



From Narrative Voice to Stylistic Form: Mapping Betrayal and Redemption in The Kite Runner

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
Article History:		This study investigates the relationship between the narrative voice, stylistic form and reader cognition in the construction of betrayal and redemption in <i>The Kite Runner</i> by Khaled Hosseini. The study is based on an integrated approach which draws on the classical narratology of Gérard Genette, post-classical cognitive narratology, and stylistic linguistics, and examines how moral meaning and emotional involvement are not only created by the events in the narratives but also by the way the events are narrated and linguistically realized. The analysis is qualitative, text-based, and focused on three major narrative moments: Amir's betrayal of Hassan, Amir's psychological (emotional) exile in America, and Amir's act of redemption through Sohrab. The study discusses how the narration of moral development is narrated as a retroactive with the burden of new knowledge through the use of homodiegetic narration and internal focalization. The findings show how within a cognitive framework these narrative and linguistic structures produce reader sympathy by evoking the moral simulation of Amir, rather than moral validation, and place readers inside Amir's moral confusion and partial ethical repair. The study makes a significant contribution in the field of narratology and stylistics by providing a model of analysis that accounts for the interaction of narrative form, language and cognition in the production of ethical and emotional experience in postcolonial fiction.
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INTRODUCTION

For centuries, storytelling has been an effective medium to convey emotions, ethics, and social experience. One such example in modern fiction is Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003), a novel in which the relationship of such key elements as betrayal, guilt, and redemption unfolds within the framework of the story's structure and stylistics. Readers' emotional response to the novel stems from the moral journey they take together with the author and main character, reflecting on their ethical concerns and opportunities for redemption. This essay provides an analysis of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* from the perspective of both narratology and stylistics to identify how the author uses narrative voice and style to evoke readers' emotions and ethics.

The following analysis employs Gérard Genette's classic narratological framework particularly in regards to his ideas regarding narrative voice, focalization, and temporal framework in conjunction with post-classical cognitive narratology. Genette's taxonomy is indispensable for establishing implications of structure regarding Amir's homodiegetic narration, the role of internal focalization and the role of retrospective narration. Nevertheless, classical narratology, although it provides a fine structure to describe narration, is incapable of describing the emotional and ethical aspects of narrative experience and, in particular, how readers engage with the moral dilemmas and emotions of characters. To overcome this hurdle, the present analysis brings in some cognitive narratological ideas, primarily those involving the activation of the readers' narrative empathy and the extent to which readers simulate characters' mental and emotional spheres.

The central theme of this approach is that the ethical power of *The Kite Runner* takes shape in the unity of the narrative and stylistic form. Linguistic features like deixis, modality, discourse markers and transitivity are used as tools of narrative involvement, which relate to the perception, evaluation and moral interpretation of events. Deictic expressions refer to spatial and temporal locations of traumatic experiences, modality expresses hesitation, obligation and regret, and transitivity patterns highlight or incomprehensible agency at key moments. All these features direct the reader's focus, facilitate emotional closeness, and influence moral evaluations, enabling the creation of an ethically charged story world that goes beyond just narrating events (Fernandez-Quintanilla & Stradling, 2023).

This can be felt through Amir's "homodiegetic" perspective, which is quite personal, fearful, failing, and the repercussions of betrayal in childhood. Amir's self-understanding and sense of self-realization, influenced by his emotional wounds and lingering guilt, significantly impact the moral arc of the story and his actions later in life, providing a psychological layer to the narrative (Aruta et al., 2022). He is a man who is never a good son, never speaks up for the oppressed, never tries to be good through repentance (Almas et al., 2024). Amir's personal guilt further complicated by the broader socio-political turmoil in Afghanistan, which connects his personal guilt with collective histories of violence, displacement, and loss, ultimately placing individual trauma in a larger cultural and national context (Kanosh, 2022; Ahmad & Saeed, 2022).

Past studies on *The Kite Runner* has extensively discussed the themes of trauma, postcolonial identity, memory and guilt, but comparatively little work has been done on the systematic relationships between narrative voice and stylistic form in shaping readers' ethical and emotional responses. It is this study that will attempt to bridge this gap by combining the classical approach to narratology with the cognitive, post-classical approach, especially as presented by David Herman and Monika Fludernik (Nieragden, 2002). Post-classical methods push narratological analysis further by considering the way in which readers respond to narrative cues, respond mentally to the various aspects of a narrative, and give emotional empathy to the characters in the story, providing a basis for how one can understand the way in which the features of a text trigger moral and affective responses (Caracciolo, 2014).

The emotional impact of *The Kite Runner* relies on the reader's capacity to feel Amir's guilt, the sense of shame, and the emerging hope that he will experience as a result of the narrative techniques and the linguistic choices that engage the reader's mind. In cognitive narratology, the reader's interpretation of the story world, the psychological state of the characters and the ethical ambiguity are the focal points that are evoked by cues within the text. Deictic shifts, especially in moments of memory, dreams, and nightmares, enhance the subjective experience and anticipate the transformation of the narrative, and the stylistic patterns lead the reader to align and invest in the narrative (Hai, 2023). Genre conventions and individual reader factors also shape these processes, as they mediate the empathetic engagement and evaluation of prosocial behavior in morally complex stories (Shen et al., 2024).

