



The Kite Runner

Khaled Hosseini

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Taking us from Afghanistan in the final days of the monarchy through the horrific invasion of the Taliban, *The Kite Runner* is the heartbreaking story of the unlikely and inseparable friendship between a wealthy boy and the son of his father's servant, both of whom are caught in the tragic sweep of history. It is also about the power of reading, the price of betrayal, the possibility of redemption, and the influence of fathers over sons, of a country over men - and the sacrifices, loyalty and lies that bind them.

--jacket flap

The Kite Runner Details

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i really wanted to like this novel. judging from its thousands of 'five-star reviews' hailing it as the one of the 'best books ever written,' i'm in the minority when i state that this novel, while well-intentioned, just left a little bit of sour taste in my mouth.

my problems with the novel are as follows: first of all the writing itself is so ham-fisted, heavy-handed, distracting and otherwise puzzling that by the midway point, i seriously considered chucking the book against the wall. each page of the novel has at least 5-10 incomplete sentences. i'm all for experimental and fractured prose--but it's important for authors to use it judiciously. hosseini, unfortunately, beats it to death. a lot of his language is cliched, too, which is funny considering there's a passage in the book about a writing teacher who warns the narrator, amir, about using cliches. i don't know if that was supposed to be funny or not, but it made me laugh (and what was worse was the san francisco's chronicle's glowing review on the book's cover and the san francisco chronicle's glowing review of amir's novel--coincidence?).

the author's use of farsi--especially in the dialogue--was equally distracting. my point is that no one speaks the way his characters speak. people don't switch back and forth between languages while speaking, and if they do, they certainly don't speak 1/2 the sentence in farsi, say one word in farsi, then translate the farsi word to english, then finish the sentence in english, when they're presumably speaking farsi to begin with. i didn't pick up this book for a crash course in colloquial farsi. after 370 pages, i was frustrated--and annoyed.

hosseini's plot often borders on the ridiculous. the 'twists' are just TOO coincidental--and not surprising at all (except in how contrived they are). for example, in a devastated kabul, amir sees a homeless man in the street. the homeless man, of course, was a former university professor who just happened to teach with amir's long deceased mother. what a coincidence! what makes it worse, is that the narrator, amir then explains that while that may, in fact, seem like a coincidence, it happens in afghanistan happens all the time. of course it does. in another example, amir's former nemesis, assaf (now a taliban crony), beats up amir and amir ends up with a scar above his lip, just like his dear friend hassan, who was born with cleft-palate. oh, the coincidence! (and the fact that amir even runs into assaf again is ridiculous). another example: amir and his wife aren't able to have children, and of course they find an orphan boy who happens to be extended family and they adopt him. what a coincidence! and after amir returns to afghanistan he doesn't call home to his dutiful wife for over a month. i kept wondering 'when's he gonna call home?' and any plot advanced by a series of 'tragedies,' (and in this book they are legion) shows little more than the writer's inability to craft a meaningful and interesting plot. not only is it pretty poor form, it's also highly manipulative and condescending. i found myself continually frustrated by hosseini's apparent distrust of the reader. we don't have to be told how and when to interpret metaphors. and if i read one more book where the protagonist is a writer or professor, i'm gonna ram my head into a metal post.

i don't want to sound like a misanthrope or jaded literature reader because i'm certainly not. this novel just left me wanting so much more in terms of plot and characterization. having said that, however, the novel could be important in that shows the cruelty of the taliban. much of what hosseini writes about is important, especially for us westerners unfamiliar with the breadth and scope of the afghani tragedy.

in the end, it was worth the \$2.00 i paid for it.

J.G. Keely says

This is the sort of book White America reads to feel worldly. Just like the spate of Native American pop fiction in the late eighties, this is overwhelmingly colonized literature, in that it pretends to reveal some aspect of the 'other' culture, but on closer inspection (aside from the occasional tidbit) it is a thoroughly western story, firmly ensconced in the western tradition.

Even those tidbits Hosseini gives are of such a vague degree that to be impressed by them, one would have to have almost no knowledge of the history of Afghanistan, nor the cultural conflicts raging there between the Shia and Sunni Muslims, or how it formed a surrogate battleground for Russia and the United States in the Cold War, or for Colonial conflicts in the centuries before. Sadly, for all the daily news reports about Afghanistan, most people know very little of its history.

Hosseini's story is thickly foreshadowed and wraps up so neatly in the end that the reader will never have to worry about being surprised. Every convenient coincidence that could happen, does happen. He does attempt to bring some excitement to the story with dramatized violence, but that's hardly a replacement for a well-constructed plot. He is also fond of forcing tension by creating a small conflict between two characters and then having them agonize over it for years, despite the fact that it would be easy to fix and the characters have no reason to maintain the conflict. And since the conflict does not grow or change over time, everything is quickly reduced to petty and repetitive reactions.

He even creates a cliched 'white devil' character, a literal sociopath (and pedophile) as the symbol for the 'evils' of the Taliban. This creates an odd conflict in the narrative, since one of the main themes is that simple inequalities and pointless conflicts stem from Afghan tradition, itself. His indelicate inclusion of wealthy, beautiful, white power as the source of religious turmoil in the mid-east negates his assertion that the conflicts are caused by small-mindedness.

