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" A Visual Grammar Analysis of the *Sea Prayer* (2018): the Journey from Peace to Conflict"

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Abstract

The Syrian refugee crisis has attracted significant attention from researchers in all fields. This paper investigates the effectiveness of images in illustrating the experience of Syrian refugees by applying Kress and van Leeuwen`s visual grammar approach to Khaled Hosseini`s *Sea Prayer* (2018). The study aims to explore how visual elements in the novel contribute to the construction of meaning. This study investigates how an illustration can narrate the story of catastrophic transformations that Syrians faced using key principles identified from visual grammar theory: representational, interactive, and compositional meanings. A qualitative approach is employed, involving the analysis of selected images from the novel. The analysis reveals that visual elements work to illustrate a shift of meaning from peace to conflict. The significance of the research could be seen in its ability to emphasize the need for an understanding of how different modes of communication are used, as words and sentences might not be sufficient to convey a thought efficiently in today's fast-changing world.

Keywords: Visual Grammar, Syrian refugees, Multimodality, representational meaning, interactive meaning, compositional meaning

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1. Introduction

The Syrian Civil War, a humanitarian crisis, was triggered in March 2011 because of a peaceful protest, influenced by the Arab Spring that occurred in both Tunisia and Egypt the same year, against al-Assad's government. Now that 13 years have passed, The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) has recorded that 503,064 people have lost their lives. In addition, "more than half of Syria's pre-war population of 22 million have had to flee their homes. Some 6.8 million are internally displaced, with more than two million living in tented camps with limited access to basic services. Another 6 million are refugees or asylum-seekers abroad" (BBC News).Furthermore, The United Nation Refugee Agency states, "After over a decade of conflict, Syria remains the world's largest refugee crisis" (2024).

The Syrian conflict, which began on March 2011, resulted in one of the largest displacement crises worldwide. "After over a decade of conflict, Syria remains the world's largest refugee crisis" (The United Nation Refugee Agency, 2024).Since 2011, more than 14 million Syrians have been forced to flee their homes in search of safety."The Syrian refugee crisis has attracted significant attention from researchers in all fields. As for linguistics, researchers have explored how language influenced the experiences and challenges faced by Syrian refugees. Research in linguistics tackled topics such as the language difficulties faced by refugees at their new land, the linguistic adaptation of refugees, and second language acquisition by Syrian refugees.This paper attempts to analyze the experience of Syrian refugees by applying Gunther Kress and Theo van

Leeuwen`s visual grammar theory to Khaled Hosseini's *Sea Prayers*(2018).

Khaled Hosseini is an AfghanAmerican novelist and United Nations Ambassador who has written three novels: *The Kite Runner*(2001), *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), and *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013) about Afghanistan.Then he publishes a fourth novel, *Sea Prayer* (2018) as a response to the death of the three-year-old Syrian refugee, Alan Kurdi who lost his life in the Mediterranean Sea attempting to reach Europe to find peace. He reflects upon the Syrian refugee crisis (Khaled Hosseini).Upon its release, *Sea Prayer* received critical praise for its emotional depth and artistic style. It is an illustrated novelthat means, according to Margaret J. Godbey,"an extended narrative with multiple images that, together with the text, produce meaning" "[abstract]".*Sea Prayer* conveys the complexities of the refugee experience without resorting to graphic depictions of violence, and this point specifically attracted the attention of reviewers.

This illustrative novel`s ability to convey the complexities of the refugee experience without resorting to graphic depictions of violence attracted the attention of reviewers. Annika Perry commends the novel stating, "This is a book that crosses all genres, it's for children, for adults, for humanity — it's a precious gift to hold it within one's hands and heart."(Perry, 2019), stated, "This is a book that crosses all genres, it's for children, for adults, for humanity — it's a precious gift to hold it within one's hands and heart." The book is written in the form of a letter from a father to his son accompanied by watercolor images by Dan Williams, a professional illustrator with 30 years' experience in the field (Dan Williams). The images assess the narration to track the development of the Syrian refugeesjourney from a life full of stability andpeace to conflictone full of horror and traumas.

