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### And the Mountains Echoed

Khaled Hosseini, 2013

Penguing Group USA

416 pp.

ISBN-13: 9781594631764

### Summary

Khaled Hosseini, the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, has written a new novel about how we love, how we take care of one another, and how the choices we make resonate through generations.

In this tale revolving around not just parents and children but brothers and sisters, cousins and caretakers, Hosseini explores the many ways in which families nurture, wound, betray, honor, and sacrifice for one another; and how often we are surprised by the actions of those closest to us, at the times that matter most.

Following its characters and the ramifications of their lives and choices and loves around the globe—from Kabul to Paris to San Francisco to the Greek island of Tinos—the story expands gradually outward, becoming more emotionally complex and powerful with each turning page. (*From the publisher.*)

### Author Bio

- Birth—March 04, 1965
- Where—Kabul, Afghanistan
- Education—B.S., Santa Clara University; M.D., University of California, San Diego School of Medicine
- Currently—lives in northern California

Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1965. His father was a diplomat with the Afghan Foreign Ministry and his mother taught Farsi and History at a large high school in Kabul. In 1970, the Foreign Ministry sent his family to Tehran, where his father worked for the Afghan embassy. They lived in Tehran until 1973, at which point they returned to Kabul.

In July of 1973, on the night Hosseini's youngest brother was born, the Afghan king, Zahir Shah, was overthrown in a bloodless coup by the king's cousin, Daoud Khan. At the time, Hosseini was in fourth grade and was already drawn to poetry and prose; he read a great deal of Persian poetry as well as Farsi translations of novels ranging from *Alice in Wonderland* to Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer series.

In 1976, the Afghan Foreign Ministry once again relocated the Hosseini family, this time to Paris. They were ready to return to Kabul in 1980, but by then Afghanistan had already witnessed a bloody communist coup and the invasion of the Soviet army. The Hosseinis sought and were granted political asylum in the United States. In September of 1980, Hosseini's family moved to San Jose, California. They lived on welfare and food stamps for a short while, as they had lost all of their property in Afghanistan. His father took multiple jobs and managed to get his family off welfare.

Hosseini graduated from high school in 1984 and enrolled at Santa Clara University where he earned a bachelor's degree in Biology in 1988. The following year, he entered the University of California-San Diego's School of Medicine, where he earned a Medical Degree in 1993. He completed his residency at Cedars-Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles and began practicing Internal Medicine in 1996. His first love, however, has always been writing.

In 2003, Hosseini published *The Kite Runner*, which became a runaway bestseller and film in 2007. He followed up with his second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* in 2007, also a bestseller. His third novel, *And the Mountains Echoed*, was published in 2013.

Hosseini has vivid, and fond, memories of peaceful pre-Soviet era Afghanistan, as well as of his personal experiences with Afghan Hazaras. One Hazara in particular was a thirty-year-old man named Hossein Khan, who worked for the Hosseinis when they were living in Iran. When Hosseini was in the third grade, he taught Khan to read and write. Though his relationship with Hossein Khan was brief and rather formal, Hosseini always remembered the fondness that developed between them.

In 2006, Hosseini was named a goodwill envoy to the UNHCR, The United Nations Refugee Agency. (*Adapted from the publisher.*)

### **Extras**

*From a 2004 Barnes & Noble interview:*

- During his years in the U.S., Hosseini has soaked in more than his share of American culture. He professes to be a fan of such U.S. institutions as the music of Bruce Springsteen and football. Still, he admits that he simply cannot appreciate baseball, saying, "I think that to fully appreciate baseball, it helps to have been born in the U.S."
- When it comes to chickens, Hosseini is a chicken. "I'm terrified of chickens," the

writer confesses. "Absolutely petrified. This intense and irrational fear is, I believe, caused by the memory of a black hen we owned in Kabul when I was a child. She used to peck her own chicks to death as soon as the eggs hatched."

- When Hosseini isn't writing or tending to one of his patients, he enjoys games of no-limits Texas hold 'em poker with his brother and friends.
- When asked what book most influenced him, here is what he had to say:

I remember reading *The Grapes of Wrath* in high school in 1983. My family had immigrated to the U.S. three years before, and I had spent the better part of the first two years learning English. John Steinbeck's book was the first book I read in English where I had an "Aha!" moment, namely in the famed turtle chapter. For some reason, I identified with the disenfranchised farm workers in that novel—I suppose in one sense, they reminded me of my own country's traumatized people. And indeed, when I went back to Afghanistan in 2003, I met people with tremendous pride and dignity under some very bleak conditions; I suspect I met a few Ma Joads and Tom Joads in Kabul.

#### Book Reviews

Hosseini's third novel (after *A Thousand Splendid Suns*) follows a close-knit but oft-separated Afghan family through love, wars, and losses more painful than death. The story opens in 1952 in the village of Shadbagh, outside of Kabul, as a laborer, Kaboor, relates a haunting parable of triumph and loss to his son, Abdullah. The novel's core, however, is the sale for adoption of the Kaboor's three-year-old daughter, Pari, to the wealthy poet Nila Wahdati and her husband, Suleiman, by Pari's step-uncle Nabi. The split is particularly difficult for Abdullah, who took care of his sister after their mother's death. Once Suleiman has a stroke, Nila leaves him to Nabi's care and takes Pari to live in Paris. Much later, during the U.S. occupation, the dying Nabi makes Markos, a Greek plastic surgeon now renting the Wahdati house, promise to find Pari and give her a letter containing the truth. The beautiful writing, full of universal truths of loss and identity, makes each section a jewel, even if the bigger picture, which eventually expands to include Pari's life in France, sometimes feels disjointed. Still, Hosseini's eye for detail and emotional geography makes this a haunting read.

