

# An Analysis of *The Kite Runner* from the Perspective of New Historicism

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**Abstract:** *The Kite Runner* is the representative work of Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan-American writer, which tells the story of growth and trauma, betrayal and redemption that happened in two generations. From the perspective of new historicism, this paper aims to interpret how textuality of history and historicity of texts are embodied in *The Kite Runner*, which reflects the interactive relationship between the text and history, and helps readers have a deeper understanding of the interaction of cultural, social and historical factors reflected in the novel and the subversion theme of the novel to the mainstream values of Afghan society.

**Keywords:** *The Kite Runner*; New historicism; Racial discrimination; Overturn

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## 1. Introduction

The term “new historicism” was first proposed by Stephen Greenblatt, a professor at the University of California in the early 1980s, and later gradually developed into a new school of literary criticism. The representative figures in this field include Greenblatt, Montrose, Hayden White, etc. New historicism emphasizes that history and text cannot be viewed in isolation. History is not a purely authoritative fact, and text is not a complete aesthetic structure. History and texts are equivalent, and have intertextual relations that influence and confirm each other<sup>[1]</sup>. *The Kite Runner* is a novel that involves human nature, race, and war, in which the author Hosseini takes Afghanistan and the United States in the 1970s as the background, and uses the traditional Afghan childhood custom of “kite chasing” as a clue to deeply demonstrate the soul redemption of people in extreme situations and reveal the struggle of human nature. This paper aims to explore the profound theme contained in the novel under the new historicism.

## 2. Textuality of History Embodied in *The Kite Runner*

Textuality of history refers to the fact that authors who write about history cannot come into contact with a so-called comprehensive and real history. They only interpret and construct ideas based on historical materials, so that the explained history has the textual characteristics of narrative discourse structure. *The Kite Runner* spans from the 1970s to the beginning of the 21st century, in which Afghanistan has experienced many changes. The author vividly and concretely portrays the society of Afghanistan, which was turbulent under the flames of war<sup>[8]</sup>. In the novel, the author uses a series of time settings to remind readers, constantly pointing the text towards history, combining real history with fictional characters, describing the people’s flight and escape during the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan, etc. Between the lines, the author reveals the profound suffering brought to the Afghan people by the crazy war, making readers have a deeper understanding of the history of Afghanistan, which demonstrates its textuality. From the perspective of new historicism, *The Kite Runner* brings history into the literary text by describing the social scenes in Afghanistan during the war and the growth stories of ordinary people. It reconstructs the real historical time, reflects the real historical culture of the Afghan society at that time, and attacks the Taliban regime’s destruction of human nature.

In addition, the experience and background of the protagonist Amir are very similar to that of the author Hosseini. They both born in Afghanistan and developed a strong interest in writing at a young age, and had to leave their hometown to seek refuge in the United States. Differently, Hosseini successfully obtained a medical certificate to become a doctor after graduating from medical school and began writing in his spare time and ultimately completed his first work, *The Kite Runner*. While Amir makes writing as his job. Therefore, perhaps Hosseini achieved his own aspirations through Amir’s characterization. It is no accident that the background of Amir’s growth in the novel is highly similar to the author’s life experience, because they both went through such a very chaotic period that made a professional doctor create such excellent works.

## 3. Historicity of Texts Embodied in *The Kite Runner*

Historicity of texts refers to “all written texts-not only those studied by critics, but also the social texts in which people live-have

specific cultural specificity and are embedded with the material content of society<sup>[2]</sup>. That is to say, the text is not only a carrier of language expression, but also participates in the composition of history<sup>[6]</sup>. Therefore, through historical analysis of the text, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of how the author organically combines his thoughts with the social background, reflecting the integration of Afghanistan's history and reality. In the text, the author expresses his understanding and feelings of history, reproducing the 30 year history of the Afghan war and domestic unrest. The Afghan people live in a world of fear, unable to feed and warm themselves, and many women, children, and elderly people die from epidemics, famine, and injuries during the war. People's lack of material possessions forces them to shift their attention to spiritual pursuits. In Hosseini's works, the personal growth of heroes and the symbolic expression of spiritual pursuit represent the Afghan people in a special period. The growth of the protagonists Amir and Hassan in the story is a microcosm of the lives of Afghan children influenced by military and religious influences, fully describing their internal and external growth. Until today, Afghan children still face many serious living conditions, with only half of them in school, while many children work in the streets or fields to support their families. They deserve the attention of people around the world, which is the historicity of texts.