The authors of this study build on this integrated narratological–stylistic approach and offers a close reading of three key narrative episodes that illustrate Amir's moral and psychological development: the betrayal of Hassan during the assault (Chapter 5 &7), Amir's

psychological exile in America (Chapter 11) and Amir's act of redemption in saving Sohrab (Chapter 25). The interplay of the positioning, the focalization and the stylistic approach of these scenes in relation to the construction of ethical tension and emotional immersion reveals the intertwining of form and feeling. Finally, this article provides an illustration of how classical and cognitive narratology can be profitably combined with stylistic criticism as a tool to understand the complex relationship between narrative technique, reader's cognition and moral judgement in post-colonial fiction (Gallese & Wojciehowski, 2011). Lastly, a more complex model for analysing the relationship between voice and form in the creation of the ethical and emotional dimensions of storytelling is provided.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The narratological approach has been consistently found to be a very suitable method to analyze *The Kite Runner* because the narrative is told from Amir's first-person, retrospective perspective and is characterized by multiple temporal shifts, memory and control of perspectives. Narrative is a key feature of the way meaning is constructed in the story, which is presented in a confessional mode that revisits, reevaluates, and morally reassesses past experiences. In this novel, Malik, Abbas and Jawad (2020) analyze it in detail using Gérard Genette's narratological theory (Genette, 1980), which has been used to analyze the novel. Their study reveals how the concepts of narrative time, level and mood structure Amir's inner conflict and moral ambivalence. This is particularly apparent in their manipulation of analepsis, the distance of the narrative, and the focalization, in which Amir is able to construct his past selectively and thus create a narrative that ranges between confession and self-justification. This analysis is a confirmation that Genette's model is working very well for describing the presence of psychological depth and ethical tension in the novel's narration.

Another narratological approach is provided by Wang Jian-rong (2009), who emphasizes on the symbolic and expressive meaning of the *kite* as a focal image in the narrative. The kite serves as a metaphorical anchor for betrayal and redemption, for Afghan cultural memory and personal trauma, says Wang. The kite is not just a plot element, but a recurring symbol that ties together Amir's childhood innocence, moral failure and subsequent attempts at redemption. The results of this study show that symbolism can do the work of narration; it is able to connect in between the individual psychology and collective identity and it is able to reinforce the ethical dimension of the narration. Malik et al. (2020) and Wang (2009) point to the importance of narrative structure and symbolic design to understanding the moral meaning in *The Kite Runner*.

These narratological studies, however, did a great job in describing how the story is structured and how it has been symbolically oriented, but they tend to be limited to structural description. They are not as successful as they could be at explaining how the reader is brought emotionally closer to Amir's guilt, nor how the way the story is written actively influences the reader's ethical opinions and feelings. The following restriction is indicative of the need to shift from traditional narratology to approaches that engage readers and process their emotions.

Post-classical and cognitive narratology are helpful approaches to the emotional, empathic and ethical reactions of readers, which are not always discussed enough by classical narratology (Nieragden, 2002; Caracciolo, 2014). These strategies are not just about the story structure, but also about reader's thinking processes for the construction of story worlds, assumptions about mental states, and affective involvement with characters. The purpose of storytelling in *The Kite Runner* is dual, according to Nayeypour (2018) who quoted Herman and Fludernik. What it does do is it is primarily Amir's healing of the trauma itself that is therapeutic, a chance for him to face the trauma in a manageable way, in a way he can tell. Secondly, it works as a vehicle to create an emotional terrain to which readers can relate and as a way to develop empathy by self-reflection. In this way, Amir's narration is a reiteration of guilt that is transformed into a quest for redemption and is a key factor in the novel's affective appeal because of its focus on personal failure.

Other research on narrative empathy has found that readers can experience empathy through other means of structuring and stylizing the text, such as the narrator's contemplation of the past, remorse, and moral judgments (Keen, 2007; Robova, 2023; Shen et al., 2024). Amir's first-person narrator voice and the way he recounts this story backwards encourages readers to experience these events, and to participate in the ongoing moral struggle. The classical narratology, therefore, is complemented by the understanding of the way in which the internal focalization and temporal layering of a narrative relate to emotional and ethical involvement (cognitive narratology).

A recent study has also highlighted the fact that the moral significance of *The Kite Runner* is not only constructed in the events but the talk too. Through the Critical Discourse Studies framework and the Social Actor framework (S.A.) of Van Leeuwen (2025), Sidra et.al. (2025) examine the construction of guilt and moral responsibility in the discourse. The methods they use involve (passiveness, association, role allocation) that help to demonstrate how Amir's acts and omissions are evaluated. The study focuses on the significance of language in the soothing of agency, blaming of the other, and the reader's sense of judgment in the presence of an inner

monologue and a narrative voice of Amir. This is a discourse approach that focuses on the moral power of the form of language, but does not make any reference to the narratological categories, such as focalization or temporal structure.