#### **Publishers Weekly**

This bittersweet family saga spans six decades and transports readers from Afghanistan to France, Greece, and the United States. Hosseini weaves a gorgeous tapestry of disparate characters joined by threads of blood and fate.... Each character tells his or her version of the same story of selfishness and selflessness, acceptance and forgiveness, but most important, of love in all its complex iterations. *Verdict:* In this uplifting and deeply satisfying book, Hosseini displays an optimism not so obvious in his previous works. Readers will be clamoring for it. —Sally Bissell, *Lee Cty. Lib. Syst., Estero, FL*

#### **Library Journal**

...explore[s] the effect of the Afghan diaspora on identity. It begins powerfully in 1952. Saboor is a dirt-poor day laborer in a village two days walk from Kabul. His first wife died giving birth to their daughter Pari.... Saboor's brother-in-law Nabi is a cook/chauffeur for a wealthy, childless couple in Kabul; he helps arrange the sale of Pari to the couple.... The drama does nothing to prepare us for the coming leaps in time and place.... The stories spill from Hosseini's bountiful imagination, but they compete against each other, denying the novel a catalyst; the result is a bloated, unwieldy work.

### **Kirkus Reviews**

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#### **Discussion Questions**

1. *And the Mountains Echoed* introduces us to Saboor and his children Abdullah and Pari, and the shocking, heartbreaking event that divides them. From there, the book branches off to include multiple other characters and storylines before circling back to Abdullah and Pari. How do each of the other characters relate back to the original story? What themes is the author exploring by having these stories counterpoint one another?
2. The novel begins with a tale of extraordinary sacrifice that has ramifications through generations of families. What do you think of Saboor's decision to let the adoption take place? How are Nila and Nabi implicated in Saboor's decision? What do you think of their motives? Who do you think is the most pure or best intended of the three adults? Ultimately, do you think Pari would have had a happier life if she had stayed with her birth family?
3. Think of other sacrifices that are made throughout the book. Are there certain choices that are easier than others? Is Saboor's sacrifice when he allows Pari to be adopted easier or more difficult than Parwana's sacrifice of her sister? How are they similar and how are they different? Who else makes sacrifices in the book? What do you think the author is saying about the nature of the decisions we make in our lives and the ways in which they affect others?
4. "Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, / there is a field. I'll meet you there." The author chose this thirteenth-century Rumi poem as the epigraph for the book. Discuss the novel in light of this poem. What do you think he is saying about rightdoing and wrongdoing in the lives of his characters, or in the world?
5. The book raises many deep questions about the wavering line between right and wrong, and whether it is possible to be purely "good"—or purely "bad." What do you think after reading the novel: Are good intentions enough to create good deeds? Can positive actions come from selfish motivations? Can bad come from positive intent? How do you think this novel would define a good person? How would you define one?

6. Discuss the question of wrongdoing and rightdoing in the context of the different characters and their major dilemmas in the book : Saboor and his daughter Pari; Parwana and her sister, Masooma; the expats, Idris and Timur, and the injured girl, Roshii; Adel, his warlord father, and their interactions with Gholam and his father (and Abdullah's half brother), Iqbal; Thalia and her mother. Do any of them regret the things they have done? What impact does it have on them?

7. The overlapping relationships of the different characters are complex and reflective of real life. Discuss the connections between the different characters, how they are made, grow, and are sustained. Consider all the ways in which an event in one of the families in the book can resonate in the lives of so many other characters. Can you name some examples?

8. Saboor's bedtime story to his children opens the book. To what degree does this story help justify Saboor's heart-wrenching act in the next chapter? In what ways do other characters in the novel use storytelling to help justify or interpret their own actions? Think about your own experiences. In what ways do you use stories to explain your own past?

9. Two homes form twin focal points for the novel: the family home of Saboor, Abdullah, and Pari—and later Iqbal and Gholam—in Shadbagh; and the grand house initially owned by Suleiman in Kabul. Compare the homes and the roles they play in the novel. Who has claims to each house? What are those claims based on? How do the questions of ownership complicate how the characters relate to one another?

10. The old oak tree in Shadbagh plays an important role for many different characters (Parwana, Masooma, Saboor, Abdullah, and Pari) during its life. What is its significance in the story? What do its branches represent? Why do you think Saboor cuts it down? How does its stump come back as an important landmark later on?


11. In addition to all of the important family relationships in the book, there are also many nongenetic bonds between characters, some of them just as strong. Discuss some of these specific relationships and what needs they fill. What are the differences between these family and nonfamily bonds? What do you think the author is trying to say about the presence of these relationships in our lives?

12. *And the Mountains Echoed* begins in Afghanistan, moves to Europe and Greece, and ends in California, gradually widening its perspective. What do you think the author was trying to accomplish by including so many different settings and nationalities? What elements of the characters' different experiences would you say are universal? Do you think the characters themselves would see it that way?

