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FATHER-SON RELATIONSHIP IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S THE KITE RUNNER AND CORMAC MCCARTHY'S THE ROAD

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ABSTRACT:

The current paper deals with father-son relationship in the East represented by Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner and in the West which is demonstrated by Cormac McCarthy's The Road. This study analyzes the characters and explores their relationships with reference to psychological theory of attachment by the renowned British psychiatrist John Bowlby (1907-1990). The two novels reflect biographical accounts of the two authors especially that of Hosseini and his life in Afghanistan and the fatherly figure type he has had like Amir and the majority of the Eastern fathers. Furthermore, it argues that the father and son relationship illustrated by Baba and Amir in The Kite Runner is cold and distant. In contrast, father - son relationship in The Road is an affectionate and loving relationship. This strong bond between the nameless father and son is meant to represent all fathers and the sons especially those in the West since the novel is written about America. The study concludes that all good fathers love their sons whether in the East or West. However, while the father and son relationship in the Road is demonstrated through the father showing his love and taking care of his son. Baba and Amir's relationship looks distant and cold with a lack of communication on the surface. Nevertheless, the Eastern fathers represented by Baba do love their sons and afford a good education for them.

Keywords: Father-Son Relationship, Attachment Theory, The Kite Runner, The Road, East, West.

1. Introduction

The current study examines the father-son relationship in two postmodern novels; The Kite Runner (2003) by Khaled Hosseini and The Road (2006) by Cormac McCarthy. These two novels are set in different worlds but both represent the hardships in life that shape the two sons' identities. The Kite Runner is about Kabul, Afghanistan and its many historical turmoils; the ruling of the Soviet Union and the violent Taliban as well as sectarian racism of the Pashtuns against the Hazaras who are the minority (Yuan, 2018, p. 58). The Road is by an American novelist about maintaining humanity in a post-apocalyptic or dystopian world where there is no more sign of life nor humanity as the cannibals threat the existence of the remaining good people. In spite of being different, the two novels share one universal theme; the father-son relationship.

Furthermore, the aspect that will be explored in this study is the kind of bond connecting the fathers and sons in these novels. Khaled Hosseini (1965) as an Afghan- American novelist relies on his own life and background to tackle the issue of Afghan fathers' high expectations of their sons. Khadawardi (2017) explains "Hosseini wrote: 'My childhood and Amir's mirrored each other in many ways'" (p.89). In other words, like Amir, Hosseini has lived in Kabul and in almost the same house portrayed in the novel. Therefore, the relationship between Baba and Amir will be demonstrated in this study as representing the father and son relationship in the East. Like Hosseini is inspired by his culture, life, and the fatherly figure type in Afghanistan from the East, Cormac McCarthy is inspired by his own life in the West when he has written The Road. Thus, this novel is dedicated to McCarthy's son since it is concerned with father and son relationship as McCarthy declared in an interview on the Oprah Winfrey Show.

Moreover, the study approaches father-son relationship in the two novels through a psychological lens. The British psychiatrist John Bowlby (1907-1990) is one of the fathers who found of the attachment theory in 1969 with the concept of "secure attachment" in which the child is dependent on the caregiver, here the father, to form his or her identity as an adult in the future. Bowlby (1988), in his book entitled A Secure Base: Clinical Applications of Attachment Theory, believes that despite the mother being the primary caregiver, the father plays a dominant role in the development of the child's character since a secure attachment between the father and son involves the father's teaching of masculinity, emotional regulation, self-confidence, and to maintain healthy relationships with others as an adult (p. 32). Therefore, attachment theory of the relationship will help to better understand the bond between the fathers and sons in the two novels tackled in this article. The main focus will be on the relationship between Amir and Baba in The Kite Runner and the

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nameless father and the boy in The Road. The study aims to illustrate how each relationship is portrayed one from the East, The Kite Runner, and The Road from the West. In The Road, the father and son relationship can be seen as a representation of father and son relationship in the West. Mifdal (2014), a critic, says, "the father and son are each other's entire world." (p.2). Baba and Amir are like strangers living under the same roof and tied only with the family name but are also tied with father - son relationship.

