

Antigone in Pakistan: *Home Fire*, by Kamila Shamsie

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Introduction

In 2014 American fiction about the Iraq War became nationally prominent when Phil Klay's collection of short stories, *Redeployment* (2014), won the National Book Award for Fiction. The judge's citation praised the plurality of viewpoints in the stories and even lauds Klay as a modern Homer:

In these thematically linked stories, Phil Klay creates a kaleidoscopic vision of conflict and homecoming. With a strikingly original set of voices, Klay inhabits the hearts of grunts, mortuary workers, chaplains, psy-ops officers, and civilian bureaucrats muddling through doomed reconstruction projects. If all wars ultimately find their own Homer, this brutal, piercing, sometimes darkly funny collection stakes Klay's claim for consideration as the quintessential storyteller of America's Iraq conflict. (National Book Foundation)

It is surely difficult to query the literary merit of *Redeployment*, but let us scrutinize the lauds of the award committee. Like Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, *Redeployment* depicts the values and struggles of warriors and royals. All narrators and protagonists serve the U.S. government, whether as "grunts" or "civilian bureaucrats." Like Homer's Ajax and Odysseus, Klay's characters inhabit a constricted world in which they are both the perpetrator of "brutal," "piercing" war and its primary victim. The "conflict and homecoming" are their conflict and their homecoming, while the lives of Iraqis are abstract, vague, and downrange. "Klay inhabits the hearts" of Americans only. Readers are asked to pity U.S. casualties, admire Army morticians and chaplains, and laugh at "darkly funny" wartime ironies of "doomed reconstruction projects" without consideration for the Iraqi counterparts, particularly the dead or those whose livelihoods depend on rebuilding the country. In Homeric terms, *Redeployment* is the story of invading Greek men, like Agamemnon and Achilles, that ignores invaded Trojan women such as Briseis and Chryseis. Is this to be celebrated?

Even if Klay is indeed "the quintessential storyteller of America's Iraq conflict," this is not to say that he chronicles the complete human experience of the Iraq War. While "all wars may find their own Homer" to depict the hardships of soldiers and veterans, they also—eventually—find their own Sophocles, whose *Antigone* renders the often overlooked trials of families, and notably women, in war. I suggest we read *Home Fire* (2017), by Kamila Shamsie, an adaptation of *Antigone* for the War on Terror, as a useful counter-narrative to the Homeric tradition of war stories. *Home Fire* privileges the perspective of two British Pakistani sisters whose family is caught up in the War on Terror, and whose attempts to bury a brother labeled a terrorist are blocked by the U.S. and Great Britain. The National Book Foundation award committee suggests that *Redeployment* offers a "kaleidoscopic vision," which implies peering through one lens to see many different variations on a theme. While Klay's prismatic episodes offer rich insight into the American,

male experience of war, for the purposes of this essay let us seek not more variations, but rather a different lens altogether.

My argument as follows has two parts. I begin by showing that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are nearly ubiquitous references in contemporary war writing, from the critical work of Paul Fussell and Jonathan Shay, to the nonfiction of Jon Krakauer and Anthony Swofford, to the novels of Gavin Kovite, Christopher Robinson, and Lea Carpenter. It is important for us to recognize and to interpret the very pervasiveness of the Homeric epics, but we must also ask what important questions, perspectives, and themes are eclipsed in the reliance on these foundational stories of men at war. Regarding the limited narratorial range in contemporary American war fiction, Sam Sacks notes,

What consequences have we wrought on the countries we attacked? What, if anything, have we learned? Questions like these rarely come up in recent war fiction, because they lie outside the scope of personal redemption, beyond the veteran's expected journey from trauma to recovery. (Sacks)