This novel has been the focus of other research papers. In 2019, Sudarshana Sinha wrote a paper entitled "Impact of Forced Migration on the Lives of the Syrian Refugees as Depicted in "Sea Prayer" and Its Resemblance to Real Life Scenario" comparing the

novel to real life experiences documented in reports in addition to depicting the physical and psychological impacts upon the Syrian refugees and how their life has turned upside down. Another paper published the same year is "A Critical Reflection on the Picture Book Sea Prayer by Khaled Hosseini" by U Maria Liny Jenifer and B. J. Geetha. It deals with the issues concerning migration and refugees based on picture books that help students comprehend the horrible experience of Syrians.Another study in 2020 dealt with *Sea Prayer*: "Privatizing Refugees'

Human Rights in Hamid's *Exit West*, Coetzee's *The Childhood of Jesus and The Schooldays of Jesus*, and Hosseini's *Sea Prayer* by Bayan AlAmmouri. She concentrates on how the three novels portray the futility of human rights institutions to recognize the plight of refugees. Also, in 2020, Amanda Zilla published her paper: "Khaled Hosseini's *Sea Prayer*: Virtual Storytelling and "User-Response" in Fictionalized Migrant Narrative". She analyzes how virtual storytelling can produce emotional response in readers of *Sea Prayer* causing them to see the horror and plight of Syrian refugees besides sympathizing with them.

In 2021, five studies were published. The first one is entitled "Sea Prayer: An Illustrated Literary Narration on the Afflictions of Refugees" by Amal Babu. In this paper, Babu explains how the illustrations managed to portray the sufferings of the Syrians. The second paper is by Beulah Hemalatha and Eunice Salomi; it is called "Deracination and Resilience: Conceptualizing the notion of Kunz's typology in Khaled Hosseini's *Sea Prayer*". It tackles the traumatic experience of the Syrian refugees by applying Egon. F. Kunz's theory of the refugee. The third paper is called "The Journey to Death: Fictionalizing the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Khaled Hosseini's Sea Prayer" by Abdul Samad Kadavan. This study also portrays the traumatic experience of the Syrian refugees but through postcolonial interpretations.

Likewise, the fourth study entitled "An Analysis of Personal and Collective Trauma in Khaled Hosseini's Novel *Sea Prayer*" by Laila Shoukat, Sanah Waheed, and Khushnood Arshad portrays the traumatic experience of the Syrian refugees by focusing on personal and collective trauma. Also, having a similar scope to the previous studies, the fifth paper by Eman Tharwat Abdo Oulwan's: "Displacement as a traumatic experience in Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* (2010) and Khaled Hosseini's *Sea Prayer* (2018)" discusses the traumatic experience of the Syrians and Palestinians in two novels: *Mornings in Jenin* and *Sea Prayer* through the lens of Cathy Caruth's and Deborah Horvitz's psychological concepts. Another study in 2022 was published: "Prayer as Method: Narrating the Cosmopolitan Pathos and the Homeless in Khaled Hosseini's *Sea Prayer*" by Md Sarfaraj Nawab. It focuses on the devastating consequences of the Syrian crisis by applying the Kantian and the Derridean ideas of cosmopolitanism and hospitality. In 2024, a study was conducted by Yıldıray Çevik entitled "Homeless at the Seashore": Trauma in Refugee Narrative, *Sea Prayer*, by Khaled Hosseini". This study like Shoukat et al's (2021) study applies personal and collective trauma besides traumatic memory using Cathy Caruth's theory to show the trauma the Syrian refugees have been exposed to.

To the knowledge of the researcher, there has been no study published that conducted an analysis of Khaled Hosseini`s *Sea Prayers* through the lens of Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar theory. That analysis presents an understanding of how visual elements contribute to reflect the emotional depth of the struggle within the souls of Syrian refugees. Kress and van Leeuwen`s framework examines how the interplay between text and images shape's the reader's comprehension of the story. It aids the understanding of meanings conveyed by images and identifies the visual strategies used to evoke emotional responses in readers. Thus, this research aims at analyzing the visual elements in *Sea Prayers* using (Kress and van Leeuwen`s, 2006) visual grammar, exploring how the application of the visual grammar theory aided the

understanding of meanings conveyed by images and identifying the visual strategies used to evoke emotional responses in readers.