2. Father-Son Relationship in The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini

In Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner, father-son relationship is demonstrated through Amir and his Baba which further reflects most of the fathers and sons in Afghanistan as well as in the East. Since at the birth of his son, Baba hires a nurse to take care of Amir, thus ridding himself of his responsibility to show Amir any care and attention that every child needs. According to Bowlby's attachment theory, Amir is brought up through an insecure attachment with the absence of the primary caregiver, the mother, the father also detaches himself from his child since infancy. The emotional and physical distance between Amir and his father results in Amir's lack of confidence, feeling of frustration, jealousy and later inability to accept and form healthy relationships with the kids of his age, such as Hassan (Bowlby, 1988, p. 152).

It can be evidently seen in the novel that Amir grows up lacking the care and attention of his father and their relationship is distant for many reasons. First, this loose bond between Amir and his father makes Amir feel an enormous guilt because his mother died while giving birth to him: "I always felt like Baba hated me a little. And why not after all I had killed his beloved wife, his beautiful princes, hadn't I?" (Hosseini, 2003, p.17). Thus, Amir feels that his father is holding him responsible for her death and resents him as the one commits a murderer. Another reason is shown when Baba complains to Rahim Khan that there is something wrong with Amir by saying, "there is something missing in that boy." (Hosseini, 2003, p. 22). This speech suggests that Amir is not the son his father wishes him to be and showcasing Baba's disappointment in his son (Upadhyay & Sharma, 2022, p. 155).

Bowlby's attachment theory typically treats this fatherchild relationship through emotional regulation, "The distressed (fearful, threatened, unwell) the child seeks out a secure base with the capacity to soothe (that is, regulate) 'bad' feelings, and evoke 'good' ones (feeling safe, held, warm, Happy, cheerful, amused, interested, excited)." (Holmes, 2014, p. 52). Thus, it can be evidently shown that Amir's personality and his lack of confidence emerge directly from his insecure attachment with his father and the absence of his father's care and positive language.

Moreover, although, Amir is bragging about their house and how rich Pashtuns are, which is a privilege to be in Afghanistan, in front of other children, but is secretly sad that he is not the son his father wishes him to be. Kai-fu (2019) explains that when Amir tries to communicate with his father, his father treats him with indifference and refuses to let him into his office, which indicates that the father refuses to show affection to his son (p. 191). Baba says, "This is grown ups' time" (Hossieni, 2003, p. 5), which leads Amir to wait for hours behind the closed door just to get the chance to talk to his father. The shutting of the doors represents the distance and lack of communication between the father and son. It is worth mentioning that the phrase "it's grown ups' time" is used by many Eastern fathers which represents

Baba in this novel.

Amir, unlike his father, is not courageous and is a fragile little boy in contrast to the other boys of his age like Hassan for example who stands up for himself and Amir in the time of need and uses his slingshot to protect Amir. Thus, Amir does not resemble his father in his personality as "like father like son" is not applicable in The Kite Runner which leads his father to say, "If I hadn't seen the doctor pull him out of my wife with my own eyes, I'd never believe he's my son." (Hosseini, 2003, p. 25). All fathers should be proud of their children but Baba, as an Eastern father, looks ashamed of his son. An example is when Amir vomits on the way to America, his father looks ashamed of how weak his son is. On the other hand, Baba is especially good to Hassan, who is his illegitimate son unbeknownst to anyone in the beginning, and is proud of him because Hassan has all the qualities of being brave with good nature that every father wishes for. Khadawardi explains that Baba shows affection and kindness to Hassan by patting him and putting his arm on Hassan's shoulder, which is something Baba never does to Amir, and even gets a surgeon to get a plastic operation in order to fix the upper lip of Hassan (p. 97). As a result, Amir gets jealous of Baba's kind treatment of Hassan who is nothing but an illiterate and servant Hazara.