Preoccupation with Homeric heroism privileges the soldiers' quest for "personal redemption" and "recovery" at the expense of considering the lives of those they harm. Often, the American soldier views their surroundings dimly, vaguely. Bombs go off without warning, indistinct shapes retreat into the distance, and the soldier goes home to attend post-deployment "classes they make you take about, Don't kill yourself. Don't beat your wife" (Klay 10). Due to language barriers, tactical necessity, and blatant disinterest, deployed American soldiers engage little with Iraqi, Afghani, and Pakistani civilians, which is reflected in their virtual erasure from the literature. Furthermore, the Homeric epics are, as Charlotte Higgins suggests, mythical, implausible stories that simplify and sanitize war (Higgins). Such sanitization continues when Iraq is reduced to "empty desert" (Scranton 95, Filkins 179) and "moonscape" (Wright 14, Crist 84) rather than a country where families live and work. American-centric war stories in which "no larger picture of the conflict is possible" are common (Sacks). Of Clint Eastwood's film, *American Sniper* (2014), Roy Scranton writes, "The Iraqis in the film are villains, caricatures, and targets, and the only real opinion on them the film offers is [protagonist] Kyle's" (Scranton). Dissimilarly, *Home Fire* is told from five different perspectives. In Sophoclean terms, Antigone (Aneeka), unable to convince Creon (Karamat) to let her bury Polynices (Parvaiz) in accordance with her religion, dies, as does Haimon (Eamonn).

Home Fire revolves around two Pakistani families in London: the working class Pashas and the elite Lones. Zainab and Adil Pasha have three children: mature Isma, completing her Ph.D. in Sociology in Amherst, Massachusetts, brash Aneeka, studying law in London; and loner Parvaiz, who joins ISIS in Syria as a audio-visual technician in order to understand Adil, an absentee father who was away for years on jihad. Adil dies in U.S. custody (ostensibly of a seizure) on his way to Guantanamo Bay detention camp after being tortured in Afghanistan. By contrast, the Lones are wealthy, political elite. British Home Secretary Karamat (modeled on Teresa May) is adamant that immigrants conform to British culture. His son, Eamonn, a charming idler on vacation between financial consultancy jobs, befriends Isma and falls in love with Aneeka (263). Parvaiz, disillusioned after he is forced to film a beheading, is murdered in Istanbul by ISIS as he attempts to flee home. Karamat forbids the repatriation of his body, which he sends to Karachi. Aneeka seduces Eamonn, hoping to persuade him to change his father's mind. Eamonn appeals unsuccessfully to Karamat and, when Aneeka goes to Karachi to claim Parvaiz's body (also forfeiting her British citizenship), he follows her in a desperate attempt to pressure

his father into capitulating. Eamonn arrives at the public park where Aneeka guard's Parvaiz's body. Before Aneeka and Eamonn can act, ISIS agents lock a suicide belt around him. The novel closes before the bombs explode.

After demonstrating the omnipresence of classical Greek stories in modern war literature, as well as their inadequacy to capture the complete picture of war, I will investigate how Shamsie retrieves *Antigone* to depict a British Pakistani family torn apart by a modern Creon. By adapting Sophoclean tragedy, rather than Homeric epic, Shamsie engages with the vital project—at once feminist, anti-imperialist, and anti-Islamophobic—of wresting victimhood from the invader and reframing the war as a needlessly violent fiasco. As Sacks suggests, “Proclaiming that veteran authors have transformed war into Homeric masterpieces filled with timeless truths is a way of excusing our own indifference. [...] One of the jobs of literature is to wake us from stupor.” (Sacks). *Home Fire* counters the Homeric trend, instead confronting readers conditioned to think of war stories as valiant veterans' sagas with the “torture, rendition, detention without trial, airport interrogations” of Muslim civilians and scenes of “a nineteen-year-old, rotting in the sun while his sister watches, out of her mind with grief” (Shamsie 93, 266). Taking her cues from Salman Rushdie, Mohsin Hamid, and J.M. Coetzee, Shamsie illuminates the struggle of those stuck between increasingly authoritarian, post-9/11 governments in the West and religious fundamentalist groups in the East.

The Homeric Epic in Modern War Literature

The notion that valorized, masculine violence is the Homeric rubric by which to understand modern war is common in major twentieth and twenty-first century theorizations of the topic. Let us briefly examine the interventions of Simone Weil, Jonathan Shay, and Paul Fussell. Weil rightly establishes Homer's text as a wholly masculine story about force in which women's relationship with aggression, either as perpetrator or victim, is never considered: “The true hero, the true subject, the center of the *Iliad* is force. Force employed by *man*, force that enslaves *man*, force before which *man's* flesh shirks away” (5, italics added). Jonathan Shay's seminal critical works about PTSD in Vietnam War veterans, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (1994) and *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming* (2002) also reflect this male-centric view. Shay posits that we can not only better understand veterans' hardships by reading *The Iliad*, but also “that scholars and critics of *The Iliad* would be better able to interpret the great epic if they listened to combat soldiers” (1994, xiii). In the accounts of soldiers on the battlefield, Shay sees wrathful Achilles, violent and abused by leaders, and in accounts of veterans at home after the war he sees wayward, traumatized Odysseys, indulging in unhealthy vices and shunned by civilian society. Like in *Redeployment*, male soldiers are both perpetrator and victim of the war, as though the conflict were a wholly American ordeal without an estimated 1.2 million Vietnamese casualties (Hirschman, et al).

While Shay invokes the Homeric epics to theorize the trials of Vietnam War veterans, Paul Fussell, in *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), turns, at times, to ancient Greek literature to explain tragic heroism in WWI. Despite theorizing the cultural legacy of WWI as largely ironic, Fussell notes the frequency with which British soldiers reference the classics (161). Even though classical notions of battlefield gallantry were nullified by machine guns and artillery barrages, Fussell notes in letters sent from the front references to Homer, Horace, Virgil, Ovid, and Shakespeare. While not all of these authors champion

the male quest for battlefield glory, they all exist within the classical tradition. Describing the “British tendency towards heroic grandiosity about all their wars,” at the heart of Fussell’s argument is the claim that WWI was the historical moment when Western Europe realized that “traditional values associated with traditional symbols associated with traditional symbols [and] the heroes of *The Iliad*” were obsolete (175, 161). In terms of gender, Fussell’s analysis necessarily omits much discussion of women, as the trenches, military bases, and even field hospitals were almost entirely populated by men. Officers, most of whom were educated at all-male schools before taking up their posts at the front, enjoyed “a wholly masculine way of life uncomplicated by Woman,” relays Fussell, quoting J. B. Priestly (273-274, capitalization original). Homosocial camaraderie filters out concerns for civilians and simplifies a complex war as an “us versus them” competition.

More recently, American writing about the post-9/11 wars continue to overtly reference the classics, especially the Homeric epics that lionize the solitary, heroic, male warrior. Most obvious is *Sparta* (2013), by Roxana Robinson, which follows U.S. Marine officer Conrad Farrell, former classics major who idealizes ancient Greek martial society: “Courage and loyalty. [...] Commitment, a code of honor. All straight from the ancient world, from Sparta. Semper Fidelis” (23). When asked by an Iraqi translator what, in his opinion, is the greatest work of literature, Conrad immediately replies: the *Iliad* (76). Indeed, he is *Iliad* obsessed. He concocts a scavenger hunt for his girlfriend with riddles leading her to items like Ajax household cleaner and Trojan condoms (105). However, *Sparta* is the story of a traumatized veteran whose antique ideals and distain for civilian life (therapy, doctors, women) cause him to consider suicide. “He’d have brought the fucking *Iliad* if he knew he’d be here for most of the day,” thinks Conrad, while waiting for an appointment at the VA hospital that he characterizes as a “brief, useless exchange” (366, 370).

The Homeric epics provide both the prevailing myth that inspires American men to join the military and structure their writing about their service. The adjective “Spartan” pervades descriptions of forward operating bases and is always capitalized. Higgins reminds us that cadets minoring in “terrorism studies” at West Point must read the *Iliad* and that “Operation Achilles was a Nato offensive in 2007 aimed at clearing Helmand province of the Taliban” (Higgins). Mark Bowden, in the Afterward to *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War* (1999), an account of the 1993 Battle of Mogadishu, writes, “By doing something old, as old as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, I had produced a book that readers perceived as new” (358). It was a *New York Times* bestseller. Anthony Swofford, in *Jarhead: A Marine’s Chronicle of The Gulf War and Other Battles* (2003), describes how Homeric epic serves as both weapon and bandage. He recalls obsessively re-reading “*The Iliad* [sic] and *The Stranger*, choosing a page randomly and reading aloud and then stopping and by memory trying to reconstruct the story before and after the page I’d read, as though closing a wound” (213). Swofford’s memorization of the poem is almost totemic, as though internalizing it will enable him to harness the fighting prowess of its characters. When a fellow Marine sees Swofford with the *Iliad*, he comments, “That’s some heavy dope, sniper. Cool.” For the sniper, Swofford comments, “‘dope’ is anything that helps him acquire a target” (154). Thus, Swofford is convinced that reading about the heroic violence of Achilles, Odysseus, Ajax, etc. quite literally improves his marksmanship.

The imprint of the Homeric epic continues throughout American Iraq War memoirs. In *One Bullet Away: The Making of a Marine Officer* (2005), which includes epigraphs from Plutarch, Marine Lieutenant Nathaniel Fick discusses his decision to join the Marines:

"I wanted to go on a great adventure, to prove myself, to serve my country. [...] In Athens or Sparta my decision would have been easy. I felt as if I had been born too late" (4). Undergoing a mock interrogation, Fick is asked, "'Do you care that you bomb and kill the little children of our country?' I shook my head no" (154). Having internalized the warrior ethos, Fick is not concerned with civilian consequences. In *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (2006), Thomas Ricks profiles Major General James Mattis, former Secretary of Defense. Ricks notes that Mattis "can quote Homer" off the top of his head and always deploys to warzones with Aurelius' *Meditations* in his luggage (313). Describing a similar fondness for the ancient Greeks, in *The Unforgiving Minute: A Soldier's Education* (2009) U.S. Army Officer Craig Mullaney exhibits a kind of golden age syndrome wherein he idealizes and relates to both "the Greeks at Troy and the Americans at Normandy" (352). Such ahistorical thinking is typical throughout contemporary war stories, where soldiers will feel more in common with mythic, fictitious characters like Achilles and Odysseus than with their enemies or nearby civilians. As in Swofford's anecdote above, we see this manifest as obsession in Mullaney's memoir. During specialized training at Ranger School, he copied by hand passages from Steven Pressfield's 1998 novel *Gates of Fire*, which dramatizes the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BC (111). So thoroughly is his military service framed by the classical tradition, relays Mullaney, that it takes on a bewildering mythic quality. "You are the musicians of Mars," Mullaney recalls being told by an officer. "Heads nodded as the lieutenants figured out the mythological reference to the Greek god of war. Like a conductor managing an orchestra of woodwinds and brass, he expected us to know when and how to use a payload of Air Force bombs, a volley of artillery rounds, and an Apache helicopter's chain gun" (203). War is sanitized, made poetic, its atrocities hidden in orchestral language. The command of weapons is emphasized and their literal impact—who they will kill—is ignored.

Thus, in Fick, Mattis, and Mullaney, we see America's educated officer class finding in the classics animus for war with little to no concern for civilian casualties. Just as in the Homeric epics gods and kings seek glory on the battlefield despite collateral damage, so too do top military officials exhibit a similar spirit. The trend continues in Jon Krakauer's *Where Men Win Glory: The Odyssey of Pat Tillman* (2009). In his recollection of Tillman's decision after 9/11 to turn down a \$3.6 million NFL contract to enlist in the U.S. Army, Krakauer quotes the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in various epigraphs and repeatedly references the epics as rubrics by which to comprehend Tillman's motivations. "Tillman's story conforms in some regards to the classic hero, and the protagonist of such a tale always possesses a tragic flaw [...] his Achilles' heel" (406). According to Krakauer, Tillman had not a "tragic flaw," but a tragic virtue: his stubborn idealism (406). Krakauer privileges Tillman's desire to go to war over his family's grief about his death in 2004 due to friendly fire. Like Achilles, Tillman's decision about whether to go to war was difficult and, also like Achilles, the historical and literary record reflects largely heroism.

In the 2010s a series of civilian women wrote "homefront" stories containing allusions to the Homeric epics. Jehanne Dubrow's collection of poems *Stateside* (2010) uses the *Odyssey's* Penelope to depict American wives whose husbands are deployed. Siobhan Fallon's *You Know When the Men are Gone* (2011) alludes heavily to Homer's *Odyssey* and Sophocles' *Ajax*. Lea Carpenter's *Eleven Days* (2013), the title of which refers to the duration of the truce that Achilles and Priam broker in the *Iliad*, follows Sara, whose son Jason, an American Special Forces operative, is missing in action. Sara talks with his former colleagues how the Homeric epics inspire young men to idealize the camaraderie,

purpose, and potential glory of war. "He always said these crazy things," a soldier tells her. The "crazy things" turn out to be quotes from Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Ulysses" (1842). "The poem is about a warrior in repose. It's about Ulysses, back from the *Odyssey* [sic]. He misses the war," says Sara. "What does he miss?" a former teammate asks. "Have you read the *Iliad*? [...] That's what he misses," replies Sara (57). War stories are often seductive and deceiving; soldiers' yearning for excitement and valor can eclipse their fear of the perils of battle. Like Swofford in *Jarhead* and Conrad in *Sparta*, National Guardsmen Mickey Montauk, in *War of the Encyclopedists* (2015), by Gavin Kovite and Christopher Robinson, consoles himself by reading the *Odyssey* (19). Worrying about how his parents will cope with his deployment, Montauk asks, "Why think about that when he could be thinking about Odysseus?" (19). Homeric epic is escapism to an idealized, simplified arena for combat and adventure in which duty, honor, and glory are relevant and how elderly parents will pay for medicare is not.

Antigone in Pakistan

However, *Antigone* is not absent in modern war literature. Between 1914 and 1945, Bertolt Brecht, Jean Anouilh, and Jean Cocteau wrote and staged adaptations set against WWI and WWII. Throughout the 1950s, 60s, and 70s Spanish, Puerto Rican, and Haitian authors such as Maria Zambrano, Luiz Rafael Sánchez, and Félix Morisseau-Leroy adapted the story to reflect struggles against dictatorship. In 2009 *Antigone Project*, by Tanya Barfield, Karen Hartman, et al., the story is updated to reflect issues of gender and race in various settings, including a WWI battlefield and a remote African village. Between 2009 and 2020, Theater of War productions, staged versions of Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Ajax*. In 2016 Theater of War staged its first performance of *Antigone in Ferguson*, which addresses police brutality in the United States. These performances continue in 2020, with online performances as recently as October, 2020 ("Antigone in Ferguson").

More recently, in 2012 the Royal National Theatre in London staged a modern adaptation in which Polyneices is a terrorist and his sister a dangerous subversive ("Antigone: Family Versus State"). The 2019 winner of Best Motion Picture at the Canadian Screen Awards was Sophie Deraspe's *Antigone*, a story of Algerian refugees' struggle to avoid deportation from Canada (Barraclough). Most analogous to *Home Fire* is Indian American Joydeep Roy-Bhattacharya's *The Watch* (2012), an adaptation of *Antigone* set at an American outpost in Afghanistan. Nizam, who travels by makeshift wheelchair after losing her legs to an American bomb, demands the release of her brother Yusuf's body (Roy-Bhattacharya 4). Sacks suggests that plurality of viewpoints and emphasis on civilian casualties in *The Watch* is refreshing and necessary: "the author's deft manipulation of a large dramatis personae reinforces the sense of classical tragedy and stops the novel from being sucked toward the abyss of subjectivity" (Sacks). One year after the Iraq War began, Seamus Heaney produced *The Burial at Thebes, A Version of Sophocles' Antigone* (2004). Overall, the story of a politically powerless woman confronting a tyrant inherently transcends the Homeric tradition of men at arms.

Home Fire begins with an epigraph from Heaney's adaptation: "The ones we love [...] are enemies of the state," an observation that most reviews of the novel like to make in order to contextually Shamsie's work in the literary tradition of classical adaptations (5). Speaking in a 2017 interview with British bookstore company Foyles about adapting *Antigone*, Shamsie credits a meeting with Jatinder Verma, co-founder and artistic director of the London Tara Arts theater company (Foyles). Verma asked Shamsie to write a play

for Tara Arts. When Shamsie admitted she was not a playwright, Verma suggested that she adapt an ancient Greek tragedy, from which emerged *Home Fire* (Foyles). *Antigone*, which Shamsie describes as “the marrow” of her novel, rather than the “the skeleton,” perfectly illustrates the twenty first century tension between individual and state:

What happens when an individual takes on [...] an unjust edict by the state? [...] There are certain things [in] Greek tragedy that strike you as timeless. How do we express grief? [...] What do we owe to a state in love and loyalty? You take these questions and you place them in a form that you know. (Foyles).

Rather than reiterate the Homeric themes of anger, soldiering, and patriotism, Shamsie considers their opposites: the lives of civilian women who must put up with “a campaign of hatred against law-abiding British Muslims” (205). While veterans, from Conrad in *Sparta* to cases studies throughout Shay’s books, almost uniformly repress grief, Shamsie foregrounds the ritual of mourning in the Pasha family, especially through Aneeka, “who wants for her brother what she never had for her father: a grave beside which she can sit and weep” (267).

In a 2019 interview with the Wheeler Center, a public arts and literacy forum in Melbourne, Shamsie recalls writing *Home Fire* in the early 2010s, when British Home Secretary Theresa May discussed revoking the British citizenship of anyone suspected of traveling abroad to support ISIS. According to Shamsie, the connection between current policy and ancient drama was clear: “What are you saying when you say, ‘This body cannot be buried here?’ You are saying that, in life and death, you have no claim to this land. That’s like stripping someone of citizenship” (Wheeler). Thus, Shamsie shifts the focus of the post-9/11 war novel away from the hegemon, who conquers through exclusion as well as invasion, onto the victim, who suffers consequences far more severe and complex than the state perceives.

Shamsie is direct in her descriptions of the casualties of the War on Terror. “I envy you your father. Mine died while being taken to Guantanamo,” Isma writes to Eamonn (46). They have only known each other briefly, but Isma is not shy about confronting men privileged to be ignorant about the War on Terror’s victims. “We don’t even know if anyone bothered to dig a grave,” says Isma of her father’s death on route to Guantanamo, highlighting the fraught nature of burial rites in the novel (52). “I’m sure they dug a grave,” replies Eamonn. “Why? Because they’re so civilized?” snaps Isma (52). “Civilization” is a fraught, debated term in both *Antigone* and *Home Fire*. Do we judge our level of civilization by our laws or by our traditions? Even Western, democratic laws, Shamsie illustrates, can be barbaric.

Shamsie is similarly blunt in her depiction of the state’s lack of pity for its citizens. After Parvaiz is murdered, Karamat declares “We will not let those who turn against the soil of Britain in their lifetime sully that very soil in death” (193). Aneeka explicitly references *Antigone* in her ultimate plea to Karamat, televised as she sits with Parvaiz’s body in the Karachi park:

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. [...] Let me take my brother home. (237)

In this excerpt, Aneeka highlights one the most important differences between texts like *Home Fire* and the traditional war story: officialdom. Most protagonists, as well as most

authors, mentioned above are members of the military, government, or other organization with their own set of laws. Just as the characters in Homer's epics adhere to codes of behavior, so too do characters from Conrad to Swofford to the unnamed narrator of *Redeployment* operate within legal frameworks that permit them to be violent. Aneeka punctures this institutional sphere and appeals to justice, a concept more noble, but also more nebulous, than law. When she demands to take Parvaiz's body home, she counteracts the idea, established in Homeric epic and reiterated throughout recent war fiction, that the faceless shapes in the desert are undeserving not only of burial, but also of acknowledgment in narrative.

Home Fire opens with a clear establishment of the power dynamic between governments—in this case, Great Britain, but applicable also to the U.S. and ISIS—and the citizens they treat with suspicion and abuse. After hours of interrogation in a windowless room in London's Heathrow airport, during which she is asked about "*The Great British Bake Off*, the invasion of Iraq, Israel, suicide bombs, dating websites," Isma is finally released:

Isma stood up, unsteady because of the pins and needles in her feet, which she'd been afraid to shake off in case she accidentally kicked the man across the desk from her. As she wheeled out her luggage she thanked the woman whose thumbprints were on her underwear, not allowing even a shade of sarcasm to enter her voice. (7)

Thus, *Home Fire* opens with a trope of post-9/11 literature, present in the work of Mohsin Hamid, Bayoumi, : the innocent Muslim being treated as an enemy of the state. While throughout modern war literature the perspective of American soldiers and government regarding Middle Easterners suspiciously is common, few texts depict what it is like to be on the receiving end of the 2001 United States's Patriot Act or Great Britain's 2000 Terrorism Act. Isma, literally shaking, embodies the victimhood so erased in much war literature. Agents of the state have invaded her privacy, presumed her guilt, and made her prove her innocence. Though the state's weapon, in this case, is interrogation, we should recall that the U.S. questioning of Adil lead to torture and death. Even in Isma's case, she is reduced to the supplicant victim, though Shamsie confronts readers with her pitiful state directly, rather than abstracting it as "other" and "downrange."

Overall, Pakistanis, Muslims, and other hyphenated, othered Britains are the foremost victims of the War on Terror in *Home Fire*. The only characters who commit acts of physical violence are the U.S. military and ISIS. Even so, language recalling the bloodshed of ancient warfare pervades the text, establishing a martial undertone and situating the Pashas always as victims. Isma's move westward from Karachi, to London, and finally to Amherst is met with "the hundred-blade knife" of Massachusetts wind in January (10). Icicles, described as "broadswords," hang menacingly above the front door of her apartment (12). Isma, a Muslim woman with familial ties to terrorism is, in a "forever war" of "global reach" always met with hostility and suspicion (Filkins; "President Discusses War on Terrorism"). In Sophocles' *Antigone*, Creon's tyranny is limited to the kingdom of Thebes. In Homer's epics, violence occurs at Troy and follows the veterans—in Odysseus's case, for years—as they seek peaceful homecomings. In the twenty-first century, the battlefield is global, though hostilities in the West are often bloodless: legal, bureaucratic, rhetorical, etc. Consequently, Shamsie redirects the frenzied violence at the heart of *Antigone* into subtle, symbolic images.

Later in the novel, when Isma returns to London to confront Karamat about his unwillingness to repatriate Parvaiz's body, the two meet in the kitchen of his mansion.