A smaller but noticeable work that focuses on the role of stylistic patterns as a source for emotional resonance in the novel. Elimane and Ben Meriem (2019) show how metaphor, in *The Kite Runner*, is a cognitive mechanism and not merely a fancy device using cognitive stylistics, specifically Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Their study reveals common metaphorical structures that unify themes of trauma, moral development, and cultural conflict, and shows how the use of metaphor can facilitate thematic coherence and emotional impact. They identified common metaphorical structures that coalesce themes of trauma, moral development, and cultural conflict and how the use of metaphor can be used to support thematic coherence and emotional impact.

In addition to metaphor, stylistic theory focuses on how narrative perspective and moral orientation may be conveyed at the micro-linguistic level, for example, by deixis, modality and transitivity (Simpson, 2004; Wales, 2014; Toolan, 2001). These features control over agency, responsibility and emotional distance. Deictic expressions help to locate traumatic memory in the particular times and spaces, modality insures hesitation and moral uncertainty, and transitivity patterns reflect whether Amir is an active agent or a passive observer. These stylistic elements are important to reader empathy and moral judgments.

In general, the literature supports four major points: Genette's narratology can have a great impact on understanding narrative structure (Genette, 1980; Malik et al., 2020); Symbolism conveys an ethical message (Wang, 2009); The discourse structure affects moral responsibility (Sidra Mahmood et al., 2025); The cognitive narratology and stylistics account for the emotional recruitment of readers (Nayebpour, 2018; Shen et al., 2024; Elimane & Ben Meriem, 2019). But most frequently these are used individually. An integrated discussion of the novel's mapping of betrayal and redemption as an ethical and emotional journey for the reader, especially at its major moments, is lacking; what is missing is an adequate analysis of how the two aspects of the novel (narrative voice and focalization (structure) and stylistic form (language)) work together.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study proposes a classical theoretical approach which integrates classical narratology, post-classical cognitive narratology and stylistic linguistics in analyzing the

constructions of betrayal and redemption in *The Kite Runner*. The multi-layered framework enables the study to go beyond the thematic interpretation to investigate the relationship between the narrative structure, reader cognition and linguistic form in the production of ethical meaning and emotional involvement. Each of the elements of the framework responds to a different level of analysis: classical narratology describes the structure of the story, the cognitive narratology offers an explanation about the emotional and moral response of the reader, and the stylistic linguistics accounts for the level of analysis of the languages used in its micro-level choices, which determine the reader's emotional and moral response and hence his/her alignment of the story.

Three structural tools for analyzing the way in which the story is being told are offered by classical narratology. The metalanguage of the narratological model by Gérard Genette (1980) is a systematic metalanguage that allows the study of the narrative voice, focalization, and temporal organization especially in terms of order, duration and frequency. *The Kite Runner*, as a memory- and time-delayed and morally reflective first-person retrospective narrative, is particularly poignant with the tools at hand.

Amir's story is homodiegetic, that is, a story in which the narrator is a character in the story. The story is told from this perspective, which limits the reader's view of events and point of view, so that he or she can only see through Amir's eyes. In addition, internal focalization restricts the reader's access to Amir's perceptions, emotions and judgments, dictating what and when they can know. Malik, Abbas and Jawad (2020) show that Hosseini uses both the narrative time and level to give Amir a chance to revisit moments of betrayal selectively, resulting in a narrative rhythm of hesitation, suppression, and delayed confession.

The idea of time (temporal manipulation) is an important aspect of the narration of moral responsibility. Amir's narration, with its constant analepsis and jumps from one time to another, presents guilt as a continual state of mind, rather than a thing of the past. The retelling of betrayal and its delay create an understanding of redemption as a process, rather than a single act. Classical narratology thus allows this study to describe how the very structure of the narration itself is part of the moral constellation that revolves around the concepts of betrayal and redemption, and not only a mere receptacle for events (Malik et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2024).

Classical narratology describes the structure of narratives, but does not fully capture the emotional and moral dimensions of narration. In order to overcome the above-mentioned

limitation, the present scheme adopts the post-classical cognitive narratology, wherein reader's engagement or involvement, empathy and moral simulation (Nieragden 2002; Caracciolo 2014) are foregrounded. Cognitive narratology does not only address the structure of the story, but also the thinking processes by which the reader builds the story worlds, anticipates the characters' actions and feels certain emotions with them.

Cognitively, narratives serve as a cue for mental simulation whereby readers imaginatively experience character states. Perspective-taking and emotional alignment allow readers to feel Amir's guilt, fear and desire for redemption, rather than just understanding it as a theme. Amir's flashbacks are necessary to the book in order to allow the reader to think about what has happened in the past, to feel remorse and to understand themselves in the present, even when they have committed a moral error, which makes them more empathetic (Nayebpour, 2018).

In this regard, the concept of cognitive narratology is very important for the comprehension of how moral ambiguity is created throughout the narrative. The reader is never given the chance to make a judgment on Amir's actions; rather, they are encouraged to experience his moral and moral doubt. This moral simulation is what makes readers feel uncomfortable when Amir is unfaithful, or feel compassion, or conflicting empathy, for Amir. As Shen et al. (2024) explain, narrative empathy could be affected by focalization, the passage of time, and feelings that are conveyed in the narrative that affect the reader's approach to ethical judgment.