It is constantly shown in the novel that Amir desperately attempts to win his father's compassion to a limit that he even tries to get rid of Hassan by putting money and a watch under his pillow to show Hassan as a thief. However, when Baba forgives Hassan for stealing (which he actually did not do) Amir gets jealous: "if Baba could forgive that, then why could not he forgive me for not being the son he'd always wanted?" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 106). This proves how the bond between Amir and his father is loose and lacking in compassion. On another occasion, out of jealousy, Amir uses Hassan's ability to run the kites for him in the tournament and to gain his father's care at the same time. Amir becomes immensely happy with Baba's gift after winning even though it costs Amir to feel guilty for the rest of his life for causing Hassan to get raped in order to get Amir the losing Kite necessary to announce Amir as the winner. In regard to Amir pressing need for his father's attention, Bowlby's attachment theory suggests that "The avoidant child dampens down affect for the sake of maintaining proximity to a rejecting or aggressive caregiver; the resistant/ambivalent infant amplifies emotion and helplessness, hopeful of activating the caregiver's attention." (Holmes, 2014, p. 52). Hence, Lambe explains that in his desperate longing for his father's affection, Amir willingly sacrifices Hassan by having risked his safety and exposed him to rape just to win over his father's attention by winning the Kite tournament but ultimately having to live with the heavy weight of guilt as a result of his ruthless action for the rest of his life (p.110).

However, because of the lack of compassion in the relationship between Baba and Amir, Amir looks out of his house to find a fatherly figure. Singh (2016) illustrates that it is because Rahim Khan always calls Amir "Amir jan' and praises him by saying bravo when he does something good that Amir finds in Rahim Khan the fatherly compassion and attention that he lacks with his real father (p. 6). Amir says, "When they left; I sat on my bed, and wished Rahim Khan had been my father."(Hosseini, 2003, p. 32). Thus, Rahim Khan becomes the father figure or the spiritual father that Amir aspires to have.

The shattered and fragmentary bond between Amir and his father affects Amir even after his father's death. Amir finds difficultly in communicating his love to Sohrab, Hassan's son, who becomes like a spiritual son to Amir. Khadawardi says: "He [Amir] came to realize that he is not much different from his father, that both of them, sinned and committed grievous sins against these whom they loved." (p. 96). This is demonstrated as an example of the Eastern fathers' inability to show love and affection to their sons although they love and care for them. Khadawardi further illustrates that the reason behind that is that Eastern fathers have received none of it, hence, they have never learned how to show affection and compassion in return.

In spite of the cold and distant relationship between Baba and Amir, it is evident that Baba, like any good father, loves his son and Amir likewise. It can be justified that Baba's guilt toward having an illegitimate son, Hassan, is one reason behind his distant relationship with Amir. Moreover, in life challenging situations, like any responsible parent, Baba strives to provide a better life and afford a good education for his son even though it costs his health and life. He works in a gas station, from which he got cancer later, and on flee market on Sundays as an immigrant in America to do so. In addition, their relationship can be supported by the morals implanted in Amir by his father. Baba, although a liberal, has come with his own moral codes that he teaches to Amir. Bowlby's attachment theory suggests that even though the father's role is crucial as a caregiver, with the absence of the mother, in developing a healthy character for the child, yet, results show that the child can grow up with positive characteristics despite the lack of attention from his father in his earlier years. (Holmes, 2014, p. 98). Evidently, Baba's later teachings is one of the reasons for bringing Amir to self-realization, the feeling of guilt, and his journey to redemption for his sins and becoming a better person and father to Sohrab. Therefore, it can be justified that father-son relationship in The Kite Runner as represented by Baba and Amir is a positive one despite its imperfections.

