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### THE ROLE OF SYMBOLS IN “THE KITE RUNNER” BY KHALED HOSSEINI

#### ANNOTATION

The main focus of this research work is to analyze the symbols and their role in interpreting the novel “The Kite Runner” by Afghan-born American writer Khaled Hosseini who has widely used artistic signs in his novel. With the help of symbols the essence of the work has been conveyed to the reader through the sensitivity of artistic principles. The symbols in the novel were analyzed being divided into categories as characters, places, things and complex symbols. The introduction of the symbols in the novel, as the secret information of the author to the reader, is a masterpiece of the artistic idea that has not been provided in the text but intended for it. Moreover, it is a figure of speech through which any author is able to express in an indirect way a certain mood, concept, a political ideology, a period or emotion in a work of literature using a physical object, character, event or word. Symbols in the literary work are of great importance to help readers visualize complex concepts and central themes, and track their development; afford writers the opportunity to communicate complex ideas efficiently and artfully; invite readers to interpret a text independently; add emotional value to a text; conceal themes that are too controversial to state openly; imply change or growth in characters or themes through shifts in the way that characters interact with particular symbols, or ways in which the symbols themselves change over time. The catastrophic events connected with the World Trade Center that occurred on September 11, 2001, caused a surge of interest in a little-known Central Asian country Afghanistan. Consequently, most people around the world discovered a new, yet soon stereotyped face of Afghan people as terrorists and their allies.

## Гулхаё Очилова

ЎзДЖТУ мустақил изланувчиси

### ХОЛИД ХУСАЙНИЙНИНГ “ШАМОЛ ОРТИДАН ЮГУРИБ” РОМАНИДА РАМЗЛАРНИНГ РОЛИ

#### АННОТАЦИЯ

Мақолада Афғонистонда туғилган америкалик ёзувчи Холид Хусайнийнинг "Шамол ортидан югуриб" романида рамзлар тасвири таҳлил қилинган. Рамзлар ёрдамида асар моҳияти бадиийлик мезонлари орқали китобхонга етказилган. Романда рамзларнинг берилиши ёзувчининг китобхонга яширин маълумоти сифатида, матнда келтирилмаган, ammo у ният қилган бадиий ғояни моҳирона ифодалайди. Бадиий асарда муайян кайфият, ғоя, сиёсий идеология, маълум бир давр ёки рухий кечинмани билвосита моддий объект, образ, воқеа ёки сўз ёрдамида ифодалашда муаллиф нутқи аҳамиятли. Бадиий асардаги рамзлар китобхонларга мураккаб тушунча ва марказий ғояларни англаш, воқеалар ривожини кузатиш, ёзувчиларга эса мураккаб ғояларни самарали етказиш имкониятини бериш, китобхонларни матнни мустақил изоҳлашга ундаш, матннинг таъсирчанлигини ошириш, ошқора айтиш тақиқланган мавзуларни яширинча ифодалаш, рамзлар орқали образ динамикасини кузатиш ҳамда рамзларнинг воқелар ривожини мобайнида қай даражада ўзгаришини таҳлил қилиш учун муҳим аҳамиятга эга. 2001 йил 11 сентябрда Жаҳон Савдо Марказида рўй берган ҳалокатли воқеалар афғон халқини террорчилар ва уларнинг иттифоқчилари сифатида эътироф этилишига сабаб бўлди. Холид Хусайний бошқа ватандошлар билан биргаликда ўз миллати ва она ватанининг унутилган қиёфасини турли нуқтаи назардан, ижтимоий ва ахлоқий жиҳатдан ўзгартиришга ҳаракат қилди. Хусайний ўзининг асарлари билан китобхонларнинг ўз халқи ва мамлака-

Thus, Khaled Hosseini along with other compatriot authors endeavored to reshape the overlooked image of his nation and his native land once he abandoned, in different perspectives, social and moral angles.