*The Kite Runner* was created in the context of the "9/11 Incident" era. One of the reasons why Hosseini decided to publish this novel is to let more people understand the true Afghanistan through humanized writing, and dispel people's prejudice against their ancestral country. After its publication, the novel gained popularity worldwide and attracted many people's attention to Afghanistan. Readers affirmed its warm portrayal of the Afghan people and culture, and praised the author's humanistic care and humanitarian thinking. In terms of culture, the novel sparked readers' attention to the Afghan war and refugees, as well as their reflection on human nature. In addition, for the Afghan people who are in dire straits, the publication of this novel also brings them a certain degree of spiritual comfort. Therefore, through the analysis of the local historicity of literature, it can be understood that literary texts are not only influenced by historical and social backgrounds, but also constitute an indispensable part of history and influence the development of society and history.

#### **4. Subversion and Containment in the text**

New historicism not only explores literature from the perspective of politicization, but also criticizes events, subverts and suppresses them<sup>[5]</sup>. Among them, subversion refers to questioning traditional forms of social attribute ideology and proposing rebellion, which can allow the public or individuals to express their dissatisfaction. Inhibition refers to the inclusion or dissolution of ideologies that represent traditional social attributes that bear many disruptive forces<sup>[9]</sup>. In this novel, human nature is an important content and idea displayed, allowing human nature to achieve maximum display in the process of subversion and suppression of different forms of characters.

Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic and multilingual country with different tribes, reflecting significant differences in customs and religious beliefs. The conflict between Pashtuns people and Hazaras people is the root of Afghan national separatism and religious nationalism<sup>[4]</sup>. In Afghanistan, Pashtuns account for 60% of the total population. They are the First Nations in Afghanistan and dominate in social, economic, political and cultural aspects. Hazaras people account for 9% of the total population. In terms of religious belief, 90% of Afghans are Sunnis, only 10% are Shiites, and almost all of these 10% Shiite believers are Hazaras. Although both are Muslims, there have been numerous disagreements and conflicts between Sunni and Shia factions in terms of doctrine, rituals, and other aspects<sup>[3]</sup>. Due to various reasons, there is a deep-rooted racial hierarchy between two ethnic groups.

In *The Kite Runner*, under the influence of Pashtuns and Hazaras people's sense of hierarchy, although Amir and Hassan grew up under the same roof and drank the same milk, Amir did not think he and Hassan were friends, because "I am a Pashtuns, he is a Hazaras, I am a Sunni, he is a Shiite, and nothing can change."<sup>[7]</sup> When Amir saw Hassan being raped by Assef, he chose to leave quietly. This consciousness of ethnic hierarchy is rooted in the heart of young Amir, blinding him, making him unable to face or directly stifling some of his friendships with Hassan. Amir and Hassan's turbulent fate in a specific social and religious context highlights the author's criticism and subversion of unreasonable social and religious factors. At the same time, the author criticizes the deeply rooted racial hierarchy in Afghanistan by borrowing the relationship between father, Ali, Amir, and Hassan, where father and son, or the two brother cannot recognize each other and friendship cannot be established. The author's attention to the marginalized vulnerable ethnic groups shows his new historicism spirit of subverting the mainstream power and social authority.

#### **5. Conclusion**

New historicism is devoted to studying the historical and cultural context of literary texts, and also the significance and influence of the text on its context. In the textual analysis of history, we know that the story of the protagonist Amir comes from the author's real personal experience and is based on historical life, but it transcends the historical life and is the writer's reconstruction narrative of history.

From the historical study of texts, we know that the author's text creation will be influenced by the social and historical background, and his text will also affect the development of history and participate in the reconstruction of history.

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