This study includes cognitive narratology, and it is through the reader's cognitive and emotional interaction with the narrative that betrayal and redemption are experienced. Redemption, as such, isn't just a story resolution, it's also an ethical realignment that the reader experiences as well as the protagonist. Moreover, Stylistic linguistics is the third level of the framework, which focuses on how language creates viewpoint, agency and ethical position in micro-textual level. The analytical tools that are provided by Stylistics are enough to explain how meaning of the narrative and emotional alignment are linguistically realized.

Deixis are terms that relate the experience of the narrative to the time, place and perspective of the text (Wales, 2014). Deictic words like "that alley" or "then" are used numerous times in *The Kite Runner* to fix traumatic memory at specific time and space, leading to deep-seated guilt and emotional attachment. Deictic shifts focus reader attention and enhance subjective likeness by locating readers in Amir's remembered past. In reality, Modality states the level of certainty, the degree of obligation, or the emotional hesitancy (Simpson, 2004; Khan &

Faiz, 2025). To convey Amir's moral doubt and psychological tension, some of the adverbs and modal verbs he uses are could, might, and had to. The modal patterns help readers to see how the moral commitment and emotional strength change throughout the story. Likewise, Transitivity, a concept from functional grammar, looks at the distribution of actions, thoughts and events between participants (Toolan, 2001). Amir is often in a position to merely witness betrayal, rather than to be its instigator, a linguistic manifestation of moral retreat in moments of betrayal. In the moments of redemption, on the other hand, changes in material processes indicate a regained agency and ethical behavior. With the help of discourse markers also show the way in which Amir structures his narration, marking hesitations, justifications, or moral reflections. They help readers understand Amir's self-representation and moral stance, influencing not only their conscious judgments, but also their subconscious verdicts.

This integrated framework is then used to discuss three focus narrative episodes: betrayal, exile, and redemption, in order to explore the impact of the combination of narrative structure and stylistic patterning on creating ethical tension and emotional immersion. The study examines narrative voice and focalization and stylistic aspects like deixis, modality, and transitivity to illustrate how *The Kite Runner* creates the themes of betrayal and redemption as both events in story and reader experience. The framework allows for a thorough consideration of the interaction of form, language and cognition to create moral meaning within the novel.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are given as under:

- I. To investigate the internal focalization and the retrospective voice of the narrator in *The Kite Runner* in the construction of Amir's moral and psychological growth.
- II. To examine the language features particularly deixis, modality, discourse markers and transitivity in the novel in order to analyze their contribution to the process of focalization and involvement in the narrative.
- III. To describe how the affective and ethical aspects of the novel's major narrative moments of betrayal, exile and redemption are explained by cognitive narratology.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- I. How does internal focalization of Genette's framework and retrospective narration voice shape Amir's moral and psychological growth?

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- II. How does deixis, modality, discourse markers and transitivity linguistically contribute to the focalization and immersion of the narrative in *The Kite Runner*?
 - III. What are the novel's affective and ethical implications of the major narrative moments of betrayal, exile, and redemption in the novel explained by cognitive narratology?

METHODOLOGY

The research method used in this study is a qualitative method based on the interpretive research approach combined with narratology-stylistics approach. It is text based, theory-driven analysis, emphasizing close reading. The study uses a qualitative approach since it seeks to analyze how both the voice of narration, stylistic form, and cognitive mechanisms create moral meaning and emotional involvement in *The Kite Runner*. The aim of the research is to understand the way the narrative and linguistic devices operate in particular textual contexts.

The main data are selected portions of the book *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini. The study uses purposive sampling methods to select the moments in the narrative that are the reflection of structural and ethical significance in the text, rather than random sampling or sampling systematically. Three key moments are selected: Amir's betrayal of Hassan, his exile in America, and his redemption by saving Sohrab's life. These episodes are the most important moments in the story and feature a lot of temporal shift, stylistic patterning, and focalization. By confining the corpus to such instances, a depth of analysis can be achieved and at the same time, the study's research questions can be kept in mind.

The analysis is carried out systematically by close reading of the text, based on the integrated theoretical framework of classical narratology, post-classical cognitive narratology and stylistic linguistics. The analysis at the narratological level focuses on aspects such as the voice of the narrator, the internal focalization, and temporal organization, which help to explain how Amir's moral and psychological growth is shaped. From the stylistic point of view, the study examines deixis, modality, transitivity and discourse markers and demonstrates their function to achieve focalization, to build agency and to involve the reader. These linguistic aspects are studied in the context of a narrative and not alone. On the cognitive level, the interpretations of the cognitive narratives are drawn upon to understand the influence of these patterns on reader empathy, emotional alignment and ethical judgement.