2. Theoretical Framework

The connection between linguistics and semiotics is indispensable since both are interested in the study of signs and their meanings. While linguistics is the scientific study of language dealing with a wide range of topics related to language including language sounds, structure, meaning, use and historical development, semiotics, on the other hand, is the broader study of signs and symbols, and it plays a crucial role in multimodal analysis as it helps in investigating non linguistic features such as images, gestures and sounds and how the convey meaning. Linguistics and semiotics are historically connected as this connection is deeply rooted in theories of both the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914). These theories help in initiating a rich research history that reflects the interplay between the study of language and the broader study of signs. De Saussure's work lays the groundwork for modern linguistics and semiotics. In his seminal book, Course in General Linguistics (1916), which is based on notes taken by students during Saussure's lectures at the University, Saussure illustrates the concept of the linguistic sign. He suggests that each sign is made of two parts: the first is the signifier which is found in the word, image, sound or gesture representing a concept or meaning; the second is the signified which is the interpretation of the signifier's meaning and the two terms are completing each other. These ideas lead to the development of semiology which establishes a framework for understanding how language functions as a system of signs. Then, Pierce extends the notion of signs to his triadic model which includes: the sign itself, what it refers to, and the meaning derived by the beholder. Pierce's work emphasizes the dynamic nature of signs and their interpretation, and he contributes to the field of semiotics by applying it to various forms of communication.

2.1. Visual Semiotics

In our digital world and through globalization, the need to communicate with other people who are not connected to us either linguistically or culturally became crucial and the need to find means of understanding became indispensable. Thus, the integration of semiotic analysis into the study of visual communication has emerged as a significant area of research. (Giorgia Aiello, 2020) illustrates that visual semiotics is a specialized branch of semiotics focusing on how visual images convey meaning. It examines the relationship between visual signs and their interpretations, encompassing a wide range of media, including art, advertising, and digital communication.Scholars have applied linguistic insights to analyze visual modes to demonstrate the interconnectedness between verbal and non-verbal communication since they complement each other. This connectedness enriches the interdisciplinary studies as it highlights the need to understand signs in various media to promote daily communication.

2.2. Multimodality

Today`s communication practices accompanied by the huge advances in modern technology are characterized by a deep blending of both verbal and visual modes. Thus, multimodality came as an essential tool of analyzing communication to aid in its understanding. (Kress, 2010) explains that multimodality refers to the use of multiple modes of communication to create meaning. Modes can be images, writing, layout, speech, etc. In his view, communication is always multimodal, as texts combine multiple modes to create meaning.He argues that modes have different potentials and limitations of meaning-making based on their intrinsic characteristics and cultural requirements.Thus, multimodality supports the comprehension of the idea that communication is not limited to language alone but goes further to understand other various semiotic resources. Multimodality examines how different modes work together to create meaning and emphasizes the importance of context in interpreting meaning.

2. 3. Reading Images: the Grammar of Visual Design

Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen wrote *Reading Images: the Grammar of Visual Design* and was first published in 1996 and then republished again in 2006. This book is considered a framework for comprehending what images say and how messages conveyed by images are constructed. In the very beginning of the book, Kress and van Leeuwen state:

> In this book, by contrast, we will concentrate on 'grammar' and on syntax, on the way in which these elements are combined into meaningful wholes. Just as grammars of language describe how words combine in clauses, sentences and texts, so our visual 'grammar' will describe the way in which depicted elements – people, places and things- combine in visual 'statements' of greater or lesser complexity and extension. (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, 1)

Kress and van Leeuwen intend to draw a framework for studying the components of images to understand the different meanings reflected by them. They want to "break down the disciplinary boundaries between the study of language and the study of images" (1996, 183). Their theoretical framework facilitates the recognition of the concept that meaning transcends the boundaries of written language. They assert that visual features serve a purpose beyond mere decoration, as they play a crucial role in the construction of meaning by reflecting social values and ideas. Therefore, through the examination of visual grammar, the component elements of visual communication tools can be comprehended to grasp the meaning they convey.

The visual grammar developed by Kress and van Leeuwen is based on the theoretical framework of M. A. K. Halliday's (1978) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) proposed by M. A. K. Halliday (1978). It asserts that language serves a purpose beyond mere communication since it plays a crucial role in facilitating social interaction and fostering cultural integration. According to

Halliday (1978), "the grammar of a language is not a code, not a set of rules for producing correct sentences, but a resource for making meanings" (p192).He mentions that the acquisition of language in children commences through social interactions before their ability to pronounce words. In addition, Halliday views grammar as a source of meaning making that includes three main components: ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings. Thus, Kress and van Leeuwen introduce in Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design (2006) the visual grammar approach as a systematic framework for the analysis of visual communication. They "wanted to treat forms of communication employing images as seriously as linguistic forms have been… because of the now overwhelming evidence of the importance of visual communication" (2006, p. 17).