The fact that this character seems to have the depth of motivation of a Disney villain also means that he does not work as a representation of the fundamental causes of colonial inequality, which tend to be economic, not personal. The various mixed messages about the contributors to the ongoing Afghan conflict suggest that Hosseini does not have anything insightful to say about it.

Perhaps the worst part about this book is how much it caters to the ignorance of White America. It will allow naive readers to feel better about themselves for feeling sympathy with the larger mid-east conflict, but is also lets them retain a sense of superiority over the Muslims for their 'backwards, classicist, warlike' ways. In short, it supports the condescending, parental view that many Americans already have about the rest of the world. And it does all this without revealing any understanding of the vast and vital economic concerns which make the greater mid-east so vitally important to the future of the world.

It is unfortunate that nowhere amongst this book's artfully dramatized violence and alternative praising and demonizing of the West is there the underlying sense of why this conflict is happening, of what put it all into place, and of why it will continue to drag us all down. The point where it could turn sympathy into indignation or realization is simply absent.

There is a bad joke on the internet showing a map of the world with the mid-east replaced by a sea-filled crater with the comment 'problem solved'. What this map fails to represent is that there is a reason the West keeps meddling in the affairs of the mid-east, and that every time we do, it creates another conflict--because almost every group who we decry as terrorists now were originally trained and armed by the US and Western powers to serve our economic interests.

As long as we see extremists as faceless sociopaths, we can do nothing against them. We must recognize that normal people fall down these paths, and that everyone sees himself as being 'in the right'. Who is more right: the Westerner whose careless bomb kills a child, or the Muslim's that does?

The point shouldn't be to separate the 'good Muslims' from the 'bad Muslims', because people aren't fundamentally good or bad. They are fundamentally people. Almost without exception, they are looking out for their future, their children, and their communities. Calling someone 'evil' merely means you have ceased to try understanding their point of view, and decided instead to merely hate because it's easier to remain ignorant than to try to understand.

This book isn't particularly insightful or well-written, but that is in no way unusual in bestsellers. The problem is that Americans are going to use this book to justify their ignorance about the problems in the east. This book will make people feel better about themselves, instead of helping them to think better about the world.

For an actually insightful, touching view of the Afghan conflict, I would suggest avoiding this bit of naive melodrama and looking up Emmanuel Guibert's 'The Photographer'.

Raeleen Lemay says

I'm really mad at myself for taking so long to read this. SUCH a good book, and while it may not be worthy of 5 stars for me, I really did love it and it broke my heart a hundred times. I look forward to reading Hosseini's other books, most likely this year.

Britta says

"For you, a thousand times over."

"Children aren't coloring books. You don't get to fill them with your favorite colors."

"...attention shifted to him like sunflowers turning to the sun."

"But even when he wasn't around, he was."

"When you kill a man, you steal a life. You steal a wife's right to a husband, rob his children of a father. When you tell a lie, you steal someone's right to the truth. When you cheat, you steal the right to fairness. There is no act more wretched than stealing."

"...she had a voice that made me think of warm milk and honey."

"My heart stuttered at the thought of her."

"...and I would walk by, pretending not to know her, but dying to."

"It turned out that, like satan, cancer had many names."

"Every woman needed a husband, even if he did silence the song in her."

"The first time I saw the Pacific, I almost cried."

"Proud. His eyes gleamed when he said that and I liked being on the receiving end of that look."

"Make morning into a key and throw it into the well,
Go slowly, my lovely moon, go slowly.
Let the morning sun forget to rise in the East,
Go slowly, lovely moon, go slowly."

"Men are easy,... a man's plumbing is like his mind: simple, very few surprises. You ladies, on the other hand... well, God put a lot of thought into making you."

"All my life, I'd been around men. That night, I discovered the tenderness of a woman."

"And I could almost feel the emptiness in [her] womb, like it was a living, breathing thing. It had seeped into our marriage, that emptiness, into our laughs, and our lovemaking. And late at night, in the darkness of our room, I'd feel it rising from [her] and settling between us. Sleeping between us. Like a newborn child."

"America was a river, roaring along unmindful of the past. I could wade into this river, let my sins drown to the bottom, let the waters carry me someplace far. Someplace with no ghosts, no memories, and no sins. If for nothing else, for that I embraced America."

"...and every day I thank [God] that I am alive, not because I fear death, but because my wife has a husband and my son is not an orphan."

"...lifting him from the certainty of turmoil and dropping him in a turmoil of uncertainty."

"...sometimes the dead are luckier."

"He walked like he was afraid to leave behind footprints. He moved as if not to stir the air around him."

"...and when she locked her arms around my neck, when I smelled apples in her hair, I realized how much I had missed her. 'You're still the morning sun to me...' I whispered."

"...there is a God, there always has been. I see him here, in the eyes of the people in this [hospital] corridor of desperation. This is the real house of God, this is where those who have lost God will find Him... there is a God, there has to be, and now I will pray, I will pray that He will forgive that I have neglected Him all of these years, forgive that I have betrayed, lied, and sinned with impunity only to turn to Him now in my hour of need. I pray that He is as merciful, benevolent, and gracious as His book says He is."