13. Discuss the title, *And the Mountains Echoed*, and why you think it was chosen. Can you find examples of echoes or recurrences in the plot? In the structure of the storytelling?

(Questions issued by publisher.)

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## KHALED HOSSEINI WAS WORKING FULL-TIME AS A DOCTOR WHEN HE WROTE HIS FIRST NOVEL,

stealing the quiet time between 5:00 and 8:00 a.m. before going off to see patients. He had come to the United States as a political refugee at age fifteen and seen his parents—a former diplomat and a teacher—struggle on welfare. He was drawn to medicine at an early age in part because of its promise of security. But the passion for writing stories, something still whispering within him from his boyhood back in Kabul, persisted.



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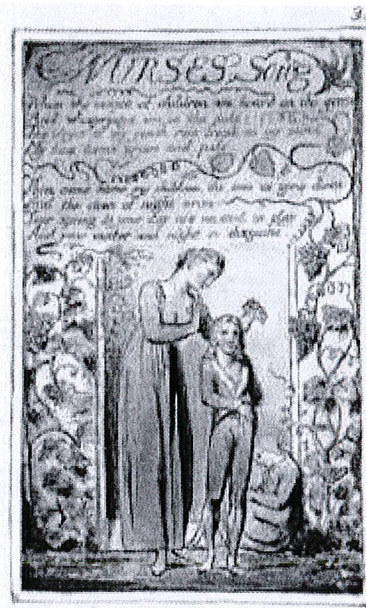
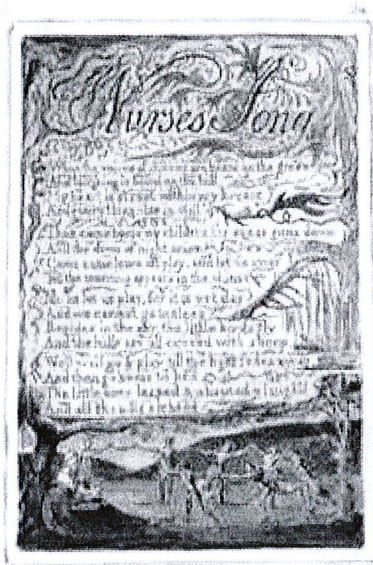
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He married and had children but kept writing. That novel, written in the dark, early hours, was *The Kite Runner*, and its 2003 publication marked the arrival of one of today's most popular and important living authors. One of the first writers to write about Afghan culture for a Western audience, Hosseini has been celebrated for his ability to ultimately both embody and transcend place and history. His true subject, book after book, is not a particular place but, more globally, what it means to be human. Since his debut, Khaled Hosseini has become a household name, unanimously celebrated by critics who have praised each novel as even more ambitious and moving than the last.

Today, Hosseini's literary success has given him an extraordinary platform that reaches far beyond the bestseller list. In 2006 he was named a Goodwill Envoy to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN Refugee Agency. Inspired by a trip he made to Afghanistan with the UNHCR, he later founded The Khaled Hosseini Foundation, a nonprofit that provides humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

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The title of the book  
(And the Mountains Echoed)  
was inspired in part  
by William Blake's  
lovely poem, "Nurse's  
Song." (from the  
acknowledgments page  
of the book)

## Nurse's Song and NURSE'S SONG

### Nurse's Song (Innocence)

When the voices of children are heard on the green  
And laughing is heard on the hill,  
My heart is at rest within my breast  
And everything else is still.

"Then come home, my children, the sun is gone down  
And the dews of night arise;  
Come, come, leave off play, and let us away  
Till the morning appears in the skies."

"No, no, let us play, for it is yet day  
And we cannot go to sleep;  
Besides, in the sky the little birds fly  
And the hills are all cover'd with sheep."

"Well, well, go & play till the light fades away  
And then go home to bed."  
The little ones leaped & shouted & laugh'd  
And all the hills echoed.

### NURSE'S Song (Experience)

When the voices of children are heard on the green  
And whisp'rings are in the dale,  
The days of my youth rise fresh in my mind,  
My face turns green and pale.



Then come home, my children, the sun is gone down,  
And the dews of night arise;  
Your spring & your day are wasted in play,  
And your winter and night in disguise.

## Commentary by Jeff Gillett

In each of these poems, we are given the words of the nurse, who is, in modern terminology, a child-minder. In both poems, she states her own thoughts and feelings before addressing the children directly. In the first poem, from the Songs of Innocence, the children then reply, so that a dialogue continues between nurse and children. In the second poem, from the Songs of Experience, the children are given no opportunity to reply.

The two nurses are seen to have very different personalities and attitudes. The former is at peace with herself and indulgent towards the children. The 'voices of children... on the green' and the sound of 'laughing... on the hill' set her heart 'at rest'. The second nurse, however, does not hear laughter on the hill, but 'whisp'rings... in the dale'. The laughter appeared open and joyful; the 'whisp'rings' seem secretive, perhaps subversive. Even their situation is less open: whilst the laughers are perhaps fully visible on the hillside, the whisperers are hidden in the 'dale'. However, it isn't clear whether it is the children who are less open and trustworthy, or whether it is simply the attitude of their guardian. The second nurse recalls 'the days of my youth', and speaks not of the peace in her heart but of the jealousy and misgivings that she reveals in her face, which 'turns green and pale'. Is she jealous of the children's freedom now, or is she thinking bitterly of her own childhood?