Visual grammar adopts the theoretical notion of 'metafunction' from the work of Halliday. Halliday's ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions are developed in visual grammar to be representational, interactive and compositional. The representational metafunction investigates how images represent reality. It illustrates what is depicted in the image through analyzing the participants, actions and events shown in an image to consider how these elements represent the ideas narrated in an image. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) say the represented participants "are the participants who constitute the subject matter of the communication." (p. 48). The interactive metafunction, on the other hand, is concerned with the established relationship between the image and the viewer which is "the interaction between the producer and the viewer of the image" (1996, p. 114).The interactive representation of an image focuses on how images communicate attitudes, emotions, and social relations to deliver the message to the viewer. The compositional metafunction considers the arrangement and organization of visual elements. It includes the analysis of the placement of elements on the page, the depiction of which elements are made prominent through size, color and contrast, and the framing of the participant of images to investigate their relation to reflect the meaning conveyed by the image.This

paper adopts the Visual Grammar approach to analysis selected images taken from the illustrative novel *Sea Prayers* by Khaled Hosseini. By applying this approach, the research uncovers the deeper meanings behind visual compositions, revealing how images are designed to influence perception and convey complex ideas without words.

3. Methodology and Data Collection

The analysis of the present study is qualitative seeking to illustrate images used in an illustrated novel to address the ongoing refugees' issue. The images are chosen from an illustrated novel, Sea *Prayer,* by Khaled Hosseini. The novel depicts the twist in the lives of Syrians, especially at Homs, whose status changed from people living in a peaceful country to persons fleeing war and destruction. The narration throughout the novel is accompanied by 36 watercolors images depicting different stages in the life's of the Syrian people starting from the peaceful pre-conflict stage, passing by the outbreak of demonstrations and struggles, and ending by the fleeing of Syrians through the Mediterranean to seek a better peaceful place to live in. 7 selected images are chosen for analysis; each one is used to represent a spot in the different stages throughout the novel moving from calm and peace to war until reaching the sea shore to find peace at another place. The analysis of images is carried according to the representational, interactional, and compositional aspects presented by Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar (2006).

4. Khaled Hosseini's *Sea Prayer* as an Illustrated Novel

Sea Prayer is an illustrated novel following the hybrid narrative medium that combines images and text to tell a story. According to the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the novel addresses the Syrian refugee crisis and is inspired by the tragic image of the Syrian child Alan Kurdi who drowns while fleeing war. The book is structured as a letter written from a father to his son reflecting on their peaceful life at Homs, Syria before the war outbreak and illustrating their journey to escape the war zone

across the Mediterranean Sea. The novel is presented in a letter format reflecting the father`s thoughts and emotions. The book features watercolors illustrations, by Dan Williams. These illustrations complement the narrative. *Sea Prayer* can be considered a universal book because it not only portrays personal struggles of its characters but also addresses a broad humanitarian message. It presents a deep understanding of the shared human experience amidst the ongoing refugee crisis.

5. Analysis of Images

The analysis is held through applying Kress and van Leeuwan`s framework of visual grammar to selected images from *Sea Prayer* to explore the intricate ways in which visual elements convey meaning. While the father is narrating his thoughts and feelings to the little boy, he is travelling through the history of his homeland Homs, Syria starting before the war outbreak to present how this land was peaceful and full of natural beauty. Then, he moves to the outburst of conflict and the destruction accompanying it, and finally ending with people deciding to flee. They travel as refugees to the other side of the Mediterranean to find peace. The framework of visual communication maintains that images, like language, have grammar that allows them to support ideas, establish relationships and structure information. In this analysis, images are being illustrated through examining the three key dimensions of visual grammar as outlined by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006): representational, interactive and compositional metafunctions.

5. 1. Figure 1

(Hosseini, 2018, p. 8)

The image depicts a big central olive tree in a green land with other olive trees in the background and a hazy image of a goat under the shadows of the central tree. The image presents a landscape, characterized by vibrant green fields. At the heart of this picturesque setting stands an olive tree creating a focal point that draws the viewer's eye. The olive tree symbolizes peace and longevity. Its leaves are dark green, contrasting beautifully with the lighter shades of the surrounding grass. Some other smaller olive trees are visible, adding a touch of realism. The goat under the shades of the tree evokes a sense of harmony between nature and livestock. Overall, this drawing serves as a celebration of nature's beauty in Homs in the past.

5. 1. 1. Representational Meaning

Kress and van Leeuwen`s (2006) consider the representational meaning of an image as a depiction of reality. They track that depiction through analyzing the participants presented in the image. In figure 1, the olive tree is the central participant occupying a significant portion of the frame. Its branches throw shades on the land and the "grandmother's goat" enjoys these shades. The tree is situated in a farm setting with a simple background of other smaller olive trees. The horizontal dark and light green areas suggest the soil at the background. The whole scene represents an agricultural cultivated environment at Homs that was present in the past.

5. 1. 2. Interactive Meaning

Visual grammar illustrates the interactive meaning of an image as the established relation between the participants in an image and the viewer. In figure 1, the image is static in the form of a drawing not a photograph. There are no people depicted in the scene so there is no direct eye contact between the viewer and the represented participants i.e. the trees, the grandmother's goat and the farm. The central olive tree as well as the whole setting of the

image is presented as objects of contemplation rather than demanding any particular response from the viewer.

5. 1. 3. Compositional Meaning

The compositional meaning, according to Kress and van Leeuwen`s visual grammar (2006), is the analysis of the arrangement and representation of participants within an image. In figure 1, the olive tree is placed centrally in the frame occupying the largest portion of the image to draw the viewer's attention to the peaceful calm state Homs used to enjoy. The tree is depicted in sharp focus and high modality while the background is more schematic and lower in modality. The whole image, with all its components and details, is placed to reflect the beauty and peace that was prevailing in Homs in the past.

5. 2. Figure 2

I have a sharply etched memory of your mother from that trip, showing you a herd of cows grazing in a field blown through with wild flowers.

I wish you hadn't been so young.
You wouldn't have forgotten the farmhouse, the soot of its stone walls, the creek where your uncles and I built a thousand boyhood dams.

(Hosseini, 2018, p. 10)

The image presents a woman holding her little child. They are enjoying a walk on a farmland. This image is accompanied by an extract from the letter written by the father to his son. The extract

illustrates how their past at Homs, Syria was full of calmness and peace. The image captures a heartwarming moment between a mother and her young child. The wide expanse of green land stretches out before them, creating a sense of openness and freedom. Scattered throughout the field are clusters of striking red flowers. These flowers add a splash of color, evoking feelings of warmth and happiness. Therefore, the atmosphere of the image is one of joy, love, and tranquility. This image beautifully illustrates a tender moment between a mother and her child, set against breathtaking nature.

5. 2. 1. Representational Meaning

Visual grammar deals with the representational meaning as the image's depiction of reality through analyzing the participants depicted in it. In figure 2, the image presents a woman holding a child while walking in a green land filled with red flowers; the primary focus is on the relationship between the woman and the child, both of whom are depicted as central figures in a nurturing and familial context. The green land setting suggests a natural, healthy environment, which symbolizes growth, life, and sustainability. The action of walking implies movement and progression, and the depiction of the woman holding the child indicates a protective and caring relationship, emphasizing maternal instincts and familial bonds. Furthermore, the green farm backdrop can be interpreted as a space of safety and abundance, reinforcing the idea of a wholesome family life.

5. 2. 2. Interactive Meaning

The interactive meaning in visual grammar is the relation held between the image and the viewer. In figure 2, the woman and her child are not looking at the viewer, but the viewer can only see their backs. This suggests that the woman and her child are focusing on their interaction rather than demanding any interference by the viewer. It also suggests that they are moving towards their calm future. The use of vibrant colors, particularly the greens of the land and the red of the roses, indicates high modality suggesting a

realistic and lively representation of the scene. The depiction of the wide green land enhances the viewer's perception of the beauty of Homs, Syria at that time.

5. 2. 3. Compositional Meaning

The compositional meaning deals with the analysis of the arrangement and representation of participants within an image. In figure 2, the placement of the woman and her child against the green farm background emphasizes their importance in the scene. This layout directs the viewer's attention to their relationship. They are bonding together by spending time walking and enjoying the beauty of nature. The open frame of the image suggests their connection to the environment while the light green land serves as a backdrop that supports but does not overshadow the presence of the woman and the child. The image's analysis through visual grammar reveals deeper insights into the themes of family bond and the relationship between humans and their home in Homs, Syria in the past.