Virginia Ronan ♥ Herondale ♥ says

"When you kill a man, you steal a life. You steal his wife's right to a husband, rob his children of a father. When you tell a lie, you steal someone's right to the truth. When you cheat, you steal the right to fairness. There is no act more wretched than stealing."

I'm going to be honest with you. To read this book was a constant struggle, not because I didn't like the writing style, not because it was bad and not because it was boring. No, if anything **"The Kite Runner"** was so hard to read because it was so exceptionally painful.

This book made me so sad! I felt helpless and angry and there were times I actually was more than just tempted to stop reading. Some of the chapters were just too hard to bear and the book touched me in a way I can't even describe. It did something with me... and I'm still not sure whether this was good or bad.

All I know is that the injustice in this book made me furious and that I just have to think about it and already feel sick to my stomach again. There were so many serious topics in this book but I think what really got to me was the central theme of violence, injustice and abuse. To read **"The Kite Runner"** was so devastating and nerve-racking I actually couldn't read more than two chapters a day. It was so upsetting that I found it

difficult to motivate myself to read it and even though this was such a painful read, I still wanted to know what would happen next.

Amir's and Hassan's story was so horrible, appalling, powerful and beautiful at the same time. It left me completely broken and raw and I think my emotions are still all over the place. So if my review sounds a little incoherent and illogical you can blame it on the book hangover I'm currently suffering from. XD

"But we were kids who had learned to crawl together, and no history, ethnicity, society, or religion was going to change that either."

The plot:

Amir and Hassan are best friends who grew up together and live in Kabul. They do almost everything together and one of their favourite hobbies is kite running. One day there is a local kite-fighting tournament Amir is determined to win and with the help of Hassan he is even able to achieve his goal. The victory of the tournament comes with a high price though and in the end their moment of happiness isn't only short lived but also comes to an abrupt end. What happens after the competition destroys their lifelong friendship and shakes the foundations of their trust, the course of their lives changing as they try to deal with the repercussions of a single day.

"It may be unfair, but what happens in a few days, sometimes even a single day, can change the course of a whole lifetime, Amir," he said.

The characters:

Beware there are plenty of spoilers lying ahead of you!!!

Amir:

"I pretended I was reading from the book, flipping pages regularly, but I had abandoned the text altogether, taken over the story, and made up my own. Hassan, of course, was oblivious to this. To him, the words on the page were a scramble of codes, indecipherable, mysterious. Words were secret doorways and I held all the keys."

Puh, what to say about him? I think I never disliked a protagonist as much as I disliked the narrator of this story. I just couldn't stand his younger self and I thought he wasn't just egoistic but also spoiled and more than just unethical. The way Amir treated Hassan made me sick and his betrayal towards his best friend hurt so much! I mean how could he let this happen? How could he stand aside without intervening? How could he even think that Hassan is "just a Hazara"?! I don't understand it and if I'm entirely honest I really think that it was good he felt bad throughout the entire book! His past haunted him and in the end it actually made him a better person. A person that stood up to bad people and a person I was finally able to forgive. It was a long journey for Amir but he eventually did the right thing and when I read the final sentences of this book I was even proud of him. XD

"It's all right." I turned to the general. "You see, General Sahib, my father slept with his servant's wife. She bore him a son named Hassan. Hassan is dead now. That boy sleeping on the couch is Hassan's son. He's my nephew. That's what you tell people when they ask."

They were all staring at me.

"And one more thing, General Sahib," I said. "You will never again refer to him as a 'Hazara boy' in my presence. He has a name and it's Sohrab."

I waited 331 pages for that to happen!!! XD

Hassan:

"Then Hassan did pick up a pomegranate. He walked toward me. He opened it and crushed it against his own forehead. 'There,' he croaked, red dipping down his face like blood. 'Are you satisfied? Do you feel better?' He turned around and started down the hill."

God bless his kind and innocent soul!!! This boy was an angel and I don't even know how he was able to forgive Amir. As it seems he managed to do it though and my deep respect and love for his character will never cease. I loved Hassan with all my heart and I think his only flaw was that he was just too good to live in this sick and violent world. He would have deserved so much more than life gave him and when I found out about Sohrab's ordeal I was more than just heartbroken. **I was devastated!!!** I know Hassan must have turned over in his grave and I felt so, so, so damn sorry for what happened to both of them.

Baba:

"The problem, of course, was that Baba saw the world in black and white. You can't love a person who lives that way without fearing him too. Maybe even hating him a little."

Baba definitely was a very flawed character but I still couldn't help but had to love him for it. There was so much good in him, yet he also had his bad sides. For a person that was described as seeing the world in black and white he actually was all different kinds of grey and in some way that made him extremely likeable and disagreeable at the same time. *lol* I think he was a very contradictory person and after finding out about his secret I was finally able to understand why. Still, I loved that despite everything he tried to be a righteous man and when it comes down to it he certainly had his heart in the right place.

"Ask him where his shame is."

They spoke. "He says this is war. There is no shame in war."