The first two lines of the second stanza are identical in both poems, but the ways in which the poems then develop are in sharp contrast. The first nurse simply tells the children to come home because it is night-time: they can carry on playing in the morning. The 'dews of night' seem nothing more than an image of night-fall. When the children beg to be allowed to play a little longer, because 'it is yet day', they are polite, but full of the joys of the natural world around them. How can they possibly sleep when 'in the sky the little birds fly, / And the hills are all cover'd with sheep'? The internal rhyme seems to emphasise the children's excitement. The nurse allows them to carry on playing 'till the light fades away'. The children's response is joyful, and the hills around are full of their exuberance:

'The little ones leaped & shouted & laugh'd  
And all the hills ecchoed.'

The second nurse doesn't listen to any arguments or pleadings. Instead, she lectures the children on the shallow falseness of their lives, both now and perhaps in later years. Here, 'the dews of night' seem to gain connotations of treachery and intrigue. 'Your spring & your day' could refer to childhood, when, from this nurse's perspective, play is simply a waste of time; 'winter and night' would then be adulthood, which appears to be a time of deception, concealing your true personality. Alternatively, all these times and seasons could refer to the children as they are now: in which case, the nurse sees the children as already being secretive and untrustworthy, as was suggested by her suspicion of their 'whisp'rings'.

The former nurse is clearly a warmer and more likeable personality - but is she, perhaps, a little too naive

and trusting? Innocence and experience are 'two contrary states of the human soul', and Blake does not equate them simplistically with right and wrong.

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**Title:** A sweeping saga of siblings  
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And the Mountains Echoed

by Khaled Hosseini

Bloomsbury, 18.99 [pounds sterling], pp. 404, ISBN 9781408842423

The American comedian Stephen Colbert once joked that when he publicly criticised the novels of Khaled Hosseini, his front garden was invaded by angry members of women's books groups. They were carrying flaming torches in one hand and bottles of white wine in the other.

It's a joke that neatly sums up two significant facts about Hosseini's status as a writer. First--and not to be underestimated, of course--it proves that he's famous enough to make jokes about. But it also reminds us that his fame has been driven by ordinary book-lovers rather than literary professionals. His two previous novels, *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, have sold around 38 million copies. Yet critics remain unsure about how seriously to treat his work as literature--often taking refuge in such traditionally ambiguous murmurs of appreciation as 'master storyteller'.

The debate is unlikely to be cleared up by *And the Mountains Echoed*, where all the elements that made his name are again firmly in place. Sure enough, this is another thumping, family-based, Afghanistancentred saga that features exile, regret and long-lost relatives across several decades. In fact, the biggest difference from Hosseini's earlier books is simply that we get a lot more of all of them--to such an extent that at times it feels as if he has more narrative here than he knows what to do with. The nine chapters, each set in a different time and/or place, naturally contain plenty of material that's relevant to the main plotlines --but also quite a lot that seems to be there largely for its own sake.

Chapter one, for example, is a bedtime story told by a rural Afghan father in 1952 about a poor farmer forced to give away one of his children to a horned giant. In chapter two, we realise why he chose this particular tale: the next day he sets off with son Abdullah and daughter Pari to Kabul, where, to Abdullah's horror, he gives the girl away to a wealthy couple called the Wahdatis.



Your phone has a voice recognition function -- how come you don't?

At this point, a naive reader might well think that the rest of the book will consist of Abdullah's quest to get his beloved younger sister back. Instead, we now move to 1949 for a comprehensive account of the troubled relationship of another pair of local siblings, who then disappear from the novel almost completely.

But, as it turns out, Hosseini is barely clearing his throat. From there, he gives the same detailed treatment to, among others, two boyhood neighbours of the Wadhatis' returning to Afghanistan in 2003 after decades in America; a Greek aid worker visiting his old mother back home; and a Mujahadeen drugs lord. Defying the old rule about not introducing important characters near the end of a novel, Hosseini gives the last chapter to someone we haven't met before, who, in 2010, finally brings the opening quest back to centre stage.

Through all of this, the aspects of Hosseini's work most responsible for that critical sniffiness are certainly present too: the broad-brush characterisation, the occasional descents into pure schlock, the less-thanstartling aperçus. ('If I've learned anything in Kabul,' writes the Greek aid worker, 'it is that human behaviour is messy and unpredictable.') The author's gainsayers might also notice that the various narrators all write like Khaled Hosseini.

And yet, I defy any critics less highminded than, say, F. R. Leavis not to enjoy the sheer zest with which Hosseini goes about his business here--or admire the unhurried confidence with which he sweeps through the years. And if they do admit that resistance is futile and allow their heartstrings to be shamelessly tugged, they might spot something else as well: in its admittedly unsubtle way, the novel gives a thorough airing to the central question of whether it's better to stay true to your roots or rise above them--a question that's presumably pretty urgent for any Afghanistan-born author whose family moved to California in 1980 when he was a teenager and is now an American literary superstar.

In other words, I'm not sure how seriously to take *And the Mountains Echoed* as literature--but, let's face it, Hosseini is a master storyteller.

[ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

*Khaled Hosseini's fame has been driven by ordinary book-lovers rather than literary professionals*

Walton, James

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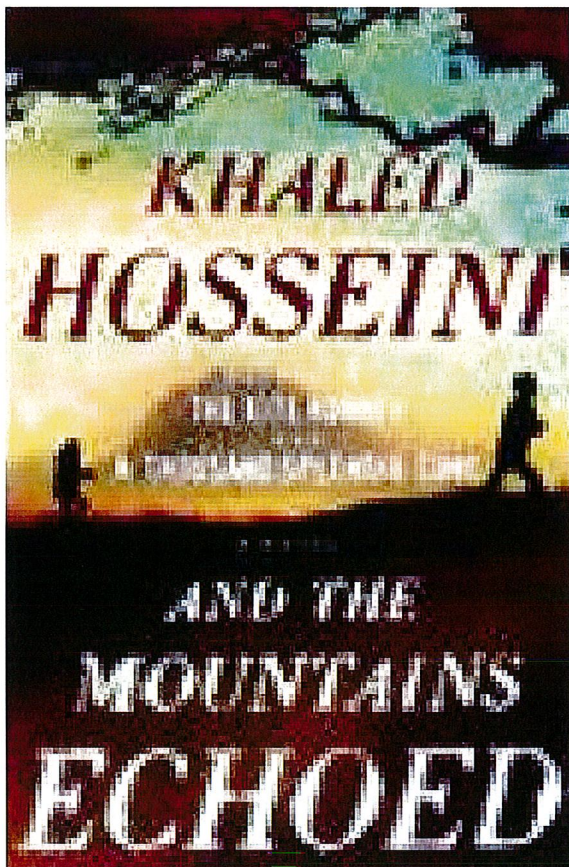
<http://www.bookmarksmagazine.com/>

Full Text:

By Khaled Hosseini

Khaled Hosseini, a native of Kabul who came to the United States in 1980, is the author of the best-selling *The Kite Runner* (\*\*\*\* Sept/Oct 2003) and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (\*\*\*\* SELECTION July/Aug 2007), both of which offer perspectives on Afghan life.

[ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]



**THE STORY:** In an impoverished Afghan village in the 1950s, Abdullah, 10, dotes on his baby sister, Pari, whom he has cared for since their mother died. But when their desperate father takes them to Kabul, where their uncle works for the wealthy Suleiman and Nila Wahdati, he allows the couple to adopt Pari. Eventually, the bohemian Nila flees the repressive Kabul for Paris, where Pari grows up in privilege, becomes a mathematician, marries, and has three children. Suspecting she may have been adopted, Pari vows to one day return to Afghanistan to discover her origins. Abdullah, meanwhile, ends up in California;



his own daughter, named after Pari, dreams of reuniting her father with his sibling. This tale of family and love spans generations and continents, as it weaves together, through multiple perspectives, the siblings' stories and fates with those of a dozen others.

Riverhead. 416 pages. \$28.95. ISBN: 9781594631764

Washington Post \*\*\*\*\*

"Over and over again, he takes complicated characters and roasts them slowly, forcing us to revise our judgments about them and to recognize the good in the bad and vice versa. ... There are a dozen things I still want to say--about the rhyming pairs of characters, the echoing situations, the varied takes on honesty, loneliness, beauty and poverty, the transformation of emotions into physical ailments. Instead, I'll just add this: Send Hosseini up the bestseller list again." MARCELA VALDEZ

Los Angeles Times \*\*\*\*

"Each of the subsequent narratives unfolds from its predecessor, a technique that echoes the classic form of *A Thousand and One Nights*. Though the novel is realistic in style, often grim in subject matter, the magic of storytelling infuses it with a tough sort of optimism, a faith that if people can't necessarily wrest happiness from a hard world, they can at least achieve understanding." WENDY SMITH

New York Times \*\*\*\*

"Khaled Hosseini's new novel, *And the Mountains Echoed*, may have the most awkward title in his body of work, but it's his most assured and emotionally gripping story yet, more fluent and ambitious than *The Kite Runner* (2003), more narratively complex than *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007). ... [It] has more than its share of contrivance and sentimentality, but Mr. Hosseini's narrative gifts have deepened over the years, enabling him to anchor firmly the more maudlin aspects of his tale in genuine emotion and fine-grained details." MICHIKO KAKUTANI

Guardian (UK) \*\*\*\*

"Hosseini's work rests entirely on the distinguished and often enjoyable tradition of the American airport bestseller. ... Enjoyable as it is, though--and it's definitely a step up from Dan Brown--it is restricted by the requirements of its genre, in particular the need for psychological situations to play out in simply satisfying or O Henry irony-of-fate ways." PHILIP HENSHER

San Francisco Chronicle \*\*\*\*

"There is a wonderful freshness to the emotional lives of his Afghan characters, all of whom, despite or perhaps because of their battles with poverty and shifting political realities, invent dynamic new ways to relate to one another. ... It is when Hosseini leaves Afghanistan for the theoretically freer air of 21st century America and France that he begins to stumble." G. WILLOW WILSON

Miami Herald \*\*\*

"Throughout *And the Mountains Echoed*, the author's heavy reliance on sentimentality rankles somewhat; after bravely devising a novel that focuses on characters' contemplative and drawnout reactions to critical events, rather than the events themselves, Hosseini apparently fears that his ruminative approach will tax the reader's patience, so he pumps in personal mini-tragedies, various displays of the debilitating effects of aging, and tearful reunions." RAYYAN AL-SHAWAF

