

COMPARATIVE-TYPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS-ETHICAL DISCOURSE IN AMERICAN DIASPORA PROSE: THE CASE OF KHALED HOSSEINI AND TAMIM ANSARY

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Abstract: This article offers a comparative-typological analysis of religious-ethical discourse in the English-language prose of two American writers, Khaled Hosseini and Tamim Ansary. Drawing on Hosseini's three major novels – *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed* alongside Ansary's historical narrative *Destiny Disrupted*, the study identifies a recurrent typology of religious-ethical concerns that runs across both fictional and non-fictional modes of diaspora writing: individual guilt and atonement, communal honor codes rooted in Pashtun tradition, gendered endurance and piety, and a providential-historical consciousness that reframes Islamic civilization for an Anglophone readership. The analysis combines discourse-analytic and linguopoetic methods, examining how lexical borrowings from Persian, Pashto, and Arabic, together with recurring rhetorical structures such as proverb citation, confessional retrospection, and direct address, encode ethical meaning at the level of language. The article argues that Hosseini and Ansary, despite writing in different genres, construct a convergent ethical vocabulary that mediates between an inherited Islamic moral framework and the individualist redemption narrative characteristic of American literary tradition, a synthesis that positions their work squarely within the scope of contemporary American literature.

Keywords: American diaspora prose; religious-ethical discourse; comparative-typological analysis; linguopoetics; Khaled Hosseini; Tamim Ansary; American literature.

1. Introduction

Diaspora writing occupies an increasingly central place in the study of contemporary American literature. Authors who arrive at English as an adopted literary language, yet write from within the historical and cultural memory of another nation, produce texts in which the receiving literary tradition and the inherited one are held in constant negotiation. American prose is a particularly instructive case: it emerged in the English-language literary market largely after 2001, in a period when Afghanistan itself had become a central object of American political and media attention, and it has had to define its own relationship to Islam, to Afghan customary law, and to the moral vocabulary of its adopted country simultaneously.

Khaled Hosseini and Tamim Ansary are the two most widely read American prose writers in English. Hosseini's novels: *The Kite Runner* (2003), *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), and *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013) are works of literary fiction that reached a mass Anglophone readership and have been the subject of substantial critical attention, chiefly focused on trauma, memory, and postcolonial identity. Ansary's *Destiny Disrupted: A New History of the World Through Islamic Eyes* (2009) belongs to a different genre – popular

historiography – yet it shares with Hosseini’s fiction an underlying project: to render an Islamic ethical and historical worldview intelligible, and in some sense persuasive, to a Western reader accustomed to a different narrative center.

This article asks how religious-ethical discourse, that is, the linguistic and narrative means by which questions of sin, duty, honor, and redemption are articulated, operates across these four texts, and what typological patterns emerge when a novelistic and a historiographic text are read together as products of the same diasporic literary position. The comparative-typological method is used here not to flatten the generic difference between fiction and history-writing, but precisely to make that difference analytically visible: it allows the study to ask which ethical concerns are shared regardless of genre, and which are genre-specific.

Both authors write exclusively in English, hold American citizenship, and are read and reviewed as participants in American literary and public life; their thematic material is Afghan, but their linguistic and institutional location is American. The article therefore treats Hosseini’s and Ansary’s work as a diasporic subfield of American letters rather than as an extension of Afghan national literature, which is the basis on which it falls within the scope of this specialization rather than that of comparative or translation-based literary study.

2. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The study draws on three interrelated methodological traditions. First, discourse analysis in the sense developed for literary text, the study of how recurring lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical choices construct a coherent ideological or ethical position across a text or corpus. Second, literary typology, understood as the classification of recurring structural and thematic patterns across otherwise distinct works, used here to organize the religious-ethical material into discrete, comparable categories rather than treating each text as *sui generis*. Third, linguopoetics, which examines how specific linguistic devices: loanwords, code-switching, parallelism, proverb, direct address carry aesthetic and ethical weight simultaneously, a method particularly suited to diaspora writing in which lexical choice (for example, the decision to leave a Persian or Pashto term untranslated) is itself an ethical and cultural statement.

The corpus comprises four English-language texts: three novels by Hosseini and one work of narrative history by Ansary. The analysis proceeds in two stages: first, the identification of a typology of religious-ethical concerns shared or contrasted across the corpus; second, a linguopoetic reading of the specific devices through which each typological category is realized in language.

3. The Corpus: Genre and Ethical Orientation

The *Kite Runner* is organized around an act of childhood betrayal and the decades-long attempt of its narrator to, in the novel’s own recurring formulation, find a way to be good again. Its ethical structure is that of individual conscience: guilt is private, its origin is a specific and nameable act, and its resolution requires a return, physically, to Afghanistan, and morally, to the person wronged.

A Thousand Splendid Suns shifts the ethical center from an individual male conscience to the endurance of two women under a patriarchal domestic and political order. Here religious language functions ambivalently: it is invoked by male characters to justify abuse and confinement, and it is drawn upon by the female protagonists themselves as a private source of

solace and moral self-possession, distinct from its institutional misuse. The novel's ethical typology is therefore one of endurance and quiet resistance rather than confession and return.

And the Mountains Echoed widens the frame further, following a single act of sibling separation across generations and continents. Its religious-ethical vocabulary is the most diffuse of the three: guilt, duty, and sacrifice recur, but they are distributed across many characters and timelines rather than resolved in a single reconciliatory return, producing an ethics of unresolved and inherited debt.

Destiny Disrupted stands apart generically but not thematically. Ansary narrates world history from a vantage point he explicitly locates inside the Islamic ethical and historical imagination, arguing that Western and Islamic historical narratives have organized the same centuries around different central stories. The book's ethical-discursive work is macro-historical rather than personal: it reframes concepts such as jihad, umma, and divine sovereignty as historically embedded ethical categories rather than as the ahistorical abstractions common in Western journalistic usage.

4. A Typology of Religious-Ethical Discourse

Reading the four texts together yields five recurrent typological categories.

(a) The guilt–atonement paradigm. Most fully realized in *The Kite Runner*, this paradigm treats sin as an individual, nameable act whose narrative resolution requires confession, restitution, and a physical or symbolic return to the place of the original wrong. Echoes of this paradigm appear in *And the Mountains Echoed*, though there the return is repeatedly deferred or rendered impossible.

(b) The honor–code paradigm. Rooted in Pashtun customary concepts such as *nang* and *namus*, this paradigm locates ethical value in communal reputation and familial duty rather than individual conscience. It operates throughout Hosseini's fiction as a counter-discourse to the guilt–atonement paradigm, often placing characters in conflict between what personal conscience requires and what communal honor demands.

(c) Gendered piety and endurance. Most developed in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, this category treats religious practice – prayer, Qur'anic recitation, private supplication – as a resource for endurance under conditions the characters cannot otherwise change, distinguishing lived piety from its institutional or patriarchal instrumentalization.

(d) Providential-historical consciousness. Specific to *Destiny Disrupted*, this category reframes Islamic history as a coherent moral-historical narrative with its own internal logic of rise, fragmentation, and renewal, positioned as an alternative to a Western-centered periodization of world history.

(e) Syncretic ethics. Across all four texts, Islamic moral vocabulary is placed in productive tension with an American narrative expectation of individual growth, self-determination, and redemptive closure. Neither register fully displaces the other; the texts instead produce a hybrid ethical idiom legible to readers formed by either tradition.

5. Linguopoetic Realization

Each typological category is realized through identifiable linguistic means. Untranslated or lightly glossed loanwords from Persian, Pashto, and Arabic (terms denoting sin, merit, honor, and religious duty) mark the guilt–atonement and honor–code paradigms as culturally specific rather than generically moral; their retention in the English text, rather than replacement with an English equivalent, is itself a linguopoetic choice that signals the untranslatability, and therefore the cultural weight, of the concept in question.

Retrospective first-person narration, structured around confession to an implied reader, is the dominant syntactic-narrative device of the guilt–atonement paradigm, while the honor–code paradigm is more often realized through reported proverb and elders’ direct speech, lending it the authority of collective rather than individual voice. Gendered piety in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is frequently rendered through short, paratactic sentences during scenes of prayer or supplication, a syntactic simplicity that contrasts with the more elaborate hypotactic style used elsewhere in the same novel for scenes of violence or negotiation, producing a formal distinction between the register of endurance and the register of conflict.

In *Destiny Disrupted*, the providential-historical register is carried largely at the level of macro-structure: chapter framing, periodization, and recurring rhetorical questions addressed to the reader, rather than through sentence-level devices, reflecting the text’s historiographic rather than novelistic form. The syncretic ethical idiom common to all four texts is most visible at moments where an Islamic ethical term is immediately followed by an explanatory clause aimed at the non-specialist Anglophone reader, a pattern that simultaneously preserves the term’s specificity and integrates it into an English-language ethical discourse.

6. Discussion

The comparison across genre is analytically productive precisely because it is not a comparison of like with like. Hosseini’s fiction enacts the typological categories through character, plot, and retrospective voice; Ansary’s history articulates a structurally related set of concerns discursively and explicitly, at the level of historical argument rather than personal narrative. The convergence between the two suggests that the religious-ethical concerns identified here are not idiosyncratic to an individual author’s fictional imagination, but represent a broader feature of Afghan-American diasporic writing in English: the need to render an inherited ethical vocabulary legible, and often persuasive, within the expectations of the American literary marketplace and its dominant genre conventions.

This has a direct bearing on how such writing should be classified. Because the ethical and linguistic negotiation described here takes place within English, and within genres (the literary novel, the popular history) that are themselves American literary institutions, the texts are most accurately situated as American literature produced from a diasporic position, rather than as translated or foreign material.

7. Conclusion

This comparative-typological reading of Hosseini’s three novels and Ansary’s *Destiny Disrupted* identifies five recurrent categories of religious-ethical discourse: guilt–atonement, honor–code, gendered piety, providential-historical consciousness, and syncretic ethics, realized through a consistent set of linguopoetic devices across both fictional and



historiographic genres. The convergence of these categories across genre supports the claim that American diaspora prose constitutes a coherent subfield within contemporary American literature, characterized by the sustained negotiation of an inherited Islamic ethical vocabulary within the narrative and linguistic conventions of English-language American writing. Further research might extend this typology to other American and, more broadly, Muslim-diasporic American writers, to test whether the categories proposed here hold at the level of a wider corpus.

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