"Tell him he's wrong. War doesn't negate decency. It demands it, even more than in times of peace."

"And now, fifteen years after I'd buried him, I was learning that Baba had been a thief. And a thief of the worst kind, because the things he'd stolen had been sacred: from me the right to know I had a brother, from Hassan his identity, and from Ali his honor. His nang. His namoos."

Sohrab:

This boy **B.R.O.K.E** my heart and I don't even know how I'm supposed to pick up the pieces. He was just ten!! Damn it!! I don't understand how people can hurt children and I can't even... *argharghsdfjklmno* I hate what Assef did to him and I'm so glad Sohrab got away from his clutches! Chapter 22 was so horrible to read... It made me sick to my stomach and I swear I was tempted to throw the book against a wall... Urgh... just to think about his hands on Sohrab... My heart aches so much for that little boy!!! He deserved a better childhood than that! Damn no!! He actually deserved a childhood to begin with!!!!

"I miss Father, and Mother too," he croaked. "And I miss Sasa and Rahim Khan sahib. But sometimes I'm glad they're not ... they're not here anymore."

"Why?" I touched his arm. He drew back.

"Because –" he said, gasping and hitching between sobs, "because I don't want them to see me... I'm so dirty." He sucked in his breath and let it out in a long, wheezy cry. "I'm so dirty and full of sin."

And OMG that beautiful ending! That hopeful, amazing and beautiful ending! It killed me, it was the death of me, it was the final nail in my coffin!!! That sweet and gentle and shy boy!!!! XD I already get emotional just thinking about it! *blinking away tears*

The bottom line:

I hated the book! I loved the book!

I hated the injustice, the pain Ali, Hassan and Sohrab had to go through, I hated the way the Taliban treated everyone they considered to be wrong and different, I hated to read about the destruction of Amir's hometown, I hated the violence, I hated the war, I hated to read about the many orphans, the hungry children on the street. I hated the way Amir acted when he was younger!!!

"She had a large purple bruise on her leg for days but what could I do except stand and watch my wife get beaten? If I fought, that dog would have surely put a bullet in me, and gladly! Then what would have happened to my Sohrab?"

But I loved the details about Afghan culture, I admired the bravery of Hassan and Baba, my heart sang whenever they tried to be righteous and good. In a world that had gone to hell they still tried to be decent, they still tried everything possible to stand up for their people, to do the right thing. They still had values and they didn't just believe in them, they also acted according to them!!!

So yes, for me "**The Kite Runner**" was a very powerful book. It pushed my boundaries and forced me to fight through it! It made me think about unpleasant things, it forced me to see the bad and ugly things our world is made of, but it also showed me the good in people and their kindness!

If you can live with a broken heart and are able to deal with the pain, this book is highly recommended. If you're one of the faint-hearted you better give it a wide berth.

As for me, I definitely will never re-read this book ever again! I'm kind of proud that I accomplished to read it though! XD

"For you, a thousand times over."

Chris says

I became what I am today at the age of twenty-nine, on a frigid overcast day in the winter of 2008.

What I am about to tell you about what I became is going to be very shocking. It is going to manipulate your emotions. It may include some random words in my native language for no reason whatsoever. It will teach you unnecessary things about my culture. It will not be smarter than a fifth grader. And it will include as many cliches and as much foreshadowing as is humanly possible.

You are going to be shocked. I, for one, never saw it coming. So I doubt you will. Get ready. Aren't you so ready to be shocked? You're never going to see this coming.

What comes next is the big revelation, so get ready!

Wait, I need to ask you something first. Did you know that the Irish like potatoes? Yeah, we really enjoy them. And alcohol too. It's pretty great. *Erin Go Bragh!* This means Ireland Forever! Unfortunately, you will be very sad to know that my father just died due to an Irish car bomb. Well, about 15 of them to be exact. All on an empty stomach! It makes me sad and you should feel sad too, kind reader.

Ok, on to the big reveal. Here it is:

On that frigid overcast day, which happened to be the day that I decided to quit reading *The Kite Runner*, I became a book snob.

Because *The Kite Runner* is adored by most people who read it, I am forced to conclude that most people need to read more. A whole lot more. You should be embarrassed if you like this book. Seriously. The moment I became a book snob (shortly after "The Scene"), I became so embarrassed to be seen reading it that I accused the guy sitting next to me on the subway of putting the book on my lap while I wasn't paying attention. "How dare you, sir! Have you no decency?" I exclaimed excitedly in my native language. Then I noticed a monkey on the platform waiting to board a train. I quickly hopped off my train, ran to him, handed him the book, and said "*Top O' the Mornin' to ya! Enjoy!*"

Later that day, I saw that monkey flying a kite in front of the Washington Monument. I noticed that the glass string wasn't making his hands bloody. Do you know why? He was wearing gloves.

Please note that I have absolutely no appreciation for life and reality.*

*Bart Bondeson, who claims to be "a better person for having read this book," suggested that I make this clarification to my review. Thanks for the suggestion, Bart! Hopefully that clears things up for those who were wondering.

Linda says

Finished this book about a month ago but it's taken me this long to write a review about it because I have such mixed feelings about it. It was a deeply affecting novel, but mostly not in a good way. I really wanted to like it, but the more I think about what I didn't like about the book, the more it bothers me. I even downgraded this review from two stars to one from the time I started writing it to the time I finished.

Let's start off with the good, shall we? The writing itself was pretty good when it comes to description, in that I really felt the author's descriptions of scenes, and in terms of moving the story forward. That said, it's not particularly challenging writing to read.

The very best part of the novel is its warm depiction of the mixed culture of Afghanistan, and how it conveys the picture of a real Afghanistan as a living place, before the coup, the Soviet invasion, and above all, the Taliban and the aftermath of September 11th created a fossilized image in the US of a failed state, petrified in "backwardness" and locked in the role of a villain from central casting.

Now for the not so good.

== Spoiler Alert ==

... because I don't think I'm going to be able to complain about what I didn't like about the book without revealing major plot points. (Not to mention, some of what follows will only make sense to someone who has read the book.) So if you don't want to spoil it for yourself, read no further, here be spoilers:

My overwhelming emotion throughout the book is feeling entirely manipulated. Of course, one major reason for this is that the author's attempts at metaphor, allegory, and foreshadowing are utterly ham-fisted. When he wants to make a point, he hits you over the head with it, hard -- Amir's split lip / Hassan's cleft palate comes immediately, resoundingly to mind.

But I feel manipulated beyond that. The members of the servant class in this story suffer tragic, unspeakable calamities, sometimes at the hands of our fine hero, and yet the novel seems to expect the reader to reserve her sympathies for the "wronged" privileged child, beating his breast over the emotional pain of living with the wounds he has selfishly inflicted upon others. How, why, am I supposed to feel worse for him as he feels bad about what he has done to others? Rather than feeling most sympathy and kinship for those who, through absolutely no fault of their own, must suffer, not just once or twice, but again and again?

Of course this elevation of / identification with the "wounded"/flawed hero goes hand in hand with an absolutely detestable portrayal of the members of the servant class as being at their utmost happiest when they are being their most servile and utterly subjugating their own needs, wants, desires, pleasures -- their own selves, in fact -- to the needs of their masters. (Even when they are protecting their masters from their own arrogance, heartlessness, or downright stupidity.)

I don't see how the main character, Amir, could possibly be likeable. Amir's battle with Assef, momentous as it is, is not so much him taking a stand because he feels driven to do so or feels that he must. Rather, he acts with very little self-agency at all -- he is more or less merely carried forward into events. (And, moreover, in the end it is Sohrab (Hassan again) who saves him.)

I finished the novel resenting Amir, and even more intensely resenting the author for trying to make the reader think she's supposed to care about Amir, more than about anyone else in the story.

A couple other points: I'm wondering if one theme of the novel is that there are no definitive happy endings, no single immutable moments of epiphany or redemption. Because Amir's moral "triumph", such as it is, over Assef, is so short-lived. He manages to crash horrifically only a week or two later, when he goes back on his word to Sohrab about his promise not to send him to an orphanage.

And lastly, I don't understand why Baba's hypocrisy is not more of a theme. He makes such a point of drilling into his son's head that a lie is a theft of one's right to the truth. His own hypocrisy there is a profound thing, and it's a shame the author doesn't do more with it.

Nevertheless, after all the bad things I had to say about it, I do have a couple quotes worth keeping:

"Every woman needed a husband. Even if he did silence the song in her." (p.178)

"That's the real Afghanistan, Agha sahib. That's the Afghanistan I know. You? You've *always* been a tourist here, you just didn't know it." (p. 232)

=== UPDATE ===

I originally posted my review The Kite Runner in February 2008. Since then, my review has generated a very robust response from other Goodreads members. I have responded a couple of times in the comments section, but I realize that by now, the comments section has gotten long enough that some folks may not realize that I have added some clarifications to my review. So, although the extended reply that I posted in the comments section in October 2008 is still available in the comments section, I am re-posting it here, so people don't miss it.

I also want to offer my continued thanks to those who have read, liked, and/or comment on my review of The Kite Runner. This kind of back-and-forth conversation on books is exactly why I signed on to Goodreads! I appreciate the feedback, and look forward to engaging in more such discussion.

Finally, one more quick reply. One recent commenter asked how I could have given this book only a 1 star

rating, if I was so affected by it. As I replied in the comments, the short answer is that I am guided by Goodread's prompts when I rate a book. Two stars is "It was OK;" 1 star is "I didn't like it." While I have praised a few things about the book, the bottom line is, overall, I didn't like it. -- Linda, 22 July 2011

Posted 24 October 2008:

There have been many comments to my review since I first wrote it, and I thought it might be about time for me to weigh in for a moment.

Before I get into my response, I must start off with a great thank you for all those who have felt sufficiently moved (positively or negatively) by my review to comment and respond. I appreciate all the comments, whether I agree with them or not.