Theoretical and textual grounding are used to ensure validity in this study. All analytical categories come from a well-defined set of narratological and stylistic frameworks, and interpretations are based on clearly identified textual evidence. The analysis is not impressionistic, but always connects statements with specific story patterns and language elements. Analytical consistency, that is the same categories and procedures are used in all three narrative episodes, is used to address reliability, so as to compare and look for patterns. Literary analysis is a process of interpretation, but because it is transparent, the analytical process can be followed, evaluated, and replicated using the same process by other researchers without involving human subjects or ethical issues concerning consent and confidentiality with the published literary text. The results are not statistically generalizable, but they are analytically transferable, and can provide insights into the use of narrative voice and stylistic form in the production of ethical and emotional meaning in first-person retrospective accounts.

FINDINGS

Findings of this study are reported research question wise for comprehensive understanding of the topic.

1 **Internal Focalization and Retrospective Voice in construction of Character's moral and psychological growth**

Hosseini's set-up for *The Kite Runner* is, from the beginning, to have the narration in retrospect and to focus on internal narration. Amir's morality is defined by one moment in his childhood: "*I became what I am today at the age of twelve, on a frigid overcast day in the winter of 1975*". The statement sets the tone for the story as a backdated and moralist piece. The adult narrator tells the children that the story is not just about what happened but what it means to remember and to have morals. This form of internal focalization keeps the reader inside Amir's mind, so that the reader only sees the past through Amir's eyes and mind.

The same opening sentence further emphasizes the stubbornness of guilt, by means of focalized memory: "*I have been peeking into that deserted alley for the last twenty-six years*". The constant mental transference to the alley is a symbolic engagement of the moral failure as a psychological place that can never be left behind. The alley serves as not only a physical place but a focalized one of unfulfilled moral obligation through all the eyes of Amir.

The use of internal focalization during the betrayal episode further emphasizes a moral dilemma because it emphasizes the possible alternatives of action instead of a corrective action. Amir thinks: "*If this was one of the Hindi movies Hassan and I watched, this was when I'd run outside and pull Hassan out and say I was sorry*". This imaginary presentation highlights Amir's moral awareness. "*But this was no Hindi movie*" is however an admission that immediately brings the contrast to a halt because the author is not just a Hindi movie, but a focalized one. But the story remains trapped in Amir's mind: Morality is not present in the world. It is not just an external event that betrays her; it's the internal betrayal from knowing to doing.

The retrospective voice also reinforces this moral lapse by Amir's saying "*I was sorry, but I didn't cry and I didn't chase the car*". The parallel structure highlights that the person is not doing anything, and the manner of the narrator in the adult voice, whispers, and narration of the tone texts indicate self-condemnation rather than justification. The internal focalization draws the reader into the shame and passivity of this moment, by aligning the reader with the moment, creating an ethical discomfort.

Retrospective narration helps to maintain the moral development of the character in the exile phase, not to solve anything. Amir remembers "*I watched Baba's car drive away from the curb with the man whose name had been the first he had said*" (pg108). The use of the verb "watched" once more emphasizes passive focalization, once again reinforcing Amir's status as an observer and not an agent. The memory was told many years later, but the emotional impact is still there, so exile will not remove guilt. Past and present are fused in a narrative, resulting in a moral consciousness.

By the time Amir is on the road to redemption the internal focalization still presents the action as something that is morally problematic, not heroic. Redemption is not told as forgiveness for sin, but as facing fear and pain. The voice of the past suggests morality as an obligation but not a finished task; one that can be fulfilled by the same consciousness that once allowed it to be avoided. Hosseini uses this extended narrative technique to lead Amir to moral growth, not as a step-by-step change but as a process of recognition, remembrance, and of self-examination and questioning.

Table 1: Internal focalization and retrospective voice across key narrative episodes

Narrative Episode	Textual Evidence	Narratological Function	Ethical Effect
Narrative Opening	“I became what I am today at the age of twelve”	Retrospective framing of identity	Moral life defined by past disappointment
Persistent Memory	“I have been peeking into that deserted alley for the last twenty-six years”	Internal focalization of memory	Guilt created as uncertain
Betrayal (Ch. 7)	“But this was no Hindi movie”	Collapse of imagined moral action	Ethical paralysis foregrounded
Betrayal (Ch. 7)	“I didn’t cry and I didn’t chase the car”	Passive self-narration	Responsibility acknowledged, not acted upon
Exile	“I watched Baba’s car pull away from the curb”	Observer positioning	Moral distance continued
Ongoing Guilt	“the person whose first spoken word had been my name”	Emotional focalization	Ethical loss adapted

Above in Table 1, the usage of internal focalization and retrospective narrative voice ensures that betrayal and redemption are experienced as psychological and moral processes rather than separated plot events.

2. Role of Language features in focalization and involvement in the narrative.

The stylistic elements of *The Kite Runner* serve as extensions of the internal focalization, through which readers can sense what is happening from Amir's personified experience and moral qualms. Hosseini's language is never neutral, but always subjective, fearful and moralistic, and he uses micro-level grammatical devices to encode these emotions.

