Disgraced

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF AYAD AKHTAR

Ayad Akhtar, who is of Pakistani descent, was born in Staten Island, New York. He majored in theater and religion at Brown University before moving to Italy to work with Polish theater director Jerzy Grotowski. Akhtar subsequently returned to the United States and completed an MFA in film directing at Columbia University. In 2012, Akhtar published his first novel, *American Dervish*, which garnered widespread critical acclaim. He wrote his first play, *Disgraced*, the same year, and it premiered at the American Theater Company in Chicago in 2012. The play won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2013, before debuting on Broadway in 2014. Akhtar subsequently wrote several critically acclaimed plays: *The Who & The What* (premiered in 2014), *The Invisible Hand* (premiered in 2014), and *Junk: The Golden Age of Debt* (premiered on Broadway in 2017). Akhtar has received two Tony Award nominations, and he won the American Academy of Arts and Letters Steinberg Playwright Award in 2017. Much of his writing centers on the experiences of Muslim American people.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Akhtar's play is set in 2011, and it explores contemporary Islamophobia in the United States. Several Muslim characters in the play (as well as those merely *assumed* to be Muslim) experience ethnic and religious prejudice, including racial profiling at airports, invasive interrogations by law enforcement, and workplace discrimination. The rise of Islamophobia in the U.S. is largely rooted in the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York City (which took place on September 11, 2001), which the characters discuss in the play. Amir's character also mentions the 1947 Partition of India into two countries, India (predominantly Hindu) and Pakistan (predominantly Muslim). This event caused an eruption of violent conflict along the borders of the two nations, the ripple effects of which still impact Indian-Pakistani relations to this day.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Akhtar's novel *American Dervish* (2012) is similar to *Disgraced*, in that it also features a Pakistani-American protagonist struggling with his identity and religious background. His play *The Invisible Hand* (2014) also centers on an affluent businessman and explores similar themes, including terrorism, capitalism, and Islamic fanaticism. Another contemporary book that explores Islamophobia is Ali Eteraz's *Native Believer* (2018), whose protagonist (much like Amir) comes from a Muslim culture but doesn't identify as Muslim and faces discrimination at work. Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) also features a protagonist grappling with his mixed feelings about the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Furthermore, in *Disgraced*, Emily's character is accused of Orientalism (the tendency for white artists to depict non-white cultures as exotic and different, in an offensive or exploitative way). The concept was coined by social theorist Edward Said in his 1978 book *Orientalism*. Other authors who explore and criticize Orientalism include David Henry Hwang (his 1988 play *M. Butterfly* addresses French-Chinese Orientalism) and Nella Larsen (her 1928 book *Quicksand* depicts Danish-African Orientalism). Like *Disgraced*, *Quicksand* also features an offensive portrait that symbolizes the way white artists depict non-white cultures and people as exotic, different, and subtly inferior.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Disgraced
- **When Written:** 2012
- **Where Written:** Chicago
- **When Published:** 2012
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Drama
- **Setting:** An upscale apartment in New York's Upper East Side, 2011–2012
- **Climax:** Amir hits Emily in a fit of rage.
- **Antagonist:** Isaac; Emily Hughes Kapoor; Islamophobia
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Greek Tragedy. *Disgraced* was modeled on ancient Greek tragedies, which typically feature protagonists who (like Amir in *Disgraced*) are cursed with troubled pasts, and whose lives gradually unravel onstage.

PLOT SUMMARY

In summer 2011, in an upscale apartment on New York's Upper East side, Emily (who's white) sketches a **portrait** of her husband Amir (who's South Asian). She's painting him in the image of a Diego Velázquez painting of his former slave, dressed to show that he's now rich—though Amir finds it unsettling that Emily is portraying him this way. Amir, who's a high-powered attorney, takes a work call while he poses for

Emily. He imagines himself making partner and seeing his name above the firm's door—even if that name is "Kapoor" instead of his real last name.

Amir's nephew Abe arrives at the apartment. Abe changed his name from Hussein to Abe Jensen to make his life easier after he moved to the United States. Now, he wants Amir to help Imam Fareed, a Muslim cleric who's been wrongfully charged with funding the terrorist organization Hamas with the charity money he collected for his mosque. Emily urges Amir to help, which agitates him. Amir doesn't think much of Islam—he tells Emily and Abe about a time when his mother spat on him because he had a crush on a Jewish girl at school. This led Amir to spit on the girl the next time he saw her. He thinks that he was right to renounce his faith years ago. Emily says that Imam Fareed needs his own people around him, but Amir doesn't feel like one of those people.

Two weeks later, Emily reads aloud from a newspaper article that quotes Amir as supporting Imam Fareed. The newspaper article makes it sound like Amir was legally representing the imam, even though he was only commenting on the case. Amir is distraught that this article will threaten his career, but Emily thinks he's overreacting. Amir angrily leaves the room and slams around their bedroom. Just then, an art curator named Isaac arrives to look at Emily's paintings, many of which feature Islamic patterns. Isaac originally suggested that it was inappropriate for a non-Muslim person to use Islamic imagery, but he changed his mind after reading a review praising Emily's work. However, he still thinks that people will accuse her of Orientalism (depicting non-Western cultures in a patronizing, exploitative way).

Three months later, Amir is drinking on the apartment terrace as he seethes with anger. Suddenly, he throws his glass on the ground, smashing it. When Emily asks what's wrong, he tells her that his boss read the newspaper article, ran a background check on Amir, and discovered that Amir's changed his last name from Abdullah (an Arabic Muslim name) to Kapoor (an Indian Hindu name). Amir is terrified about his future at the firm, but Emily still thinks that Amir is being ridiculous.

In the middle of this conversation, Isaac and his wife Jory (Amir's work colleague) arrive early for a dinner party. Isaac shares the news that he's going to feature Emily's art in his show—he thinks that her use of Islamic patterns is innovative and important, and that she has a bright future ahead. Amir prefers Emily's earlier work, which didn't use Islamic imagery, but Isaac doesn't think that's a lucrative direction for Emily's career.

The conversation pivots to Isaac's upcoming trip to India, and Amir admits that he finds airport security awful. He usually volunteers to be searched to avoid being racially profiled. Emily thinks that the authorities are trying hard *not* to be racist, and she and Isaac scold Amir for being passive-aggressive. Isaac says that the problem isn't Islam itself, but its political agenda.

Amir, growing agitated, asks Isaac if he's ever read the Qur'an. Isaac hasn't. Amir thinks that Islam condones wife-beating and other problematic values (though Emily disagrees, scolding Amir again). The group then discusses the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Amir admits that a small part of him intuitively sympathizes with the terrorists, which he hates—that's why he's distanced himself from Islam. When Amir leaves the room, Isaac accuses him of secretly being a terrorist.

Amir and Jory decide to head out to get some champagne, to lighten the mood. While they're gone, Isaac tells Emily that the law firm promoted Jory to partner instead of Amir, because the newspaper article made them suspicious about Amir's dealings with the Muslim community. Isaac wonders why Amir would ever speak out in support of a Muslim cleric. Crushed, Emily admits that she made Amir do it. While they talk, Isaac makes several moves to touch Emily, and they allude to having had sex on a recent trip they took to London. Isaac urges Emily to leave Amir; he sees him as the slave in Emily's portrait, an outsider who's trying to have "his master's wife."

Isaac moves in to kiss Emily just as Jory and Amir return—and Jory is enraged to see them embracing. Amir, meanwhile, has just learned that he was passed over for the promotion, and he's shouting at Jory. Isaac aggressively insults Amir, and Amir spits in Isaac's face. Isaac tells Amir that "you people" are "animals," and he and Jory storm out. Emily admits to Amir that she slept with Isaac, but she regrets it. In a blind fit of rage that releases years of pent-up resentment, Amir hits Emily in the face. Suddenly, he realizes what he's done, just as Abe walks in to see Emily on the floor, her face bloody.

Six months later, Amir has lost both his job and his marriage. Emily and Abe arrive as he's packing up the apartment. Abe has changed his name back to Hussein—and he's currently in trouble with the law. Recently, he was in a coffee shop when his friend Tariq annoyed a barista. She noticed the men's Muslim skullcaps and heard them talking about Muslim oppression, so she called the police. The police arrested Hussein and Tariq, and the FBI interrogated both of them, threatening to deport them. Amir scolds Hussein for being so reckless and publicly portraying himself as Muslim. Hussein tells Amir that he used to look up to him, but now he thinks that Amir just hates his own people. He leaves.

Once Amir and Emily are alone, Amir repeatedly apologizes to her. He's read reviews of her new show, and he's proud of her success. Emily interjects that her art was naïve, and that she had a part in their marriage collapsing too. She asks Amir not to contact her again and leaves. Suddenly, Amir notices a wrapped canvas leaning against the wall—it's Emily's portrait of him. He unwraps the painting and gazes at it intently.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Amir Kapoor/Abdullah – Amir Kapoor, a successful Pakistani American lawyer of about 40, is the play's protagonist. Although he and his wife, Emily, lead an affluent lifestyle, Amir is so haunted by his strict Muslim upbringing and ashamed of his ethnic identity that he's unable to be happy. He's also terrified of being discriminated against and resentful of the way well-meaning people like Emily are unintentionally racist and patronizing toward him. Amir tries to suppress these feelings, but he often yells, breaks things, and drinks to excess. When Amir's nephew Abe and Emily pressure Amir into speaking with a newspaper about Imam Fareed (a Muslim cleric who's been falsely accused of funding terrorism), Amir's bosses at the law firm end up reading the article. It portrays him as supporting the imam, so they run a background check on Amir and find out that his name is Abdullah (an Arabic name meaning "servant of Allah") and not Kapoor (an Indian name) like he told him. They also question his associations with Islam, and this incident that brings Amir's repressed emotions to the surface. Soon after this, he and Emily have Isaac (an art curator) and Jory (Amir's work colleague) over for dinner. And when the conversation turns into a heated debate about Islam, Amir struggles to keep it together. Whereas Amir's firsthand experience with Islam makes him critical of the religion, his wife and friends dismiss and belittle his opinions, which deepens his resentment. Later in the evening, Amir finds out that Jory was promoted at work instead of him (likely a result of the background check)—and that Emily and Isaac are having an affair. These shocks cause Amir to lose control completely: he screams at Jory, spits in Isaac's face, and beats Emily until her face is bloodied. The play ends with Amir in disgrace, as the play's title suggests: his violence costs him his marriage, his friends, and his job. His character is a testament to the deep effects that racism and Islamophobia can have on a person, as well as the dangers of trying to deny one's identity or suppress one's emotions out of shame.

Emily Hughes Kapoor – Amir's wife, Emily, is a beautiful, white artist of about 30. Whereas Amir renounced his Muslim faith years ago and tries to distance himself from Islam, Emily is fascinated by his Islamic culture and thinks that Amir's opinions are wrong. And although Emily thinks that she's worldly and open-minded, the way she dismisses Amir's lived experience with the faith makes him feel unseen and resentful. She, along with Amir's nephew Abe, pressure Amir into speaking out in support of Imam Fareed (who's been falsely accused of funding Islamic terrorism), which causes Amir's bosses to discriminate against him and pass him up for a promotion. Emily also uses traditional Islamic patterns in her artwork (despite having no real connection to Islam herself), and she paints a **portrait** of Amir that portrays him as an outsider to white culture. Isaac, the art curator she's working with, points out that this is Orientalism (the tendency for Westerners to portray Eastern cultures in a patronizing, exploitative way). However, neither of them seem to have a problem with profiting off of Emily's success as a painter. When Emily and Amir have Isaac and Jory (Amir's work colleague) over for dinner, Emily shames Amir for his negative views of Islam in front of their friends, which emboldens Isaac to be overtly racist toward Amir. The night culminates in Amir finding out that Emily and Isaac have been having an affair, which leads him to take out all of his pent-up shame and resentment on Emily. He beats her until her face is bloodied, an incident that destroys their marriage. At the end of the play, Emily and Amir are separated. And although Emily seems afraid of Amir, she decides not to press charges and apologizes to him for her disrespectful artwork and the role she played in what happened. Although Emily is the victim in this situation, the way she treats Amir throughout the play is a testament to how even well-meaning, progressive people can be unintentionally racist.

Isaac – Isaac is an art curator who's working with Emily; he's the husband of Amir's work colleague Jory. He decides to support Emily's career even though he knows that her paintings may offend people, as she's a white woman from a non-Islamic culture who uses Islamic imagery in her art. Isaac thinks that Emily's work is innovative and lucrative—and he encourages her to keep using traditional Islamic patterns in her paintings, knowing that this will also benefit his career as an art curator. At a dinner party at Amir and Emily's apartment, Isaac (who's Jewish) and Amir (who's of Pakistani descent and was raised Muslim) get into a heated debate about Islam. Amir is critical of the problematic values (like antisemitism and wife-beating) that he believes the Qur'an espouses, but Isaac is adamant that Islamic culture is beautiful. He intermittently brags about being well-traveled and well-read, making it clear that he wants to seem worldly and sophisticated. At the same time, however, Isaac is overtly prejudiced toward Muslim people, admitting that he's suspicious of South Asian people in airports. He even calls Amir a "closet jihadist" (Islamic terrorist) when Amir leaves the room. The dinner party culminates in Jory and Amir finding out that Isaac and Emily are having an affair, which leads to a fight: Amir spits in Isaac's face, and Isaac says that this behavior is why "you people" (meaning Muslims) are called "animals." Isaac, like Emily, seemingly wants to enjoy and benefit from the specific aspects of Islamic culture that he wants to acknowledge—all the while dismissing or actively discriminating against actual South Asian/Muslim people.

Hussein (Abe Jensen) – Abe is Amir's 22-year-old nephew who recently emigrated from Pakistan to the United States. He changed his name from the Arabic "Hussein" to the more stereotypically American-sounding "Abe Jensen" because he, like Amir, is afraid of being discriminated against for being Muslim. He's more outspoken about Islamophobia than Amir is,

however, and he and Emily pressure Amir into speaking out in support of Imam Fareed (who's been falsely accused of using charity money to fund a terrorist organization). Doing so has a detrimental impact on Amir's career, proving that Amir and Abe's fears of discrimination are warranted. Toward the end of the play, though, Abe decides to change his name back to Hussein and stops hiding his Muslim identity. One day, he and his friend Tariq wear Muslim skullcaps and openly talk about Islam in a coffee shop. When a barista questions them about the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda, and Tariq says that the U.S. created it, she calls the police. Hussein and Tariq are arrested and interrogated by the FBI, who suspect that the men might have ties to Islamic terrorism because of the way they dress and present themselves. Abe's character highlights how difficult it is for Muslim people to openly support their own culture in U.S. society. Abe looks up to Amir—but by the play's conclusion, he finds himself disgusted with his uncle, because Amir hates himself for coming from a Pakistani Muslim background.

Jory – Jory, Isaac's wife, is a lawyer at the same firm where Amir works. Amir and Emily invite Jory and Isaac over for dinner, and when their conversation turns into a heated debate about Islam, Jory sides with Amir. She, like him, is critical of Islam (she thinks it's a hateful religion) and tends to be suspicious that South Asian people are terrorists. When she and Amir run an errand to get a bottle of champagne for dinner, Jory tells him that she was promoted to partner over him, even though she hasn't been at the firm is long. Amir explodes on her, accusing Jory of ruining his career—and as this is happening, she and Amir return to the apartment and walk in on Isaac and Emily embracing. Jory correctly guess that they're having an affair and storms out—but not before telling Amir that their bosses no longer trust him since finding out that he's Pakistani and was raised Muslim (he'd led them to believe that he was an Indian Hindu). Since Jory is Black, the way their employers favor her highlights the fact that they're specifically racist against people from Muslim countries, rather than racist towards non-white people in general.