First of all, I'd like to address the question of whether we're "supposed" to like Amir or not. Yes, I do realize that sometimes writers create and/or focus on a character that the reader is not meant to like. Here, though, the story is clearly meant to be about some kind of redemption -- but I found Amir so distasteful, that I simply wasn't interested in his redemption. The focus of the story was entirely on how Amir's life had been corrupted by the despicable things he'd done - when the things he'd done were entirely part and parcel of the position of power and privilege he occupied over Hassan.

Which brings me to my second point, the insufferable current of paternalism that runs throughout the story. The members of the servant and poorer classes are consistently portrayed as saintly, absurdly self-sacrificing, one-dimensional characters. Regardless of what terrible things befall them, they are shown to have nothing but their masters' interests at heart. Granted, it may be unlikely that the powerless would be overtly talking back and setting their masters straight; however, the novel gives no indication that they even have any private wishes of recrimination, or much of a private life, for that matter. Given this portrayal, it is even more difficult for me to muster any interest in Amir's suffering. But to suggest that perhaps we're misinterpreting the servants' subservient attitudes because we approach the story from a different time, place, or culture, is simply to engage in a cultural relativism borne out of -- and perpetuating -- the very same paternalism.

To clarify my point, let's look at some comparable examples from US culture. Consider any one of a huge number of films such as *Driving Miss Daisy*, *Clara's Heart*, *Bagger Vance*, or *Ghost* (all simply continuing a tradition that reaches back to Shirley Temple's days) in which noble servants or similar helpers have absolutely no concern in their lives other than making sure the wealthy people they are serving have happy, fulfilled lives -- while they themselves never seem to have any of their own personal hopes, desires, triumphs, tragedies, or even any hint of a home, family, personal, or romantic life at all. Their total happiness is bound up entirely with serving the lives of their rich counterparts. It is this quality, present throughout Hosseini's book, that bothers me most.

In the end, however, a beautifully written story could have overcome these criticisms -- or at the very least, I would have been able to temper or counter my points above with lavish praise for the writing. However, here, again, the novel falls flat. It is not particularly well-written. As some other commenters have also pointed out, the storytelling is quite heavy-handed, and the narrative suffers from implausible plot twists and uncanny coincidences, and a writing style that relies far too heavily on cliches and obvious literary devices.

I wish that I could say I liked the book more. To answer [another commenter's] question, I haven't read *A Thousand Splendid Suns*; I'm afraid I wasn't particularly motivated to do so after my reaction to this one. However, I do believe, as that commenter also suggests, that there is something to be gained from the debate and discussion that the book has inspired.

La Petite Américaine says

After pondering long and hard, I'm going to try now to articulate just what it was about this book that sucked so much, why it has offended me so greatly, and why its popularity has enraged me even more. This book blew so much that I've been inspired to start my own website of book reviews for non-morons. So let us explore why.

First, let's deal with the writer himself. Hosseini's father worked for Western companies while in Afghanistan. While daddy (who I am guessing, from Hosseini's tragic account of the "fictional" father, never accepts his son) worked and got wealthy, normal Afghans lived their lives. When war broke out, Hosseini's father was offered a safe position in Iran. Just before the revolution in Iran, his father was offered another job in Paris, before finally taking the family to the USA.

That's fine ... some of us are lucky in life. Others are not. What bothers me, though, is that *The Kite Runner* is so obviously what Hosseini WISHES had happened.

There is no doubt in my mind that the Hassan character really did exist in some form or another. Surely Hosseini had a friend/sometimes playmate/servant who was left behind while Hosseini's powerful family escaped. Surely, Hosseini feels guilty for leaving his homeland by simple privilege while the less fortunate were left behind to fight the Soviets, the Mujahideen, and then the Taliban. And surely, Hosseini wishes he were some flawed hero that didn't simply get lucky. He **wishes** he'd majored in English, as the protagonist does, and published fiction books instead of becoming a run-of-the-mill doctor; he **wishes** his father had depended upon him in the USA as happens in the book, instead of getting by just fine as a rich exile with a daddy-doesn't-love-me complex; he **wishes** he could go back to Afghanistan, risking his life to make amends for his shitty and cowardly past, instead of remaining a wealthy outsider living happily in the USA.

Hosseini is simply some guy who feels guilty about having escaped what so many of his fellow countrymen couldn't, and he makes up for it in fantasy in a million ways: accepting his fallen father, marrying an "unsuitable" woman, listening to a voice from the past, saving the son of his friend he watched being raped decades before (when he was too selfish to intervene), stomaching the live stoning of a burka-clad woman and her adulterous lover, taking a beating from an old enemy/Taliban child molestor, giving \$2000 to a poor smuggler who tries to feed his kids on \$3 a week, and saving a 12 year-old from suicide. If Hosseini REALLY did all this, what a hero he would be. Instead, he just makes it up and calls it a novel ... and people devour this shit with tears, labeling it as "inspirational" and "moving."

What really bothers me? Besides all of the contrived and predictable plot twists?? What really disturbs me is that people not only eat this shit up, but they also call it "literature," award it, and give this guy money and license to write another book.

For lack of better words ... WTF?!?!?! Has everyone just gone STUPID?!?!?!

I could go on about how the writing sucks, especially when the author admits to using cliches (elephant in the room, dark as night, thin as a rake, et fucking c) but I won't.