The use of deictic expressions constantly puts the reader within Amir's immediate perceptual field, further engaging the reader in the narrative. When Amir fights with “Assef”, he tells his story: “*I thought no one would hear us screaming in this far corner of the world*”. The

spatial deictic phrase “*this remote patch of land*” locates fear in space, making space subjective, an isolation from chapter 5. By using “this”, the reader is aware of what Amir is seeing, rather than what is being described from a distance. Likewise, when Amir says “I wished Baba were there” the personal deixis helps to strengthen the focalization. “there” is deictic, indicating a space of absence, and thus engaging readers in Amir's sense of vulnerability and dependence.

Modal constructions play a key role in encoding Amir's fear and moral hesitation. In the same shot, Amir thinks, “*I wondered if anyone was going to hear us scream*”. The modal “would” is used to show uncertainty, and not expectation; linguistically, Amir is not in control of the situation. The word modality does not just mean ‘possibility’ here, but it also emphasizes psychological vulnerability, mirroring Amir's apprehensive thoughts. Later, Amir's evaluative perception shows up in epistemic modality: “I would have wagered that he was grinning”. The “would have bet” is a conditional, suggesting inference, rather than certainty, and making the reader aware that everything is through Amir's subjective interpretation. The limited knowledge is foregrounded in this modal framing, which maintains the focus of the story.

Similarly, Amir's internal thinking and feeling are organized by discourse markers. Amir's physiological reaction is narrated before his ethical reaction in the assault scene: “*I had not yet breathed out when I realized I hadn't yet acted. I exhaled slowly and quietly*”. The discourse organization is sequential, which mirrors Amir's internal processing and takes the reader through the body and not moral action. The absence evaluative commentary means that the reader is immersed in the moment, rather than evaluating it from the external perspective.

Ethical recognition is also framed with contrastive discourse markers. Amir is struck by Hassan's fear: “*But I remember Hassan's face, the first time I saw him.*” “But” indicates an emotional adjustment, as Amir realizes Hassan is as vulnerable as he is, and emphasizes the depth of their bond. This contrast intensifies the moral complexity by pairing recognition with the imminent lack of action.

Along with it, Amir is consistently an observer, not an agent, at key moments, through transitivity patterns. Amir says: “*I had seen them converge on the boy I had known since I was a kid*”. The mental process, “watched,” puts Amir in a perceptual role and the material action is performed by “them.” Moral retreat is encoded in the clause structure of agency, which is grammatically displaced. This is because even Amir's emotional awareness is conveyed not through physical but through mental means: “*I saw that he was scared*”. The clause emphasizes

the perception aspect of the image, emphasizing the ethical distance between seeing and doing. Transitivity thus helps to create a focalization effect, making it possible to make the reader feel passivity as a grammatical reality, rather than an abstract claim.

Table 2: Stylistic Evidence Supporting Focalization and Immersion (Chapter 5)

Feature	Textual Statement	Linguistic Function	Narrative Effect
Deixis (Spatial)	“this remote patch of land pg 32”	Proximal anchoring	spatial Isolation experienced subjectively
Deixis (Personal)	“I wished Baba were there”	Absence spatially	encoded Emotional vulnerability
Modality	“I wondered if anyone would hear us scream”	Epistemic uncertainty	Psychological helplessness
Modality	“I would have bet he was grinning”	Inferential stance	Subjective perception foregrounded
Discourse sequencing	“I exhaled, slowly, quietly”	Bodily focus	Immersion before ethics
Transitivity	“I watched them close in”	Mental process dominance	Moral passivity encoded
Transitivity	“I saw that he was scared”	Perceptual process	Awareness without action

As evident in Table 2, Khalid Hosseini’s stylistic choices constantly place Amir as an observing and reflecting substance rather than an acting agent.

3. Use of Cognitive Narratology in Describing Affective and ethical aspects in the novel

The Kite Runner's cognitive narratological approach to evoking the affective and ethical effects is achieved by the reader being placed "*Inside Amir's mind and heart*" as he navigates through guilt and responsibility. The novel is not meant to be judged from an exterior lens, it is meant to be read and moralized as readers accompany Amir on his subjective journey back to the past. The alignment starts when Amir clearly tells his father that he has betrayed him in plain words, "*I was there to witness Hassan getting raped.*"

This acceptance is blunt, so it does not conform to the narrative comfort and immediately puts readers in an ethical situation. Cognitive empathy is not here for the sake of justification, but because of the shock of confession it makes the readers think of the moral significance of the act as the narrator does. Amir's delayed expression of guilt has an affective impact. Instead of the voice of moralizing, there is silence, there is distance and there is ethical work. Amir remembers the suffering of betrayal inside him saying: "*I felt like sticking a knife in my eye*". This metaphor evokes embodied cognition, encouraging readers to feel the pain, rather than feeling the remorse, that is described. Some writers have tried to account for this effect in terms of the concept of emotional transportation, with cognitive narratology proposing that the reader internalizes guilt from the text in bodily terms by means of the language that evokes physical sensation.

During the exile, Amir constantly monitors himself for moral effects, maintaining his self-monitoring. Amir's failure to forget is always a major theme of the story, even when his situation changes. Guilt is demonstrated, rather than overcome, inviting the reader into an ethical engagement. This continuity is what readers are asked to involve cognitively, namely moral continuity, where they are asked to continue their ethical scrutiny as the narrative advances without the need to reset their moral interpretation.