Minneapolis Star Tribune \*\*\*

"Hosseini possesses a fertile imagination that's allowed to roam at will, but it frequently lands well beyond the boundary of his primary story. *And the Mountains Echoed* feels more like a short-story collection than a well-ordered novel, and while its author indulges in old-fashioned storytelling, his stories are just versions of ones we've read before." BOB HOOVER

## CRITICAL SUMMARY

As in his previous two novels, Hosseini has written a beautiful story about how familial, platonic, and romantic bonds play out over the course of tumultuous periods in Afghan history. This time, Hosseini widens his scope to cover the last half-century-plus of Afghan life around the globe. Told through different points of view that toggle back and forth through time, *And the Mountains Echoed* could have been grim in its exploration of love, loss, and acceptance of fate and morally unacceptable

behavior. Critics agreed, however, that the novel is surprisingly hopeful, "radiant with love: the enduring bond of a brother and sister; the irritable but bedrock connection of cousins; the quiet intimacy of master and servant who become friends; the commitment of a doctor and nurse to war's victims" (Los Angeles Times). Too many characters and too few plots, as well as some maudlin and contrived scenes, bothered a few reviewers. But overall, Hosseini has crafted another compelling, well-written tale of Afghan life and what lies beyond it.

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## About the Author

Full text biography:

**Khaled Hosseini**

Birth Date : 1965

Place of Birth : Afghanistan, Kabul

Nationality: American

Occupation : Novelist

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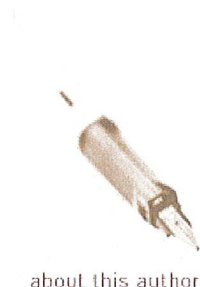
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about this author

### Awards:

Original Voices Award, Borders Group, 2004, for *The Kite Runner*; Richard & Judy's Best Read of the Year, 2008, for *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

### Personal Information:

Born March 4, 1965, in Kabul, Afghanistan; son of Nasser (a diplomat) and a teacher (mother); immigrated to United States, 1980; married; wife's name Roya; children: Haris, Farah. **Education:** Santa Clara University, B.A., 1988; University of San Diego, M.D., 1993. **Avocational Interests:** Soccer, racquetball, writing. **Addresses:** Home: CA. Agent: Elaine Koster Literary Agency, 55 Central Park W, Ste. 6, New York, NY 10023. **E-mail:** khaled@khaledhosseini.com

### Career Information:

Writer. Practicing physician specializing in internal medicine, 1996-2004; The Permanente Medical Group, Mountain View, CA; practicing internist, 1996-2004. Active in volunteer work for Paralyzed Vets of America and Aid the Afghan Children; United Nations Refugee Agency; goodwill ambassador, beginning 2006; Khaled Hosseini Foundation, founder and president.

### Writings:

#### NOVELS

- *The Kite Runner*, Riverhead Books (New York, NY), 2003.
- *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Riverhead Books (New York, NY), 2007.
- *And the Mountains Echoed*, Riverhead Books (New York, NY), 2013.

### Media Adaptions:

*The Kite Runner* was adapted for audiobook, read by the author, Simon & Schuster Audio, 2003, and was adapted for a film directed by Marc Forster, Paramount, 2007. Film rights to *A Thousand Splendid Suns* were purchased by Columbia Pictures.

### Sidelights:

Khaled Hosseini's fiction is inspired by his memories of growing up in pre-Soviet-controlled Afghanistan and Iran, and the people who influenced him as a child. His debut novel, *The Kite Runner*, introduces readers to life in the pre-Soviet Afghanistan of the author's childhood and honors his memories of Hazara servant Hossein Khan, who worked in the Hosseini household during their years in Tehran and taught the young Hosseini to read and write. His second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, follows thirty years of tumultuous Afghan history, a history torn by civil war, the rise of the Taliban, and the lives of two women who work to sustain their families, friendships, and hope for the future despite challenging circumstances. As Barbara Hoffert noted in a *Library Journal* review, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* "proves that one can write a successful follow-up after debuting with a phenomenal best seller."

Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, the son of a diplomat father and teacher mother. When the Afghan Foreign Ministry assigned Hosseini's father to Iran in 1970, the family accompanied him, and they lived in Tehran until 1973. That year, Afghan king Zahir Shah was overthrown in a bloodless coup, leaving the government unstable and the country vulnerable. The year 1976 found the family in Paris, again on diplomatic assignment, and they were still living there in 1980, when the government fell in a bloody communist coup and Soviet troops took control of Afghanistan. The Hosseinis were granted political asylum in the United States and moved to San Jose, California. Arriving in their new country with nothing, the Hosseini family relied on welfare before regaining their economic feet. Fifteen years old at the time of his arrival in the United States, Hosseini eventually trained as a physician. Writing remained his main love, however, and he worked on his first novel during the off-hours from his work as a practicing medical internist at a Los Angeles hospital.