5. 3. Figure 3

I wish you remembered Homs as I do, Marwan.

(Hosseini, 2018, p. 14)

The image depicts a marketplace in which people are engaged in different activities. It reflects the details of the old marketplace with its brick floor and goods hung on the shops' walls. The image also reflects the living atmosphere of the market in which people from all walks of life come together to buy, sell, and socialize. The brick floors create a warm and inviting atmosphere, lending a sense of history and tradition to the market. The crowded market, with its brick walls, and hanging goods is a witness to the appeal of a traditional marketplace.

5. 3. 1. Representational Meaning

Figure 3 portrays various actions, such as people interacting, trading, or engaging in social activities. The crowd suggests a dynamic environment full of movement and energy, indicating a lively market atmosphere. The market itself serves as a conceptual space representing community, commerce, and cultural exchange. The diversity of people in the market emphasizes the richness of human interaction in Homs, Syria at that time.

5. 3. 2. Interactive Meaning

In figure 3, the participants in the image are not looking at the viewer, and they are looking elsewhere. So, this suggests they are focusing on their activities at the market. The tight packing of the crowd evokes a sense of closeness and community. The high modality of the image, represented by the vibrant colors, enhances the realism and emotional impact of the scene which reflects the lively atmosphere in Homs, Syria in the past.

5. 3. 3. Compositional Meaning

In visual grammar, compositional meaning focuses on how different elements within the image are arranged and how this arrangement affects interpretation. In figure 3, the placement of people draws extra attention, suggesting their significance in the market's social dynamics. The wide shot of the entire market provides a sense of the environment in which people are busy practicing their daily activities. The market's atmosphere and

activities are depicted in the color contrast and prominence of the people.

5. 4. Figure 4
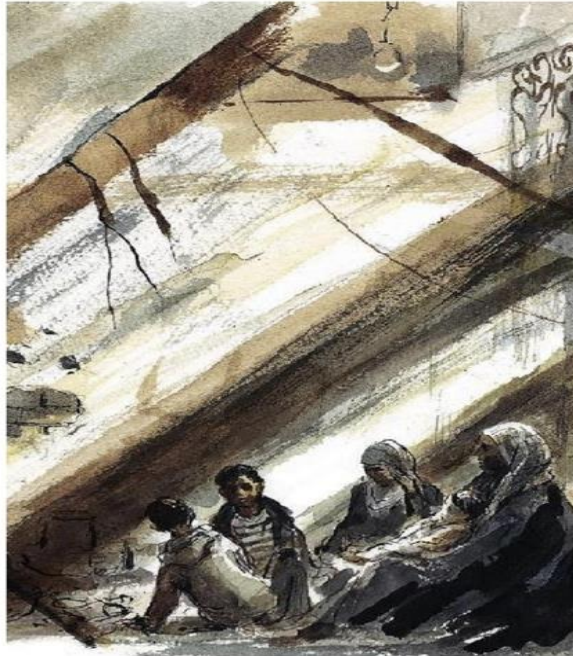
(Hosseini, 2018, p. 29)

This image presents women and children seeking shelter from bomb strikes under a destroyed building. It reflects the destruction of the city and the despair of the people living there. It also portrays a grievous scene of women and children seeking shelter from the horrors of war under a destroyed building. It is a reminder that the victims of war are not mere statistics, but real people with hopes, dreams, and the fundamental right to live in peace.

5. 4. 1. Representational Meaning

In the image of women and children hiding from bomb strikes under a damaged building, the representational meaning, according to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), focuses on how the

participants and the environment are depicted. The action of hiding suggests a response to danger, highlighting the urgency and fear associated with bomb strikes. The damaged building signifies destruction and instability. It represents not only physical damage but also the psychological trauma experienced by those seeking shelter.

5. 4. 2. Interactive Meaning

The interactive meaning explores the relationship between the image and the viewer as well as among the depicted participants (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). In figure 4, the individuals in the image are looking in different directions. A young boy is looking towards the viewers; his look creates a sense of urgency and a plea for empathy. On the other hand, the women in the image are not looking at the viewer; their looks reflect despair or resignation and further enhance the emotional weight of the scene. The closeness of the people in the image to one another suggests intimacy and a shared experience of fear. Dark color tones present a dramatic effect, making the viewer acutely aware of the dangerous circumstances.