**Key words:** Symbol, Afghanistan, America, Pashtun, Hazara, war, Taliban, personage, kite, loyalty, betrayal.

ти ҳақидаги қарашларини сезиларли даражада ўзгартира олди.

**Калит сўзлар:** рамз, Афғонистон, Америка, пуштун, ҳазора, уруш, толибонлар, персонаж, варрак, садоқат, хиёнат.

## INTRODUCTION

Almost any fictional work embraces in itself symbols which can signify a range of reference beyond itself informing the reader of the conceptual information, the author's individual world picture, social, historical, political or cultural contexts and implicit meanings to decode. Professor of linguistics D.Ashurova states that "*Symbol is a stylistic device functioning in the literary texts as a polyconceptual structure. It is necessary to underline its conceptual and text-forming functions because symbolic meanings appear in the text on the basis of frequently repeated key words.*" [Ashurova D.,2016;228] The word *symbolism*, derived from the Greek word *symbollein* (a compound of the word *syn=together* and *ballein=to throw*), means *to throw together*. [ www.enotes.com] Canadian literary critic H.N.Frye defines a literary symbol as: "Any unit of any literary structure that can be isolated for critical attention." He proposes five levels, or *phases*, of symbolism which are:

- Literal/descriptive (motifs and signs)
- Formal (image)
- Mythical (archetype)
- Anagogic (monad)

The **descriptive** phase exhibits the centrifugal, or outward, property of a symbol. Frye labels any such symbol a *sign*. He does not define the sign beyond this sense of pointing to the external, nor does he refer to any particular semiotic theory. Frye next introduces the **formal** phase, embodied by the image, in order to define the layer of meaning that results from the interplay of the harmony and rhythm of the signs and motifs. The notion of form relies heavily on the assumption of inherent meaning within the text. The **mythical** phase is the treatment of a symbol as an archetype. This concept relates most closely with intertextuality and considers the symbol in a work as interconnected with similar symbolism throughout the entire body of literature. Frye proposes an **anagogic** phase wherein a symbol is treated as a monad. The anagogic level of medieval allegory treated a text as expressing the highest spiritual meaning. [Frye, Northrope., 1957]

## THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of the research is to analyze the symbols and their role in interpreting the novel "The Kite Runner" by Khaled Hosseini. Afghan-American writer Khaled Hosseini is one of the most celebrated representatives of Afghan diaspora literature and his works are distinguished by genuine descriptions of his native land and nation.

The symbols in the novel are discussed under the categories of characters, places, objects and complex notions.

### METHODOLOGY

The following approaches were implemented to analyze the work and to reveal the symbols: historical-comparative, socio-cultural and contextual. These approaches play a crucial role to evaluate the writer's works and to define the role of symbols in interpreting in his novel "The Kite Runner".