Though violence is out of character for both of them, Karamat notes, "I'm closer to the knife block" (250). They spar with words, not weapons, but the red wine he sips as he refuses unequivocally to let Isma bury her brother is described as "a miniature blood ocean (249). "Droplets of red" pool in empty wine glasses full of "pinkly melting ice" that transports the notion of Parvaiz's body, at that same moment preserved crudely in ice in a Karachi park, into the Lone house (249). Later, unable to find sugar for his tea, Karamat stirs in a spoonful of red jam, evoking blood and viscera: "He watched the bits of jam bobbling in the tea, feeling mildly revolted" before gulping it all down (266).

Even more subtly is the Lone family's violence toward the Pashas communicated through Eamonn and Aneeka's relationship. The morning after their engagement they pit cherries together and discuss Parvaiz's radicalization. Eventually, they argue. Ignoring Aneeka's plea to "fight like a man, not a boy," Eamonn, with "a crimson stain" on his dressing gown, "cherry stains on his hands," and a bloody finger from hastily opening a beer bottle, grows frustrated and hurls houseplants off his balcony (96, 98). In a scene that evokes the past torture and murder of Adil and the future murder of Parvaiz, all of which Eamonn's father sets into motion, we witness the startling death of a cactus "never before so anthropomorphized as with arms outstretched in a headfirst plummet, its neck snapping in two on impact" (98). Eamonn becomes in twenty first century London a frenzied warrior, enraged by his lover and causing "carnage on his patio" (98). The scene resonates as both instance of awful, corporeal violence and comical vignette of a yuppie hurling house plants from his balcony. Like Klay's *Redeployment*, it is "brutal, piercing, and darkly funny" (National Book Foundation). Yet, *Home Fire* goes further and represents the victimhood erased in literature like *Redeployment*. Aneeka, "still in the stained dressing gown," produces an image on her phone (102). "That's Parvaiz [...] He wants to come home. But your father is unforgiving [...] so 'm not going to get my brother back" (102). Just as the cactus, poor thing, is for the compost," so too is Parvaiz's fate not only sealed, but acknowledged - represented (100). Shamsie reminds us that Parvaiz and others like him are at the margins of all modern war stories, unrecorded casualties obscured by persistent Homeric myth and a fog of war that Shamsie brushes aside to reveal the truth.

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Notes

¹ See also British Pakistani Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2018), the work of Iraqi Sinan Antoon and Hassan Blasim, the novels of British Pakistani Nadeem Aslam, in particular *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013), and the wartime blogs of the pseudonymous Iraqi woman Riverbend, published as *Baghdad Burning: Girl Blog from Iraq* (2005) and *Baghdad Burning II: More Girl Blog from Iraq* (2006).

² See also Bryan Doerries, *The Theater of War: What Ancient Tragedies Can Teach Us Today* (2016), John Rhead, "Two Books About the Hell of War" (2016), *Survivors' Songs: from Maldon to The Somme* (2008), Nancy Sherman, *Stoic Warriors: the Ancient Philosophy Behind the Military Mind* (2005) and *The Untold War: Inside the Hearts, Minds, and Souls of Our Soldiers* (2011), James Tatum, *The Mourner's Song: War and Remembrance from the Iliad to Vietnam* (2003), and Martin Winker, "'Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori?': Classical Literature in the War Film" (2000).

³ See also Laura McKenzie, “‘Through blackening pools of blood’: Trauma and Translation in Robert Graves’s *The Anger of Achilles*” (2020), Angela Hobbs, “Who Lied? Classical heroism and World War I” (2018), Judith Hallett, “Re-Envisioning WWI as America’s Trojan War: Thornton Wilder as Homeric Bard in *Theophilus North*” (2018), and Elizabeth Vandiver, *Homer in British World War One Poetry* (2011).

⁴ VA is the abbreviation for “Veteran’s Administration.”

⁵ See *Antigone Adapted: Sophocles’ Antigone in Classic Drama and Modern Adaptation, Translation, and Transformation*, by Roberto Cardullo (2011).

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