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Review:

Khaled Hosseini. *The Kite Runner*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2003.

On May 5, 2005, people gathered from all over Rhode Island at Roger Williams University, impatiently waiting to listen to a man who had traveled a long way to speak about his first novel, which has made its place their hearts. Eyes were all locked on the stage to see Khaled Hosseini, the author of the best-seller *The Kite Runner*.

Fluently and intelligently written, *The Kite Runner* not only is Hosseini's debut novel, but it is the first one written in English by an Afghan. A medical doctor living in California, Hosseini was born to a diplomat family in Afghanistan. His family left Afghanistan for France during the 1970s Golden Era and then in the 1980s immigrated to the United States. Hosseini's book begins with the story of Amir, the privileged son of a wealthy businessman in Kabul, and Hassan, the son of Amir's father's servant. Theirs is a page-turning story of death and redemption that both reveals the struggle of the Afghan people and the universality of the human condition.

The Kite Runner derives its name from an ancient Afghan hobby of dueling kites. Kite flyers attempt to down their opponent's kites. In most cases, the kite flyer is encouraged to duel aggressively at high altitudes by the 'string giver' who usually holds the string reel while the hands of kite flyers are cut by the ground glass coating of kite string. When the opponent's kite has been downed, then the real battle turns into a race, the kite run, to see who retrieves the fallen kite.

In the novel, Hosseini depicts the sociopolitical climate of Afghanistan and the Afghan community living in exile or as immigrants in the United States. While the novel is an easy read, it requires plenty of attention and willingness to deal with multidimensional problems, which unfold in three parts. In the first part, Hosseini recreates a lost Afghanistan during the last days of the monarchy of Zahir Shah and the regime that overthrew him. The second part explores emigration during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the tragedies of displaced and tired people living in exile; it well describes the process of immigration and its implications for the expatriate community. The last part gives insight into the Taliban's regime in Afghanistan.

As Hosseini made clear when visiting our campus, he believes that despite the many media stories about Afghanistan, little has been said about the Afghan people themselves, their culture, and their traditions—how they lived in their country and how they have managed abroad as exiles. Throughout each page of this novel, readers can find that the author is telling a story he has invented from his life experience as an Afghan American and from what he imagines about those who lived through the turmoil he dramatizes. To create a unique story about Afghan people, Hosseini knits together dialectical phrases of Dari and Pashtu with Afghan history, cultural traditions, humor, and social criticism. Hosseini confronts many prejudgments that exist in some Afghan groups and families. He bravely tells the fictional tale of people growing up under the same roof, but treated differently. Hosseini believes that "fiction is a wonderful medium to convey such things. The role of fiction is to talk about difficult subjects, precisely about things that make people cringe or make people uncomfortable, or things that generate debate and perhaps some understanding."

Throughout the novel, the reader is exposed to many characters, some heroic and some despicable: Amir's father, Baba, the bear wrestler, the honest, and respected man in his generation; Amir, the jealous protagonist and fearful son of that Baba; Hassan, the simple, innocent, and loyal servant and friend of Amir; Rahim Khan, Baba's friend, the progressive and encourager of Amir; Sohrab, the scared but courageous son of Hassan; and Asif, both the extremely cruel neighbor of Amir in his childhood and the brutal Taliban official during the Taliban regime. Each character plays their fictional roles tremendously well, representing the politics and culture in Afghanistan during those decades of war.

Even though Khaled Hosseini lived away from Afghanistan during these decades, he has captured a mostly authentic Afghan experience by relying on eyewitnesses, media reports, television or radios. Those interested can read the book in at least one of the twelve languages or wait to see what DreamWorks is going to present when the film version of this novel is released in the near future. We can only hope a film version of *The Kite Runner* is true to the multidimensional problems Hosseini's characters face.

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