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

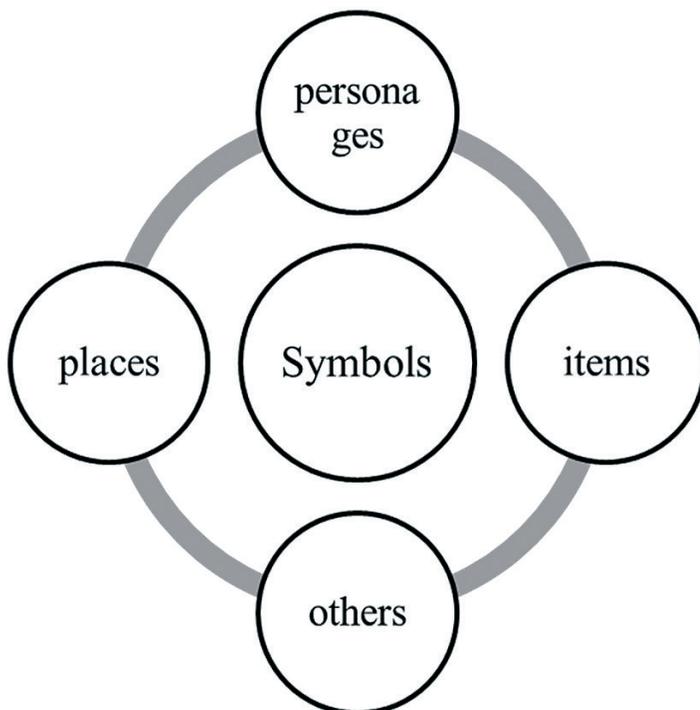
Khaled Hosseini's first novel "The Kite Runner" which was published in 2003, received positive reviews both from critics and readers turning into an international bestseller and getting published in 42 languages, eventually being adapted into a film in 2007. [Bloom, Harold.,2009] *He thought he might be content to write his novel for his family only, but his wife Roya suggested that he now had the opportunity to "put a human face on the Afghan people."* [Stuhr, Rebecca., 2009;3) Increasing popularity of "The Kite Runner" provided it the position on the New York Times bestseller list for more than two years. "*Hosseini has taken the sorrowful history of his tragically manipulated birthplace and turned it into informative, sentimental but nevertheless touching popular fiction*" claims the critic David Kipen. .[Bloom, Harold.,2009] Mir Hekmatullah Sadat recognizes the importance of moralistic and pedagogical values of the novel stating that: "*Many have tried telling the story of Afghanistan but usually flinging a burqa (veil) over her true face. Hosseini has cast that burqa off and describes in detail every wrinkle and birthmark.*" .[Bloom, Harold.,2009;9] Readers are taught to search for redemption for the sins by triumphing over the beast inside them through good deeds and intentions only. Additionally, Ronny Noor describes that "*It is rightly a "soaring debut," as the Boston Globe claims, but only if we consider it a novel of sin and redemption, a son trying to redeem his father's sin.*" .[Bloom, Harold.,2009;63] Rebecca Stuhr considers that *there are many ways to describe this novel, but Hosseini calls it a love story. It is not a conventional love story, however. It is the story of love between two friends who are also servant and master; the sins of commission and omission that tear the friendship apart; and the loyalty and altruistic love that survives in spite of everything. It is also the story of the love between father and son, husband and wife, and parent and child. The novel takes place across generations and continents, offers adventure, and provides a fresh look at the country and culture of Afghanistan.* [Stuhr, Rebecca., 2009;25) All things considered, "The Kite Runner" is a poignant story of real Afghanistan and Afghan people.

The novel is about a man named Amir who had fled with his father to the United States from Afghanistan in search of a peaceful and prosperous life. However, his betrayal to his friend and as it was later known his half-brother, the feeling of unatoned sinfulness toward the boy who could thousand times over run a kite for him, his childhood memories left back in Kabul haunt him during his entire life until the moment he is given a chance "to be good again" by rescuing his nephew risking to go back to now Taliban ruled Afghanistan. Once his mission is completed, he wins over the beast, the

monster inside him. The author tells the reader that evil is overcome by virtue; one can conclude that redemption is achieved through performing a list of good works.

Before shifting to further analysis of the symbols in the novel, the necessity of having clear comprehension of some notions is prevailing. David Kipen defines the term “kite running” as “... a kite runner is a sort of spotter in the ancient sport of kite fighting. In a kite fight, competitors coat their kite strings in glue and ground glass, the better to cut their rivals’ moorings. While the fighter’s kite is swooping and feinting in an effort to rule the skies, his kite-running partner is racing to own the streets, chasing down all their opponents’ unmoored, sinking trophies.” [Bloom, Harold., 2009; 49] Moreover, Rebecca Stuhr provides with the following definition of the “kite fighting”: *The traditional Afghan sport of kite fighting or gudiparan bazi was banned along with other activities and forms of celebration under the Taliban. Usually there is a kite flyer and someone who holds the drum with the wire and who advises the flyer on when to let out more wire. This wire is often coated with ground glass. The fight takes place when two kites come into contact. The victor in the fight cuts the wire of the opponent. A runner will then chase after the severed kite. The retrieved kite is kept as a trophy.* [Stuhr, Rebecca., 2009; 29] Kite fighting is a traditional game in Afghan culture usually held in a form of tournament in winter time. Apparently, the title of the novel defined above holds a symbolic connotation as well.

Symbol expresses an image and usually is repeated throughout the text. Similarly there is a plentiful symbolism in Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* which refers to a set of concepts or ideas. The symbols in the novel can be grouped into several categories:



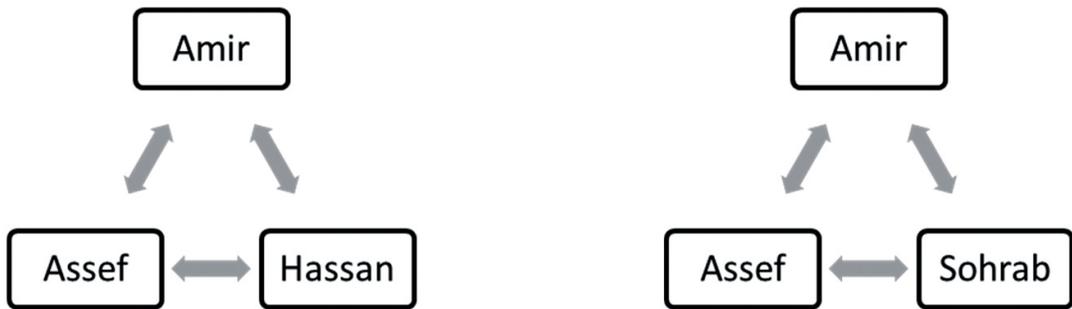
In his *Critique of Judgement* (1790) Kant defines the literary symbol as an 'aesthetic idea' represented by object, event, movement or character. [Childs, Peter., 2006; 6] Several characters such as Amir, Assef, Hassan, Sohrab, Genaral Tahiri, Zaman, Wahid, and Dr Rasul can be included into the category of personage symbols.

Amir is one of the main character symbols. Throughout the story we can observe his evolution and maturity on a personal, spiritual and emotional scale which indicates an educational aspect of the novel attaching it to the bildungsroman genre. The novel starts with his confession "*I became what I am today at the age of twelve... That was a long time ago, but it's wrong what they say about the past, I've learned, about how you can bury it. Because the past claws its way out. Looking back now, I realize I have been peeking into that deserted alley for the last twenty-six years.*" [Hosseini, Khaled., 2003; 1] For twenty-six years on he was living with the burden in his heart and mind, with the memory of his childish but coward like actions. "*What makes the novel so unique, considers Arley Loewen, is Amir's ruthless self-revelation. Instead of the perpetual self-justification of greatness and the constant blaming of others for their evils, standard fare in Persian classics, here the main character draws away the veil of his soul. He sees himself and is shocked!*" Now Amir, in an hour of self-reflection, realizes, "*There was a monster in the lake. It had grabbed Hassan by the ankles, dragged him to the murky bottom. I was that monster.*" [Hosseini, Khaled., 2003; 56] Risking his own life to rescue Sohrab, his nephew he won the battle with the monster, it was his triumph. He was released from his sins, he redeemed for his sins. Thus he symbolizes the victory of virtue over evil.

Assef is the next symbol who is an antagonist through which Hosseini courageously described the evil within the country, immoral deeds and ill manners of the people. Through Assef the author made a reference to another notorious figure in the history in order to reveal his character more explicitly, that he was Hitler's fan when he spoke about his idol with enthusiasm and excitement: *I'm going to have a little chat with him, man to man, mard to mard. Tell him what I told my mother. About Hitler. Now, there was a leader. A great leader. A man with vision. I'll tell Daoud Khan to remember that if they had let Hitler finish what he had started, the world be a better place now.* [Hosseini, Khaled., 2003; 39] Or when he gave a book about his hero as a birthday present to Amir: *I tore the wrapping paper from Assef's present and tilted the book cover in the moonlight. It was a biography of Hitler. I threw it amid a tangle of weeds* [Hosseini, Khaled., 2003; 97] Rebecca Stuhr claims that *Hosseini portrays Assef unsparingly as a sadistic, psychopathic killer. Not only is he evil, but, as a Talib, his only principle seems to be one of eliminating the Hazara population.* [Stuhr, Rebecca., 2009; 33] Furthermore, Assef constantly humiliated Hassan due to the fact that he was Hazara, even expressed his disrespect and disgust by committing rape. Through Assef, Hosseini portrayed racism, pedophilia, violence and cruelty that were going on in the country.

Hassan is another symbolic personage who represents naivety, sincerity, loyalty and devotion together with brevity. He is a loyal friend who can run a kite for Amir a thousand times over and a brave boy who can protect his friend from a group of of-

fenders who were much older and stronger than them. From his childhood memories Amir reminisces: *I turned and came face to face with Hassan's slingshot. Hassan had pulled the wide elastic band all the way back. In the cup was a rock the size of a walnut. Hassan held the slingshot pointed directly at Assef's face. ... If you make a move, they'll have to change your nickname from Assef 'the Ear Eater' to 'One-Eyed Assef,' because I have this rock pointed at your left eye.*" [Hosseini, Khaled.,2003;42] Moreover, the author draws a parallel between Hassan and his son Sohrab who *had the same temperament as his father* [Hosseini, Khaled.,2003;211) and who accomplished his father's promise given to Assef as if fulfilling his order ... *The slingshot made a thwiiiiit sound when Sohrab released the cup. Then Assef was screaming. He put his hand where his left eye had been just a moment ago.* [Hosseini, Khaled.,2003;29] Like his father, Sohrab was abused by Assef and it was his revenge to Assef's oppression both to his father and himself. Furthermore, the everlasting theme of fight between vice and virtue is shown within a triangle when certain characters encounter each other in different circumstances but within the same conflict:



If in the first triangle Amir was not courageous enough to protect his friend from Assef, however he broke the second triangle correcting his mistake when he rescued Sohrab from the hands of evil, Assef.

There are other characters in the novel who serve to portray a true face of ordinary Afghani people. *I was about to go back inside when I heard voices coming from the house. I recognized one as Wahid's. "nothing left for the children." "We're hungry but we're not savages! He is a guest! What was I supposed to do?" he said in a strained voice. ...I unsnapped the wristwatch and gave it to the youngest of the three boys. But they lost interest and, soon, the watch sat abandoned on the straw mat. ...I understood now why the boys hadn't shown any interest in the watch. They hadn't been staring at the watch at all. They'd been staring at my food.* [Hosseini, Khaled.,2003;241] Wahid symbolizes Afghani men who remained in their fatherland unlike many of their compatriots who left the country. Despite the poor living condition and economic crisis in the country, in the time when only Taliban could afford meat, Wahid and his family could preserve qualities belonging to Afghan people. They offered their last food to the guests even though their own children were starving. Hospitality, generosity and respect are recognizable features of eastern people. In addition, Wahid's brother Farid

describes suffered Afghani men who have lost their dear people because of uneasy times *the wars had made fathers a rare commodity in Afghanistan...* Moreover, Farid symbolizes Afghan people who have to live in constant fear and anxiety in their own home. *“And sometimes the dead are luckier,” he said.* [Hosseini, Khaled.,2003;244]

The owner of an orphanage, Zaman who has to sacrifice one child for the sake of others periodically for the joy of Taliban is another character symbol. *Zaman dropped his hands. “I haven’t been paid in over six months. I’m broke because I’ve spent my life’s savings on this orphanage. Everything I ever owned or inherited I sold to run this godforsaken place.* [Hosseini, Khaled.,2003;257] He stayed in his country to help the children who already lost their childhood somewhere between the wars in any way he could, let it be by providing them with food and shelter only. Zaman represents the symbol of an impoverished nation both morally and economically.

There were deep wounds on science and education of the nation, defects in their functioning, like the man who was once a lecturer and an honorable doctor of science Now the science was in a disappointing state. It was stinking and did not receive attention for several decades: *When he leaned forward to take the money, his stench—like sour milk and feet that hadn’t been washed in weeks—flooded my nostrils and made my gorge rise.* [Hosseini, Khaled.,2003;248] The government who has turned its teachers, professors, and men of science into beggars is considered to be heavily sick. Dr Rasul illustrates the unfortunate and appalling status of education and science in the country.

Another representative of the category is General Taheri. *The general believed that, sooner or later, Afghanistan would be freed, the monarchy restored, and his services would once again be called upon. So every day, he donned his gray suit, wound his pocket watch, and waited.* [Hosseini, Khaled.,2003;177-178] Eventually, his expectations are realized. Through General Iqbal Taheri the author displayed his optimistic outlook toward the future of his homeland, *watan*. Besides that, the author made the general the prototype of superficial arrogance of his nation. Living in America he did not land any job as it was below his dignity. Even on usual days he used to wear his shiny suit and behave as an important person in order to make a good impression on people. *I learned that he had kept his family on welfare and had never held a job in the U.S., preferring to cash government-issued checks than degrading himself with work unsuitable for a man of his stature—he saw the flea market only as a hobby, a way to socialize with his fellow Afghans.* [Hosseini, Khaled,2003;176]

Afghanistan once with crowded streets, beautiful buildings and green gardens, with nights peaceful and full of bright stars, scenting with kebab and fruits now has turned into a desert, into the place of a terror. The following lines from the novel show the scale of destruction within the country: *Rahim Khan told me how, when the Northern Alliance took over Kabul between 1992 and 1996, different factions claimed different parts of Kabul. “If you went from the Shar-e-Nau section to Kerteh-Parwan to buy a carpet, you risked getting shot by a sniper or getting blown up by a rocket - if you got past all the checkpoints, that was. You practically needed a visa to go from one neighborhood to the other”.* [Hosseini, Khaled.,2003;199] Afghanistan is

the backdrop with childhood memories, blissful moments, peaceful times simultaneously being the land once lost and deprived, the site of fear and panic, the place of destruction and massacre.

The flea market where Afghan community usually gathered is a little Afghanistan. Afghan people living in America could feel real Afghan atmosphere and talk to each other. *Afghan music played in the aisles of the Used Goods section. There was an unspoken code of behavior among Afghans at the flea market: You greeted the guy across the aisle, you invited him for a bite of potato bolani or a little qabuli, and you chatted. You offered tassali, condolences, for the death of a parent, congratulated the birth of children, and shook your head mournfully when the conversation turned to Afghanistan and the Roussis—which it inevitably did.* [Hosseini, Khaled.,2003;138] Like for many Afghans, for General Taheri also the flea market was a place reminding them of their vatan.

Moreover, we can observe using the stadium in Kabul for unusual even vicious purposes in the novel. *They are to go to a soccer game at Ghazi Stadium in Kabul. They sit through the first half of a soccer game, the Afghan players wearing long pants, the Talib guards keeping the crowds from making too much noise. During halftime, a cleric presides over a public execution. The Talib official, appearing as described by Zaman, throws the first stone. Following this bloody and murderous interlude, the game resumes.* [Stuhr,Rebecca.,2009;32] The Ghazi Stadium which should be the site for sport competitions, concerts or cultural events has turned into a square of executions by Taliban. The stadium and players portray the state of sport and culture in the country.

What is more, there are several items playing a figurative role throughout the novel. They combine several notions in themselves. For instance, a slingshot is a symbol of keeping and fulfilling promise given by father and accomplished by son when Sohrab threatened Assef and followed it by shooting a metal ball to his eye. Sohrab performed Hasan's warning to make Assef "one eyed". The slingshot – serves as a symbol of inheritance of father's skill, instrument to his son.