Imam Fareed – Imam Fareed is a Muslim cleric who's wrongfully accused of funding the terrorist organization Hamas using charity money he raised for his mosque. He's not present during the play's action, but other characters—notably Abe, Emily, and Amir—talk about him often. Abe and Emily are adamant that Amir (who's a Pakistani American lawyer) should publicly support and legally represent Imam Fareed—though Amir is hesitant to get involved, fearing that he'll be discriminated against for associating with a case that involves Islamic terrorism. Emily pressures Amir into speaking out in support of Imam Fareed to a journalist. The *New York Times* ends up running an article that makes it look like Amir is Imam Fareed's lawyer, even though he only observed the trial. As a result, Amir's bosses grow suspicious about his ties with the Muslim community. They run a background check on him and discover that Amir tried to pass himself off as an Indian Hindu (when he's actually Pakistani and was raised Muslim). This leads Amir's bosses to discriminate against him, passing him up for a promotion and making Jory (Amir's less-qualified colleague) a partner at the firm instead. Imam Fareed's situation speaks to the how pervasive Islamophobia is in the United States, causing people like the imam to be treated unfairly simply for supporting their communities.

Amir's Mother – Amir's mother, who died some time ago, was a Pakistani Muslim woman who hated non-Muslim people. She instilled antisemitic, racist, and sexist views in Amir, to the point that she spat on him when she found out he had a crush on a Jewish girl named Rivkah. Amir seems to have been traumatized by his strict religious upbringing and is deeply ashamed of the values that his mother raised him with. As an adult, he tries to distance himself from these hateful beliefs by rejecting and hiding his cultural heritage.

Diego Velázquez – Diego Velázquez was a 17th-century Spanish painter. Emily paints a **portrait** of Amir in the image of Velázquez's 1685 portrait of his assistant (formerly his slave), entitled *Portrait of Juan de Pareja*. Emily's and Velázquez's paintings embody an Orientalist approach to non-white people: both condescendingly depict their subjects as exotic outsiders trying to assimilate into affluent white culture.

Tariq – Tariq is Hussein's Muslim friend. Tariq and Hussein go to Starbucks wearing Muslim skullcaps and openly discuss Islam, and a barista (whom Tariq is rude to) assumes that they're Islamic terrorists when Tariq makes a sarcastic comment about the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda. She calls the police, and the men are arrested and interrogated by the FBI.

Barista – The barista, who works at Starbucks, gets annoyed when Tariq tries to flirt with her. When she asks Tariq and Hussein if they support Al-Qaeda (because they're wearing Muslim skullcaps and openly discussing Islam), Tariq tells her that the U.S. created the terrorist organization. This leads the barista to call the police, and Tariq and Hussein are arrested and interrogated by the FBI.

Steven – Steven is one of Amir's bosses at the law firm. When he discovers that Amir was raised Muslim, he questions Amir's ties with the Muslim community and seems to believe that he may be involved with Islamic terrorism. Steven's behavior toward Amir is an example of Islamophobia in the workplace.

Rivkah – Rivkah is a Jewish girl whom Amir had a crush on in sixth grade. Amir's mother was a conservative Muslim woman with antisemitic views, so when she found about Rivkah, she spat on Amir. The next day at school, Amir spat on Rivkah. When he tells this story to Emily and Abe, he seems deeply ashamed and says that he was right to renounce his Muslim faith.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mort – Mort is one of Amir's bosses at the law firm.

Paolo – Paolo is a legal client whom Amir yells at and berates him on the phone.

TERMS

Orientalism – Orientalism, a term coined by social theorist Edward Said, refers to the way Western artists often depict non-Western cultures as exotic and different—but in patronizing a way that subtly implies the culture in question is somehow alien or inferior. It also refers to the way Western artists borrow Eastern cultural or religious imagery for their own benefit, despite having no real connection to the culture they're borrowing from. In *Disgraced*, **Isaac** warns **Emily** that her use of traditional Islamic patterns in her art might be perceived as Orientalist.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

UNINTENTIONAL RACISM AND RESENTMENT

In *Disgraced*, Amir Kapoor (who's South Asian and was raised Muslim but has renounced Islam) and his wife Emily (who's white) seem to have a progressive interracial marriage and worldly, liberal-minded friends from different backgrounds. Emily celebrates Amir's Muslim culture much more than Amir himself does, and the couple's friends Jory (who's Black) and Isaac (who's Jewish) see themselves as well-traveled and open-minded. Nonetheless, Emily often says unintentionally offensive things to Amir about his Muslim heritage, which also emboldens Isaac to be overtly racist, creating tension and resentment in both of their relationships with Amir. Emily and Isaac's behavior shows that even people who think of themselves as well-intentioned and progressive can do and say racist things. Furthermore, the play suggests that unintentional racism is just as damaging as overt racism, because it creates resentment that undermines healthy relationships.

Emily champions herself as a progressive person who celebrates Islam—but in doing so, she minimizes Amir's lived experiences as a person of Muslim heritage, which makes him feel unseen. Emily knows that talking about Islam triggers Amir, because he felt stifled growing up in a dogmatically religious household—yet she often scolds Amir about his negative view of Islam. She champions her own interpretation of a religion that she's never lived with, dismissing her husband's emotional trauma surrounding his Muslim upbringing. By constantly talking about Islam, Emily brings up triggers that remind Amir of a painful time in his life, which makes him feel on-edge and resentful of Emily. One night, at a dinner party, Amir says that he finds airport security "a nightmare" because airport authorities tend to racially profile South Asian people like himself. This embarrasses him, so he usually just volunteers for a search to avoid being singled out in front of everyone in the airport. Rather than empathizing with him, Emily dismisses Amir's experience of racial profiling and even criticizes his way of avoiding discomfort and humiliation. She suggests that airport authorities try really hard *not* to be racist, and she scolds Amir for being passive aggressive toward them by volunteering for searches. In depicting Amir as the aggressor rather than the victim, Emily suggests that his feelings and concerns about airport security are unfounded. This makes Amir feel misunderstood and ignored, causing him to resent her even more.

Emily is so concerned about seeming progressive and accepting of Islam that she often pressures Amir into unsafe situations where he's subject to overt racial discrimination. Amir fears getting entangled with a Muslim cleric, Imam Fareed, who's been wrongly accused of funding terrorist activity with charity money that he collected for his mosque. But Emily, thinking that she's being open-minded and progressive, pressures Amir into speaking out in support of Imam Fareed to the press, dismissing Amir's fear of backlash as exaggerated. When Amir's bosses see the newspaper article, they question his ties with the Muslim community and end up firing him, destroying his career as a lawyer. In this situation, Emily prioritizes looking progressive over taking the racism that Amir experiences seriously. This not only builds resentment between them as a couple but also puts Amir in a vulnerable position, as it singles him out to be discriminated against.

Emily's casual, unintentional racism also emboldens overtly racist people (like their friend Isaac) to speak up, causing further harm. When Emily scolds Amir for his attitude at airports, Isaac (who has never been racially profiled himself) suggests that Amir only exacerbates people's suspicions about Muslim people by volunteering to be searched. At the same time, Isaac admits that he himself is suspicious of Muslim people in airports, as he believes that any one of them could be a terrorist. Isaac embodies the racism that Amir fears, yet he also criticizes Amir for trying to avoid racist confrontations—a hypocritical perspective that creates tension between the two friends. As the dinner conversation continues, Isaac grows more outwardly hostile and pressures Amir into talking about Islam. In a vulnerable moment, Amir admits that he's so opposed to Islam because he still struggles to rid himself of

problematic ideas that he was indoctrinated with as a child (racism against Jewish people, for instance). Then, as soon as Amir leaves the room, Isaac calls Amir a "closet jihadist" (Islamic terrorist) in front of Jory, who's Amir's work colleague. Isaac shames Amir for talking about Islam at all, publicly labeling Amir with a dangerous stereotype that could have very real ramifications for his job (or even his personal safety).

Emily and Isaac's behavior causes Amir to seethe with ongoing resentment. Eventually, Amir cracks under the pressure of tolerating racist conversation, and he has an angry outburst at the end of the dinner party that destroys his marriage with Emily and friendship with Isaac. This implosion of relationships is largely the result of Emily and Isaac continuously indulging their own privilege (in being able to talk about Islam without being traumatized or punished) above Amir's very real suffering as an ethnic minority. The play thus suggests that subtle, unintentional racism isn't harmless: it can create resentment, enable more overt racism, and even ruin relationships.

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

In *Disgraced*, Emily is a young white artist whose painting career takes off when she starts using Islamic patterns in her work. Emily's use of Islamic imagery is problematic because she's appropriating (borrowing from) and profiting off a culture that doesn't belong to her. She also paints a **portrait** of her husband, Amir (a wealthy South Asian lawyer), as a former slave who's become rich—suggesting that she sees him as an outsider to affluent white culture. Emily benefits from her use of Islamic culture, as does Isaac, the art curator who's featuring Emily's art in his upcoming show. Meanwhile, the story's South Asian characters (like Amir and his nephew Abe) only suffer harassment and discrimination for their association with Islam. Through this juxtaposition, the play highlights why cultural appropriation is unfair: it enables people who don't experience racism to profit from a culture that isn't theirs, while people who are actually *from* that culture are stigmatized.

Emily's use of Islamic culture in her work is exploitative of and offensive to people who actually come from that culture. A conversation that Emily has with Isaac introduces the idea that the Islamic influences in Emily's art aren't harmless or fun—they are, in fact, quite problematic. Emily suggests that "being a white woman" doesn't mean she has "no right to be using Islamic forms"—in other words, she feels that it's okay to use traditional Islamic imagery in her art, even though she isn't Muslim herself. Isaac tells her that she'll probably "be accused of […] Orientalism" (a term for the depiction of non-Western cultures as exotic, other, and ripe for exploitation). This lets readers know that Isaac, at least, recognizes the issue with Emily taking advantage of a culture that isn't hers—but both of them are okay with her doing so if it allows them to turn a profit. Despite Emily's protestation that her work isn't Orientalizing, she does make Amir feel othered and exploited when she paints a portrait of him in the image of artist Diego Velázquez's portrait of a former slave who's dressed to show that he's become wealthy. In associating her South Asian husband with a freed slave, Emily problematically depicts Amir as an outsider who's attempting to fit into Western culture but isn't seen as an equal to affluent white people.

The play's white characters—notably, Emily and Isaac—profit from using Islamic culture and enjoy success. Isaac tells Emily that "The work you're doing with the Islamic tradition is important and new. It needs to be seen. Widely." Isaac clearly approves of Emily's art and thinks that others will too—in this way, she can expect to receive praise and recognition for using Islamic culture to further her art career. Isaac plans to feature Emily's Islamic art in his upcoming show, which means that he, too, will reap the benefits of Emily's appropriation of Islamic culture. Amir suggests that Isaac look at some of Emily's earlier landscapes, which don't feature Islamic imagery, but Isaac isn't interested—he only wants her paintings that use Islamic patterns. Isaac thinks that "it's smart that [Emily] moved on" to appropriating Islamic imagery, as he thinks her that earlier work "is not as fertile a direction for her." His comments reveal that he thinks Emily will specifically profit from the way she's appropriating Islamic imagery, because it makes her work seem unique or exotic. By extension, Isaac will benefit too, as he'll earn commission for her paintings if they sell during his show. All of this profiting happens because Emily takes something from Islamic culture and copies it for her own benefit.

In contrast, the people who actually come from Islamic backgrounds face stigmatization (rather than praise) when they associate themselves with Islamic culture. The play implies that non-white people do not receive positive recognition or opportunities for drawing on their own culture—those opportunities tend to go to white people, who profit from representing non-white cultures. This illustrates why cultural appropriation like Emily's art is harmful and unfair. For instance, while Emily profits from her appropriation of Islamic culture, Amir gets passed up for a promotion at work when his bosses find out that he has Muslim heritage. When the press quotes Amir as standing up for Imam Fareed, a Muslim cleric who's been wrongly accused of funding terrorist activity, his bosses see the article. Realizing that Amir comes from a Muslim background, they grow uncomfortable with Amir's ties to the Muslim community and make his less-qualified colleague Jory a partner at the law firm instead of him. While Emily gets praised for her support of Islamic culture, then, Amir gets punished for his presumed association with it. A similar incident happens to Amir's nephew Abe when he happens to wear a Muslin skullcap in a Starbucks. When Abe's friend Tariq upsets a barista, the barista notices Abe and Tariq's skullcaps and calls the police—likely assuming that the men are terrorists—and Abe

and Tariq end up being interrogated by the FBI. Unlike Emily, who achieves success by appropriating elements of Islam, Abe and Tariq get harassed when they try to openly support their own Muslim culture. Through this contrast, the play reinforces the idea that American society punishes ethnic and religious minorities who try to represent or support their own culture. In contrast, Emily is rewarded for representing Islamic culture. This juxtaposition suggests that, as a white person, Emily can profit from Islamic culture in a way that South Asian people like Amir, Abe, and Imam Fareed cannot.

ISLAMOPHOBIA, OPPRESSION, AND INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

Disgraced highlights the widespread discrimination that Muslim Americans face on a daily basis. Amir and his nephew Abe fear discrimination to the point that they change their names to mask their Muslim heritage—and the play suggests that such fears are actually justified, since all of the Muslim characters in the play experience institutional racism. For instance, Muslim cleric Imam Fareed is wrongly accused of funding terrorists after he collects charity money for his community, showing how Muslims are often unfairly targeted in the United States. Then, a newspaper article quotes Amir (who renounced his Muslim faith a long time ago) as supporting the cleric, which has a detrimental impact on his career as a lawyer. In another instance, the FBI interrogates Amir's nephew Abe after he stops hiding his Muslim identity. Through these instances, the play highlights how widespread Islamophobia and systemic oppression severely inhibit Muslim Americans' abilities to be visible and participate in American society.

Two of the characters in the play change their names to sound less Muslim, implying that it's common for South Asian Americans from Muslim cultures (whether they're practicing Muslims or not) to be so fearful of prejudice that they feel they have to mask their identities to avoid discrimination. Amir changes his last name from Abdullah (which is Arabic) to Kapoor (which is Indian) to make himself seem Hindu instead of Muslim at work. The fact that he does this implies that Islamophobia is rampant even among educated professionals like his colleagues, likely as a result of people's prejudice toward Muslim Americans. If Amir had kept his Muslim last name, it's possible that he would have faced discrimination in his career. The fact that an Indian name is more accepted than an Arabic name further suggests that Muslim Americans are specifically discriminated against because of the way other people automatically associate them with Islamic terrorism. Similarly, Amir's nephew changes his name from Hussein (a traditional Islamic name) to "Abe Jensen." This choice implies that society treats him with suspicion if he's open about his culture and religion, implying that oppression of Muslims is so widespread in the United States that many live in debilitating fear of discrimination. They feel like they *have* to mask their true identities just to participate in American society.