3. Father-Son Relationship in The Road by Cormac McCarthy

The Road, tells the story of the beautiful relationship between a boy and his Papa representing father-son relationship in the West as argued in this paper. The father and son in this novel coexist only for each other in a harsh and violent world "He [the father] knew that the child was his warrant. He said: If he is not the word of God God never spoke." (McCarthy, 2006, p. 3). According to Bowlby, the child in this novel is provided a secure attachment in which the father is a warm caregiver who provides his son not only care and attention but also teaches him to be self-confident and courageous in the face of adversity (Bowlby, 1988, p. 140). On other words, the father considers the boy to be everything to him and the only reason for existing. Mifdal (2014) describes the novel as the following: "The Road can be interpreted as a spiritual journey, represented by the close and intimate relationship between father and son where values of sacrifice, real altruistic love are portrayed on the backdrop of rampant barbarity and moral vacuity." (p. 3). The son, naive and innocent, is the only goal of the father to protect and get to the warm south in order to save his life from the cold wrecking world.

A great emphasis is put on the importance of the relationship between the father and son in The Road. This bond between them is portrayed in the most emotional way to remind the humans of the significance of such relationships in the world; they give meaning and hope to life. The characters are nameless in The Road, "Naming the two main characters by 'father' and 'son' implies continuity and hope and highlights the moralistic spiritual foundation of any human cohesive social life." (Mifdal, 2014, p. 7). This indicates that the father and son represent all the fathers and sons in the world, especially that of the West since the novel is written in America, and any father or son can relate to them.

Like The Kite Runner, the father teaches his son about ethics and morals; the right and wrong: "The good guys may suffer, like Prometheus, but keep on 'carrying the fire' to humanity" (Mifdal, 2014, p. 3). Together they carry the torch of fire for humanity with their strong father-son relationship and pure hearts. However, eager as he is to teach his son about the bad guys and the ugly world, the father becomes cruel and falls into mistakes by refraining from assisting those they encounter on the way out of fear is soon reminded of the morals he teaches to his son by seeing the obvious disappointment in his son's face and action of refusing to talk to his father.

Although the boy has never seen the world pre-apocalypse, he has a pure nature by instinct and aims to help all the good people he and his Papa meet on the road. The boy's role serving as an inevitable reminder to his father of his healthy teaching can be further analyzed through Bowlby's comment as cited by the scholar, Holmes, in his book entitled John Bowlby and Attachment Theory (2014) that:

Between parents and children there is an inherent asymmetry. It is a parent's job to provide a secure base for children...[and there is a] role reversal between parent and child as a manifestation of anxious attachment, one that inevitably inhibits the exploratory capacities of the child.(p. 90).

The boy whom the father calls "the word of God" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 114), thus, becomes the source of salvation for his father and he constantly reminds Papa that they are the good guys and should not commit sins against other humans.

On the other hand, fatherly figure in The Road, unlike in The Kite Runner is presented in a different light; the father is supportive and has a very affectionate bond with his son. Lukitaningrum (2008), a scholar, discusses the type of father Papa is as he is an affectionate, skillful, responsible, loving person and his love for his son gives him a strong sense of purpose to survive in the waste land and challenging situations of their current life. (p. 11).

Furthermore, the father keeps telling stories about the past to his little boy to demonstrate that goodness still exists, thus, guiding him along the way. The old stories that are told by the father in this novel illustrate that the only meaning in life can be by passing morals through education. Therefore, the father teaches his son about the good guys who can be seen as representative of an ideal image of ethical identity in a savage world where humans have become monsters tearing apart their own kind's flesh (Ray, 2017, p. 127). "He [the father] strung the tarp behind them to reflect the heat and they sat warm in their refuge while he told the boy stories....old stories of courage and justice." (McCarthy, 2006, p. 42). Alkaç (2019) suggests that "These "old stories of courage and justice", told by the father, as a favorable pastime activity, not only construct as a moral code for the boy, but also constitute a purpose of their lives." (p. 75).

