

# The balance of dying: complex approaches to mortality in the kite runner

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



There is a considerable difference between being dead, and dying. Everyone is dying, some people die for ninety years, others for three. Death cannot be escaped. Although, with this mindset, a question is sparked-is anyone truly living? Humans are born into this world with a blank slate and an infinite number of pages to fill; the sole purpose being to live fully and completely within this notebook. People are meant to live each second to its fullest potential, basking in the expanse of the world without hesitation. Terrified of missing a second in an entity of time, the main goal is to preserve in whatever means necessary, spending as much time as we have surrounded by friends and loved ones. If we think on this behavior for a moment, all of this is a drive someone feels when they are given an expiration date. So, it appears as if living and dying are two contrasting words with the same meaning. It is Khaled Hosseini (born in Kabul Afghanistan) whom most effectively argues death is not what is important, but rather the pages beforehand. In *The Kite Runner*, an exuberant novel written in 2003, Hosseini uses personal references, and knowledge of the Soviet invasion in his home country to stretch classic ideals of living and dying. In fact, it is proven perception and reaction are the factors impacting these ethics. Hosseini proves continuously death in life is possible. The characters are so desperate for viability and happiness, they spend their entire lifetimes dying for unreachable targets. Whereas Hassan, and the tragedy surrounding him, live on vibrantly throughout life and death.

Amir is a prime example of death in life. He is constantly presented dying, in one sense or another. Early on, Amir shows signs of morbidity. Feeling responsible for his mother's demise during childbirth, Amir struggles with

guilt, longing, and desperation. In turn, he spends his lifetime dying and hungry for his father's love and approval. Fearing a lifetime of guilt and burden, Amir's mindset begins to change. Thus, showing through his reoccurring thoughts "[he] always felt like Baba hated [him] a little. And why not? After all, [Amir] did kill [Baba's] beloved wife, his beautiful princess [didn't] [he]? The least [Amir] could [do] [is] to have the decency to [turn] out a little more like [his father]" (19). Baba's demeanor, words, choices, and behaviors impact Amir throughout his existence, leaving the boy devastated and guilt stricken. Feelings, that stem from the dilemma "[he] [hasn't] turned out like [Baba]" (19). Desperately, Amir reacts to his father by frantically trying to earn his respect. Despite the good-hearted intentions that lay behind Amir's actions, it is evident he is the author of his own death. Within the span of a few chapters, Amir finds himself dying from a new guilt, blossoming from his injustice against Hassan. The failure hangs over his head, driving Amir to confess he had been "[hoping] [...] someone would wake up and hear, so [he] wouldn't have to live with [his] lie anymore[.] But [when] no one woke up...[he] understood the nature of [his] new curse" (72). Amir is so eager to abridge his sins and release himself from guilt, his life becomes revolved around this, and this alone. Often finding himself feeling empty, forlorn, and incomplete, Amir begins missing out on the world around him. Amir never truly experiences life, proving the ideal death in life is possible. Similarly, to Amir's situation, if an event is perceived so negatively that it becomes an obsession, it has the ability to destroy life, and demolish the potential of true living.

Meanwhile, Baba has his own unique way of showing unsuccessful attempts at living a life of happiness. His most obvious, and perhaps worst offense is his constant disappointment in Amir. The world to Baba, is clean-cut, black and white, where everything and everyone has its place. But, Amir is a benevolent spirit, and lacks the conformity of Baba's standards. Anger, and pure confusion renowned the only response that Baba can muster. He wants nothing more than Amir to grow up exactly like him. Instead, Amir is a "boy who can't stand up for himself" (22), and Baba's worst concern is Amir will then "[become] a man who can't stand up for anything" (22). These actions and thoughts eventually lead to Baba's downfall. Filled with loss, emptiness, and guilt, Baba struggles to come to terms with an imperfectly sculpted son, and a boy he can never claim as his own. Baba's decisions are the causation of his own awareness. Baba, Hassan's biological father, knows he can never legitimately accept Hassan as his own. The knowledge of this causes an unspeakable turmoil- one that can never be shared or understood by anyone else. When Ali, Baba's childhood friend and the man that Hassan calls father, decides to leave with Hassan, Baba's suffering is amplified. Amir's father pleads, yells, and fights for Hassan and Ali, but it is with no avail. "'Please,' Baba [says], but Ali [...] already turned to the door, Hassan trailing him. I'll never forget the way Baba said that, the pain in his plea, the fear" (107). Due to the tragedy of his own sins, a lifetime of desperation is cemented in Baba; attributes masked behind judgement and anger. Baba is best described as "[a] man torn between two halves [...] [Amir] and Hassan. [Baba] loved [them] both, but he could not love Hassan the way he longed to, openly and as a father. So, he took his anger out on [Amir] instead [...]"

