the tortures inflicted on the father he never knew) using the cover of a family trip to Pakistan to join the Caliphate in Raqqa where he becomes a member of the IS media unit.

In America Isma meets Eamonn and despite recognising him strikes up a friendship with him, when Karamat is made Home Secretary they admit to each other about their fathers. On his return to the UK, Eamonn takes a package from Isma to her house and is immediately smitten with Aneeka – her initial reaction is hostile, but immediately after she pursues him and the two have an affair.

I recently read the brilliant and Republic of Consciousness shortlisted *We That Are Young* - a modern day King Lear and a book disappointingly overlooked for the Women's Prize where it would have made a fascinating comparison to this book. Preti Taneja's approach to dealing with the "source text" was to follow not just the main plot, but often the dialogue of King Lear, and more specifically to choose to convey some of the more dramatic/odd parts of the original plot literally rather than in a figurative sense. That choice was fundamental to her very conception of that novel: her realisation that concepts and events which render King Lear strange to a modern Western reader can be understood in a modern context when transplanted across the world.

Shamsie's approach has been a little more figurative - she has used much of the basic set up of Antigone (someone fighting against the state who is denied burial rights and effectively rendered stateless after their death) while not feeling the need to follow every last aspect of the original. She has brilliantly drawn out how the clear themes of Antigone (split loyalties to state/family, the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, the meaning of justice and the difference between state law and natural justice, female roles) are so relevant today.

However there are clearly quite areas where the initial set up is different to Antigone. For example: no Eteocles; Aneeka/Isma's father's back story having limited parallel with Oedipus; Eamonn's initial relationship with Isma and Isma being the older sister (which both come from Jean Anouilh's version I think); Aneeka being the more beautiful daughter (Anouilh and the original have Isemene as more beautiful).

I felt though that there were more direct links in the last section, but that these were subtle, for example:

- Eamon's call with his father warning him *"stopping a family from burying its own - that never looks good. That's what people are beginning to say around me. if your advisers won't tell you this, your son will"* echoing Hameon telling Creon *"under cover of darkness the city mourns for the girl"*

- Terri's warning to Karamat *"And you've lost your son"* echoing Tiresias prophecy that Creon's actions mean he will lose *"a son of [his] own loins"*.

- A blinding dust storm late in the book, which gives an echo of "the violent eddy lifted from the ground ... the vast atmosphere thickened to meet it" just before Antigone covers Polynices body for the second time

I also loved the ending - and how the joint suicide of the classic version is played out instead.

I did have some reservations about the writing. Like many others, I found the opening section very clunky and clichéd (for example a comment Isma makes about seeing her supervisor's hand being waved in welcome being like the outstretched arm of the Statue of Liberty). Had I have picked this book and browsed through it, without it being Booker longlisted, I may well have put it straight back down.

Although the writing improves as the book progresses it remains uneven, a meditation on grief could have been written by Ali Smith, the section below (for which there simply is no excuse in a literary novel) from the pen of Clive Cussler.

"His companion leant against the counter behind which the shopkeeper was standing, and flipped his phone from hand to hand while looking at the other customers. They filed out quickly in response, leaving the two men and the shopkeeper alone in the cavernous store. 'Look at all this!' the younger one said. 'The Røde SVMX. The Sennheiser MKH8040. The Neumann U 87.' 'Uh huh. Just get what Abu Raees asked for, and let's go. I'm starving.' The shopkeeper reached beneath the counter and pulled out a box. 'The Sound Devices 788T. Didn't Abu Raees receive my message? I've had it for over two weeks."

One possible reason for this is that Shamsie is deliberately trying to write each section in the character of the point of view narrator.

Overall I really liked this book – and was very disappointed to see it not making the Booker shortlist, so was delighted that the Women's Prize has given it the recognition it deserves.

Hugh says

When the Booker longlist was announced, this was one of the books that most interested me, because I really enjoyed Shamsie's previous two novels (A God in Every Stone and Burnt Shadows). I was a little nervous when I read that this is a modern retelling of Antigone, because my knowledge of the classics is very limited, but it is a fine book and another one which would make a worthy winner.

