Title: Round, unvarnished tale: borders welcomed the 'plain, old-fashioned storytelling' of Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner with open arms

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Document Type: Book review

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Full Text:

In contrast to last month's mauling of Jonathan Safran Foer's Everything is Illuminated, the November meeting of Borders Brent Cross book group gave a warm welcome to Khaled Hosseini's first offering, The **Kite** **Runner**. "The reception given to these two debut novels couldn't have been more different," says Stuart Scattergood. "Whereas Everything is Illuminated ranks as one of the group's least-said-soonest-mended reading experiences, Hosseini's first baby was welcomed into the group's open arms and cradled, nurtured and pretty much oohed and aahed over by everybody present."



Testament to Hosseini's "immediately accessible" writing style was the fact that the group's discussion began directly with a consideration of the principal protagonists, Amir and Hassan. The group praised Hosseini's mastery of the "all too rare skill of plain, old-fashioned storytelling", and his ability to take the reader straight into the lives of the two boys without resorting to stylistic special effects or literary sleight-of-hand.

Hassan, the group felt, was the real star of the novel, with his untimely death at the hands of the Taliban coming as "a punch in the stomach". It was the Hazara servant boy's loyalty to his master and best friend that "fatally endeared Hassan to the hearts of the book group"; a devotion that was even more moving, according to Borders, in the face of Amir's betrayal of Hassan and his father Ali, when he frames them both for theft.

Amir was "a more nebulous character", however. While some readers felt that he had been too hard on himself in carrying around guilt from his past, others pointed out just how nasty he had been to Hassan in his formative years. These readers felt that he deserved his guilt as a just reward.

But one other character was identified as possibly even more important than either of the two leading men: the character of Kabul itself. One member of the group had spent time in pre-1970s Kabul, and had even been stoned for wearing revealing western clothing; she reported that the author had successfully captured both the colour and complexity of Kabul in its more innocent days, and the sense of this unique city's isolation from the rest of the world.

Scattergood says: "The detached, matter of fact style of the storytelling gave far greater weight to the Kabul character by never giving in to the sensationalism of the many catastrophic changes that were wrought upon the city. The human element of the novel was magnificently strengthened by the author's choice to give the 'real' characters a chance to shine, rather than making the changes to their environment the main focus of the story."

The group also appreciated the novel's many turning points and moving moments, which provided a "very positive reflection of the depth of interest and fascination" that it found in the book.

Dennys Harriet

**Source Citation**   (MLA 7th Edition)

Dennys Harriet. "Round, unvarnished tale: borders welcomed the 'plain, old-fashioned storytelling' of Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner with open arms." *The Bookseller* 9 Dec. 2005: 26. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 17 Nov. 2013.

*Document URL
http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA140446316&v=2.1&u=msu\_main&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w&asid=97b606dd9a21c6194df33a676648df4d*

Reflection: What do you think of this article? What are some things from this that you would like to discuss in seminar?