Spanning four decades, *The Kite Runner* is narrated by Amir, a writer living in California. Amir begins his story with his affluent childhood in Kabul, where the quiet, motherless boy yearns for attention from his busy father, Baba, and finds a friend in Hassan, the son of his father's servant. Amir resents sharing his father's affection with the loyal and talented Hassan, but when Amir wins a kite-flying contest, his father finally gives him the praise he craves. In that single incident, he loses Hassan, however, when the boy runs off to reclaim a downed kite and is attacked and raped by Assef, the town bully. Feelings of guilt for not helping his friend prompt Amir to push Hassan away, and even accuse his former friend of theft. Eventually, Amir and Hassan are separated by distance when Amir's father is relocated.

Hosseini's story then jumps forward several years, as the adult Amir, who fled Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation, moves to the bay area of California. Married to a beautiful Afghan woman, he has become a successful writer. Although Baba has by now died of cancer, in 2001 Baba's former partner calls from Pakistan. Familiar with the history of Amir and Hassan, the man tells Amir that Hassan and his wife have been executed by the Taliban, and their son, Sohrab, is now an orphan. The man suggests that Amir owes a debt to Hassan, and Amir agrees. He returns to find Sohrab in the custody of Assef, and it is then that he finally stands up to the man who had raped his friend.

"Rather than settle for a coming-of-age or travails-of-immigrants story, Hosseini has folded them both into this searing spectacle of hard-won personal salvation," wrote a *Kirkus Reviews* critic in a review of *The Kite Runner*. The reviewer added that the novel also serves up "a rich slice of Afghan culture." Edward Hower wrote in the *New York Times Book Review* that the author's "depiction of prerevolutionary Afghanistan is rich in warmth and humor but also tense with the friction between the nation's different ethnic groups." "The novel's canvas turns dark when Hosseini describes the suffering of his country under the tyranny of the Taliban," Hower added, noting that "the final third of the book is full of haunting images." *School Library Journal* reviewer Penny Stevens called *The Kite Runner* a "beautifully written first novel," and a *Publishers Weekly* contributor dubbed the book "stunning." "It is rare that a book is at once so timely and of such high literary quality," the critic elaborated.

A trip to Kabul in 2003 provided Hosseini with the inspiration for his second novel. As he explained to Louise Ermelino in *Publishers Weekly*, he witnessed Afghans "walking down the street, wearing burqa, with five or six children, begging." Talking to these women, Hosseini heard stories that both shocked and saddened him. "One woman told me she was the wife of a policeman who hadn't been paid in six months," he recalled to Ermelino. "The family was starving so she sent her children out to beg. She told me another story of a widow who ground bread and laced it with rat poison and fed it to her children, then ate it herself. These stories were the germ, the starting point for [*A Thousand Splendid Suns*]."

Described by a *Publishers Weekly* contributor as "another searing epic of Afghanistan in turmoil," *A Thousand Splendid Suns* introduces Mariam and Laila, the two wives of the brutal and misogynistic Rasheed. Mariam had wed the middle-aged Rasheed at age fifteen, eighteen years later her failure to produce an heir prompted Rasheed to take the fourteen-year-old orphan Laila as his second wife. Laila has already taken a lover in Tariq, and when she bears a daughter Aziza, rather than a son, she knows it is only a matter of time before her violent husband discovers that Aziza is not his child. As the country's turmoil continues, Mariam and Laila work together, courageously defending their family and providing Aziza security and love. In his story, Hosseini brings to life the brutal treatment endured by women in the repressive patriarchy promoted by Taliban culture, while also presenting what the *Publishers Weekly* contributor dubbed a "lyrical evocation of the lives and enduring hopes of [his] . . . resilient characters." "Unimaginably tragic, Hosseini's magnificent second novel is a sad and beautiful testament to both Afghani suffering and strength," concluded *Booklist* contributor Kristine Huntley, and a *Kirkus Reviews* writer noted that *A Thousand Splendid Suns* "is never depressing." Praising Hosseini's prose as "simple and unadorned," Hoffert wrote that the author "deftly sketches the history of his native land," creating a "heartbreaking" and "highly recommended" tale.

Hosseini's third novel, *And the Mountains Echoed*, begins in a small village outside of Kabul in 1952. A poor laborer and widower named Kaboor raises his son, Abdullah, but sells his daughter, Pari, to a wealthy family. Pari is raised by a kind couple, Nila Wahdati and Suleiman, but Abdullah struggles to adjust to the loss of his sister. When Suleiman suffers a stroke, Nila takes Pari to Paris, and Abdullah loses touch with his sister. The years pass, and he decides to find her. Discussing the novel in an NPR *Weekend Edition Sunday Online* interview, Hosseini noted, "In some ways, I see the characters in this book, as with all of us in real life, as victims of the passage of time. And memory is the way we gauge that. So memory is a recurring theme in this book and the question is raised a number of times about whether memory is a blessing--something that safeguards in all the things that are dear to you--or is memory a curse--something that makes you relive the most painful parts of your life, the toil, the struggle, the sorrows."

A *Kirkus Reviews* critic observed that "the stories spill from Hosseini's bountiful imagination, but they compete against each other, denying the novel a catalyst, the result is a bloated, unwieldy work." James Walton, writing in the *Spectator*, was far more impressed, commenting: "I defy any critics . . . not to . . . admire the unhurried confidence with which [Hosseini] sweeps through the years. And if they do admit that resistance is futile and allow their heartstrings to be shamelessly tugged, they might spot something else as well: in its admittedly unsubtle way, the novel gives a thorough airing to the central question of whether it's better to stay true to your roots or rise above them." Offering more strident praise, a *Publishers Weekly* contributor stated: "Hosseini's eye for detail and emotional geography makes this a haunting read."