When he saw [Amir], he saw himself. And his guilt. [...] [he] was also being hard on himself. [Baba], like [Amir], was a tortured soul” (302).

Inconceivable emotions transform Baba, and he spends the rest of his life full of urgency to atone for his greatest sins. Everything Baba did, “ feeding the poor, giving money to friends in need, it was all a way of redeeming himself...” (302). However, nothing helps Baba, and he remains unpleased, sorrowful, and on the brink of death. Thus, Baba goes to show spending a lifetime yearning and desperate, it is the equivalent of spending a lifetime dying; hence showing the extraordinary power of death in life.

Assef is another example of dissolution in existence being an inducement of human perception. The classic textbook example of a sociopath, Assef is murderous, heinous, and evil; marketing all words that stand out as prominent quality traits for destruction. The catch is Assef appears truly happy with his life and choices, equally speaking out and saying; “ you don’t know the meaning of the word ‘ liberating’ until you’ve...stood in a roomful of targets, let the bullets fly, free of guilt and remorse, [knowing] you are virtuous and good and decent, [knowing] you’re doing God’s work” (277). Assef speaks out about how his life is complete, happy, admitting that he is “ free of guilt” and “ doing God’s work”. Upon closer examination, it appears in reality Assef shares a bond with the other characters. He is in a state of pain, desolation, and lifelong death. All of Assef’s behaviors and choices can be tied back to his childhood. As a boy, Assef was raised to believe he was above everyone and everything, never having a true role model to light the way for him. In this state of loneliness and confusion Assef acts out. His

actions are rash, and to one's eye, evil. But the reality of it is that Assef was merely hungry for self-realization; hungry to find something that made him belong. In his eyes, his injustices against Hassan, the Hazara population, and nearly every person in Afghanistan, was nothing more than a plea for peace and acceptance. As evident in the case of Assef, when desperation is present, it has the power to be catastrophic.

Hassan is the shining example of the human perception involved with the concept of living and dying. Hassan lived a truly cataclysmic life, beginning without a mother- a woman who had rejected him due to a deformity beyond control. His mother, Sanaubar "[took] one glance at the baby in Ali's arms, [saw] the cleft lip, and barked a bitter laughter... She [refused] to even hold Hassan, and just five days later she was gone" (10). Hassan's tragedy grows, transforming into a brutal rape, and a betrayal by his childhood best friend, and biological brother. But his suffering comes to a close, when he is ferociously murdered in the courtyard of his own home. It is this, however, that proves to be the most important mark about Hassan. Hassan does withstand an insufferable amount of adversity, but he drastically differs from the other characters in the novel. Hosseini presents the idea that Hassan's reaction to negativity and pain is the reason behind his genuinely happy life. He is free from guilt, and yearning. Hassan looks upon life with endless positivity and happiness. These quality traits are the building blocks on which Hassan views his time on earth. From there, Hassan grows phenomenally, overcoming all tragedy, and proving that through forgiveness and loyalty, a life without pain is always within reach. Hassan goes on to

write a letter to Amir, confirming his happiness and contentedness with life. The letter is presented to Amir by Rahim Khan, and exposes Hassan's pure state of lifelong euphoria. I dream of good things, and praise Allah for that. I dream that Rahim Khan sahib will be well. I dream that my son will grow up to be a good person, a free person, and an important person. I dream that lawla flowers will bloom in the streets of Kabul again and rubab music will play in the samovar houses and kites will fly in the skies. And I dream that someday you will return to Kabul to revisit the land of our childhood. If you do, you will find an old faithful friend waiting for you. May Allah be with you always. (218) Even in the end when Amir was certain he had immensely wronged Hassan, and he was undeserving of forgiveness, Hassan remained loyal, faithful, and forever a friend to Amir. Thus, it is proven throughout contrasting differences, Hassan believed nothing in life was worth permanent suffering. He made it clear his pain was real and evident, but the reaction to suffering has the ability to create either pure happiness, or lifelong devastation- a sensation of dying throughout existence.

Imagine a life of authentic joy, free from feelings of yearning, pain, and guilt. Hosseini utilizes his characters to prove that a life of this variety is possible. By illuminating desperation, human backlash, and juxtaposing the standard ideas of living and dying, Hosseini shows what is possible if negativity overrules life. Amir, Baba, and Assef are clear pieces of evidence that aid in forming this argument. The three men dedicate their lives to atoning for sins and suffering, back-sliding into a constant aspiration for more. Hassan and the death around him, are polar opposites. Hassan frees his life and spirit of

the death revealed with suffering, and lives on truly and vibrantly. Thus, proving true happiness comes from within, and pain is meaningless if we refuse to relinquish control. Hosseini masters language and emotion to sculpt the argument, self-pity is a concept of human creation. If avoided, a life of undeniable bliss is possible. However, with suffering, we are all damned to a lifetime of eternal death.