

Khaled been 'healed  
at last' and begins



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Khaled Hosseini, author of *The Kite Runner*, and M. L.

Stedman, author of *The Light Between Oceans*, use different literary techniques, appropriate to their text types, to portray the idea that the past is never over. Hosseini uses framed, first person, retrospective narration to draw on his own experience of Afghanistan, depicting a privileged, upper class boy, Amir, who betrays his servant and loyal friend by not interfering in his rape. Stedman, in a linear narrative, unravels a story centred around a young couple's desire for children, that leads them to commit an act, with good intention, that causes pain and torment, but equally brings growth. Hosseini and Stedman use different literary techniques such as narrative structure, characterization of the central protagonists and the exploration of similar themes to convey the progression of guilt to redemption, ultimately reinforcing the notion that one can never escape the consequences of their past, but can pursue a degree of absolution. Both Stedman and Hosseini use narrative structure to portray the guilt-ridden mental state of the protagonists and position the reader to observe the consequences of the protagonist's actions. *The Kite Runner* is presented as a framed narrative, through first person retrospective narration.

This perspective provides detailed insight into Amir's internal thoughts and feelings at pivotal moments within the text. As Amir recounts the event of Hassan's rape he states that he, ' Almost said something. Almost. The rest of my life may have turned out differently if I had'. This statement by Amir illustrates the intense regret and guilt he feels as he relives his act of cowardice. Amir's irrational mental state is revealed when he confronts his childhood enemy, Assef, and the consequences of his past actions years

later. After the violent confrontation with Assef, Amir feels that he has been 'healed at last' and begins laughing in respite.

It is in this scene that Amir feels he has finally come to redeem himself. By contrast, *The Light Between Oceans* is a linear narrative, conveyed through omniscient third person narration. Dissimilar to Hosseini's immediate confrontation of the notion that the past is never over with the statement 'the past claws its way out', Stedman's use of text structure allows for gradual exposure of the notion that one can never escape their past. This progressive exposure by Stedman is demonstrated when, at the beginning of the text, during deep conversation with Isabel, Tom states that 'sometimes it's good to leave the past in the past'.

However, as the narrative unravels and the ramifications of his actions are felt, he states that 'sins catch up with you in the end'. Moreover, Stedman's use of third person narration, unlike Hosseini, establishes a sense of distance between central protagonists, Tom and Isabel, while enabling the couples contrasting perspectives and internal thoughts regarding their difficult situation to be expressed to the reader. The themes of guilt and atonement are the driving force behind both central protagonists' actions. Their feelings of guilt and the subsequent search for atonement define the choices they make later in their lives. Stedman, primarily through Tom's character, explores the theme of guilt and atonement using plot. Through plot, Stedman puts before the reader the complexity of human emotion.

While Tom feels immense guilt for his actions from the outset, seeing reason and considering the pain his choice will cause others, Isabel's strong

maternal drive and instinct obscures her ability to reason and impedes her feelings of guilt. It is not until much later in the text, when the ramifications of what she has done are felt that Isabel develops true feelings of regret and recognises she must 'do what's right'. Although exploring similar themes to Stedman, Hosseini takes a different approach using flashbacks to convey Amir's awareness of his guilt and illustrate his search for atonement.

The Kite Runner begins with Amir stating that he 'became what he is today at the age of twelve...in the winter of 1975.' This indicates that Amir's entire life revolves around the guilt he feels over Hassan's rape. When Amir discovers that his wife, Soraya, is infertile, he believes that 'something, someone, somewhere, had decided to deny him of fatherhood for the things he had done'. Hosseini introduces his novel with the line, 'looking back, I realise I have been peeking into that deserted alley for the last twenty-six years', revealing Amir's sense of remorse over his childhood actions, and the line 'there is a way to be good again', demonstrates Amir's wish for atonement. Amir immediately feels guilt for his betrayal of Hassan, as he comprehends the gravity of his actions, whereas Tom and Isabel only begin to feel guilt and understand the severity of their decision after their encounter with Lucy's biological mother, Hannah. While Tom and Isabel atone for their misdeed almost directly by returning Lucy to Hannah and serving their sentence, Amir is not offered the same opportunity to directly make amends for his error, instead finding redemption by later liberating Hassan's orphaned son from the destruction the Taliban caused in Afghanistan.

Characterisation of major and minor characters in both *The Kite Runner* and *The Light Between Oceans* is used to create an understanding of the motivations behind the protagonist's actions. Both authors present their protagonists as flawed characters affected by a troubled, damaging past. Hosseini constructs his complex protagonist as simultaneously conveying privilege and wealth and a sense of deprivation. Amir is deprived of his father's love and approval throughout his childhood and as a result becomes desperate for validation. Amir's feeling of responsibility for killing his mother, his father's 'beloved wife', paired with his deep longing for his father's acceptance, help to characterize Amir as a vulnerable, flawed individual.

Furthermore, Hosseini depicts Amir, through retrospective narration, as a dishonest and manipulative child, demonstrated by his small, yet significant, violations of Hassan's trust. Amir uses his privilege to demean Hassan, asserting his superiority with stating that 'When we came across a big word that he didn't know. I'd tease him, expose his ignorance', and boasting that 'Words were secret doorways and I held the keys'. The characterisation of Amir as flawed and manipulative brands him as an unreliable character.

Much like Amir, Tom a 'war hero' and Isabel are portrayed as somewhat flawed characters as a result of their past, with Tom damaged and left unable to show emotion by his experiences serving his country on the front line and Isabel still grieving the loss of both of her brothers. Tom's statement, 'I've been around so much death for so long that it has made me numb', further characterises him as a vulnerable, wounded individual.

Additionally, when the dilemma of whether to alert authorities about the dead body and the newborn or to dispose of the body and care for the child

as if it were their own arises, Tom hesitates, showing that he is capable of comprehending the possible consequences that may result from his decision. It also illustrates that he is able to consider and understand the pain and torment his actions may bring to others, helping to characterize Tom as an individual driven by reason and compassion for other people. Despite his initial fears and uncertainty, Tom's compassionate nature and love for his wife prompts his eventual decision to accept the newborn as his own, allowing Isabel to have the child she was deprived of. Both authors use characterization as a tool to convey the protagonist's deep feelings of shame and strengthen the concept that the past cannot be escaped. Through their texts, Hosseini and Stedman explore the impact of guilt over a decision made in a time of great stress. The consequences of our actions and the influence they hold over our everyday lives is explored by both authors throughout the tragedies of *The Kite Runner* and *The Light Between Oceans*.

Through the use of various literary techniques, Stedman and Hosseini both explore how the consequences of one's actions follow them throughout life, and discuss the protagonists' guilt and their search for atonement, effectively portraying the long and sometimes difficult journey from penitence to eventual absolution. Hosseini and Stedman use these features to expose the myopic attitude of the characters while also inviting consideration of the importance of confronting and atoning for the past. Hosseini's sustained use of first person narration invites understanding that Amir's response as a child was driven by fear of humiliation and a desire to be loved. Stedman, on the other hand, uses a more disjointed third person narration, establishing a sense of distance between reader and the central

protagonists', Tom and Isabel, enabling the reader to observe the events that unfold without hindrance from personal thoughts and emotions of the narrator, while also challenging them to consider how their own actions affect others.

Through their respective texts, the authors warn us of the consequences of our actions and ask that when we are faced with a moral conflict, we rise above, to find the courage to avoid cowardice and do what is right.