The play's South Asian characters do end up facing outright discrimination within the legal system and the workplace, demonstrating the systemic oppression that Muslim Americans face—and proving that their fears are justified. Toward the end of the play, Abe changes his name back to Hussein and starts wearing a Muslim skullcap. One day, Hussein and his friend Tariq are at a restaurant when Tariq annoys a waitress. The waitress notices Hussein and Tariq's skullcaps and asks them if they support the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda, suggesting that she associates Muslims with terrorists. The waitress calls the police, likely mentioning her suspicions, and FBI agents show up. The agents ask Hussein and his friend questions like, "Do we believe in jihad? Do we want to blow stuff up? How often did I read the Koran?" Their questions reinforce the idea that Americans treat Muslims with suspicion because they wrongly associate Islam with terrorism. This outcome this suggests that Hussein actually *did* need to mask his identity to avoid being harassed by the authorities. In addition, a Muslim cleric named Imam Fareed is wrongly imprisoned for collecting charity money for his mosque, as he's accused of using the donations to fund terrorists. In this instance, a Muslim American person is unfairly targeted for an ordinary activity that wouldn't be interpreted as criminal if someone from a different religion or ethnic group was doing it. Given that Hussein was unfairly targeted as well, the play implies that it's common for Muslim Americans to be unjustly oppressed by authority figures like the police or the FBI. When a newspaper quotes Amir as defending the Muslim cleric, Amir is terrified—and his fears ultimately prove to be justified. Amir's bosses read the article, grow suspicious of Amir, and run a background check on him. The background check uncovers that Amir's real family name is Abdullah. The name is clearly tied to the Muslim faith, as it means "servant of Allah" (Allah is God in the Islamic tradition). This makes Amir's bosses uncomfortable because they're prejudiced against Muslim people, and so they begin to distrust him—even though he renounced his Muslim faith years ago. They end up passing up Amir for a promotion, giving the position to his less-qualified colleague Jory instead. This incident shows that the prejudice Muslim Americans fear is a real threat—one that can affect people's very livelihoods.

By presenting such a wide range of avenues in which Muslim people (or those simply *perceived* to be Muslim, like Amir) are discriminated against, *Disgraced* points to just how pervasive Islamophobia is in the 21st-century United States. Many of the non-Muslim characters in the play unfairly associate all Muslim people with Islamic extremist terrorism, and this prejudice bleeds into every aspect of American society and fuels systemic oppression. With characters ending up wrongfully distrusted, questioned, or even imprisoned, readers are left wondering how Muslim Americans are supposed openly participate in a

society that treats them so unjustly.

SHAME, ANGER, AND DISGRACE

Disgraced explores how shame about core aspects of one's identity can create lasting traumas. Amir Kapoor is a wealthy lawyer of Pakistani descent, and he lives in an upscale New York apartment with his beautiful wife Emily (who's white). On the surface, it looks like Amir's affluent lifestyle give him all he needs to be happy. The reader soon learns, however, that Amir feels pressured to suppress his cultural heritage, leading to frequent angry outbursts. He ultimately loses control and lashes out violently at Emily, ruining their marriage and leaving Amir alone and disgraced, as the play's title suggests. Through this chain of events, the play highlights the harmful effects that shame can have on a person's psyche—and the lasting damage that these feelings can cause.

Amir and his wife, Emily, lead a luxurious and materially wealthy lifestyle, which suggests that—at least on the surface—ethnic minorities like Amir are just as capable of success and happiness as white Americans. Amir is clearly well-off: he has a high-powered job as a lawyer, and he and Emily live in a lavish apartment in New York's upscale Upper East Side neighborhood. The apartment has "High ceilings, parquet floors, crown molding. The works," emphasizing how luxurious the Kapoors' home life is. Amir also wears $600 shirts to work, and Amir and Emily enjoy expensive weekend trips to the Hamptons, further indicating that that they lead a luxurious, enjoyable lifestyle. On the surface, then, Amir's lifestyle suggests that racial and/or religious minorities like Amir are able to be just as successful and happy as white Americans.

Despite the glossy veneer of Amir's life, however, he feels traumatized by his Muslim background—and his efforts to suppress this part of himself make him unhappy. Amir tries to distance himself from his Muslim upbringing, even going so far as to renounce his faith—yet he struggles to fully rid himself of his ingrained cultural values. Notably, Amir dislikes how his family taught him to be hostile toward non-Muslim people. For example, Amir feels disturbed after admitting that despite his horror at the 9/11 terrorist attacks, he also felt proud that "we were winning." He was taught to think of Islamist terrorists as fighting a war against Western cultures, and he's ashamed to admit that some part of him intuitively roots for Muslims to win this so-called war, even though he condemns terrorist activities. Similarly, Amir hates that his mother raised him to be prejudiced against Jewish people, yet he often lapses into passive-aggressive comments about them himself. For example, Amir frequently stereotypes Jewish people (like his bosses at his law firm) as greedy, which is a common antisemitic trope. Amir also dislikes the way his mother encouraged derogatory attitudes toward white women, based on the Islamic idea that women shouldn't expose their bodies in public. His mother believed that "White women have no self-respect" because "they think they have to take off their clothes to make people like them." Amir tries to distance himself from that belief—but he worries that deep down, a part of him still thinks that way, which makes him feel ashamed. Amir also thinks that Islamic doctrine endorses wife-beating, though his wife Emily questions Amir's interpretation. Despite their difference of opinion, Amir worries about having absorbed damaging ideas from his Muslim upbringing. He wants to suppress the hostile values toward non-Muslims and women that he learned growing up, but he struggles to do so because they run so deep. This makes him feel conflicted and shameful about his inability to fully progress past them, feelings that disrupt his otherwise comfortable, enjoyable life.

Amir's inner conflict about his Muslim heritage causes him to struggle emotionally: he has frequent outbursts that ultimately leave him alone and disgraced. Amir becomes irate whenever his wife Emily brings up Muslim culture, because he dislikes talking about Islam at all. He wants to suppress that part of his identity but struggles to get past it, and he's unable to control his emotions when triggered by the subject. For example, Emily keeps pressuring Amir into helping a Muslim cleric, Imam Fareed, who's been wrongfully accused of funding terrorist activity because he collected charity money for his community. But when Amir previously visited the cleric in prison, Imam Fareed only scolded Amir for not praying, which irritated Amir because it reminded him of the pressure he felt to comply with Islamic rituals growing up. Now, every time Emily brings up Imam Fareed, Amir grows terse and shuts down the conversation with comments like, "Can we stop talking about this?" He also starts to behave angrily, with actions like noisily "slamming around in the bedroom." Then, at a tense dinner party, Emily and their friend Isaac berate Amir for his negative attitude about Islam. At the end of the dinner party, Amir also learns that Emily cheated on him with Isaac. In a moment of blind rage, Amir spits on Isaac, yells at Isaac's wife Jory, and hits Emily. The stage directions read that Amir's violence should convey "the discharge of a lifetime of discreetly building resentment." This suggests that Amir is more prone to lashing out because he's tried to repress a part of his identity for so long: every time Islam comes up, he grows more agitated, eventually snapping and lashing out at everybody. The play thus suggests that repressing part of one's identity fuels shame and anger, which—if left unchecked—can result in disgraceful behavior.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

PORTRAIT

The portrait that Emily paints of her husband Amir, entitled *After Velázquez's Moor*, symbolizes the tendency for Western people to treat Eastern cultures in a patronizing or exploitative way. Emily paints Amir in the likeness of *Portrait of Juan de Pareja*, the portrait that artist Diego Velázquez painted of his former slave. In Velázquez's original, the subject is dressed to show that he's become rich. Emily thinks that in painting Amir this way, she's honoring his wealth and success—without realizing that she's depicting him in a condescending way and making him uncomfortable. In modeling the portrait after Velázquez's, she's portraying Amir like Velázquez's freed slave—an outsider who's trying to assimilate into affluent white culture. The likeness between the two paintings represents the way she views Amir (and, by extension, his Muslim culture) as very different to her own white American culture, the same way Velázquez's former slave was an outsider to European culture. She sees nothing wrong with representing Islamic culture in her own way through her art, and she pays little heed to how her depiction of Amir makes him feel belittled. In this way, the portrait embodies Orientalism, the tendency for white artists to depict non-white cultures as exotic, alien, and subtly inferior.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Little, Brown and Company edition of *Disgraced* published in 2013.

Scene 1 Quotes

High ceilings, parquet floors, crown molding. The works.

Related Characters: Emily Hughes Kapoor, Amir Kapoor/Abdullah

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

Before the action of the play begins, there's a description of the stage setting. The entire play take place in Amir and his wife Emily's apartment on New York's Upper East Side, and this particular quote describes the upscale styling of the couple's home. The "*High ceilings, parquet floors, crown molding*" are meant to signal that the Kapoors are wealthy: Amir is a high-powered lawyer, and Emily is an up-and-coming painter, so they're able to afford a beautiful home in one of the most expensive neighborhoods in the U.S. In characterizing the couple as successful people who are used to having "*The works*," these stage directions hint that the Kapoors have every reason to be happy and fulfilled.

Yet, as the play progresses, it becomes clear that Amir is far from happy, and that his and Emily's marriage is far from perfect. Amir struggles emotionally with shame over his Muslim upbringing and the racial discrimination he faces as a South Asian American—both of which interfere with his ability to enjoy his life, despite his wealth and success. The contrast between the play's setting and Amir's inner turmoil thus suggests that material possessions can't mask, compensate for, or erase emotional pain. The only way Amir can actually be happy is to accept himself, which he never quite manages to do.

I think it's a little weird. That you want to paint me after seeing a painting of a slave.

Related Characters: Amir Kapoor/Abdullah (speaker), Isaac , Diego Velázquez , Emily Hughes Kapoor

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

The play opens with Emily (who's white) painting a portrait of her husband Amir (who's South Asian) in the likeness of artist Diego Velázquez's painting of his former slave (*Portrait of Juan de Pareja*). But as she does so, Amir lets her know that the portrait makes him uncomfortable. In Velázquez's painting, his freed slave (who has since become Velázquez's assistant) is dressed up in fine European clothes. The portrait is seemingly meant to honor the former slave—yet painting a non-white person of low social status in this way also makes him look like he's trying to fit into a culture that he'll never be fully accepted into.

In the same way, Emily thinks that she's honoring Amir's success by painting him dressed up in fancy clothes (he's posing for her in an Italian suit jacket). But she doesn't seem to realize that she's inadvertently drawing parallels between Amir and Velázquez's assistant. That she chose to paint Amir in this way suggests that she subconsciously views him (just as Velázquez viewed his former slave) as an exotic outsider who's trying to assimilate into affluent white culture but will never be seen as a true equal. Later in the

play, art curator Isaac will point out that the portrait is Orientalist. (Orientalism is a term for Western artists' depiction of a non-white or non-Western people in a patronizing way that implies that they're inferior.) This seems to be why Amir feels uncomfortable about the portrait: rather than paying homage to him, Emily is making him look like an outsider.

> Why'd he get you a statue of Siva? [...] He doesn't think you're Hindu, does he?

Related Characters: Emily Hughes Kapoor (speaker), Jory , Mort , Amir Kapoor/Abdullah

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

After Amir takes a work call from his boss Mort, Emily questions why Mort gave Amir a statue of the Hindu god Siva as a birthday present. She alludes to the fact that Amir's bosses think he's Hindu—but in fact, Amir comes from a Pakistani Muslim family, though he's renounced the religion in adulthood. Readers can infer that Amir is trying to pass as an Indian Hindu at the law firm where he works, to avoid being discriminated against if people were to assume that he's Muslim. And indeed, Amir's bosses (and readers) later find out that he was born with the last name Abdullah (an Arabic name that means "servant of Allah"), changing it to Kapoor to protect himself from being discriminated against for having a Muslim-sounding name. This makes it clear that Amir deeply fears workplace discrimination because of Islamophobia in the United States (prejudice against people from Muslim cultures and the association of innocent Muslim people with terrorism). Amir is so afraid of this prejudice that he feels he needs to mask his cultural heritage, which speaks to just how pervasive of an issue this is in the United States—even for highly educated and successful professionals like Amir.

Emily, however, thinks that Amir is being unnecessarily guarded about having a Muslim background. She seems to find it funny that his bosses assume he's Hindu, rather than questioning why he felt the need to change his name and hide the truth about his heritage. Soon enough, however, Amir's bosses uncover that he's actually from a Pakistani Muslim family, which makes them fear his ties with the Muslim community. As a result, they begin to distrust him and end up passing him up for a promotion, making his less-qualified colleague Jory a partner at the firm instead of him. This outcome suggests that Amir's fears are, in fact, warranted—U.S. society discriminates against people of South Asian descent, to the point that they may be forced to distance themselves from Islamic culture in professional environments.

> I don't like what's happening. Somebody's gotta do something about it.

Related Characters: Emily Hughes Kapoor (speaker), Imam Fareed , Hussein (Abe Jensen) , Amir Kapoor/Abdullah

Related Themes:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

The quote occurs when Amir's nephew Abe is on his way up to the Kapoors' apartment to discuss Imam Fareed (a Muslim cleric who's been wrongfully accused of funding terrorism). Here, Emily is heavily implying that the "somebody" who has to do something to help the imam is Amir. And indeed, when Abe comes up to the apartment, he and Emily pressure Amir (who's a lawyer) to represent Imam Fareed's case.

Throughout the play, Emily tries to come off as accepting and open-minded about Islam—but in doing so, she dismisses Amir's lived experience as someone who was raised Muslim and understands what it's like to be the target of Islamophobia. He's hesitant to get involved with Imam Fareed because he's worried how other people will perceive his association with a case that's related to Islamic terrorism. Emily refuses to hear this, though, effectively privileging her own desire to seem progressive over the very real risks that Amir faces while living in a society that's largely Islamophobic. In this way, although Emily seems well-intentioned, she's being dismissive and insensitive of Amir's fears. This creates resentment between them, because Amir doesn't feel like Emily understand (or event acknowledges) the discrimination that Muslim people are at risk of experiencing.

> You know how much easier things are for me since I changed my name?

Related Characters: Hussein (Abe Jensen) (speaker), Emily

Hughes Kapoor, Amir Kapoor/Abdullah

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

When Amir's nephew Abe arrives at the Kapoors' apartment, Amir insists on calling him by his real name, Hussein. When Abe moved from Pakistan to the U.S., he changed his name from Hussein (a traditional Muslim name) to "Abe Jensen" (a more stereotypically American name) in order to hide his Muslim background. Although Abe is a devout Muslim and much more outspoken than Amir is about Islamophobia, he's still afraid of being discriminated against. So, much like Amir changed his last name from Abdullah (an Arabic names that means "servant of Allah") to Kapoor (an Indian name) to avoid being discriminated against in his career, Abe feels the need to hide a huge part of his identity just to be accepted in his new country.

The fact that both of the main South Asian characters in the play feel the need to do this implies that Islamophobia is common in U.S. society. And indeed, later on in the play, even Amir and Emily's friends casually espouse prejudice toward Muslim people. As a result of this, many South Asian people like Amir and Abe feel like they have to hide their identities to navigate everyday life without facing prejudice or harassment. Moreover, both Amir (who doesn't identify as Muslim) and Abe (who does) feel the need to mask their identities, suggesting that even non-Muslim South Asian people fear that they'll be discriminated against.

So Rivkah and I'd gotten to the point where we were trading notes. And one day, my mother found one of the notes. Of course it was signed, Rivkah. *Rivkah?* my mom says. *That's a Jewish name* […] So I tell my mom, No, she's not Jewish. But she knew the name was Jewish. *If I ever hear that name in this house again, Amir*, she said, *I'll break your bones. You will end up with a Jew over my dead body.* Then she spat in my face […] Next day? Rivkah comes up to me in the hall with a note. Hi, Amir, she says. Eyes sparkling. I look at her and say, *You've got the name of a Jew*. She smiles. *Yes, I'm Jewish*, she says […] Then *I* spit in *her* face.