Redemption doesn't come as a story payoff, but as an ethical challenge. "*There is a way to become good again,*" is Rahim Khan's message in the form of a cognitive trigger for moral reorientation. The sentence is intentionally vague and open to readers' projections of expectations and moral aspirations into the narrative. According to the cognitive narratology model, this moment is a prospective simulation, where the readers can feel at the same time as Amir that moral repair is to be enacted, thus entering into Amir's decision-making process.

The saving of Sohrab is a story of suffering, not of victory. Sohrab's rescue is a story of suffering and not victory. The reader's sense of Amir's physical misery when he confronts Assef is designed to lead the reader to rethink what violence means and what it is not: a heroic act. Amir says "*My body was broken but now I feel healed*" which makes redemption an internal, not external, experience. Here, readers are encouraged to consider redemption over success or forgiveness, but through the willingness to suffer for ethical repair. The kind of cognitive empathy that is expressed here is not the one based on closure but is based on moral cost.

The moral significance is at its most tender moment when Amir is with Sohrab. The silent, withdrawn child evokes the frustration of emotional closure, and thus the reader's sense of the

limits of redemption. Amir recognizes this uncertainty, and the story refuses to give him moral answers and instead leaves him in an ethical dilemma. Cognitive narratology considers this to have to do with a reader's ongoing moral responsibility, one which he is not freed from, but must carry in tension: empathy, doubt, and responsibility.

Table 3: Cognitive and Ethical Impact Across Key Narrative Moments

Narrative Moment	Exact Textual Statement	Cognitive Effect on Reader	on Ethical Impact
Betrayal (Confession)	"I watched Hassan get raped."	Shock-based simulation	moral Immediate ethical confrontation
Post-betrayal Guilt	"I felt like sticking a knife in my eye."	Embodied processing	emotional Guilt experienced as physical pain
Ethical Awakening	"There is a way to be good again."	Prospective simulation	moral Hope for ethical repair activated
Redemption (Suffering)	"My body was broken but I felt healed."	Reframing moral endurance	pain as Redemption defined internally
Moral Uncertainty	"I opened my mouth and almost said something."	Sustained tension	ethical Redemption left incomplete

Table 3 shows how feelings of guilt, pain, hope and moral doubt in the reader without providing moral closure. The novel engages the reader's empathy and moral awareness through the mediums of confession, interactive imagery, and unfulfilled action, as it spans the themes of betrayal, exile, and redemption.

The overall affective and ethical strength of the novel can be attributed to its capability to engage readers in the moral dilemma, and not just to observe it. Hosseini's confession, body imagery, delayed atonement and ethically costly action builds a cognitive empathy and a moral simulation. Betrayal is experienced as a collective suffering, exile as an unfulfilled conscience and redemption as a continuous moral obligation, not a destination. Thus, *The Kite Runner* shows how narrative can influence not just the emotional reaction but the ethical reaction as well.

DISCUSSION

This study aims to explore the interaction between the narrative structure, stylistic form and reader cognition in the construction of betrayal and redemption in *The Kite Runner*. The study brings together the elements of classical narratology, stylistic linguistics and cognitive narratology, thus directly addressing gaps found in previous research that tended to focus on one narration aspect at a time. The results of this study validate and enlarge the previous studies by proving that Hosseini's narrative techniques are effective if analyzed as a system and not as isolated structural, symbolic or thematic features.

In previous narratological research, especially, (2020), has proven that Genette's model is useful to analyze how the narrative time, level, and mood shape Amir's internal conflict. Their analysis is compelling, and their evidence of the use of retrospective narration and temporal manipulation to achieve psychological depth and moral ambiguity in *The Kite Runner* is convincing. The results of the present research corroborate this statement, proving that internal focalization and narrative retrospection are the main elements in the ethical structure of the novel.

Whereas Malik et al. (2020) mostly stay at the descriptive level of structure, this study represents an extension of their approach as it shows how the structures actively contribute to the moral experience of the reader. The analysis reveals that the use of internal focalization is not only arranged the perspective, but it also places the reader in Amir's moral doubt and deferred responsibility. In this respect, the present study goes further than the structural mapping, by interpreting the ethical implications of Genette narration: a point that has been recognized but not discussed extensively in previous narratological studies.

The kite is a symbol of betrayal, redemption and Afghan identity in Wang Jian-rong's (2009) symbolic analysis as a metaphor. The story of the kite is used to illustrate how it can serve as a focal point for the narrative, tying together personal trauma and national memory. The result of the present study does not contradict this symbolic reading, but it supports it and reveals that the novel's emotional intensity is not only due to the reading of symbolism.

This study demonstrates symbolic meaning is reinforced by linguistic positioning, employing the stylistic mechanisms of deixis and transitivity. In the case of betrayal, the ethical power of the kite is not only in its meaning but in its grammar, which suggests that Amir has no

agency and foregrounds his perception. The present research thus presents a re-conceptualization of symbolism as a phenomenon that is central to stylistic form, such that the affective impact of symbolism is enhanced when it is complemented by focalized language patterns.

Nayebpour (2018) makes the claim that storytelling in *The Kite Runner* serves as a therapeutic means for Amir and a vehicle for readers to engage in his emotional process of trauma. The results of this study largely support Nayebpour's assertion in regard to Amir's past guilt as an unfulfilled psychological state and not a past reality.

The present study builds on this argument by defining the mechanisms by which cognitive engagement happens. This study is not simply an example of what happens when readers read with empathy, but rather an illustration of how empathy is evoked by specific narrative and stylistic devices, embodied imagery, focalised confession and delayed moral resolution. The study helps to reinforce cognitive narratology by connecting reader empathy to features that can be identified in the text instead of in abstract concepts of emotional resonance.

Mahmood et al (2025) have recently demonstrated that these linguistic devices (passivation and role allocation) influence perceptions of guilt and moral responsibility in *The Kite Runner*. They take a Critical Discourse Studies perspective, which focuses on the ways in which blame is distributed and agency is diffused in Amir's narration. The results of the present study fully corroborate this conclusion, especially in the stylistic analysis of the transitivity patterns used to repeatedly situate Amir as a perceiver, rather than an actor, at times of betrayal.

This study, however, develops Mahmood et al. (2025)'s understanding of discourse as a place of negotiation of ideas by combining narratology and cognition. It shows that linguistic denial of agency does not just create moral responsibility at the level of the discourse, but also influences the way the reader's mind will work when reading about moral failure. The simultaneous relationship between discourse choices at linguistic, narratological, and cognitive levels is indicated in this integration, which reinforces an ethical discomfort felt by the reader.

Elimane and Meriem (2019) emphasize the importance of metaphor as a tool for trauma organization and moral development in *The Kite Runner* by analyzing it cognitively. The present study confirms their results which showed that metaphor is a cognitive mechanism and not a decorative device. The analysis reveals that the role of embodied imagery in creating emotional involvement, especially when they come from guilt and suffering, is very important.

This study provides a more extensive stylistic framework for metaphor. It is not about metaphor as a tool in isolation; it shows how metaphor contributes to the experience of narrative immersion with deixis and modality and transitivity. This holistic stylistic approach demonstrates that the emotional resonance is not the result of individual figurative expressions, but of a harmonious use of language which is constantly reinforcing a focalization and an ethical tension.

The overall results of this research solve the major problem which has been pointed out throughout the literature, namely the separation of narratology, stylistics and cognition. The study illustrates how the themes of betrayal and redemption in *The Kite Runner* become experiential processes through the use of form, when the same episodes of the narrative are examined in all three approaches.

This integrated framework makes a methodological contribution by providing a model that can be replicated to analyze ethically complex narratives. The study demonstrates that moral meaning arises at the nexus of narration voice, language selection and reader cognition and thus moves beyond description toward explanation, in the area of narratology. It does so, however, by making *The Kite Runner* a paradigm of postcolonial fiction's use of narrative technique to create a sustained ethical engagement.

LIMITATIONS

This research is limited in scope and is qualitative, text-internal analysis of selected narrative chapters in *The Kite Runner*. Purposive sampling enables in-depth study of moments of betrayal, exile and redemption, but the results are not intended to be comprehensive of the novel or statistically generalizable. Furthermore, the study is not based on empirical reader-response data, but on interpretive narratological and stylistic analysis. While the cognitive approach is based on a well-established framework, future studies could also investigate the cognitive responses of various readers to the same narrative and stylistic cues using empirical research.

CONCLUSION

This study will examine the relationship between the narrative voice, stylistic form and reader cognition in the construction of betrayal and redemption portrayed in *The Kite Runner*. The study introduced the concept of moral meaning in the novel, which is created not only by the events in the novel, but also by the use of the novel's perspective and linguistic means, by

integrating classical narratology, stylistics and cognitive narratology. Amir's first-person, retrospective telling and his personal point of view in the story "*Redemption*" and "*Betrayal*" as a psychological rupture, not a final resolution, and redemption as a process of ethical challenge, not a completed act.

The results reveal that the ethical quality of the narratological structure is comprehended through stylistics. All of these devices deictic anchoring, modal hesitation, discourse markers, transitivity patterns serve to maintain the focus and keep the reader in Amir's moral uncertainty. On the cognitive level, these narrative and linguistic strategies evoke feelings of empathy not endorsement, and invite readers to feel guilt, responsibility and some degree of repair with the narrator.

IMPLICATIONS

From a theoretical perspective, the study highlights the importance of using more than one linguistic method, namely narratology, stylistics, and cognitive, to achieve the explanation of the ethical and emotional effects of narratives. Theoretically, it illustrates how reading engagement can be explained without relying on empirical evidence by using a close reading approach combined with systematic analysis of language. *The Kite Runner* could be effectively taught as a text that can be used to teach pedagogically how the narrative form influences moral understanding and not just as a text that is a thematic exploration of guilt and redemption. In general, the study provides a brief, unified set of tools for analyzing morally complex narratives, demonstrating the interplay between form and language to create extended moral engagement.

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