Why? A couple of reasons:

- 1) If you liked this book, a part of you is sick, and a larger part of you is an idiot
- 2) I could write a 100-page thesis about how much this book blew monkey chunks, but it's not worth my time

3) This shit sells, and Hosseini, between his stupid book and movie deals, is an even richer man than he was before ... which in the end, makes him smarter than you, me, and everyone else He understands the market and fed it back to us. We probably deserve it.

????? says

In 2012, when I was Mathematics teacher at a private high school in Iran, I had an Afghan student in my class. Sometimes, I discussed with my students about literature, and I told them of novels and poem. I found it very strange that my students had no interest in literature and even sometimes looked with hostility to this discussion. Days passed and much time was left to the end of school year. One day I saw Ali, Afghan student, came to me and had a booklet in his hand and I saw in his eyes several times as if he wanted to say something, but he was quiet. I waited for a little, and after a few moments, I began to speak. He smiled, and with a special Afghan accent, he said " I have written a story, sir " and became quiet again. I said "it's excellent! ", and I asked, "do you read books? ". Yes, sir, he replied. I asked, "what kind of books do you like? ". Mark Twain and John Steinbeck and Jules Verne, he answered. I asked what you have written? He replied I wrote a story about a 13 years old Afghan boy who immigrated to Iran. I got his booklet, and I read it in a week. It was a dark story. A week later, we discussed again after class. Ali invited me to go his house at night for reading books. I was pleased, and I greeted this plan. When night arrived, I took the kite runner and went to Ali's home. When I entered the house, I saw a house with mud walls that has no rooms, except a small hull that there was a table in the middle of it and almost nine children were dining. Of clothes of Ali's father, it was obvious that he was a building worker and he welcomed me very sincerely. I thanked him, and I went to the storehouse in the corner of the yard that Ali had made it, a place to be alone. Ali took the book and with incredible passion began to read. This process was repeated almost every night for a week, and we have read half of the Kite Runner. Among pages of the book, Ali informed me about Afghanistan, explained of how twenty people, entered Iran with a small car, illegally and secretly. Of how his classmates ridiculed him because of his Afghan accent, of how he was forced to work in a brick burner factory all days after the school, of how his dad has forced him to marry at the age of 13 in the summer. Then Ali proceeded to speak that he wants to be a writer and prizes the Nobel award. I saw in his room that he had Ferdowsi, Omar Khayyam, Hafiz and Rumi's book poem. When I looked at his face, I saw an unusual man who was ahead of his time and situation. Ali said, because Afghans have been banned of the registration in public schools in Tehran, he is forced to register in a private school, and now he and his mother must work hard to pay school charges.

The next week, I went to class, but I didn't see Ali. When I asked the guys about him, they replied that because his father hadn't citizenship card and passport, he was arrested, and all of them have deported to Afghanistan. I was agitated that I couldn't continue reading Kite Runner never. Even I felt so depressed and sad when I saw the book in bookstores. Until this spring, after three years, I got a message in WhatsApp messenger from Ali, that congratulated teachers day to me. He was written that he married to a girl who was in love with her and they have a two months old girl baby. He was written he is working at a bookstore in Kabul and he has read almost thousand books in three years. He was written they have the 4G Internet in Kabul and I replied him, it's supposed to we have 4G in Tehran as well, soon! When I received the message, I could reread the Kite Runner. It was a great book, especially for me, recall nostalgia of tired immigrants and unfavorable circumstances.

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didn't "feel" while reading this one. I experienced a full range of emotions.

In the end, it grounded me and put all of my petty gripes into perspective. We all need to be reminded of how blessed we are at times. I highly recommend this book to anyone that is looking for an emotional and enlightening story.

Henry Avila says

Amir, a little boy growing up in the early 1970's in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, has the idyllic life, a wealthy father Baba, a widower, the mother died giving birth to Amir, he believes, the father hates him for that, in the most beautiful house some say in the city, a great friend Hassan, the son of Ali, a servant and loyal to the family. Baba and Ali had been friends too in childhood, strange since Hassan's father is just a Hazara (Mongol), Hassan's promiscuous mother, had left them to join a group of dancers , a detested minority in the country , hated and persecuted, by the dominant Pashtuns, they call themselves the real Afghans...But the world never stays the same, always moving forward for better or worse and it gets much, much worse, King Zahir Shah, peaceful, forty year reign is ended , overthrown, by his disloyal cousin, Daoud Khan, making himself the President of the Republic, whatever that is ...The communist kill the usurper, the Russians invade and forty bloody years later the wars continue... Amir and Hassan are inseparable, constantly playing together , walking to the top of the nearby hill, as Baba's son reads to Hassan, an illiterate, making up stories also, to trick his friend, he does that often to the always amiable boy, flying kites, in the blue skies, their great passion, together. Hassan saves the cowardly Amir from the local bully Assef, half - German, with blond hair and evil eyes , brass knuckles in his pocket, a crazed sadist, he enjoys inflicting major damage to his victims , but will not challenge the Hazaras powerful slingshot. Pahim Khan is Baba's, wise, best friend and business partner, frequent visitor and knows all the dark secrets that even Amir doesn't. Kind to the lonely boy, while the disappointed, cold father, at six foot five, strong as an ox, too brave, sometimes, during bad situations, he wrestled a bear once and lived to boast about his victory, sees his child, a weak boy, a bookworm, can he really be his son ? In the neighborhood kite contest, Amir with the help of Hassan wins, defeats dozens of opponents, the proud father looks glowingly from above, on his rooftop , with Pahim Khan, this is his son, at last. But while the incomparable kite runner, Hassan, follows the last blue kite, slowly falling (a symbol of an era soon gone) , that was downed by Amir to insure victory, and get the souvenir, a horrible event occurs, in a dirty alley, witnessed by timid Amir , it will ensure a lifetime of pain, remorse and unforeseen consequences. A terrific tale of redemption, a child's view of the world turned sideways, shattered into many pieces that will never be the same, but still life must go on, people are complicated, and reality is hidden from most of us .