In order to survive for the sake of providing a shelter and a better life for his son, the father struggles and endures with all his might to maintain his strength and will as it is demonstrated in the novel:

The man had already dropped to the ground and he swung with him and leveled the pistol and fired from two-handed position balanced on both knees at distance of six feet. The man fell back instantly and lay with blood bubbling from the hole in his forehead. (McCarthy, 2006, p. 68).

As shown here, the father also fights against death, protects the boy from the cannibals, and kills one of them when the cannibal puts a knife on the boy's throat.

It is worth mentioning that what makes the bond between this father and son so special is the amount of courage and love the two have for each other. All parents love their children no doubt, but McCarthy makes a point by showing how other families deal with the crisis at hand with what it seems to be a dead-end with the end of the world and the spread of cannibalism. The majority of the parents hang their children and themselves to avoid being starved to death or raped or eaten by the cannibals. However, the case is different with the father and son, the mother of the family, who later commits suicide out of despair, suggests doing what other families do too but the father refuses to do so. Instead, the father, although a sensitive person who would not hurt anyone, decides to march along the road with two bullets in his pistol and reach the south to get a peaceful shelter for his son. On multiple occasions, the father puts his life in danger to save his son. On the father being responsible, Lukitaningrum comments that the father has taken care of the child since his birth by embracing him and cleaning him right after he is born without the need of his wife ultimately proving his high sense of responsibility and care even when the boy is older (p. 35).

Moreover, throughout the novel, the boy constantly asks his father questions about everything including his mother which the father kindly answers. This communication bond between them proves how close and affectionate the father and son are:

It neared, growing louder. Everything trembling. Then it passed beneath them like an underground train and drew away into the night and was gone. The boy clung to him crying, his head buried against his chest. Shh. It's all right. I'm so scared.

I know. It's all right. It's gone.

What was it, Papa?

It was an earthquake. It's gone. We're all right. Shh (McCarthy, 2006, pp. 27-28).

This warm bond between them is also illustrated by how the father affectionately embraces his son to shield him from any fear or danger either psychologically or physically. In life threatening situations, the parental instincts spring to life. The good fathers always sacrifice their lives for the sake of protecting their children. The Road proves an example that relationships especially of the family, and here the father and son relationship, are the source of keeping humanity survive in terms of morals and ethics (Younus, 2020, p. 32). The compassionate bond between the father and the son is like a warm affectionate embrace to the readers as it gives a source of spiritual strength to keep struggling in life none stop until reaching their destination and achieving their goals.

However, to compare the relationships in the two novels, Baba and Amir in The Kite Runner, and father and the boy in The Road; both are two families without mother figures. While the absence of a mother brings the father and son closer and strengthens their bond in The Road, the absence of a mother in The Kite Runner leads the father and son to drift apart and look almost as strangers to each other. Ultimately, the father-son relationship in The Road represents the father and son relationship in the West as it is a warm relationship full of care, attention, and love that every father and son crave for. Although the son in The Road is entirely depended on his father and like Amir he does not show any bravery qualities, yet his father is not disappointed in him, on the contrary, he is worried about him and does his best to educate his son. Therefore, Papa and the boy, unlike Baba and Amir, do not wish for a son or father figures to feel emotional fulfillment.

Conclusion

The present study concludes that the father-son relationship between Baba and Amir in The Kite Runner is a reflection of the relationships between fathers and sons in the East. Amir's father seems to be disappointed in his son, Amir. Baba and Amir's relationship is distant and cold with no communication or affection especially when Amir is still a child as Baba hired a nurse to take care of his son since infancy. Amir constantly craves for his father's affection of which he rarely gets. Therefore, when Baba praises Amir for winning the Kite tournament, Amir is overwhelmed with emotions and is very happy. Baba wishes Hassan to be his legitimate son for his bravery and good nature, which makes Amir very jealous. Because Baba does not prove as a warm father to Amir, Amir looks at Rahim Khan who offers him fatherly affection, and gives him the attention he lacks. Nevertheless, the journey Baba and Amir take from Afghanistan to America proves