Related Characters: Amir Kapoor/Abdullah (speaker), Emily Hughes Kapoor, Hussein (Abe Jensen) , Rivkah , Amir's Mother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

Amir tells his wife, Emily, and his nephew Abe this childhood anecdote in order to explain why he renounced Islam. In short, when Amir was in sixth grade, he had a crush on a Jewish girl named Rivkah. Amir's mother, a conservative Muslim woman who was antisemitic, spit on Amir when she found out about this—prompting Amir to spit on Rivkah the next day at school. After telling this story, Amir says that he's glad he renounced his Muslim faith, which makes it clear that he's ashamed of what he did to Rivkah. More generally, he's ashamed of ever believing the prejudiced values that he believes Islam instilled in him—and as a result, he completely rejects the Pakistani Muslim culture he was raised with, instead pretending that he's an Indian Hindu.

In this way, Amir is seemingly unable to separate his mother's religious views and prejudices from his wider cultural identity. He runs them together, rejecting *everything* about his background. From the bitter, resentful way that Amir recalls his childhood, it's clear that he still has a lot of unresolved trauma and anger about his past. He feels constantly triggered when the conversation veers toward Islam, and he has angry (sometimes even violent) outbursts. This is a testament to how repressing one's identity and internalizing shame can have a detrimental impact on a person's psyche. Rather than processing his past trauma and letting it go, Amir is steeped in bitterness—and this will eventually have disastrous effects on his relationships.

White women have no self-respect. How can someone respect themselves when they think they have to take off their clothes to make people like them?

Related Characters: Amir Kapoor/Abdullah (speaker), Imam Fareed , Hussein (Abe Jensen) , Emily Hughes Kapoor, Amir's Mother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

Having just told Emily and Abe about his mother's antisemitism, here Amir tells them about how conservative Muslims like his mother don't believe that white women respect themselves. In the Islamic faith, it's common for women to cover their bodies and faces—by comparison, white Western women tend to show more of their bodies.

Amir's mother apparently believed that white women "take off their clothes to make people like them," and this is one of the many religious notions that Amir takes issue with. However, he generalizes his mother's opinion to that of all Muslims, which suggests that his own trauma and internalized shame about his strict religious upbringing has led him to be prejudiced toward Islam in general. As a result, Amir denies his Pakistani Muslim heritage entirely, failing to process or makes peace with his past.

This is the second time Amir has interjected with an outburst about his mother during a conversation that isn't even about him. (He, Emily, and Abe are discussing a court case in which their acquaintance, Muslim cleric Imam Fareed, has been wrongfully charged with funding a terrorist organization). The way Amir repeatedly brings up his difficult childhood, even though he doesn't want to think about it, suggests that he's harboring a great deal of resentment that prevents him from focusing on other things or fully enjoying his life.

Scene 2 Quotes

❝ I think you're overthinking this.

Related Characters: Emily Hughes Kapoor (speaker), Steven , Mort , Imam Fareed , Amir Kapoor/Abdullah

Related Themes:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

Scene Two opens with Amir distraught over a *New York Times* article that quotes him as speaking out in support of Imam Fareed (a Muslim cleric who's been wrongly accused of funding terrorism with charity money). The article makes it sound like Amir is Imam Fareed's lawyer, even though he was only observing the trial when he made comments to a journalist. Amir is terrified that this article will damage his law career, because he fears that his bosses will question his ties with the Muslim community and discriminate against him due to Islamophobia (prejudice against Muslim people). The fact that even someone like Amir—who isn't even a practicing Muslim, and who's wealthy and successful—is so afraid of discrimination speaks to the prevalence of Islamophobia in U.S. society.

But Emily, quoted here, only dismisses Amir's worries, as she does throughout the play. She's convinced that Amir's anxiety about the issue is unreasonable, and that he's paranoid for trying to hide his Muslim background (Amir is Pakistani American and was raised Muslim, but his bosses think that he's an Indian Hindu). Emily may think that she's comforting Amir and being open-minded and progressive in regards to Islam—but really, she's denying his lived experience and minimizing his fears (which later turn out to be justified when Amir's bosses discriminate against him). Her dismissive attitude makes Amir feels ignored and unseen, and it builds resentment between the couple, contributing to the eventual breakdown of their relationship.

❝ Let me get this straight: Some waiter is a dick to me in a restaurant and you want to make a painting. But if it's something that actually might affect my livelihood, you don't even want to believe there could be a problem.

Related Characters: Amir Kapoor/Abdullah (speaker), Diego Velázquez , Steven , Mort , Imam Fareed , Emily Hughes Kapoor

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

Amir and Emily are discussing Amir's bad day at work: after reading a newspaper article that portrayed Amir as supported Imam Fareed (a Muslim cleric falsely accused of funding terrorism), Amir's bosses, Steven and Mort, ran a background check on him. They discovered that Amir comes from a Pakistani Muslim background but tried to pass himself off as an Indian Hindu (having changed his last name from the Arabic "Abdullah" to the Punjabi "Kapoor"). Amir fears an Islamophobic reaction from Steven and Mort, and it turns out that he's right: they pass up Amir for a promotion that he deserves, because they assume that his hidden association with Islam means he can't be trusted. It's implied that this is because his bosses wrongly associate all Muslims with terrorism, which speaks to how South Asian Americans are at risk of workplace discrimination in a way that their white colleagues aren't.

When Emily dismisses Amir's worries, Amir brings up something that happened the other night, when a waiter was racist to Amir (automatically assuming that Amir was just a poor immigrant) until Amir explained to the waiter that he's wealthy. The altercation with the waiter inspired

Emily to paint a portrait of Amir in the image of artist Diego Velázquez's portrait of his former slave (who has since become wealthy). In doing so, she unintentionally portrayed Amir as an outsider who's become rich and is trying (unsuccessfully) to integrate into affluent white culture. Amir's point here is that Emily is focusing on the wrong issue. The encounter with the waiter was offensive, but it didn't pose any real threat to him or his livelihood. The incident at work, however, does—but Emily continues to minimize Amir's concerns and deny his lived experience as a minority.

Amir's frustration at Emily is revealing, as it suggests that she often dismisses his concerns about racism, which makes him feel unseen. It also suggests that Emily picks and chooses how she engages with the discrimination that Amir faces. When it seems like she can get something positive out of Amir's suffering for herself (like a painting), she has no problem acknowledging it. But when Amir actually feels unsafe and afraid, Emily tends to accuse him of exaggerating. In this way, Emily's approach to Amir's race and religious background can be read as exploitative: she's looking for ways to capitalize off of it through her art, but she's not really concerned with helping Amir feel safer as he navigates life in an Islamophobic society. As a white woman, Emily has societal privileges that Amir doesn't. She can choose when to engage with or respond to the racism that Amir faces, but Amir doesn't have that luxury.

> About me being a white woman with no right to be using Islamic forms? I think you're wrong about that.

Related Characters: Emily Hughes Kapoor (speaker), Isaac

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

Isaac, an art curator at the Whitney Museum, has just arrived at the Kapoors' apartment to look at Emily's paintings. When Isaac and Emily first met the weekend before, he suggested that Emily's use of traditional Islamic patterns in her artwork was unethical, because she herself doesn't come from an Islamic culture. Specifically, he suggested that viewers would find her paintings Orientalist (meaning that they portray non-Western people in a derogatory way).

Here, Emily repeats back Isaac's criticism to him and disagrees with him: she thinks that by drawing on Islamic influences in her art, she's being progressive and open-minded. The play, however, implies that as a white person in the Western world, she's essentially exploiting marginalized cultures for her own benefit. Emily ends up achieving a great deal of success and garnering critical acclaim for her paintings that feature Islamic patterns—perhaps even more than actual Islamic artists do. This disparity implies that, despite Emily's protestations, there *is* something wrong with her appropriating Islamic forms in her artwork.

> You know what you're going to be accused of… […] Orientalism.

Related Characters: Isaac (speaker), Emily Hughes Kapoor

Related Themes:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

When Isaac (an art curator) visits Emily to look at her paintings, they discuss whether or not it's appropriate for Emily (as a non-Muslim person) to use traditional Islamic patterns in her art. Isaac initially opposed the idea—but after reading a positive review of Emily's work, he changes his mind. Isaac knows—as he points out here—that Emily's work is Orientalizing. Orientalism refers to the way Western people sometimes romanticize non-Western cultures in a patronizing or exploitative way. It can also refer to a form of cultural appropriation, or the borrowing of another culture's imagery for one's own profit—often at the expense of people who are actually *from* that culture.

Emily effectively profits off of using and reinterpreting Islamic patterns, though she denies (or fails to recognize) that this could be respectful or unfair to the Islamic cultures she's borrowing from. Isaac, on the other hand, knows that it's a problem—he even knows the technical term ("Orientalism") for what Emily is doing. Nonetheless, Isaac seems primarily concerned about what others will say (and whether that will impact Emily's success) than with the morality of what they're doing. He decides to support Emily's art career anyway, because he knows that a white American artist using patterns from a non-Western culture will garner attention. As a museum curator, Isaac is also arguably guilty of Orientalism as well: if his art show featuring Emily's paintings is successful, he'll be profiting off of Emily's appropriation of Islamic patterns.

The Islamic tiling tradition, Isaac? Is a doorway to the most extraordinary freedom. And which only comes through a kind of profound submission. In my case, of course it's not submission to Islam but to the formal language. The pattern. The repetition. And the quiet that this work requires of me? It's extraordinary.

Related Characters: Emily Hughes Kapoor (speaker), Amir Kapoor/Abdullah , Isaac

Related Themes:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

Emily is talking with Isaac (an art curator) about why she likes to use Islamic patterns in her artwork. Her intentions seem to be well-meaning: as she notes here, she finds Islamic art beautiful and inspiring. Specifically, she's drawn to the symbolism of "profound submission" that she observes in Islamic tiling.

Just prior to this, Isaac told Emily that her interest in (and use of) traditional Islamic patterns could be seen as Orientalizing. Orientalism refers to the way Western people portray Eastern cultures as exotic and different, but in an overly romanticized and patronizing way. Later in the play, Amir explains that Islamic culture is saturated with the idea of "submission," and that this is what he hates about it—he's been pressured his entire life to submit to an ideology that he doesn't like. Emily, however, doesn't come from an Islamic culture, so the idea of "submission" seems new and foreign, and she romanticizes it as exotic and mysteriously profound.

This, of course, frustrates Amir. For him, someone who's actually lived under Islam, the idea of submission feels oppressive. But for Emily, it seems liberating. She doesn't actually have to submit to the culture the way Amir did—she just takes the imagery that's useful or interesting to her and repurposes it in a way that benefits her by using it in her art. Emily criticizes Amir for being too negative about Islam, because he doesn't see the beauty that she does in Islam's emphasis on "submission." But in doing so, she dismisses and minimizes Amir's lived experience as a Pakistani Muslim, which makes him feel undermined and resentful.

Scene 3 Quotes

He drinks. Drinks again. Stares down into the bottom of his glass. Burning.

Beat.

Then all at once, he SMASHES the glass on the terrace floor. Shards fly.

Beat.

The burst of violence doesn't seem to have soothed him.

Related Characters: Imam Fareed , Mort , Steven , Amir Kapoor/Abdullah

Related Themes:

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

The third scene opens with Amir drinking on his apartment terrace. Although readers don't know it yet, Amir has just had a horrible day at work. His bosses, Steven and Mort, read the *New York Times* article that portrayed Amir as supporting of Imam Fareed (a Muslim cleric who's been accused of funding terrorism). They grew suspicious about Amir's ties with the Islamic community (likely suspecting some sort of terrorist affiliation), so they ran a background check on him and found out about his Muslim heritage for the first time.

Dwelling on his day, Amir loses control and smashes the glass he's been drinking from. Amir renounced Islam years ago and tries to hide his Pakistani Muslim heritage, because his struct Muslim upbringing traumatized him. Therefore, his emotions are triggered any time the topic of Islam comes up in his life. Amir still struggles to accept himself as a South Asian from a Muslim family, because he feels ashamed of where he comes from. Instead of processing his shame, though, he represses his emotions and constantly feels tense under the surface. But each time another character references his Islamic background or discounts his opinions about the religion, his discomfort boils to the surface and tends to spill over in angry (and sometimes violent) outbursts like this. Stage directions like the ones in this passage suggest that the way Amir denies his identity and represses his emotions is destructive. Rather than helping him cope and move on, his self-denial causes him to lose control of his behavior in ways that he tends to regret.

He knew about my name change. *Your birth name is not Kapoor*, Steven says. *It's Abdullah*. Why did you change it?

Related Characters: Amir Kapoor/Abdullah (speaker), Imam Fareed , Emily Hughes Kapoor, Mort , Steven

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

Amir is telling Emily about his difficult day at work: his bosses Steven and Mort read a *New York Times* article in which Amir was portrayed as supporting Imam Fareed (a Muslim cleric who's been accused of funding terrorism). Growing suspicious about Amir's connection with Imam Fareed, Steven ran a background check on Amir and discovered that he changed his name from Abdullah (an Arabic name meaning "servant of Allah") to Kapoor (an Indian name). Steven assumed that the name change meant Amir was trying to hide something about his past, and his mind immediately jumped to terrorism as soon as he realized that Amir was actually from an Islamic background—even though Amir renounced his faith years ago. Steven's assumption speaks to the way Muslim people (or those merely assumed to be Muslim) tend to be unfairly scapegoated and discriminated against in American society.

Amir doesn't know it yet, but he's about to be passed up for a promotion to partner at the law firm because of Steven and Mort's suspicions. This unfortunately suggests that Amir is justified in his instinct to mask his identity, as he does experience workplace discrimination simply for coming from a Muslim culture and having a Muslim name. That Amir's career suffers simply because his bosses are Islamophobic shows how difficult it can be for South Asian people with Muslim-sounding names (even if they're not Muslim) to participate in society, because they're vulnerable to discrimination fueled by Islamophobia.

> The work you're doing with the Islamic tradition is important and new. It needs to be seen. Widely.

Related Characters: Isaac (speaker), Jory , Amir Kapoor/Abdullah , Emily Hughes Kapoor

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

Isaac (a Jewish art curator) and his wife Jory (a Black lawyer who's Amir's work colleague) are having dinner with Amir and Emily. Isaac has just told Emily that he's going to feature her art in his next show, and here he explains why. Emily (who doesn't come from an Islamic background) uses Islamic patterns in her paintings. And although Emily herself noted earlier that Islamic artists have been using these patterns "for a thousand years," the art world has tended to overlook their contributions. It's "important and new," however (at least in Isaac's opinion), when a non-Islamic artist does the same thing. Emily's work stands out because she's using a marginalized culture—which has largely been overlooked by the Western art world—for her own benefit.

In this way, Emily's art could be interpreted as unfair and exploitative of a culture that doesn't belong to her. And as the curator who will be featuring Emily's work in his show, Ivan is benefitting as well—even though he knows that Emily will get credit for using imagery that doesn't belong to her culture, while artist who are actually *from* that culture and use the same imagery will likely be overlooked and ignored. Despite this, Isaac is eager to cash in on Emily's success.

> Moor? Haven't heard that word in a minute.

Related Characters: Jory (speaker), Diego Velázquez , Isaac , Amir Kapoor/Abdullah , Emily Hughes Kapoor

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

Isaac (a Jewish art curator) and his wife Jory (a Black lawyer) are having dinner at Emily and Amir's apartment. Emily has just shown everyone her portrait of Amir, which is modeled on artist Diego Velázquez's painting of his former slave entitled *Portrait of Juan de Pareja*. The painting depicts the non-white slave as a wealthy businessman—suggesting that he's now free, has made his fortune, and is attempting to integrate into European society. In honor of the connection that she sees between the slave's life and Amir's life, Emily names her own painting *Study After Velázquez's Moor*.