5. 4. 3. Compositional Meaning

The compositional meaning, according to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), focuses on the arrangement of elements within the image and how this affects interpretation. In image 4, a mother protecting her child is foregrounded in the image highlighting the emotional core of the image to draw the viewer's attention to the devastating circumstances people are facing in Homs, Syria. The wider frame that includes the damaged building contextualizes people's situation within the broader environment of destruction. This image reveals the state of conflict and the plea of people to survive.

5. 5. Figure 5
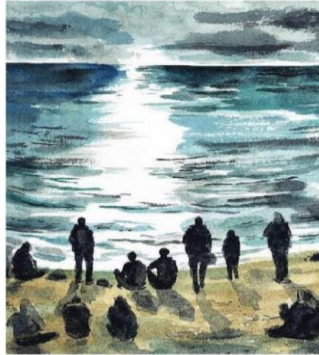
 (Hosseini, 2018, p. 32)

This image depicts a scene of desperation and hope as a group of people stands at the water's edge, gazing out at the sea. They are waiting to be rescued from the turmoil and danger that surrounds them everywhere. The atmosphere is heavy with emotion, capturing the weight of the moment as these individuals seek refuge from attacks and chaos. This image also encapsulates the struggles of those forced to leave everything behind in search of safety.

5. 5. 1. Representational Meaning

Representational meaning for Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) illustrates the depiction of participants within an image. In figure 5, people are standing and sitting by the seashore waiting for an escape from the war zone; the peoples' actions—waiting, sitting, and standing—convey a sense of anticipation and uncertainty. The representational meaning of his image suggests a journey full of hope and desperation, as they seek safety across the water. The participants in the image are not giving any direct looks at the viewer which means that they are not seeking any interference by other persons. The sea serves as a powerful symbol in this context. It represents both a barrier and a pathway to safety, embodying the duality of risk and opportunity. The seashore setting symbolizes a

border gate between danger and safety. Thus, the sea represents
both a barrier and a pathway to a new life.

5. 5. 2. Interactive Meaning

In figure 5, the people depicted in the image are looking
toward the sea. These directed looks at the horizon reflect their
longing for safety behind the sea. The individuals in the image are
not situated as a tight group, on the other hand, they are seen in a
dispersed arrangement to reflect the idea of isolation and individual
struggle within a collective situation. The dark tones of colors used
in the image help in conveying those people's despair, and the white
beam of light flashing from the middle of the surface of sea water
indicates the hope coming from the other side.

5. 5. 3. Compositional Meaning

The placement of individuals in the foreground against the
vastness of the sea emphasizes their significance in the scene since
they are trapped between the conflict of war in their homeland
Homs, Syria and their decision of escaping trough the sea to seek a
peaceful better place to live in behind the Mediterranean. This
composition draws attention to the hard situation they are facing and
their anticipation of the journey they are going to take. The wide
frame that includes the wide dark sea with light in the middle
contextualizes both struggle and hope in the coming journey.

5. 6. Figure 6
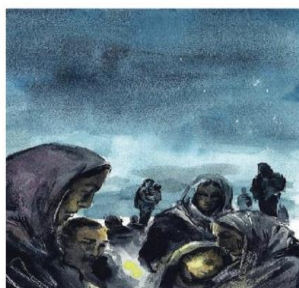
These are only words.
A father's tricks.
It slays your father,
your faith in him.
Because all I can think tonight is how deep the sea,
and how vast, how indifferent.
How powerless I am to protect you from it.

(Hosseini, 2018, p38)

This image portrays a deeply moving scene at the shoreline, where a group of women and children stands anxiously holding their children tightly, cradling them against their bodies as if to shield them from the uncertainty that lies ahead. The image is heavy with emotion; it encapsulates the struggles of those forced to leave everything behind in search of safety and belonging.

5. 6. 1. Representational Meaning

In figure 6, the act of waiting, in this image, conveys a sense of anticipation and uncertainty. The women and children are depicted in a vulnerable state. This narrative emphasizes themes of desperation resulting from what they faced during the conflict in Homs, Syria and hope for finding a new life after reaching the other side of the sea as they seek a means of escape from danger. The presence of women and children emphasizes the emotional bonds and responsibilities that accompany their journey.

