

Isolation in Khaled Hosseini's Sea Prayer

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Abstract

The ongoing refugee crisis all over the world has been creatively captured in Literature by many writers, notably writers from the Arab heartland. They write extensively as insiders who have experienced large scale violence in home countries torn apart by war. Thus, if the refugee crisis is isolation of people, then these people experience isolation twice. Isolation first happens when they are left homeless in their homeland and then when they are isolated in adopted nations where they live on an island in the midst of other human beings. The Afghan American writer Khalid Hosseini has elaborated on this dominant theme in his fiction. In his last novel, Sea Prayer, Hosseini with a sparing use of words displays the sense of isolation that refugees experience everywhere. An idyllic world is shattered by a never ending war that forces its inhabitants into a state of homelessness. The isolation and desolation experienced by the refugees of war is poignantly captured in Sea Prayer. Tossed aside by warring governments, refugees float around as islands adrift in hostile waters. Hosseini's brevity with words spares no emotion, as he carries his story forward on a prayer n hope.

KEYWORDS: Isolation, refugees, emotion, nations

“The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much” (Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness). And that is exactly the precincts of Khaled Hosseini's latest best seller, Sea Prayer. A people who are different in their faith and way of life are forcibly annihilated or isolated, are forced to seek new shores and new lands to blend in and settle down but find themselves unwanted refugees in every land they go to other than their bomb torn homeland.

Isolation is a theme that draws the human soul into its folds isolating it from the world outside. But isolation can be of different kinds, the isolation that one withdraws into voluntarily to escape harsh reality and isolation that is enforced on one by external forces. Khaled Hosseini, the Afghan American writer presents the theme of isolation and desolation that a war-ravaged people experience as well as the isolation of individuals lost in refugee crowds.

Khaled Hosseini who was born in Kabul, Afghanistan emigrated to America where he now lives as a full-time writer even though he is a trained physician. He weaves together stories of unbelievable pain and horror in the war-torn regions of Arab nations. Men, women and children, whole families torn asunder by the violence of warring governments are thrown together in a motley group as they each grapple with their sense of isolation. Hosseini touches upon this sense of loss and bewilderment as his characters

stumble through their lives amidst whizzing bullets and exploding bombs, trying to cope with everything that life and war has to throw at them.

Hosseini's first novel, *The Kite Runner* catapulted him to instant fame as it rode high on the best sellers list. The story of a young boy and his father, it traces their tumultuous relationship through tumultuous times, through Talibanized Afghanistan and then as immigrants in their adopted country America. Hosseini's second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was also set in Afghanistan but takes on a more feminine perspective as he follows the lives of the two women protagonists, Mariam and Laila. Hosseini's last novel, *Sea Prayer* is an illustrated one with the deft strokes of Dan Brown, the illustrator heightening the story of a father and his little son standing on the shores of a new life.

A father cradles his little son in his arms reminding him of the life they are leaving behind. A life that the father had lived in his beloved homeland, the land of his ancestors, a land and ancestral home that he had hoped to bequeath to his little son. A rambling home where he had spent his early boyhood in the company of his siblings, sleeping under the stars on the terrace and waking up to the morning sounds of the olive trees in the morning breeze accompanying the clanging of kitchen ware as his mother cooked away a robust meal for the family. The father reminds his little son Marwan of the same fields that he was taken to by his mother, he clutching her hand with his tiny fingers as she walked him through the poppy fields and orchards pointing out the cows grazing leisurely in the fields. The father wonders if Marwan remembers his ancestral farm house and the creeks where his father and his uncles spent many summers swimming and building play dams. Memories of a life lived not so long ago comes flooding back to the father as he reminisces a life of peace and communal harmony. A life suddenly shattered by skies that spat bombs. The devastation that followed war is soon everywhere that Marwan's father immersing the land in starvation and burials. The little boy grows up in the midst of rubble and splashing in waters left behind in craters by bombs. The school of life teaches him that his classmates are to be found amidst the ruins of war. A vast populace uprooted by war that has spared none, gather on the sandy beaches of rough waters hoping for and escape to safer lands. And even as they wait expectantly for a comforting haven across the seas, Marwan's father whispers the dread of every refugee, that they are unwanted in every foreign land. That sense of isolation and desolation is heightened as a sea of people crowd together on the sands, each marooned in his or her own world, cut off from the others. The striking silhouette of the father holding little Marwan in his arms, wrapped to his heart with a prayer on his lips for the safety of his little boy on the rough and unfriendly waters of the sea tug at our heartstrings as we recall the picture of three-year-old Syrian boy Alan Kurdi whose cold and inert body was washed ashore. An ill-fated trip for a little child forced across the seas by warring adults only to be washed ashore dead. Hosseini like the rest of the world was haunted by the image of the dead Alan Kurdi and as George Orwell says gives in to the "Desire to see things as they are, to find out true facts and store them up for posterity". Khaled Hosseini was impelled to write this story to pay tribute to the dead little boy and thousands of refugees driven from their home country by a cruel war. He preserves for posterity in tragic poetic prose the pain and loss of a father who unaware of the murderous intentions of the sea promises his baby boy a safe journey across. The untold tragedy hangs heavily

in the air as Marwan's father says a sea prayer to protect his little son. A prayer that sadly went unanswered.

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