The Moors were North African/Islamic people who migrated to the Iberian Peninsula and the Mediterranean during Velázquez's time (the 17th century). The European people in these regions tended to view Moors as invaders and outsiders who could never fully integrate into white

society. Jory is surprised that Emily would use the word "Moor" in a painting of her husband, likely because it's an antiquated term—but also because she knows it's demeaning and offensive for Emily to associate Amir with this group. After all, by associating Amir with the Moors, Emily is subtly implying that Amir is an outsider to white American culture—even though he was born in the United States and has risen to success in his law career.

Emily, meanwhile, is seemingly oblivious that likening her husband to a slave and depicting him as a non-white outsider trying to fit into American society could be seen as condescending and offensive. Her obliviousness is a hallmark of Orientalist thinking, the idea that Western people sometimes perceive non-Western people as exotic, different, and subtly inferior—often without realizing that this is a form of racism. Here, Jory subtly hints that there's something offensive about this, though Emily doesn't pick up on the subtext—even though Amir is clearly offended by her portrait.

> So there you are in your six-hundred-dollar Charvet shirt, like Velázquez's brilliant apprentice-slave in his lace collar, adorned in the splendors of the world you're now so clearly a part of... And yet... [...] The question remains [...] Of your Place.

Related Characters: Isaac (speaker), Diego Velázquez , Jory , Amir Kapoor/Abdullah , Emily Hughes Kapoor

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

Isaac, Jory, Emily, and Amir are discussing Emily's portrait of Amir. The painting is modeled after *Portrait of Juan de Pareja*, Diego Velázquez's 1685 painting of his former slave, dressed to show he's become wealthy.

During this conversation, Amir clearly wants to change the subject; he's uncomfortable because he doesn't like being associated with a slave. But despite Amir's protestations, and Jory's surprise at the portrait (she notices the racist subtext), Emily and Isaac keep talking about the painting anyway. Here, Isaac explicitly states why the painting could be seen as offensive: it essentially depicts Amir (like Velázquez's freed slave) as a racial outsider trying to integrate into wealthy white culture. Both paintings are Orientalist (a term coined by theorist Edward Said in his 1978 book *Orientalism*), in that they alienate non-Western people by portraying them as exotic outsiders.

In saying that "the question remains [...] Of your Place," Isaac also implies that Amir will always be seen as an outsider and never fully accepted into the culture he's trying to be a part of. Isaac says this as though he's talking about what *other* people will think of Amir depicted in this way—but really, he's revealing what *he* thinks about Amir. (Soon after this, he makes a racist to Emily comment that Amir is a "slave" who "has the master's wife.") Isaac's comment thus exposes his Islamophobia, which only escalates as the dinner party continues and the conversation becomes more heated. Moreover, Isaac only speaks up after Emily brings the painting out and starts talking about it. In this way, her dismissal of Amir's discomfort emboldens other, more overtly racist people (like Isaac) to chime in and be offensive toward Amir, alienating him further.

> It's a nightmare at the airports.

Related Characters: Amir Kapoor/Abdullah (speaker), Isaac , Jory , Emily Hughes Kapoor

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

Emily and Amir are hosting their friends Isaac and Jory for dinner. When the conversation turns to travel, Amir admits that he finds airport security "a nightmare." The play is set in 2011, 10 years after the September 11th terrorist attacks, after which South Asian Americans began to be racially profiled at airports in increasing numbers. When Amir references how difficult airports are for people like him, he's implying that airport authorities tend to single out people who look like they might be Muslim, because they assume that such people are more likely to be terrorists. Amir's frustration shows that people of South Asian descent, like himself, are disproportionately targeted for searches in airports, which can be humiliating. This highlights the prevalence of Islamophobia in American society, as South Asian people (even those who aren't actually Muslim, like Amir) face unfair discrimination that interferes with their ability to do ordinary things like travel.

> Those agents are working hard *not* to discriminate... Then here's this guy who comes up to them and calls them out...

Related Characters: Emily Hughes Kapoor (speaker), Isaac , Jory , Amir Kapoor/Abdullah

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

Amir has just admitted that he finds airport security "a nightmare," as he (like many South Asian Americans) is often racially profiled. Because Amir finds it humiliating to be singled out for additional searches in front of other passengers, he usually proactively volunteers to be searched, which helps him take back some control over an unjust situation.

Emily immediately responds by criticizing Amir, as she assumes that Amir is being "passive-aggressive" by volunteering to be searched. In her opinion, airport security officers are "working really hard *not* to discriminate," and Amir volunteering for searches makes them feel bad, because it makes them look racist. As a white woman in the U.S., it's unlikely that Emily has ever been racially profiled, so she doesn't know what the experience is like. Yet she effectively privileges her own assessment of Amir's situation over his actual experiences with discrimination, and she dismissively undermines Amir's coping methods. Emily's habit of assuming that Amir's experiences with racism are false or exaggerated makes him feel unseen and misunderstood—and it builds resentment between them that ultimately destroys their relationship.

> I picked up the recipe when I was on a Fulbright in Seville.

Related Characters: Emily Hughes Kapoor (speaker), Isaac , Jory , Amir Kapoor/Abdullah

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

Isaac and Jory are having dinner at Emily and Amir's apartment. Throughout the dinner conversation, they all drop in references—like Emily does here—to how well-traveled and educated they are. Emily explains that she went to Spain on a Fulbright scholarship (a prestigious academic exchange program for graduate students). She, Isaac, and Jory then share anecdotes about their own travels and experiences with other cultures. It's implied that the characters all think that they're worldly, open-minded, and progressive. However, as the dinner party continues, each of them reveal beliefs that are Islamophobic (prejudiced against Muslim people) or Orientalist (condescending toward non-Western cultures).

Emily is notably fixted on and accepting of Islam—but she often dismisses the lived experiences of Amir (who's of Pakistani descent and was raised Muslim). She thinks that his complaints about discrimination are exaggerated, and she doesn't see an issue with painting a portrait of him that makes him look like an outsider trying to fit in. Isaac also tries to say progressive things about Islam, but he grows more outwardly racist and hostile toward Amir as the evening goes on. Jory is outspoken from the start that she thinks Islamic culture is hateful and oppressive. Even Amir, in his efforts to distance himself from the prejudices he faces as a person from an Islamic culture, harbors his own internalized Islamophobia (he often suggests that Islam does, in fact, encourage terrorism, even though he knows that not all Muslims are terrorists). The characters' beliefs suggest that being well-educated, well-traveled, and wealthy doesn't necessarily make people open-minded and progressive—even if the characters assume that this is the case.

> I was horrified by it, okay? Absolutely horrified. [...] That we were finally winning. [...] It's tribal, Jor. It is in the bones. You have no idea how I was brought up. You have to work *real* hard to root that shit out.

Related Characters: Amir Kapoor/Abdullah (speaker), Amir's Mother , Emily Hughes Kapoor, Isaac , Jory

Related Themes:

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

Amir and Emily are having dinner with their friends Isaac and Jory. The dinner conversation is focused on Islam, and Amir is trying to explain why he renounced his Muslim faith. Isaac asks Amir how he felt about the 9/11 terrorist attacks a decade earlier, and Amir, in a vulnerable moment, reflects that he was "horrified" to discover that a small part of him

rooted for the terrorists. Though he doesn't condone terrorism, he was raised to take pride when Islamic terrorists succeed in their efforts to target non-Muslim cultures. Earlier in the play, he revealed that mother, in particular, influenced him to harbor racist, sexist, and antisemitic beliefs.

However, Amir is aware of why these beliefs are problematic, and he doesn't *want* to feel this way. He renounced his Muslim faith years ago, distanced himself from his culture, and tried to stay away from anything to do with Islam because he wants to "root [...] out" the values he learned growing up. Here, he's essentially admitting how shameful he feels about his Muslim upbringing, and in particular how shameful he feels about the values that his bigoted mother taught him. Yet it's clear that he struggles to do so—he has to "work *real* hard." Amir tries to distance himself from Islam, but he ends up suppressing a large part of his identity, which only results in internalized shame and self-hatred.

> Fucking closet jihadist.

Related Characters: Isaac (speaker), Jory , Emily Hughes Kapoor, Amir Kapoor/Abdullah

Related Themes:

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

During the dinner party at Amir and Emily's apartment, the conversation turns to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Amir has just tried to explain that he renounced his faith because he felt like his Muslim upbringing made him feel solidarity with terrorists who committed the attacks—and that scared him. Amir's point is that he hates feeling instinctively aligned with people who do deplorable things just because they share a religious background. This is why he renounced Islam and tries to distance himself from his Pakistani Muslim heritage as much as possible.

However, after Amir says this, Isaac mutters (out of Amir's earshot) that he thinks Amir is a "closet jihadist" (an Islamic terrorist). Isaac effectively shames Amir for discussing Islam and terrorism at all, even if Amir's intent was to address his personal shame about his Muslim background and distance himself from the problematic values he was raised with. Isaac labels Amir as a terrorist in front of his wife, Jory (who's Amir's work colleague), which means that Isaac's comments could have negative ramifications for Amir's career, were Jory to repeat them. This shows how people who feel ashamed of their racial or religious backgrounds generally have few safe spaces to discuss their feelings. As soon as Amir mentions terrorism (even if it's to condemn it), he's immediately labeled as a terrorist himself—which is a false accusation that could be incredibly damaging to his life.

> The expression on that face? Shame. Anger. Pride. Yeah. The pride he was talking about. The slave finally has the master's wife.

Related Characters: Isaac (speaker), Diego Velázquez , Emily Hughes Kapoor, Amir Kapoor/Abdullah

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 70

Explanation and Analysis

Emily and Amir are hosting their friends Isaac and Jory for dinner. Amir and Jory have just stepped out to buy some champagne, and Isaac uses the interlude with Emily to share his real feelings about Amir. Here, Isaac and Emily are discussing Emily's portrait of Amir, which she painted in the likeness of artist Diego Velázquez's 1685 painting of his former slave (*Portrait of Juan de Pareja*). While Emily thinks there's nothing wrong with depicting Amir this way, Isaac suspects that in some sense, Emily (as a white person) sees Amir (as a non-white person) much like Velázquez likely saw his freed slave. In essence, Isaac thinks that the portrait subtly portrays Amir as an inferior person who's trying to elevate himself by taking on the trappings of affluent Western culture. In doing so, Isaac exposes his own racism, since he sees Amir as inferior (a "slave") who's trying to have "the master's wife" (meaning a white wife, like Emily).

Isaac also notices Amir's expression in the painting, which symbolizes Amir's mixed feelings about his Pakistani Muslim heritage. Amir is full of "Shame. Anger. Pride," as he feels both an instinctive pride in his Muslim identity and deep-seated shame in coming from a Muslim background. This aspect of his identity is something that Amir tries to suppress—but trying to do so only exacerbates his negative feelings. He's caught in a disorienting mixture of ingrained Muslim "pride," "shame" over the problematic values that he was taught growing up, as well as "anger" that he's not fully

accepted in white society.

Scene 4 Quotes

❝ Do we want to blow stuff up? How often did I read the Koran? [...] Do I hate America?

Related Characters: Hussein (Abe Jensen) (speaker), Emily Hughes Kapoor, Barista , Tariq , Amir Kapoor/Abdullah

Related Themes:

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

In the play's final scene, several months have passed since the disastrous dinner party when Amir ended up losing his temper and hitting Emily. Amir has since lost his job, and Emily is divorcing him. Now, Abe and Emily have stopped by to discuss Abe's legal issues: having decided to stop hiding his Muslim identity, Abe changed his name from Abe back to Hussein and began wearing a Muslim skullcap in public. A barista in a coffee shop heard Hussein and his friend Tariq discussing Islam—and when Tariq made a comment to her about Al-Qaeda, she called the police, and Abe and Tariq were interrogated by the FBI. They were questioned about having ties to terrorism—"Do we want to blow stuff up? How often did I read the Koran? [...] Do I hate America?"—simply because they openly presented as Muslim.

This situation is an example of how common Islamophobia is in U.S. society, particularly within institutions like law enforcement. People like the barista, as well as the authorities, unfairly equate all Muslim people with terrorists—something that began to happen more often after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Abe's situation implies that it's all but impossible for Muslim people to openly represent or support their culture in U.S. society, because others (including the authorities) tend to single them out and accuse them of terrorism—even if they're doing something as ordinary as trying to have a conversation in a coffee shop. In this way, many Muslim Americans face discrimination that makes it difficult for them to navigate their daily lives.

❝ When you step out of your parents' house, you need to understand that it's not a neutral world out there. Not right now. Not for you. You have to be mindful about sending a different message.

Related Characters: Amir Kapoor/Abdullah (speaker), Emily Hughes Kapoor, Imam Fareed , Tariq , Hussein (Abe Jensen)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

Amir's nephew Abe (who changed his name back to Hussein) has just been interrogated by the FBI, who threatened to deport him because they suspected that he might be a terrorist. This all happened because Hussein wore a Muslim skullcap and openly talking about Islam in public. Here, Amir scolds Hussein for acting so recklessly. Unlike Hussein, Amir doesn't identify as Muslim, yet his bosses still discriminated against him when they found that he came from a Muslim family and grew suspicious of his ties with the Muslim community. As a result, Amir thinks that the smartest course of action for Muslim Americans is to hide their faith and cultural heritage as much as possible.

Although Amir's advice isn't what Hussein, a devout Muslim, wants to hear, both of them have experienced unfair discrimination over the course of the play. Amir's fear then, does seem to be justified, as the openly Muslim characters in the play (Hussein, Tariq, and Imam Fareed) have found it almost impossible to participate in society as a Muslim-presenting person. South Asian Americans don't live in a "neutral world," and they don't have the same liberties as other ethnic groups—to talk freely about their religious background or support their own culture—because doing so puts them at risk of Islamophobic discrimination.

By contrast, the play's white, non-Muslim characters (notably artist Emily and art curator Isaac) are praised for using Islamic culture for creative purposes. All the while, the Muslim and/or South Asian characters in the play are discriminated against for who they are (or for who others *think* they are). This highlights why cultural appropriation (borrowing from another culture) can be harmful, as it creates an environment in which people are punished for their own culture, while people outside of that culture benefit from it.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

SCENE 1

In late summer 2011, in an upscale apartment on New York City's Upper East Side, a magnificent painting of Islamic patterns hangs on the wall. There's a couch in the center of the living room, next to a small table covered with bottles of alcohol. Emily, a beautiful white woman, sits at the dining room table with a book opened to an image of Diego Velázquez's painting *Portrait of Juan de Pareja*. She's sketching a **portrait** of her husband, Amir (who's South Asian), while he poses in an Italian suit jacket and boxers.

Given Amir and Emily's lavish home, they're clearly wealthy successful—and one might assume that this makes them happy. But their relationship dynamic immediately raises a red flag, as Emily (who's white) is painting Amir (who's South Asian) in a way that could be seen as racist. She seems to be basing her portrait of Amir on Diego Velázquez's portrait, which depicts a former slave who's dressed to show that he's become wealthy. In painting Amir in the freed slave's likeness, Emily implies (perhaps without realizing it) that she thinks of Amir as an exotic outsider to their affluent, majority-white culture. Her painting symbolizes the condescending way in which white people sometimes see non-white people as exotic, other, and subtly inferior—sometimes without even realizing it.

Amir is a little uncomfortable that Emily is sketching a **portrait** of him in the image of a slave, who's the subject of Velázquez's painting. Emily quibbles with Amir, telling him that Velázquez freed the slave and made him his assistant. She was inspired to make this painting because when a racist waiter was dismissive of Amir last night, Amir made the waiter realize he'd misjudged him. This made Emily think about the way people first reacted to Velázquez's painting, not realizing that the slave pictured was actually his assistant. Amir jokes that Emily should call up her "black Spanish" ex-boyfriend to sit for a portrait instead. Emily changes the subject, telling Amir not to worry: her last show was popular, but she didn't sell many paintings. Amir points out that sales aren't everything.

Amir feels uncomfortable with Emily's portrait, because its parallel with Velázquez's painting of his freed slave implies that Emily sees Amir as an outsider who will never be fully accepted into white culture as an equal. Emily's dismissive response is ironic, given that she recognizes that the waiter the previous night dismissed Amir in a similar way. It's possible that she often unintentionally offends Amir in this way, though she's seemingly unaware of what she's doing. And although Amir jokes around to show that this doesn't bother him, it's possible that he's privately resentful of Emily's subtle racism.

Just then, Amir's phone rings: it's his client Paolo. Amir—still posing—yells that Paolo is going to kill the deal. Then, another call comes in, and Amir switches over, yelling at his paralegal for not calling him back even though it's Saturday. Amir aggressively berates the paralegal for missing a correction on a contract and hangs up. Emily tells him that the way he yells turns her on. Amir walks over, looks at Emily's sketch, and tells her that she's talented—though he still thinks that sketching him in as a slave is messed up. Emily teases Amir that she knows he likes things a little messed up, and they kiss.

This passage introduces the fact that Amir has a problem with anger. And given that his outburst happens immediately after raising his concerns about the painting with Emily, his anger may have something to do with feeling ashamed of his ethnicity. Although Amir's banter with Emily is lighthearted, the fact that he keeps raising concerns about the portrait implies that it genuinely bothers him. He's likely upset because the painting depicts him in a racist way, as an outsider who's trying to assimilate into affluent white culture instead of the successful New York City lawyer he is. This is perhaps what fuels his aggression on the phone, suggesting that he struggles to control his emotions when he's triggered by racism.

Amir then calls his boss, Mort, to explain that Paolo is being difficult—but Amir is going to make him regret his behavior. After Amir hangs up with Mort, he and Emily discuss their plans for Labor Day weekend. They're meeting up with people named Jory and Isaac in Bucks County, Pennsylvania—something that took Amir a long time to arrange. Emily is nervous about this, but Amir reassures her that Isaac will love her work.

Given Amir's openness with Mort about making Paolo's life miserable, it seems like the people in Amir's life enable his anger and aggression rather than trying to discourage or temper it. Meanwhile, it's unclear who Jory and Isaac are—but given that it took Amir a long time to arrange a meeting with them, readers can infer that they're important, high-status people. Amir's assurance that Isaac will love Emily's work perhaps suggests that he's part of the art world and may be able to help her paintings sell—which means that Emily could profit off of her portrait of Amir.

The conversation then pivots to Mort: Amir says that he hardly ever sees his boss, and that Mort depends on him. Emily thinks it's weird that Mort bought Amir a statue of the god Siva as a birthday present, considering that Amir isn't Hindu. But Amir doesn't mind; he thinks that his last name (Kapoor) will be on the building soon. He knows that his dead mother would have been shocked to see it up there with all the Jewish names—even if Kapoor isn't Amir's real family name.

A likely explanation for Amir changing his last name to Kapoor (an Indian name) is that he comes from a Muslim background—Amir, after all, is an Arabic first name that's common among Muslim men. This would suggest that Amir is ashamed of his ethnicity and perhaps even afraid that openly associating with Islam would negatively impact his career. He likely (and perhaps rightly) assumes that he'll fare better at work by passing himself off as Hindu, because he believes that Americans tend to discriminate against people with Muslim-sounding names. Siva is a Hindu god, so the fact that Amir's boss gave him a statue of Siva means that his colleagues do indeed think that he's Hindu.

Just then, the intercom buzzes: much to Amir's surprise, Emily has invited Amir's 22-year-old nephew, Abe, over. The interruption annoys Amir, but Emily insists on inviting Abe up to the apartment. She says that she doesn't like what's happening and wants Amir to do something about it, but Amir doesn't know what more he can do. He reminds her that he's already been to see "that guy in prison." Abe knocks on the door walks in, dressed in a hoodie, jeans, and sneakers. Amir greets Abe as "Hussein"—he's not going to start calling him Abe Jensen. Abe says that his life has gotten easier since he changed his name to something non-Islamic. This annoys Amir, but Emily reminds him that he changed his name too.

It's not yet clear why Emily invited Abe over without telling Amir, but it seems to have something to do with "that guy in prison." The play has hinted at the fact that Amir feels insecure in his career because of his ethnic and religious identity, so it's likely that this mysterious association with someone in prison adds to his worries about what people will think of him. Meanwhile, Abe's name change (from the Arabic Hussein to the stereotypically American-sounding Abe Jensen) reinforces the idea that many South Asian people from Muslim cultures hide their true identities because they fear Islamophobia. The fact that multiple characters have this concern suggests that U.S. society tends to treat Muslim Americans with suspicion, likely because they erroneously associate Muslim culture with Islamic terrorism. This association fuels prejudice against innocent people from Muslim backgrounds who have nothing to do with terrorism.

Abe wants Amir to legally represent his friend Imam Fareed, who's been accused of funding the terrorist organization Hamas just because he collected charity money for his mosque. Imam Fareed already has a team of Jewish lawyers, but he wants a Muslim lawyer instead. Amir doesn't want to get involved—he thinks that Imam Fareed is antisemitic. Amir doesn't think much of Islam, though Abe says that their family thinks Amir was a good Muslim kid before he turned against the religion.

The presumably false charge against Imam Fareed reinforces the idea that U.S. society tends to automatically associate Muslims with Islamic terrorism, which leads to discrimination against Muslim Americans for ordinary activities (like collecting charity money). Such discrimination makes it difficult for Muslim Americans to openly participate in American society, which probably contributes to why Amir and Abe hide their Muslim roots.

Shocked, Amir tells Abe to sit down and listen to him. He tells the story of his first crush, a girl named Rivkah: they exchanged notes in their sixth-grade class, and Amir's mother saw one of the notes. She got upset because Rivkah is a Jewish name, and she told Amir that God hated Jews and that she would break his bones if she heard Rivkah's name in her house again. Then, she spat on Amir. The next day, Amir asked Rivkah if she was Jewish, and she said yes. Amir spat in her face. Reflecting on that event, Amir thinks that renouncing Islam was smart.

Amir was raised in a strict Muslim household, and his upbringing seems to have traumatized him. He's clearly ashamed of the racist and antisemitic beliefs that his mother held, and the way he treated Rivkah decades ago still haunts him. Amir renounced his Islamic faith because he wanted to distance himself from such values and the trauma surrounding them—and this also seems to be why he wants nothing to do with Imam Fareed.

Emily is surprised, since Amir's mother was always nice to her. Amir explains that Emily won his mother over—but Muslim people generally don't think that white women have self-respect, because they take their clothes off to make people like them. Abe interjects that not everyone thinks that, though he admits that he's heard it before—even from Amir's mother. Imam Fareed, however, isn't like that: he even let Emily sit in his mosque and sketch the building for weeks. Amir doesn't understand what Emily sees in Islam.

Amir continues to expose the problematic values that his mother raised him with, which even Abe reluctantly admits are fairly common in the Muslim community. Though Abe and Emily agree that not all Muslim people are as racist or sexist as Amir's mother was, Amir still wants nothing to do with his Muslim identity. It seems that he can't separate it from the shame he feels about the regressive values his mother taught him.

Emily asks Amir to remember the beautiful mosque they once visited in Spain, which Amir told her made him want to pray. She also points out that Matisse (an artist Amir likes) was influenced by Islamic art like Moroccan tiles, but Amir brushes her off. Abe then urges Amir think of Imam Fareed as a wise man who's been wrongly imprisoned, rather than a Muslim, but Amir snaps that there's nothing he can do about it. After an awkward silence, Abe leaves the apartment. Amir can't fathom why Abe wanted to come to the United States from Pakistan but now spends all his time at an Islamic center.

Emily dismisses Amir's criticisms of Islam, even though he's actually lived under the religion, while she never has. Instead, Emily chooses to only see the aspects of Muslim culture that she wants *to see: the beautiful architecture and art, not the actual religious values that Amir takes issue with. Emily seems to think of Islam as different, otherworldly, and exotic, revealing her Orientalism (a tendency for Western people to view Eastern cultures in a patronizing or exploitative way). Abe, meanwhile, seems to be stuck between feeling ashamed of his Muslim identity (as evidenced by his name change and typical American style of dress) and wanting to connect more deeply with his culture and religion. The way Amir snaps at Abe once again shows that others talking over him about Islam triggers his anger—which he struggles to control when it surfaces.*

Emily is upset that Amir won't see Imam Fareed as a human being who needs help, which further annoys Amir. When he went to see Imam Fareed in prison, the imam just tried to convince him to start praying. Emily cuts Amir off, saying that Imam Fareed was probably trying to be useful, and that he needs his own people around him right now. Amir doesn't think he's one of those people, but Emily disagrees. Amir is exasperated; he wants to stop talking about this. Emily, on the other hand, doesn't think they talk about it enough. The couple stares at each other until Emily tells Amir that she loves him.

As Emily berates Amir for his negative attitude about Islam, she's dismissing his trauma surrounding his religious upbringing—and again, this dismissiveness makes him feel resentful. Amir's encounter with Imam Fareed implies that when he was growing up, he probably felt pressured to adhere to Islamic rituals like prayer, which likely contributes to his hostility toward Islam as an adult. When Amir feels his past trauma being triggered, as he does now, he tends to shut down the conversation. This habit suggests that he's repressing his conflicted feelings about his upbringing, as he'd rather avoid the topic altogether.

SCENE 2

Two weeks later, Emily sits at the dining table, reading aloud a newspaper article about Imam Fareed's trial. The article quotes Amir as supporting the imam and claiming that the justice department has no viable case. Amir is upset because the newspaper makes him sound like Imam Fareed's lawyer, but really, he was just commenting on the case. Emily disagrees: she doesn't think it's a big deal, especially since Imam Fareed is innocent anyway. That's not Amir's point, though—he's worried about what people will think, though he hopes that people will notice his last name isn't a Muslim one. Emily tells him to call the newspaper if the article bothers him so much, but Amir is still worried.

Amir's reaction to the newspaper article speaks to the way many South Asian Americans don't feel safe publicly supporting Muslim communities, because they fear racist backlash for associating with anything to do with Islam. Emily dismisses Amir's fears as unfounded and exaggerated, failing to acknowledge the discrimination that people from Muslim backgrounds often experience in U.S. society. Her dismissive attitude makes Amir feel unseen and does nothing to calm his worries.

Emily thinks that speaking out in support of Imam Fareed was the right thing to do. She's proud of Amir, and she thinks Mort will be too—philanthropy makes wealthy executives look good. As Amir continues to obsess over the article, the intercom buzzes: it's Isaac. Emily tries to shut down her conversation with Amir, because Isaac is coming to accompany her on a studio visit with an art curator. Amir, annoyed, reminds Emily that he's the one who set up that meeting. Emily asks if they can talk about the article later, but Amir just walks away to the bedroom and begins slamming things around as he searches for his phone.

Rather than trying to understand Islam for what it is, Emily is more interested in how supporting Muslim culture can benefit Amir professionally and socially. This begins to suggest that Emily is only concerned with looking *worldly and progressive, not with addressing the real concerns that ethnic and religious minorities (like Amir) have about the unique challenges they face in U.S. society. The way Amir angrily leaves the room and slams things again implies that he struggles to control his emotions when people invalidate the way he feels about his Muslim identity.*

When Amir returns to the living room, Emily tells him that he's probably just overthinking the article. Amir points out that Emily wants to make a painting about some waiter being rude to him, yet she doesn't seem to care about something that might actually affect his career. Emily doesn't understand what one event has to do with the other. Just then, Isaac (who's an art curator at the Whitney Museum) knocks on the door, interrupting the tense environment. Amir curtly thanks Isaac for a nice weekend and coldly says goodbye to Emily, who leans in intimately and tells Amir that everything will be fine at work.

Emily continues invalidating Amir's fears as exaggerations—she doesn't understand his experience as an ethnic minority in a society that's largely prejudiced against people from his background. Emily's dismissiveness makes Amir feel resentful, a dynamic that's clearly building tension between them and undermining their relationship.

Emily fetches some coffee for Isaac while he looks around the apartment a little intrusively. He picks up a book, and they chat about various art shows. Over the weekend, Isaac told Emily that, as a white woman, she shouldn't use Islamic forms in her paintings. Emily disagreed. Now that Isaac has read reviews of Emily's work, he's changed his mind. He looks at Emily's painting of an Islamic garden and admits that it has presence. Despite his initial hesitance, Isaac appreciates how earnest Emily's approach to painting is. However, he's worried that people will accuse her of Orientalism—especially since she a "brown husband." Emily swears at Isaac for saying this, which Isaac approves of—she's prepared for what the critics will say.

Emily thinks that it's okay to use traditional Islamic imagery in her art, even though she doesn't come from a Muslim culture herself. She's also received positive reviews for doing so, suggesting that she'll be able to profit from her use of Islamic imagery. Isaac and Emily both know that many people think it's exploitative when Western people treat non-Western cultures as exotic source material that they can freely use as they see fit (this is what "Orientalism" refers to). But despite Isaac's initial worry, he wants to work with Emily because he thinks that her Islamic-inspired art will be lucrative. In this way, both of them are okay with disrespecting another culture, as long as it means they're able to use that culture for their own benefit. Isaac even jokingly refers to Amir as Emily's "brown husband" rather than by his name, which further suggests that Isaac doesn't personally take issue with casual racism or Orientalism—he's only worried about public perception.

Emily thinks that people obsess over the politics of art and forget to look at the art itself. She tells Isaac to look at the Islamic tiling galleries when he goes to the Frieze Art Fair later this year—they'll blow his mind. The patterns, repetition, and meditative aspects of the tiles are extraordinary. Isaac tells Emily that she sounds like an American minimalist who's trying to "obliterate the ego." She quips back that Islamic artists have been doing that for "a thousand years," so they know better. It's about time that artists started drawing inspiration from Islamic art—Emily thinks that Islam is part of "us" too. Isaac looks confused, but he agrees, nevertheless.

Emily romanticizes Islamic cultural artifacts despite having no real connection to them as a non-Muslim person. She even suggests that Islam is part of "us"—that is, a part of Western culture that everyone should be freely able to use. But Isaac points out that Emily sounds like any other American artist who's tried to "obliterate the ego," or achieve spiritual transcendence, something typically associated with Eastern religions like Buddhism. Her attitude, as Isaac previously suggested, is Orientalizing: she sees Islamic culture (like the tiles) as exotic, mysterious, and foreign. Moreover, she feels entitled to represent them as she wants, through her own Western perspective. In this way, Emily's art is exploitative: she's garnering critical acclaim as a Western artist who's essentially taking advantage of Islamic imagery, while actual Islamic artists who've used the same techniques for "a thousand years" haven't been as widely recognized.

SCENE 3

Three months later, Amir is drinking on the apartment terrace, seething with anger. Suddenly, he smashes his glass onto the ground, shattering it—but this doesn't alleviate his feelings. As Amir goes into the apartment to pour another drink, Emily breezes in with bags of groceries. Isaac and Jory are coming over for dinner, and Emily hopes this means that Isaac wants to feature her work in his art show. She walks up to Amir seductively, but he turns her down, saying that doesn't help. Emily tells Amir that she misses him. She notices that Amir forgot to buy wine for dinner, and he looks distracted. Emily wants to know what's wrong.

It's unclear why, exactly, Amir is upset in this passage—but the way his conversation with Emily ended in the previous chapter perhaps implies that it has something to do with the newspaper article that he was worried about. Regardless, smashing the glass out of anger is another example of how Amir struggles to control his emotions (and tends to have physical outbursts) when he feels slighted or ashamed.

After a pause, Amir tells Emily that he had a meeting at work today. One of his bosses, Steven, ran a background check on him and discovered that he's Pakistani, not Indian. Amir unconvincingly explained that Pakistan was part of India when his father was born, but Steven also discovered that Amir changed his last name from Abdullah to Kapoor. The firm thinks that Amir misrepresented himself when he was hired. Emily doesn't understand what the big deal is, but Amir is worried.

Although the reader doesn't have the full picture yet, it's likely that Amir's bosses thought to run a background check on him because they read the newspaper article that portrayed Amir as supporting Imam Fareed. Given that the imam is accused of funding terrorism, the article may have led them to assume that Amir is affiliated with terrorist organizations as well. Amir's employers uncover that he was born with the last name Abdullah (an Arabic name meaning "servant of Allah"), and that he's not Hindu as they originally assumed. At this point, it's unclear whether his bosses just have a problem with him lying, or if they're also taking issue with the fact that Amir is Pakistani and was raised Muslim. If the latter is the case, this again implies that U.S. society tends to automatically associate Islam with terrorism. This fuels prejudice against innocent people, like Amir, who merely have cultural ties to Islamic countries. Amir's fear of workplace discrimination may be justified, then—but, as before, Emily dismisses his concerns as absurd.

Suddenly, the intercom buzzes—their dinner guests are here early. Emily runs to get dressed while Amir opens the door to greet Isaac and Jory (a commanding-looking Black woman). Jory goes to put the dessert they brought with them into the fridge, while Amir and Isaac discuss baseball. Jory says that the pork tenderloin Emily is making smells great, and Amir asks Isaac if he eats pork. Isaac jokes that he eats it all the time—he's making up for the years when he didn't. He then excuses himself to use the bathroom, and Amir pulls out a bottle of scotch for himself and Jory to drink.

Amir and Emily's friends are diverse (Jory is Black, and Isaac's comment about eating pork implies that he's of Jewish heritage and formerly ate kosher). Readers might assume that because Jory and Isaac belong to minority communities, they'll have progressive attitudes about other cultures. But given the way Emily treats Amir disrespectfully, despite wanting to seem progressive, it's possible that Jory and Isaac hold offensive views about Muslim culture as well.

Amir and Jory discuss a client who's in an absurd custody battle over a dog. They talk about various legal cases and joke about how Mort doesn't do any work. Jory has decided against taking a job with Credit Suisse because the salary is too low. Amir thinks she should take the position, but Jory says that she's put down roots already. Amir eagerly imagines himself and Jory running their own law firm—he tells her that they're "the new Jews." Amir knows that he and Jory will never be made partners at their current firm. Just then, Isaac returns from the bathroom, and the conversation stops abruptly.

Here, readers learn that Jory is Amir's colleague at the law firm. Amir again alludes to the fact that their bosses don't do much work and that they depend on him—but despite this, it's implied that he and Jory won't be made partners because Jory is a Black woman and Amir is of Muslim heritage. Regardless of their talent and work ethic, they're likely to be discriminated against because of their identities. When Amir imagines himself and Jory as "the new Jews," he stereotypes Jewish lawyers as powerful and greedy. Whether he's joking or not, the fact that he uses this trope suggests that he's still struggling to rid himself of the antisemitism that his mother instilled in him.

Emily enters just after Isaac, looking lovely. The group chats about dinner, and Amir offers everyone drinks. Isaac wants scotch, and Emily wants port. She jokes that it's an odd choice of drink, but she just loves it. Isaac notices that Emily has a copy of *Denial of Death*, a book that he recommended to her because it was famously mentioned in a Woody Allen movie. Amir says that Emily has been raving about it. Isaac got the title of his new art show, "Impossible Heroes," from the book—he thinks that it represents how artists are turning away from cynicism nowadays. Jory and Amir make fun of the show's title.

Ernest Becker's Denial of Death *is a psychology/philosophy book about how civilization was created out of humanity's awareness of our own mortality. In essence, it argues that we treat civilization as a symbolic defense against death. One of Becker's main points in the book is that people try to make their lives meaningful to ensure that their legacies live on after they die—and that this instinct to prove one's own superiority is what drives conflict like bigotry and violence. The fact that the play references this book hints that its principles are relevant to what's happening—namely, that the characters' prejudices and misunderstandings of one another are rooted in fear and pride. Meanwhile, Isaac and Emily's choices of beverages—scotch (Scottish whiskey) and port (Portuguese dessert wine)—are perhaps meant to seem worldly and sophisticated. This again hints that they care about* looking *progressive and cultured, yet readers know that they're dismissive of issues that actually affect other cultures.*

Isaac tells Emily that he wants her paintings in the show, as he thinks that her work on Islamic art is important. Emily is thrilled. Amir makes a toast to Emily and then starts negotiating how many paintings she can have in Isaac's show, which makes everyone laugh. Isaac wants the Islamic garden painting that Emily has on the wall, and Emily mentions that she's also been working on a **portrait** of Amir called *Study After Velázquez's Moor*. Jory is surprised to hear the word "Moor." Emily begins to tell the story behind the painting, which makes Amir uncomfortable. She goes to get her art book and shows everyone *Portrait of Juan de Pareia*, Velázquez's painting of his Moorish freed slave. She explains that her portrait of Amir is based on this. Amir jokes that he's her own personal Moor, but Emily corrects Amir—he's her muse.

Isaac wants to feature Emily's art in his show, meaning that he, too, will profit from her appropriation of Islamic culture. He doesn't seem to care that this is exploitative, as Emily will be praised for using Islamic culture despite having no real ties to it. All the while, society is unfairly punishing South Asian people like Imam Fareed for associating with their own culture and religion. The Moors were Muslim inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula and Mediterranean during the Middle Ages, so Jory is probably surprised to hear such an antiquated word. Europeans in these regions generally treated the Moors as outsiders or invaders, so associating Amir with a Moorish former slave subtly singles Amir out as an outsider to white culture.

Isaac says that he'd prefer to stick with abstract pieces, though he thinks that the **portrait** is a stunning depiction of Amir, whose shirt looks incredibly crisp. Jory jokes that everyone at the office talks about Amir's expensive-looking shirts, and she wonders how much Amir spends on them. Amir is silent, but Emily says that they cost $600 apiece. Meanwhile, Isaac analyzes *After Velázquez's Moor* aloud: Amir is dressed in expensive clothes looking like Velázquez's "apprentice-slave," embodying the world he's now a part of. He wonders how the painting's viewers will assess Amir's place in the world, and everyone falls into an awkward silence.

Isaac explicitly states why the portrait is problematic: Emily is depicting Amir (like Velázquez's "apprentice-slave") as a foreigner who's trying to integrate into affluent white society but will never be fully accepted. Amir's expensive shirts signal that he's been able to carve out a successful life for himself, which suggests that he should be happy. Yet the way Emily alienates him through her art makes him feel ashamed of his Muslim background—which, in turn, interferes with his ability to enjoy his life.

Amir says that he likes Emily's landscapes better, but Isaac disagrees—he doesn't think landscapes are a "fertile" direction for her. Emily knows that Amir likes the landscapes because they have nothing to do with Islam, but Isaac prefers the ones that draw on Islamic imagery. It's interesting for a young Western painter to pay homage to Islamic influences, and he likes how the Islamic perspective is less focused on glorifying individuals. Isaac says that Emily has a huge career ahead of her, and he's happy that he's a part of it.

Isaac makes it clear that the only paintings of Emily's he wants for his show are those that feature Islamic patterns. Isaac thinks that Emily's appropriation of Islamic culture will be "fertile"—meaning that she'll gain fame and financial success from it. And as an art curator, Isaac will too. Emily and Isaac will effectively profit off of a culture that doesn't belong to them, while the South Asian characters in the play are stigmatized for any association with their own heritage.

Isaac proposes a toast to Emily Hughes Kapoor, which prompts Jory to asks where in India the name Kapoor is from. Amir grows tense—their boss Steven questioned Amir's name too. Emily says that Kapoor is a common Punjabi name, which reminds Isaac about his upcoming trip to India. It's clear that he doesn't know much about the geography of the country. Thinking about his trip, Isaac admits that he's terrified of flying, but the airport security checks reassure him. He asks Amir what he thinks of security, given the stories one hears, and Emily answers that Amir usually volunteers to be searched. Amir explains that it's just easier this way, but Emily says that the airport authorities are trying hard *not* to be racist, because that looks bad. She scolds Amir for being passive-aggressive at airports, and Isaac agrees with her.

Amir's discomfort in airports suggests that security tends to profile him because, as a person of South Asian descent, they assume he might be Muslim—and that this means he's more likely to be a terrorist. Emily dismissively assumes that Amir is in the wrong for his behavior at airports, effectively privileging her own assumptions about the situation over his actual lived experiences. She belittles his way of avoiding racial profiling (volunteering for searches instead of being singled out, which he finds humiliating). All of this likely makes Amir feel undermined and unseen. Furthermore, Emily doesn't seem to realize that shaming Amir in front of others encourages them to shame him too. In this case, Isaac feels emboldened to shame Amir because Emily makes it seem okay.


Jory, however, thinks it's admirable that Amir is so forthcoming at airports—the world would be safer if everybody was like that. Amir thinks that the next terrorist attack will probably be committed by a guy who looks like him, but Emily disagrees—she thinks it'll be a white guy with a gun. Amir imagines the gun pointed at him. Isaac thinks that if every Middle Eastern person volunteered for searches at airports, it would only exacerbate people's suspicions. Amir asks Isaac if *he* has suspicions, but when Isaac gets defensive, Amir says that he doesn't blame him.

Jory and Isaac's comments about airports suggest that although they're friends with Amir, they're prejudiced against Muslim people (they tend to automatically associate Muslim people with Islamic terrorism). Although this likely brings up shameful and embarrassing memories for Amir, readers also know that he hates his Muslim background. For that reason, he actually agrees with their discriminatory comments, suggesting that he's internalized the same Islamophobia that others treat him with.


Emily's phone rings: it's Abe, who's calling Emily because Amir won't call him back. Emily ignores the call, and she asks if everyone is ready to eat their first course, a fennel and anchovy salad. Jory and Isaac joke about Jory's bad cooking, and then Emily and Jory head to the kitchen. Isaac apologizes to Amir for bringing up a sensitive topic, and Amir admits that he and Emily don't feel the same way about Islam. Amir says that Islam is regressive, but Isaac disagrees, citing a famous Muslim sculptor he loves. Amir asks Isaac if he's read the Qur'an, but he hasn't.

Amir explains what he doesn't like about Islam—namely, the religious values that he finds regressive—based on his upbringing in a Muslim family. But, much like Emily, Isaac only wants to acknowledge the cultural aspects of Islam that he enjoys (like art) rather than listening to Amir and accepting his position about the religion. In doing so, he subtly suggests that Amir's negative attitudes about Islam are wrong. It seems that Amir can't win: Isaac and Jory have just revealed their own Islamophobia in admitting that they're suspicious of Muslim in airports (because they think such people might be terrorists). Yet, at the same time, Isaac subtly shames him when Amir voices his own distaste for Islam.

As Jory and Emily return with the salad, Amir notes that the Prophet hated paintings and dogs. Jory wonders what's wrong with dogs, and Amir says that he doesn't know. Isaac asks Amir what his point is, and Amir replies that what artists like Emily are doing is out of synch with "the Muslim psyche." Islam, in his view, comes from people suffering through tough lives in the desert. Isaac quips that Jewish people suffered in the desert too—but Amir thinks that Jewish people took a different approach, noting that the Talmud looks at things many different ways. Islam, by contrast, just asks people to submit. Isaac argues that the problem isn't Islam, it's "Islamo-fascism." But Amir tells Isaac that he doesn't know what he's talking about—he hasn't even read the Qur'an, after all.

Isaac continues to undermine Amir's take on Islam, despite having never read the Qur'an himself. This further shows how Isaac, like Emily, privileges his own opinion over the opinions of those who have personal experience with Islamic culture. Isaac thinks it's possible to separate Islam (which he seems to think of in terms of its broader culture rather than its religious doctrine) from "Islamo-fascism" (using Islamic doctrine to further violent goals). This annoys Amir, since in his experience, it doesn't matter whether a Muslim person is extremist or not—at least in the U.S., they tend to be discriminated against regardless.

As the group sits down to dinner, Isaac agrees that he should read the Qur'an. Jory read some of it in college, but she only remembers the angry rhetoric. Amir agrees with her perspective—he thinks that it reads like hate mail. Emily interrupts him to say that there's something beautiful about the Qur'an's depiction of humanity as stubborn and self-interested. As the group digs into their salads, Isaac says that the problem isn't Islam itself, but the way the religion is politicized. Technically, Islam avoids separating religion and politics. Jory thinks that it's just as bad to treat the Constitution like a religious text, since it was written so long ago and seems out of date, and Amir agrees.

As Amir raises concerns with what he believes is hateful rhetoric in the Qur'an, Emily and Isaac essentially talk over him and try to minimize what he's saying. The discussion is getting more heated, and given Amir's previous angry outbursts, he's probably becoming quite agitated. Emily and Isaac continue subtly berating him for his negative attitude about Islam, even though others (like Jory) feel the same way. Their comments are likely contributing to Amir's ongoing resentment of those who make him feel like his opinions are invalid.

Isaac compliments the salad, and Emily says that she got the recipe when she was studying in Spain. This prompts the group to briefly discus how beautiful Spain is. When Amir agrees that he loves the country, Isaac points out that Muslims like Amir are no different from other people—Isaac and Amir have the same idea of what "the good life" is. He didn't even know Amir was Muslim until he read the newspaper article.

Again, Isaac is undermining Amir and refusing to listen to what he has to say about Islam. In his opinion, he and Amir are no different, since they both enjoy "the good life" of traveling and experiencing other cultures. Although Isaac is likely trying to sound progressive and open-minded, Amir likely finds his comments patronizing, as he's implying that he knows better than Amir does. Meanwhile, Isaac also confirms Amir's fear that people who read the newspaper article about Imam Fareed will assume that Amir is Muslim.

There's an awkward pause, and then Amir says that he renounced his faith. He tells the group that according to Islam, that act is punishable by death, though Emily disagrees. Then, Amir brings up wife beating. Emily tells Amir to stop, but he continues: according to Islam, the Angel Gabriel told Muhammad to beat his wives if they didn't obey him. Emily says that the translation is debatable, and that the correct advice is for men to leave their wives, not beat them. Amir disagrees.

As the conversation about Islam continues, Amir finds it harder to hide his shame and anger about coming from a Muslim background. He feels compelled to discuss the problematic values he was taught growing up (likely from his mother, whom the play earlier established as prejudiced against non-Muslim people). Amir hints that he was taught to condone violence against women, which repulses him. But Emily, as before, dismisses Amir's experiences as ridiculous.