The book is in five sections each of which focuses on a different character. I found the first slow going - we are introduced to Isma as she travels from Britain to Massachusetts to pursue her academic career. Isma is an orphan who has been looking after her younger twin siblings (Aneeka and Parvaiz), and her father was a

jihadi fighter in Chechnya and Afghanistan who only returned occasionally. She meets another Briton from a Pakistani family, Eamonn, who is the son of the home secretary (Karamat) and is in America on holiday. This section is primarily a scene setter - the real action starts when Eamonn returns to London and meets Aneeka. They embark on a clandestine affair.

In the third part we learn more about Parvaiz. He is a drifter more interested in sound recording than working who is left at a loose end when Isma leaves for America and Aneeka starts a law degree. He gets entangled with, and radicalised by Farooq, who turns out to be a recruiter for IS and who persuades him to head for Syria, with the promises that he will find out more about his father and his death while being transported to Guantanamo, and that he will lead a privileged life in the media arm of the organisation.

Things heat up when Parvaiz decides he wants to return to Britain, and the remainder of the book plays out the tragedy that ensues. (view spoiler)

I won't comment in detail about how this relates to the Sophocles play or the Anouilh version of the story - I will leave that to more expert critics. What I will say is that as a modern parable it works surprisingly well and becomes a very compulsive story. The Prime Minister and Chancellor are obviously modelled on Cameron and Osborne, so it is clear that Shamsie did not foresee the upheavals of the Brexit vote, but all of the other political content is chillingly plausible, and Shamsie paints a very nuanced picture of the difficulties faced by the Muslim community in dealing with their own extremists on one side and intolerance and misunderstanding on the other.

Perhaps slightly flawed in places, but the best parts are very good indeed.

Adina says

Just announced as the winner of Women's Prize for Fiction. So happy the novel finally got the recognition it deserves.

4.5* rounded up.

Home Fire is the candidate I support to win the Booker Prize. Well, I only read 4 nominees until now so it is not a definite opinion. However, it is highly unlikely that I will make too much of an advancement in my reading of the longlist until the shortlist is published so it will probably remain on top for a while.

If you read a few reviews you will realize that the novel is based on Antigone. Unfortunately, I cannot add anything on the subject as I have no knowledge of this classic story and I would feel like a fraud to comment on it after only reading the Wikipedia summary.

The novel is divided in 5 sections, each focusing on the experience of one character. At its core, it is the story of a British family of Pakistani origin and their struggle to live in their adoptive country in the shadow of the terrorist threat, especially because of their troubled history.

I did not ponder too much how it must be for a normal Muslim family abroad to live with all this suspicion from people and the government. This subject has an important role in the novel and it made understand how difficult it must be to make sure that you do everything right, that you do not provoke violence, always being afraid of being followed. It also discusses the difficulties a family faces when a member of the family proves

to be jihadi. It also touches IS recruitment and other sensitive subjects that are very well done.

I thought the beginning to be a bit shaky but please persevere. The writing gets much better after 30 pages or so. It becomes a powerful, emotional and important novel for our times.

I received this copy from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

4.5* An excellent book overall although there were some shaky parts. Made me think about a subject I did not pay too much attention: how to live in as a Muslim Citizen of an European country with the potential terrorist stigma. Review to come next week most likely.

Roman Clodia says

Delighted that this has now been recognised as the magnificent book it is: well done Women's Prize panel!

Inspired by Sophocles' Antigone, this has a slightly shaky start but then soars into an outstanding tragedy of love, politics, justice and humanity. By drawing on Athenian tragedy, Shamsie makes the point that clashes of civic law vs a deeper, more humane sense of what is right have *always* been contested, and the tension between family and state always problematic. What she does so brilliantly in this book is to take these questions and give them an acutely charged contemporary relevance that leaves the reader shaken.

I have been lucky enough to read an ARC (thanks Bloomsbury and NetGalley!) so can't say too much so far in advance of publication, but this is a book which takes complicated public issues and makes them intimate and personal. Refusing to simplify or neaten, Shamsie has produced a book which treats matters both horrific and beautiful with clear-sightedness, intellectual grace and compassion.

