

# A Study of The Kite Runner from the Perspective of Genette's Narrative Theory

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**Abstract:** There is always a distance between the narrator and the story. Narrative Distance can be of varying degrees. The objective of the current study is to explore how the narrative discourse is employed by Khaled Hosseini in the novel "The Kite Runner". Genette's (1980) model provides the theoretical framework for the research as the study attempts to analyze how the narrative discourse of narrated speech, transposed speech and reported speech apply to the narration of The Kite Runner.

**Keywords:** Khaled Hosseini; The Kite Runner; Narrative Discourse

## 1. Narrative Discourse of Genette

Gerard Genette is a French narratologist whose narrative theories are invaluable as it fills the need for a systematic theory of narrative. In his famous monograph *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Genette clarifies the concepts of narrative. From his point of view, there are three distinct notions concerning narrative<sup>[1]</sup>. Narrative refers to narrative statement, the succession of events, or an event, which consists of someone recounting something. Genette further distinguishes three terms, namely, story, narrative and narrating. He uses story for the signified or narrative content and narrative for the signifier, while narrating for the producing narrative action and the real or fictional context where the action takes place. Along this line of thinking, narratology becomes a study of the relationship between narrative and story, between narrative and narrating, and between story and narrating, which can be further elaborated from narrative time, narrative focalization and narrative discourse.

Genette divides narrative discourse into three types, namely, narrated speech, transposed speech and reported speech. And in reported speech, Genette further elaborates it from three specific aspects: interior monologue, dramatic dialogue and stream of consciousness<sup>[1]</sup>. Narrated speech also known as narrated discourse is made up of narrated dialogues and narrated thoughts. Yet generally speaking, among literary works, the traces of narrated dialogues are more discernible than the narrated thoughts. Narrated dialogues quote the character's speeches directly. It does not need extra words or descriptions to narrate the story, but tells the story in a vivid and authentic way. Unlike narrated discourses which quote the character's dialogues directly, in transposed speech, or indirect narrated discourse, the narrator needs a lot of narrated verbs and tags, such as "he said," "he thought" to conduct the narrating, though sometimes these tags are omitted in indirect narrated discourse to make the narrating more concise.

## 2. Analysis of The Kite Runner

Narrative discourse plays a vital part in narrative. In *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini has made a good command of narrative discourse so as to narrate the story in a more intriguing and attractive way. In this part, narrated speech, transposed speech and reported speech are elaborated to reveal the charm of the narrative discourse in the novel.

### 2.1 Narrated Speech

According to Genette, narrated speech is the most distant and reduced, for it does not involve the readers that much. Meanwhile, it conveys a large amount of information by involving the characters themselves. Narrated speech, also known as narrated discourse, is mainly divided into two types. One is narrated dialogues and the other is narrated thoughts, or narrated inner speech<sup>[1]</sup>. In narrated dialogues, the expressions such as "I said," "he said," "she cried," "he added," are common. While in narrated thoughts, phrases like "I thought," "he thought," "she pondered," are recurrent. *The Kite Runner* features a great number of narrated dialogues and a few narrated thoughts. For example, in Chapter Four, when Amir was reading a story to Hassan, and they had the following dialogues: "What does that word mean?" "Which one?" "Imbecile."<sup>[2]</sup>

The narrator directly quotes his conversations with Hassan. In narrated dialogues, the narrator reveals the real or fictive conversation scenario to the readers. Instead of narrating, the narrator presents the dialogues to the readers so that they can "listen" to the conversations themselves.

Besides narrated dialogues, the other form of narrated speech is narrated thoughts. In Chapter Ten, when Amir and his Baba were confronted with the Russian soldiers, these sentences appear: Can't you just let it go for once? So this is where Baba dies, I thought. This is how it's going to happen<sup>[2]</sup>.

The narrator uses “I thought” to quote the character’s thoughts italicized, which is very typical of narrated thoughts.

## 2.2 Transposed Speech

Different from narrated speech is transposed speech. Instead of directly quoting the characters’ dialogues, it quotes the other characters’ words without using quotation marks and changes the first-person narrative into a third-person narrative. For example, instead of quoting the sentence “I want to hear you recite poems,” the narrator changes the sentence into “Hassan said he wanted to hear me recite poems.” The third-person tone makes it more impersonal and objective. In *The Kite Runner*, besides narrated speech, Hosseini uses a large amount of transposed speech.

In Chapter Twelve, the last sentence of the first paragraph reads like this:

*“Ali swore that if you ate watermelon the night of yelda, you wouldn’t get thirsty*

*the coming summer.” (Hosseini 2003: 155)*

It is quite obvious that the sentence is said by Ali. Instead of using a quotation mark to quote it, the author directly transposes it into a third-person narrated speech, which results in a gap or distance needed by the readers in the process of reading from outside in.

## 2.3 Reported Speech

In Narrative Discourse, Genette points out that the reported speech is the most “mimetic” form in which the narrator pretends literally to give the floor to his character<sup>[1]</sup>. Interior monologue and stream of consciousness are the two major forms in reported speech, which can expose the character’s inner speech to its maximum.

### 2.3.1 Interior Monologue

Interior monologue is also called immediate speech. There is no intermediary of a narrating, as the narrator is obliterated and the character substitutes him or her. In *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini uses a great many interior monologues since the novel is narrated from a first-person narrator. In Chapter Five, when confronting Assef’s interrogation “How can you call him your ‘friend’?” Hassan has the following interior monologue: But he’s not my friend! I almost blurted. He’s my servant<sup>[2]</sup>.

Interior monologue is meant to speak to oneself. One’s innermost secretive thoughts, desires and anxieties flow from inside out in the form of interior monologue. Then, readers are tempted to trust the character and the authenticity of the narrative.

### 2.3.2 Stream of Consciousness

Stream of consciousness shares some features of interior monologue, since they both mimic the character’s inner thoughts. Laurence Bowling defines stream of consciousness as “that narrative method by which the author attempts to give a direct quotation of the mind”<sup>[3]</sup>. Yet stream of consciousness is different from interior monologue in that interior monologue is usually triggered off after one event, and has a close logic connection, while stream of consciousness, also known as unconsciousness, does not occur in a logical pattern, but in a very random and casual way. In *The Kite Runner*, streams of consciousness are recurrent. In Chapter Seven, when Amir was flying his kite in the kite flying tournament and when he was very likely to win, his thoughts were also flying just like the kite, the narrator thus narrated:

*But all I heard—all I willed myself to hear—was the thudding of blood in my head.*

*All I saw was the blue sky. All I smelled was victory. Salvation. Redemption. If Baba was wrong and there was a God like they said in school, then he’d let me win. I didn’t know what the other guys was [...]* (Hosseini 2003: 71)

## 3. Conclusion and Implication

Narrative discourse engages the readers as much as possible through triggering their curiosity and imagination. More importantly, it makes the narration more appealing and coherent. By means of these three major narrative strategies, Hosseini creates a narrative that ingeniously combines authenticity with originality, the aesthetic with the ethical, and the oriental with the occidental, which is a perfect justification for its enormous success both on the book market and inside Academe. In this research study, the primary objective was to study the narrative structure of *The Kite Runner* by applying Genette’s (1980) model of narrative discourse. It is demonstrated that Genette’s (1980) model is quite comprehensive and applicable to *The Kite Runner*. In recent times, many people have started criticizing structuralist narratology. However, we cannot deny the importance of Genette’s (1980) model of narratology for the detailed study of structural aspects of narratology. There is still a need to study the narrative structures present in different genres like poetry, short stories, autobiographies, etc.

## References:

[1]Genette, G. (1980). Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method, trans. Jane E. Lewin, 235, 236.

[2]Hosseini, Khaled (2003) *The Kite Runner*, New York: Riverhead Books.

[3]Bowling, Lawrence (1950) What is the Stream of Consciousness Technique? Reprinted in Kumar and Mckean.

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