Jory chimes in: she agrees with the French for banning the veil. Isaac disagrees, saying that he knows a few brilliant women who wear the veil. Jory wants to know who, but Isaac deflects before saying that he thinks his personal trainer's sister does. Emily thinks that the veil can be a source of pride for many women, but Jory disagrees—she thinks the veil is evil. Amir mockingly says that Muhammad used to advocate *against* abusing women until he started talking to some angel. That reminds Isaac of Mormonism.

Again, Isaac is trying to seem progressive about Muslim practices like veil-wearing. But when Jory asks him for clarification about the women he knows who wear the veil by choice, he struggles to come up with any names. Despite his outward positivity, though, Isaac previously admitted that he's suspicious of Muslim people in airports. His praise of Islam thus comes off as ungenuine, hypocritical, and patronizing toward Amir.

Exasperated, Amir explains that the Qur'an was about life in the desert 1,500 years ago, and people who try to recreate that life end up like the Taliban. Emily feels awkward as Amir continues to explain that the Qur'an wants people to be proud of fighting and killing for Islam. It's hard for even lapsed Muslims like himself to escape his ingrained Muslim pride. Isaac asks Amir if he felt proud after September 11th, and Amir admits that he did—he was horrified, but a small part of him felt proud that the Muslims were winning. To Amir, this is deeply ingrained in him, though he's worked really hard to try and get rid of that thinking. Emily gets fed up and goes to the kitchen.

In a vulnerable moment, Amir tries to explain why he renounced Islam. It seems that, growing up, he was taught to feel unyielding pride in his religion—which triggered a reaction to the 9/11 terrorist attacks that horrified him and made him deeply ashamed. Despite renouncing Islam, Amir still struggles with negative feelings about his upbringing. This suggests that denying and suppressing his Muslim background hasn't helped him process and release the shame he wants to free himself from. Emily continues to dismiss Amir whenever he tries to express his complicated feelings about his religious heritage, exacerbating his already complicated emotions.

Amir thinks that Isaac probably feels the same way about Israel, but Isaac says that he hates Israel—and many other Jews do too. He is outraged, though, when Middle Eastern politicians talks about wiping Israel off the map. Amir points out that many people *like* that kind of talk, and Isaac asks Amir if *he* likes that kind of talk. Amir admits that a part of him does—because he was conditioned by Islam to like it, and that's what's wrong with the religion. Emily, sounding disheartened, reminds Amir that they're supposed to be celebrating. Isaac interjects that fundamentalism comes from Amir, not from Islam. Amir accuses Isaac of patronizing him, but Isaac tells him that his generalizations about Islam are "terrifying."

Amir continues to explain why he renounced Islam: his mother taught him to be hostile toward Jewish people, and here he implies that Muslim people around the world want to wage war on Israel, which is regarded as a Jewish nation state. Amir feels ashamed that he ever associated with Islam, and even more ashamed that part of him still feels instinctively protective of the religion. He wants to overcome such attitudes by distancing himself from his heritage and religious background. Meanwhile, Isaac's hostility toward Amir becomes more overt here, as he jumps in and immediately assumes that Amir is making up the fundamentalist ideas that he claims he got from Islam.

Emily breaks the tension by asking Amir to join her in the kitchen. Once Amir has left the room, Isaac mutters that Amir is a "closet jihadist." Jory tells Isaac to be quiet. She's worried about how "off" Amir seems tonight, and she wonders if he knows the news about her work at the law firm. She signed a confidentiality agreement, so she can't say anything about it to Amir, but she feels like the should. Amir abruptly reenters, drunk, and says that they're here to celebrate Emily tonight—they should have a nice dinner. He and Jory head out to pick up some champagne.

Here, Isaac explicitly says that he thinks Amir is a "closet jihadist"—that is, that he's secretly an Islamic terrorist. Although Isaac has tried to come off as progressive and accepting of Islam, here he's reinforcing the harmful stereotype that anyone associated with Islam is also affiliated with terrorism. Moreover, Isaac makes this accusation to Jory, who's Amir's colleague—meaning that Isaac's comments could damage Amir's career, were they to circulate further. Jory, meanwhile, alludes to something going on at work that she's not allowed to tell Amir. It's possible that Amir is being undermined and kept out of the loop and work because his bosses found out that he's from a Pakistani Muslim family. If this is the case, it seems that Amir's fears about workplace discrimination are warranted.

After Amir and Jory leave, Emily turns to Isaac and scolds him for egging Amir on—but Isaac says that Amir can handle it. Emily tells Isaac that he shouldn't be doing this in her home—he could have told her about the art show over the phone. She says that London was a mistake, but Isaac leans in and tells Emily that he doesn't believe her. He touches her, but she pulls away. Emily asks if what happened in London is why he put her in his art show, but he assures her that it isn't—her art what inspired the show. Isaac touches Emily again, and she's slower to resist this time. He tells Emily that Amir is a mess of a husband and an alcoholic. He also lets Emily know that the law firm promoted Jory to partner. This confuses her, since Amir has been at the firm twice as long as Jory.

Emily and Isaac's exchange in this passage, and particularly the way Isaac touches Emily, imply that they're having an affair—they apparently went to London together, and something happened between them while they were there. Emily seems to suspect that their relationship is what led Isaac to put her paintings in his show. Isaac reassures her that her art is genuinely inspiring—but previously, he seemed motivated by the fact that both he and Emily could garner praise from Emily's use of Islamic patterns in her art. In this way, he (like Emily) is willing to borrow from and exploit Islamic culture, if it means that they can profit off of it. Meanwhile, Isaac drops the bomb that Jory made partner at the law firm, even though Amir is more qualified for the job—which could suggest that his bosses are discriminating against him because of his Muslim background.

Isaac explains that Amir's involvement with Imam Fareed made it look like "he was representing a man who was raising money for terrorists," and Amir's bosses at the law firm got angry. They held a meeting at work, where Amir broke down in tears and told them that they wouldn't care if he'd spoken out for a rabbi rather than a Muslim cleric. Steven found this comment antisemitic. Emily says that "you people," meaning Jews, are too sensitive about antisemitism, but Isaac reminds her that she's married to someone who feels an instinctual alliance with Islamic terrorists. He wonders aloud why Amir would go anywhere the imam. Crestfallen, Emily admits that Amir did it for her, because she pressured him to speak out in support of Imam Fareed.

Amir's bosses wrongly assume that he's involved with terrorists, which has a detrimental impact on his career. Clearly, his fears about workplace discrimination were justified, as he was passed up for a promotion just for being quoted as supporting a Muslim cleric. While Emily and Isaac are likely going to achieve success by profiting off of Islamic influences in Emily's art, Amir's bosses punish him for who he is. This juxtaposition highlights the idea that people who are actually from Muslim cultures face prejudices that others don't. Emily reveals to Isaac that she was the one who forced Amir to speak out in support of Imam Fareed. She's so eager to seem open-minded about Islam that she pushed Amir into a vulnerable situation, putting him at risk of discrimination.

Isaac says that Amir will never understand Emily. In Amir's **portrait**, his expression is full of "Shame. Anger. Pride." Isaac thinks that Amir is like Velázquez's slave—he "finally has the master's wife." Emily is disgusted, but Isaac continues, saying that he's in love with Emily and that she'll cheat on Amir again, just like she did in London. Isaac leans in to kiss Emily, who stands there, frozen. Suddenly, Jory walks in; when she sees them embracing, she demands to know what's going on. Amir walks in after her, yelling at Jory for not telling him about her promotion earlier—but he stops suddenly when Jory screams that Emily and Isaac were kissing.

Isaac again touches on why Emily's portrait of Amir is problematic. She thinks that the painting is celebrating Amir—but really, it depicts him like an outsider who's trying to assimilate into affluent white culture without truly being accepted by it. Isaac's comment about Amir finally having "the master's wife" implies that he thinks of South Asian people like Amir as inferior and not good enough for white women like Emily. Amir's expression in the portrait symbolizes his inner shame and anger about his cultural heritage. Meanwhile, the confrontation between Amir and Jory, and between the two couples, hints that Amir's internalized rage is about to boil to the surface.

Emily lies that Isaac was just comforting her because she was upset about Amir not getting promoted. Jory doesn't believe Emily, and she angrily grabs her purse to leave. Amir yells at Jory that she's ruined his job and his marriage—he's worked for years to make partner, and she took that away from him. Isaac tells Jory not to listen to Amir and tries to comfort her, but Jory tells him not to touch her. Isaac then turns on Amir in a fit of rage, and Amir spits in Isaac's face. Isaac tells Amir that this is why people call Muslims animals, and he storms out. As Jory gathers her things to follow him, she spitefully tells Amir that Mort is retiring. She's taking over his caseload instead of Amir, because Amir can't be trusted.

The entire evening has resurfaced Amir's trauma surrounding his Muslim upbringing and his internalized shame about his identity. He felt pressured to defend and explain himself, which prompted Emily to be dismissive and Isaac to be outwardly hostile. Meanwhile, his career is imploding because he's being discriminated against at work. The play has continuously hinted that Amir struggles to control his anger when he's triggered by the topic of Islam—and here, Amir completely loses control by yelling at Jory and spitting in Isaac's face.

After Jory leaves, Amir asks Emily if she's sleeping with Isaac. Emily admits that she had sex with him went they went to London for the Frieze Art Fair. She says that she's disgusted with herself and scrambles to apologize—but suddenly, in a fit of blind rage, Amir hits Emily in the face. Overcome by rage, he keeps hitting her, releasing "*a lifetime of discreetly building resentment*." Suddenly, Amir comes to his senses; he can't believe what he's done. Then, there's a knock on the door: Abe walks in to see Emily on the ground with a bloody face.

The stage directions indicate that in beating Emily, Amir is releasing a lifetime of pent-up aggression through physical violence. He's been unsuccessfully trying to reject his cultural heritage and free himself from the shame and anger he feels surrounding it. Yet Amir's efforts to suppress his Muslim roots haven't helped him process and release his complicated emotions about his past and his identity. In fact, trying to cover up who he is has only caused personal and professional conflict in his life. At best, he's repressed his feelings, and now they've come out in a horrifically violent way—leaving him (as the play's title suggests) in disgrace.

SCENE 4

Six months have passed. Amir, looking broken, is packing up the living room, which is now full of boxes. Emily and Abe walk in. Abe is wearing a Muslim skullcap, and Emily explains that he got stopped by the FBI. Abe was Starbucks with his friend Tariq, and Tariq tried to flirt with a barista, who got annoyed. Noticing Abe and Tariq's skullcaps, the barista asked them what they thought about Al-Qaeda. Tariq got angry and said that Americans created Al-Qaeda, which prompted the waitress to call the police. Abe and Tariq were arrested—and at the station, the FBI was waiting for them.

Amir's dejected appearance, combined with the fact that he's packing up the apartment, imply that he and Emily are now separated. Amir's outburst, the culmination of all the shame he's internalized for decades, has resulted in the loss of his marriage. Furthermore, the apartment has been an ongoing symbol of the Kapoors' success and prosperity, so the fact that Amir is now leaving it suggests that he's experienced a professional and financial fall from grace as well. Meanwhile, Abe's legal troubles speak to the prevalence of Islamophobia in U.S. society. When Abe and Tariq openly present as Muslim (by wearing skullcaps) and talk about Islam in public, they face discrimination, because others wrongly associate them with terrorism. This situation highlights how difficult it is for Muslim Americans to openly support their own culture and religion.

The FBI agents interrogated Abe and Tariq, asking them if they wanted to blow something up and if they hated the United States. Then, the FBI threatened to deport Abe unless he became an informant. Suddenly, Emily says that she wants to leave. Abe and Amir implore her to stay, so she goes to the kitchen for some water. Amir calls Imam Fareed's lawyer and leaves a message for him on Abe's behalf. He warns Abe that the world isn't neutral, and that he needs to present himself differently in public if he wants to avoid being interrogated by authority figures like the FBI. Amir worries that Abe will get deported if he doesn't act smarter.

Amir's comments are meant to shame Abe for being reckless, but he inadvertently reveals that he knows Islamophobia (the fear that all Muslim people are terrorists) is rampant in the United States. As a result, Muslim people like Abe have to avoid publicly representing their religion if they don't want the authorities (like the police or the FBI) to discriminate against them. As before, this suggests that it's difficult for people from Islamic cultures to be visible in American society at all—though Amir doesn't seem particularly sympathetic to this idea.

Abe wonders if being deported would be so bad, but Amir tells him that he can have a better life in the United States. Abe quips that Amir's life isn't so great—he knows that Amir got fired. He asks Amir how he could hurt Emily in such a disgraceful way. Dejected, Amir responds that he doesn't know. Amir wonders why Abe was so stupid as to change his name back to Hussein, start wearing a skullcap, and talking about Islam in Starbucks. Abe, disgusted, accuses Amir of hating himself and his own people. He used to look up to Amir, but now he thinks that Amir has just given in. Americans have taken Muslim people's land and forced them to act like Americans, yet they don't understand Muslim rage.

Abe calls out the fact that Amir has tried to suppress a part of his identity. Clearly, though, doing so only worsened Amir's shame and anger surrounding his Muslim background, culminating in him lashing out violently, destroying his marriage with Emily, and losing his job. Abe feels angry (as his comment about Muslim rage reveals), but he doesn't want to make the same mistake Amir did by trying to suppress a part of his identity. In publicly embracing his Muslim culture, however, Abe experiences discrimination, suggesting that both routes—hiding from or leaning into Islamic culture—present challenges for South Asian Americans.

Realizing that Emily heard him say this, Abe apologizes for his outburst and leaves. Amir tells Emily that he got the **painting**, and Emily explains that she didn't want to throw it away. Amir says that he wants her to take the apartment, but she doesn't want it. He asks why Emily dropped the charges if she hates him so much, but Emily says that she doesn't hate him. After a pause, Amir congratulates Emily on her *New Yorker* review, and he asks if she's read his letters. Emily was right about him, he says, and he's finally understanding her art. Emily interjects, saying that her art was naïve. Amir apologizes to Emily over and over again, but Emily stops him. She "had a part in what happened," and she was selfish—her work made her blind.

Emily's Islamic-inspired paintings have seemingly brought her a great deal of success in the art world. Meanwhile, Amir, Abe, and Imam Fareed have all been discriminated against for their associations with Islam. However, Emily finally acknowledges that there was something wrong with the way she exploited Islamic imagery for her own personal gain. In saying that she "had a part in what happened," Emily admits that she thinks her dismissive attitude towards Amir contributed to the resentment and tension in their marriage.

Amir looks emotional as he says that he wishes Emily could be proud of him. Emily leaves, telling Amir not to contact her again. Amir starts packing again, and a wrapped canvas leaning against the wall catches his eye. He tears the wrapping off to reveal Emily's **portrait** of him. He looks at it for a long time, with a searching gaze.

The way Amir ends up at the end of the play, alone and having lost his entire livelihood, is the result of several different factors. The way he and the other South Asian American characters in the play were treated speaks to both the casual racism and the systemic Islamophobia that's commonplace in U.S. society. This certainly played a role in Amir's downfall, as being constantly misunderstood, judged, and discriminated against took a toll on him. But ultimately, Amir's decisions were his own, and the way his resentment exploded into violence against Emily is a testament to how damaging shame and repressing one's identity can be. In the end, Amir is left with nothing but Emily's portrait of him, which portrays him as an ethnic outsider trying to assimilate into affluent white culture. Amir's searching gaze as he stares at the painting suggests that he's still trying to figure out who he really is, and what his place is in American society. That the play ends on this note implies that this is a question all ethnic and religious minorities are forced ask themselves—one that doesn't have an easy answer.

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