A searing, towering, magnificent piece of storytelling which deserves to win prizes and be read by everyone - brava, Ms Shamsie!

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

I went looking for a review copy of this when it was included on the Man Booker Prize Long list, and was approved for one by the publisher through Edelweiss.

This is a book that kept morphing as I read it and discussed it, and it ended up in a place far removed from my expectations at the beginning. Nowhere in the publisher summary or promotional material does it mention that the author is also basing this novel on the myth of Antigone, but she has, and that proves important in understanding some of her choices.

The author is from Pakistan, and the characters have some loose ties to Pakistan and end up there during some of the events, but it is more important inside the novel that the three central characters (siblings) are all children of a jihadi who was killed during or because of his military action. The characters themselves aren't certain, just know that he's gone, so I won't give that detail away. It's important to also understand that as a

jihadi, he is working toward the magical homeland idea, and to that end has voluntarily fought in Afghanistan, Syria, Chechnya, and beyond. And the people he was involved with have done the same. Between that fact and the fact that the siblings are split between the USA and the UK, and the placeness of the novel feels very unstable.

More instability in the novel comes from the shifting viewpoints and genres. The novel starts with Isma, the oldest sister as she moves to Amherst for school, including a long drawn out inquisition at the airport that makes her miss her flight. She meets Eamonn, son of a powerful politician in the UK, but his family is also close to her family in country and religion of origin, even if they don't seem to claim it anymore. At this point the novel feels like it is headed one specific direction, but there is a major shift to a romance novel for a while, and then it turns into a jihadist recruitment novel, and then a story about the placelessness of people labeled terrorists. Too much time, perhaps, is spent on what to do with a dead body without a country (this is a place where the author is trying to hard, in my opinion, to shoehorn the novel into the myth, when it is not needed, she has enough of a story without that.)

As you can tell from my attempt to summarize, there is a lot going on in this novel. But I also found myself thinking far more deeply about the context. How far reaching are the wounds of Partition, which is where this family first lost their footing? How has that impacted the longterm inclination towards jihad? How do the way their family is treated in the USA and the UK effect how one member can only find home and family with a group of soldiers who knew his father? And outside this story, how is our current political situation worsening these kinds of narratives, pushing people into outsider status and otherness, without home, without firm footing? I think that's the thread that is between the lines, and to me, the most powerful part. I was waffling between three and four stars but I think my own thinking as a result of the novel pushes it to four.

I do think there are misses here, though. The mythological connection weakens the story, especially the ending. Without saying what the ending is, I think it's a cop out to have a single climactic moment rather than following characters as they deal with the real-world, complex complications of the decisions that people have made. That's a movie move, not a novel move. There are missed opportunities between characters, conversations and interactions I expected them to have but are instead skipped, glossed over, or deemed not important. Isma and Aneeka should have had a huge fight about one plot element, and I felt like the connection between Isma and Eamonn's father had a lot of potential and it just dissipates.

I would like to read more by this author, although I personally don't feel this is strong enough to make the Booker shortlist. Too many dropped plot points, a lack of realism at crucial moments, and the unevenness in genre and story arcs. I did appreciate the deep thinking it inspired, and it ended up having enough in it to count as one of the reads for my Borders 2017 challenge.

Dianne says

This is a powerful and gut-wrenching book loosely based on Greek mythology's story of Antigone, a woman defying a king to secure her brother an honorable burial. I knew this going in, so I did some research on Antigone so I could appreciate the parallels as they unfolded.

"Home Fire" is told through 5 viewpoints: sisters Isma and Aneeka, their brother Parvaiz (Aneeka's twin), British Home Secretary Karamat Lone and his son Eamonn. Isma, Aneeka and Parvaiz are Muslims living in London and Amherst, the children of Adil Pasha. Adil abandoned his family to join the "fight against

oppression" as a terrorist, and after imprisonment in Bagram, died on a plane for transport to Guantanamo. Being the children of a known terrorist creates difficulties for Isma, Aneeka and Parvaiz that play out in various ways throughout the narratives.

This is a classic Greek tragedy in a modern "of the moment" setting, both heartbreaking and eye-opening. I deeply appreciate Shamsie's ability to create empathy for each character and their situations. This was long-listed for the Man Booker in 2017 and was the favorite of many of my Goodreads friends, and for good reason.

I highly recommend this gem. Also, here's a shameless plug for another Antigone-based book that I loved, "The Watch" by Joydeep Roy-Bhattacharya. Not as masterful perhaps as Shamsie's, but one that deeply affected me and I still think about often.

Rachel says

Congratulations to Home Fire for winning the 2018 Women's Prize for Fiction!

I don't know why I'd been under the impression that Home Fire was going to be a kind of loose, 'blink and you miss it' retelling of Antigone, but I'm almost glad that that had been my expectation, because the reality of this book completely caught me off guard. And I loved it. In this novel Kamila Shamsie gives us a fearless adaptation set in present-day London, following two Muslim families both grappling with family legacy and national identity.

I hesitate to say that you won't get anything out of this book if you aren't familiar with Antigone, but just in terms of my own experience, my reading of it was almost entirely informed by the parallels. Just consider that this reads more like a Greek tragedy than it does a contemporary novel - not in terms of prose quality, certainly, but in terms of themes and narrative structure.

There is nothing subtle about the way in which Shamsie riffs off Sophocles, but the hidden depths in Home Fire makes it a rewarding and necessary retelling, as does Shamsie's choice to reframe the story around an all-Muslim host of characters. The main theme at the heart of Antigone- measuring the power of the individual against the power of a corrupt state - is also the main theme of Home Fire. But it's complicated here by the fact that the protagonists and antagonists alike are all a part of the same minority group; all striving to live as best they can in a society which continues to alienate and dehumanize them.

The main criticism which I've seen leveled against this book - that its characters are flat - is valid, and I agree to an extent, but I also find myself forgiving this more here than I might in another novel. The characters are 'flat' as such because they're deliberately constructed archetypes, and this is where I'm wondering if this would be a less rewarding reading experience for those not already familiar with the original story and characters. The Creon figure here I thought was particularly fascinating for the way Shamsie subverted certain elements of his narrative.

Anyway, I thought this novel was stimulating; the way in which Shamsie uses a classical narrative to give voice to a minority group is one of the best reasons I can think of to adapt a story that's already been told to death. Home Fire is topical and classical all at once, and an engaging, dramatic tragedy from start to finish.

Maxwell says

I don't give 1-star reviews very often because I feel like I don't read a lot of books I would label as 'bad.' And this book, even, isn't 'bad' in my eyes. But when I think about things I enjoyed regarding this novel, there's pretty much nothing redeemable for me. The characters were flat, the plot was paper thin (even though I know it's a modern retelling of *Antigone*, I don't feel like that knowledge did anything to elevate the story), and the writing was nothing special and verged on poor at times. I know others who loved this book but, boy, I did not. In fact for the first time in a long time I couldn't wait to finish it. And that never really is a fun reading experience. If it had been any longer I would've DNF'd it. But I was more determined to push through since I am attempting to read all of this year's Man Booker longlist. Wouldn't necessarily recommend this but read some other reviews and see what people had to say that liked it, because it might be just the right book for you. It wasn't for me.

Elyse says

Update ... WINNER for the women's prize of fiction for 2018!!!!

SHORT LISTED FOR THE WOMAN'S PRIZE FOR FICTION

LONG LISTED FOR THE MAN BOOKER PRIZE

WOW!!!!

Personal and political life merges together in the most heartbreaking of ways when a man loves a woman whose family is connected to a Muslim terrorist.

The author explores justice, love, and passion in ways that can be compared to older classics - think Romeo and Juliet - yet set in modern time.

Beautifully written - poetic - great character development.

It's painful to read about two families pitted against each other...but it's very insightful and informative- especially how the ISIS recruits - influences - and corrupts.

Terrific Discussion Book!