One of the main symbols appearing throughout the novel in multifaceted connotations – is the kite. It implies contrasting concept and ideas as clear sky and peaceful times, friendship between the boys, Hassan's loyalty, Amir's betrayal, his tool to achieve his father's love and care, symbol of brevity and cowardice, a new beginning and hope, giving back Sohrab his lost childhood, as well as protection. *"The police headquarters is still there," Farid said. "No shortage of police in this city. But you won't find kites or kite shops on Jadeh Maywand or anywhere else in Kabul. Those days are over."* [Hosseini, Khaled.,2003;246] Those peaceful days were over, those days when the sky used to host thousands of kites were over, those days when the streets used to be full of either watchers or participants were over. Hopefully, kites would fly in the winds of liberty and peace in some beautiful day.

As for other symbols, most of the childhood memories of Amir are connected with winter making them blurred and gloomy, reminding him of the kite tournament which is held in that season that changed his and Hassan's life. (*I became what I am*

today at the age of twelve, on a frigid overcast day in the winter of 1975. [Hosseini, Khaled.,2003;1] It also may symbolize the destructed country and hope for spring to come one day.

Winning in the kite fighting tournament was the only and prevailing way of establishing a good father and son relationship with his Baba for Amir. As he claims, *Baba and I lived in the same house, but in different spheres of existence. Kites were the one paper-thin slice of intersection between those spheres.* [Hosseini, Khaled.,2003;49] Amir was a sensitive boy who had keen interest in reading books and writing his own stories unlike his father's brutal character and athletic physique; Baba did not like his lack of aggression. Thus, Amir wanted to demonstrate his skill, to tie if only a thin string between father and son. (*...Behind him, sitting on piles of scrap and rubble, was the blue kite. My key to Baba's heart.* [Hosseini, Khaled.,2003;71] He was obsessed with the idea that he could succeed Baba's approval when he won the kite-fighting contest. *He feels acutely that his father blames him for the death of his mother, and he pins all his hope on this one moment of glory to reverse the years of exile from his father's love.* [Hosseini, Khaled.,2003;28] Therefore, triumph in the kite running competition was his chance to warm the rapport with his father.

*For kite runners, the most coveted prize was the last fallen kite of a winter tournament. It was a trophy of honor, something to be displayed on a mantle for guests to admire.* [Hosseini, Khaled.,2003;52] Running the last kite of the tournament for Amir, for the person whose name he uttered first, for the person whom he considered his friend, who read him stories and spent most of their time together was a symbol of Hassan's loyalty and sincere devotion; *For you a thousand times over, he'd promised.* [Hosseini, Khaled.,2003;70] However, this same kite is a symbol of cowardice and weakness for Amir who could not protect or even try to protect his friend from villains. The rest of his life he had to live with this guilt. (*In the end, I ran. I ran because I was a coward. I was afraid of Assef and what he would do to me. I was afraid of getting hurt. That's what I told myself as I turned my back to the alley, to Hassan. That's what I made myself believe. I actually aspired to cowardice, because the alternative, the real reason I was running, was that Assef was right: Nothing was free in this world. Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba. Was it a fair price?* [Hosseini, Khaled.,2003;77]. Towards the end of the novel, the meaning of running a kite changes. Now Amir had a new duty, to give Sohrab back his dispossessed childhood. Running kite for Sohrab a thousand times over is the beginning of their new path. Accordingly, running the kite symbolizes devotion for Hassan, weakness for Amir and hope for Sohrab.

### CONCLUSION

Returning to the statement posed at the beginning of this work, it is now possible to claim that symbols serve to reveal implicitness hidden deep in the text and realize the author's multidimensional purposes. Symbols allow writers to convey ideas to their readers poetically or indirectly rather than having to say them outright, which can make texts seem more nuanced and complex. The symbols, let it be presented through the tool of personages, places, objects or abstract notions, help the author to

express his intentions in a more figurative, metaphorical, impressive and sensitive way. Therefore, the symbols in *The Kite Runner* are of great use in order to interpret and analyze the work, which also serve to receive enduring place both in the mind and hearts of readers.

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