

METAPHORICAL USAGE OF CRAFT TERMINOLOGY (IN “KITE RUNNER” BY KHALED HOSSEINI)

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Abstract

This article explores the metaphorical use of craft-related terminology in *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, focusing on kite fighting and carpet weaving. The novel employs terms like kite running, cutting, glass-coated strings, and the last fallen kite to symbolize themes of loyalty, betrayal, and redemption. Additionally, carpet weaving serves as a metaphor for the complexity of life and the tendency to hide moral failings. By analyzing key extracts, this article highlights how Hosseini masterfully integrates craft imagery to enhance the novel's emotional depth and cultural significance.

Keywords

metaphor, symbolism, kite fighting, kite running, betrayal and redemption, loyalty and sacrifice, carpet weaving, afghan traditions, childhood innocence, guilt and atonement.

Introduction: Metaphors are a fundamental aspect of human cognition and language, shaping the way we conceptualize abstract ideas. In cognitive linguistics, metaphors are not merely rhetorical or stylistic devices but essential tools for structuring thought and meaning. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), introduced by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By*, suggests that people understand complex concepts through metaphorical mappings from concrete, embodied experiences.¹⁰⁹ According to this theory, metaphors pervade everyday language and thought, with common examples including "*TIME IS MONEY*" (e.g., "spending time") and "*ARGUMENT IS WAR*" (e.g., "attacking an opponent's position").

Another important perspective is Blending Theory (Conceptual Integration Theory), developed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner in *The Way We*

¹⁰⁹ Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Think.¹¹⁰ This theory explains how different mental spaces combine to create new meanings, allowing metaphors to emerge from the interaction of multiple cognitive domains. Unlike CMT, which focuses on direct mappings between source and target domains, Blending Theory emphasizes how new, emergent meanings arise from the fusion of multiple conceptual inputs.

In addition, Image Schema Theory, proposed by Mark Johnson and expanded by Leonard Talmy, highlights the role of recurring bodily experiences in shaping metaphorical thought.¹¹¹ Image schemas, such as *CONTAINMENT* (inside/outside), *FORCE* (pushing, pulling), and *VERTICALITY* (up/down), structure how people interpret metaphors across different languages and cultures. These schemas underlie many metaphorical expressions, such as "rising tension" (*VERTICALITY*) or "breaking free from constraints" (*CONTAINMENT*).

Metaphors also serve broader social and cultural functions, as explored by Zoltán Kövecses in *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* (2010). He argues that metaphorical expressions are shaped not only by cognitive processes but also by cultural models and historical contexts. Similarly, Raymond W. Gibbs, in his book, discusses how figurative language, including metaphors, influences storytelling and literary interpretation, making them integral to both linguistic and literary studies.¹¹²

This theoretical foundation provides a basis for analyzing the role of metaphor in various discourses, including literature, politics, and everyday communication. Understanding these frameworks allows for a deeper exploration of how metaphor shapes meaning beyond surface-level language use.

This version provides a solid theoretical background without tying it directly to *The Kite Runner*, leaving room for later analysis. Let me know if you'd like any refinements!

Khaled Hosseini's "*The Kite Runner*" is a novel deeply rooted in the cultural and emotional landscape of Afghanistan, employing rich symbolism and metaphors to explore themes of guilt, redemption, and friendship. Among these, the crafts of kite fighting and carpet weaving play a central role, not only as literal pastimes but also as powerful metaphors for relationships, struggles, and personal growth. Hosseini uses various craft-related terms—such as kite running, cutting, glass-coated strings, the last fallen kite, and carpet weaving—to represent deeper emotional and moral conflicts within the novel.

¹¹⁰ Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. (2002). *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities*. New York: Basic Books.

¹¹¹ Johnson, M. (1987). *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹¹² Gibbs, R. W. (1994). *The Poetics of Mind: Figurative Thought, Language, and Understanding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kite Fighting as a Symbol of Loyalty and Redemption

The title itself, *The Kite Runner*, refers to Hassan, who retrieves fallen kites after kite-fighting tournaments. In Afghan tradition, the last cut kite is the most prized, and runners chase after it with determination. This act of running after a kite becomes a metaphor for Amir's lifelong pursuit of redemption. While Hassan's literal kite running showcases his unwavering loyalty to Amir, Amir's metaphorical kite running later in life—his attempt to rescue Sohrab—reflects his own journey toward atonement.

This theme is explicitly highlighted in one of the most famous lines in the novel:

*"For you, a thousand times over," Hassan had said before running after the last fallen kite.*¹¹³

This phrase, repeated by Amir to Sohrab at the novel's end, shows how kite running symbolizes devotion, sacrifice, and redemption.

Glass-Coated Strings: The Pain of Betrayal

In Afghan kite fighting, the strings (tar) are coated with powdered glass to make them sharp enough to cut an opponent's kite. This technique serves as a powerful metaphor for the betrayal that defines Amir and Hassan's relationship. The sharp, dangerous string mirrors the emotional wounds Amir inflicts on Hassan through his cowardice and deceit. Just as the string is both a tool of triumph and destruction, Amir's actions bring him success but also deep guilt and loss.

Hosseini captures this dangerous beauty in his writing:

"In Kabul, fighting kites was a little like going to war."

*"The kites were made of thin paper, and the strings were coated with glass to cut the opponent's strings"*¹¹⁴.

This imagery reinforces the idea that winning a kite fight—like Amir's initial victory—can come at a painful cost.

Cutting the Kite: Letting Go and Loss

The act of cutting an opponent's kite is the ultimate goal in kite fighting, symbolizing victory. However, in the novel, "cutting" also represents loss and abandonment. When Amir cuts Hassan out of his life, it is akin to severing a kite string—irreversible and devastating.

*"The tension in the air was as taut as the glass string I was tugging with my bloody hands"*¹¹⁵.

Here, the intensity of kite fighting mirrors Amir's own internal turmoil. Later, when Amir watches Sohrab fly a kite at the end of the novel, he tells Sohrab, "For

¹¹³ Hosseini, K. (2003). *The Kite Runner*. Riverhead Books, p. 67

¹¹⁴ Hosseini, K. (2003). *The Kite Runner*. Riverhead Books, p.52

¹¹⁵ Hosseini, K. (2003). *The Kite Runner*. Riverhead Books, p.56

you, a thousand times over," echoing Hassan's loyalty. The act of cutting a kite at this moment becomes symbolic of letting go of past guilt and beginning anew.

The Last Fallen Kite: The Ultimate Prize and Redemption

The last kite to fall in a tournament is highly sought after, representing honor and glory. In the novel, the last kite that Amir retrieves after the tournament is meant to win his father's approval. However, this moment is tainted by Hassan's assault, which Amir allows to happen. Decades later, when Amir rescues Sohrab from Assef, the act is symbolically similar to retrieving a fallen kite—this time, however, the "prize" is not a trophy for personal gain but a step toward redemption and healing.

Carpet Weaving: Life's Complexities and Hidden Sins

While kites are the dominant craft imagery in the novel, carpets and carpet-weaving also serve as subtle yet meaningful metaphors. Afghan carpets, known for their intricate designs and deep cultural significance, symbolize tradition, fate, and the complexity of human relationships.

"Baba had built the orphanage, but perhaps just as importantly, he had also built a successful carpet-exporting business"¹¹⁶.

This reference to Baba's carpet business ties into the novel's broader themes of legacy and moral responsibility. Just as carpets are woven with intricate detail, Amir's life is shaped by the interwoven choices and consequences of his past.

Another carpet-related metaphor appears in the idea of hiding sins beneath the surface, much like sweeping dust under a rug. Baba, despite being seen as a great man, harbors his own secrets:

"Baba's motto about throwing parties was this: Invite the whole world or it's not a party"¹¹⁷.

This grand approach often masked the underlying tensions and secrets within their lives—just as carpets may hide imperfections underneath their surface.

Conclusion

Hosseini masterfully weaves craft-related terminology into the novel's deeper themes, using kite fighting and carpet weaving as powerful metaphors for life's struggles, betrayals, and redemptions. Through the symbolism of kite running, cutting, glass-coated strings, and carpets, he highlights the complexities of human relationships and the weight of past actions.

By the end of the novel, the simple act of flying a kite becomes a moment of profound emotional closure, showing that while the past cannot be undone, healing and redemption are always possible—much like a masterfully woven carpet, where

¹¹⁶ Hosseini, K. (2003). *The Kite Runner*. Riverhead Books, p.14

¹¹⁷ Hosseini, K. (2003). *The Kite Runner*. Riverhead Books, p.16

every thread, no matter how painful or broken, contributes to the beauty of the whole.

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