Stephen says

I liked this book a lot. Due to the uncomfortable nature of the story told, I'll probably never read it again, but I'm glad that I did read it once. I saw it as the story of one not very likeable boy growing up in a soon to be war torn region and his eventual struggle for redemption.

I was quite surprised to see how popular some of the negative reviews of this book were and I'd like to comment on a few of the comments they contained.

One condemnatory critic said "This is the sort of book White America reads to feel worldly." Ah, if only that were truer. In a study done not long ago, over half of American adult men, when asked, admitted to having read NO books in the last year. Personally, as a white American, this book made me grateful that I grew up

where I did, and once again reminded me of how good I've had it, and how little I really know about life outside these insular, isolationist, United States.

Another critic claimed that this book "...portrays Afghanistan as backward" Personally I thought that it portrayed it as a war torn, deeply wounded country that was at one time a bit like our ante-bellum south. It was made quite clear that we saw pre-soviet Afghanistan through the eyes of a doubly privileged class, the rich child.

Another critic claimed "The members of the servant and poorer classes are consistently portrayed as saintly, absurdly self-sacrificing, one-dimensional characters." Yes, that's true. But the viewpoint is a that of an over-privileged, rich, selfish child. Given the ante-bellum south atmosphere that our protagonist sees, it's a wonder that the epithet "uncle Tom" wasn't used.

Finally one critic complained "The book fails exactly where it most needs to succeed - in the depiction of the Taliban." Personally, I felt that while that need may be great, I didn't see that as the purpose of this book.

I saw this book as the story of one man's journey toward redemption against a background of a troubled heritage. I sometimes recall doing things as a child that now makes me wonder about myself, and while I like to think I've become a better human being, I sometimes shudder at the savage, thoughtless child that was once under this skin. For the personal perspective alone, I think this book is a worthwhile, if sometimes uncomfortable, read. If you let it, it may make you a better person.

Naeem says

I found this book a failure of courage and imagination -- all the more upsetting for the author's astute sense of detail and wonderful psychological depth. But ask yourself this: if the Taliban are real humans than why are they not represented as such? No doubt we will all love the movie as well.

If you want to read a book on Afghanistan, I recommend Jason Elliot's *An Unexpected Light*.

Below is my complete review:

I started out loving this book. Hosseini is dead on target in his depiction of children's psychology, the non-contractual relationships between master and servant, and in his weaving of the threads between trauma, memory, and denial.

Further, Hosseini captures the feel of life in a Third World country. His depiction of Afghanistan confirms my own short travels in Afghanistan during the 1970s. Indeed, I was becoming ever more excited with the possibility of teaching this book in my new course on Afghanistan. But alas.

The book fails exactly where it most needs to succeed - in the depiction of the Taliban. When we do not have an archive, or the possibility of getting at the facts and narratives of a part of history, fiction can be used creatively and responsibly in order to construct something real. Take, for example, the extraordinary slave narrative written by Guy Endore -- Babouk. After years of research, Endore writes a history of a slave engaged in rebellion just prior to the Haitian Revolution.

Hosseini has the skills but not the courage nor the empathy/sympathy to portray the Taliban as historical, sociological, economic, modern creations. Discounting and trivializing his own skills, he characterizes the

Taliban in the easiest way -- as simple, cartoonish, evil. He thereby does nothing to enlighten us. Worse, he panders to a sleepwalking liberal public who happily accept his vision as a seemingly authentic reflection of their own myopia.

Most everyone is satisfied: the U.S. public for having read about a country they destroyed -- feeling all the better at having disposed of evil; the publishers for their timely profit; and Hosseini for having expressed his romantic sense of loss.

At least V.S. Niapaul is honest about his hatred for his own people. Hosseini's twist is less forgivable -- he gives aide to the very people whose malice, neglect, ignorance, and misunderstanding of Afghan people is one key factor in the destruction of this beautiful land and vital people.

A failure of imagination is often the result of a failure in will, in courage, in politics. Hosseini traps himself in the politics of nostalgia.

(For a similar review with a more academic bent, please see:

<http://www.commondreams.org/archive/2...>

Catriona (LittleBookOwl) says

4.5 stars!

Oh, my heart. This was heartbreaking and beautifully written!