5. 6. 2. Interactive Meaning

In figure 6, the individuals in the image are divided between some who are looking towards the viewer and others who are looking elsewhere. Those who are looking towards the viewer are creating a direct connection, inviting empathy and engagement. This gaze evokes feelings of urgency and a plea for understanding while those who are looking elsewhere are not looking for help from the viewers, but they are longing for safety and hope for a better future. The physical closeness of the women and children suggests intimacy and shared experience and highlights the emotional bonds formed in crisis. The use of dark muted tones of colors conveys despair and uncertainty about the future.

5. 6. 3. Compositional Meaning

In figure 6, the placement of women and children in the foreground emphasizes their despair directing the viewer's attention to their expressions and emotional states. This layout highlights the personal stories behind their experience, making their plight more relatable. The wider frame that includes the sea and dark sky contextualizes those people's struggle within the broader narrative of migration and displacement, reinforcing the challenges they face.

5. 7. Figure 7

(Hosseini, 2018, p. 40)

This image shows a boat full of people in the middle of the sea, illuminated only by a beam of light. It symbolizes the grieve journey of refugees fleeing war-torn homelands, driven by the urgent need for safety and a better future. The emotional weight of this imagery is profound as it captures the essence of what it means to be a refugee: the loss of home, the fear of the unknown, and the constant pursuit of safety.

5. 7. 1. Representational Meaning

In figure 7, the representation of the boat and its occupants symbolizes a desperate escape from conflict. The dark sea and night sky contribute to a sense of danger and uncertainty. The small boat is depicted as fragile against the vastness of the sea. The image highlights the vulnerability of those aboard. The presence of people suggests a collective experience of fleeing, emphasizing themes of survival and resilience amidst chaos.

5. 7. 2. Interactive Meaning

In figure 7, in a night scene, the darkness evokes feelings of empathy and urgency, drawing the viewer into the emotional state of the escapees. The central position of the boat within the frame

suggests the focus and importance of the idea of escaping conflict. The crowdedness of the boat indicates the fierceness of war in Homs, Syria to the extent that many people are throwing themselves in the sea to escape war.

5. 7. 3. Compositional Meaning

In image 7, the boat is centered in the middle of the sea to signify that it is the last and only hope of survival for those people. The boat is floating somewhere in the sea where light prevails; the position of the boat in the middle of light symbolizes hope and safety, and the dark far areas of the sea, on the other hand, represent danger which the individuals face in the boat. The relation between the boat and the horizon signifies the journey ahead. There is no land in the image which signifies the far distance and the length of the journey.

Applying Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar to the images extracted from Khaled Hosseini's *Sea Prayer*, key observations emerge regarding the interplay of visual elements and narrative themes. The illustrations in *Sea Prayer*, created by Dan Williams, serve not only as a complement to Hosseini's text but also as a vital narrative device that enhances the emotional depth of the story. This emphasizes the significance of visual representation in conveying meaning. In this work, the use of color, composition, and imagery effectively communicates the contrasting realities of the characters' past and present. Visual grammar analysis confirms that the images in *Sea Prayers* play the role of the universal language.

6. Conclusion

The application of Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar within the context of the illustrated novel *Sea Prayer* highlights the depth to which the images work in complementing and expanding the textual narrative. This study engages representational, interactive, and compositional meanings and declares that the visual elements in *Sea Prayer* do more than simply accompany the written text as they enhance its emotional and thematic depth. The combination of images and text illustrate shared communicative

functions where the visual carries symbolic and experiential meaning that may be difficult to express with words alone. This analysis reflects that images are universal in their capacity to evoke shared human experiences. The employment of visual elements within the illustrations shows how visual design principles transcend linguistic boundaries and connect with audiences through an emotional touch. The universal theme of twist from stability to suffering and migration depicted in the images presented in *Sea Prayer* declares the idea that visual language can be universally understood just as verbal language. Hence, this research brings into view the integrating importance of visual grammar in the analysis of illustrated texts, especially those with socially relevant themes. This paper postulates that future studies in multimodal discourse will go on to explore how visual elements function as a universal means of communication, especially in works that deal with powerful emotional and humanitarian messages. *Sea Prayer* serves as an example of how images and text can work together to create a cohesive, universal message that transcends cultural and linguistic boundaries.

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