a spiritual journey which solidifies the emotional bond between them. Consequently, they are finally able to break free from the cold relationship as they become more communicative and closer. When they reach America, like any responsible parent, Baba strives in very challenging situations to provide a better life and afford a good education for his son. This proves that Baba, like all good Eastern fathers, does love Amir despite being unable to show him affection and love. In contrast, the relationship of the father and son in The Road demonstrates the fatherson relationship in the West. The father in The Road affectionately teaches his son about the world and is never disappointed in his son. Unlike Baba in The Kite Runner, the father in this novel takes care of his son since his birth as he bathes and feeds him, and later reads stories to him when he is older. Much like Baba and Amir, the father and son in this novel take a survival journey on the road to the south which further strengthens their relationship and brings them closer emotionally.

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العلاقة بين الأب والابن في الروايتين عداء الطائرة الورقية لخالد حسيني والطريق لكورماك مكارثي

الملخص:

يتناول البحث الحالي العلاقة بين الأب والابن في الشرق ممثلاً برواية عداء الطائرة الورقية لخالد الحسيني، وفي الغرب عبر رواية الطريق لكورماك مكارثي يحلل هذا البحث الشخصيات ويستكشف علاقاتها باستخدام نظرية التعلق النفسية للطبيب النفسي البريطاني الشهير جون بولبي (1907-1990). تعكس الروايتين السيرة الذاتية للمؤلفين، خاصة قصة الحسيني وحياته في أفغانستان والشخصية الأبوية التي كان يتمتع بها مثل أمير وأغلبية الأباء الشرقيين. علاوة على ذلك، يشير هذا البحث إلى أن العلاقة بين الأب والابن، التي صور ها بابا وأمير في عداء الطائرة الورقية، علاقة باردة ومتباعدة. وفي المقابل، فإن علاق الأب والابن في رواية الطريق هي علاقة حنونة تسودها المحبة. هذه الرابطة القوية بين الأب والابن المجهولين تهدف إلى تمثل جميع الآباء والأبناء وخاصة أولئك الذين يعيشون في الغرب حيث أن الرواية مكتوبة عن أمريكا. وأخير في عداء الطائرة الورقية، علاقة باردة ومتباعدة أولئك الذين يعيشون في الغرب حيث أن الرواية مكتوبة عن أمريكا. وأخيراً يخاص هذا البحث إلى أن كل الآباء الصاحين أو وخاصة الغرب أما علاقة الأب والابن في الغرب في الطريق فتتجلى من خلال إظهار الأب حبه واهتمامه بابنه. من ناحية أبناء هم سواء في الشرق أو مع عده وجود تواصل ظاهري، ومع ذلك، فإن الأباء الشرقيين الذين يمثلهم بابا يمن المتحبة إلى أن كل الآباء ولمان أو مع عدم وجود تواصل ظاهري، ومع ذلك، فإن الأباء الشرقيين الذين يمثلهم بابا يحبون أبنائهم والأبناء أبناء موجارة مع عدم وجود تواصل ظاهري، ومع ذلك، فإن الأباء الشرقيين الذين يمثلهم بابا يحبون أبنائهم والأبناء أبن المواقف الصعبة يكونون على استعداد للعمل الجاد و بما يتجاوز قدراتهم على إعالة أبنائهم وتوفير التعليم الجيد لهم.

الكلمات الدالة: العلاقة بين الأب والابن، نظرية التعلق، عداء الطائرة الورقية، الطريق، الشرق، الغرب

پهيوهندييا کوړ و بابی د رومانا "کولاره فرين"يا خالد حوسينی و د رومانا " ريگه "يا کورماک مهکارتی

پوخته: