

"Analyze how justice is represented and understood in two works studied."

Fielas Child, The Kite Runner

What makes a novel a page-turner? One explanation has to do with justice. Since justice is not always carried out in the real world, readers often want to see justice carried out in fictional worlds. We want the hero to prevail, the villain to perish and the police to be fair and just. For this reason, we find Fielas Child by Dalene Matthee and The Kite runner by Khaled Hosseini intriguing literary works. In these works, the notion of justice is represented and understood **in the contexts of South Africa and Afghanistan**, where racial tension, family ties and personal identity are all issues. Readers of these works want to see the injustices of these societies set right.

At the heart of both novels is a sense that racial discrimination is unjust. In particular there is a character in each novel who represents the oppressed people of their place and time. Dalene Matthee, who wrote Fielas Child during the height of apartheid in South Africa in the early 1980s, presents us with Fielas, an African woman who is discriminated against in the late 1880s. She is systematically lied to, ignored and incriminated by the Magistrate and the police. The reader feels sympathy for Fielas because her story is told through free indirect speech, a narrative technique that allows the reader to hear a character's thoughts. By telling Fielas's story, which was inspired by true events, Matthee seems to be criticizing the authorities of the society in which she lives, South Africa, for being cruel and unjust. Essentially she is suggesting that South Africa has not changed much in 100 years.

Similarly, The Kite Runner explores the theme of racial discrimination. Just like the state discriminates against blacks in Fielas's Child, the Taliban discriminates against the Hazara in The Kite Runner. The protagonist's childhood friend, Hassan, is brutally murdered and falsely accused of stealing because he is Hazara. Unlike Fielas's Child, Hosseini's tells his protagonist's story through first person narration. The effect is that the reader feels the guilt of Amir, who has failed to stand up for his Hazara friend. Khaled Hosseini wrote the novel in English from his home in San Jose, while the United States was invading his country of origin, Afghanistan, between in 2001 and 2002. Many people around the world learned about the injustices of the Taliban government through Hosseini's criticisms of it in the novel, The Kite Runner.

Both novels comment a **particular problem** created by racism: it breaks up families. For example Fielas is a black woman raising a white foundling, Benjamin. When the state discovers this, they remove the child from her and claim he belongs to the van Rooyens, a white family that lost a child years earlier. They live on the other side of a mountain range. The reader constantly wonders, like Benjamin, if he could have possibly walked through the forest and over these mountains as a toddler. Matthee uses free indirect speech to show us the thoughts and doubts of every character, including Benjamin and Fielas. Then in the final chapters, Barta van Rooyen, Benjamin's supposed mother and the one character whose thoughts are not exposed to the reader, breaks out crying. She cannot keep her dark secret any longer: The state gave her Benjamin, because the Magistrate

found it inappropriate for a white child to live with Fielie and her black family. Just as Matthee shows us how racism leads to broken families and dark secrets, so too do we see a similar issue in *The Kite Runner*. While the protagonist shares his secret sense of guilt with the reader through direct narration, we do not realize that another character, Amir's father, holds a secret that tears his family apart. His father had had an extramarital child with the wife of his servant. Hassan and Amir are really half-brothers, which Amir only learns much later in life. Both novels make use of plot twists that shock the reader. Just as it was found inappropriate for a black woman to raise a white child in South Africa in Matthee's novel, so too would it have been found inappropriate for a Pashtun man to father a child with a Hazara woman. Both Hosseini and Matthee show us how racism leads to secrets that lead to broken families.

It could be argued that both novels are really about a search for identity. As readers, we want Amir to redeem himself of his wrongdoing, and we want Benjamin to find out who his real mother is. However, both characters are prevented from achieving their goals because the state stands in their way. The Taliban murders Hassan before Amir can say sorry. The Magistrate lies to Fielie and tells her Barta van Rooyen is Benjamin's biological mother. Furthermore, both families have dark secrets that prevent these characters from knowing who they are. Barta does not tell the truth, nor does Baba, Amir's father. It seems that the authors are telling us that justice can only be found once the truth is told. One could fairly say that Benjamin and Amir's search for identity is South Africa and Afghanistan's search for identity respectively.

In these literary works, justice can be understood in terms of racial equality and honesty. The authors have employed clever narrative techniques and plot twists to keep their reader intrigued. Both authors were influenced by the times and places in which they wrote. Their commentaries suggest that South Africans and Afghans can only achieve peace and justice once they cease to discriminate against and lie to each other.