#### Related Information:

#### PERIODICALS

- *Booklist*, July, 2003, Kristine Huntley, review of *The Kite Runner*, p. 1864, March 1, 2007, Kristine Huntley, review of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, p. 39.
- *Kirkus Reviews*, May 1, 2003, review of *The Kite Runner*, p. 630, March 1, 2007, review of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, p. 187, March 15, 2013, review of *And the Mountains Echoed*.
- *Library Journal*, April 15, 2003, Rebecca Stuhr, review of *The Kite Runner*, p. 122, March 14, 2007, Barbara Hoffert, review of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, p. 58, April 1, 2013, Sally Bissett, review of *And the Mountains Echoed*, p. 73.
- *Maclean's*, June 24, 2013, Dafna Izenberg, review of *And the Mountains Echoed*, p. 69.
- *New York Times Book Review*, August 3, 2003, Edward Hower, review of *The Kite Runner*, p. 4.
- *Publishers Weekly*, May 12, 2003, review of *The Kite Runner*, p. 43, February 26, 2007, review of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, p. 52, March 19, 2007, Louisa Ermelino, interview with Hosseini, p. 34, March 18, 2013, review of *And the Mountains Echoed*, p. 54, July 29, 2013, review of *And the Mountains Echoed*, p. 63.
- *School Library Journal*, November, 2003, Penny Stevens, review of *The Kite Runner*, p. 171.
- *Spectator*, May 11, 2013, James Walton, "A Sweeping Saga of Siblings," p. 34.
- *Times* (London, England), August 30, 2003, review of *The Kite Runner*, p. 17.
- *Times Literary Supplement*, October 10, 2003, James O'Brien, review of *The Kite Runner*, p. 25.





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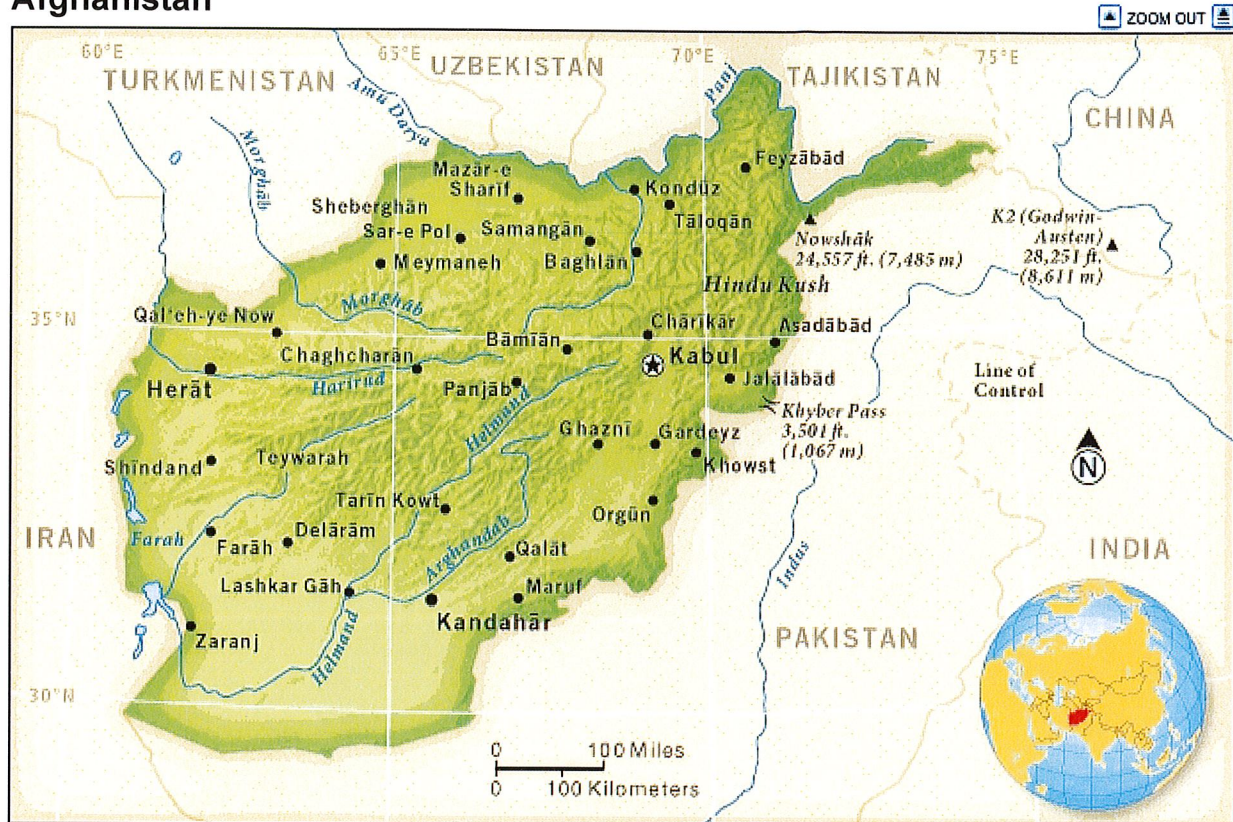
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