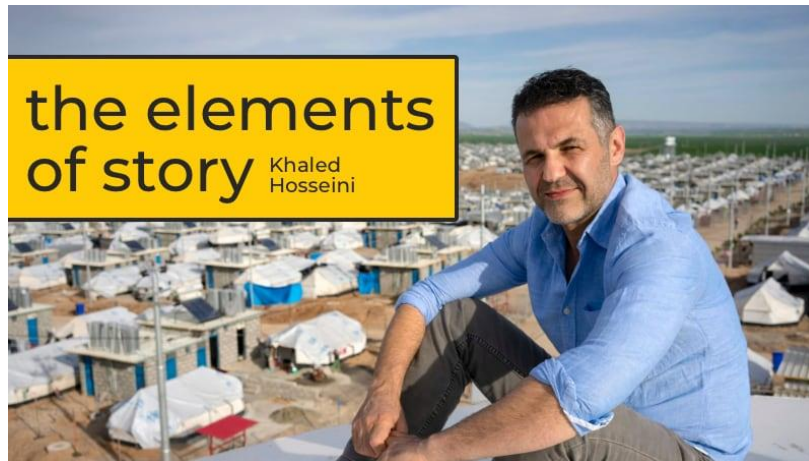


THE ELEMENTS OF STORY KHALED HOSSEINI'S A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS

Co-Produced by Canadian Stage and the Toronto International Festival
of Authors in Association with Diaspora Dialogues
October 6 – November 13, 2020



September 30, 2020, Toronto -- Canadian Stage is thrilled to partner with the Toronto International Festival of Authors and Diaspora Dialogues to present THE ELEMENTS OF STORY, a new series that examines the work of internationally celebrated authors and cultural thinkers. The inaugural edition takes participants on a six-week exploration into Afghanistan's complex intersection of politics, religion, and gender through the eyes of bestselling author Khaled Hosseini's breathtaking novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

This one-of-a-kind literary series of interactive discussions and lectures led by fascinating scholars and thinkers -- all hosted by celebrated author, artist, activist, **Samra Habib**, winner of the 2020 Canada Reads for her book *We Have Always Been Here: A Queer Muslim Memoir* -- invites participants to go beyond the page to deepen their experience and understanding of the novel and its author.

The marquee event features a livestreamed **IN CONVERSATION WITH KHALED HOSSEINI** on November 13 at 7 PM. Hosseini is considered one of today's most important literary writers. He is a Goodwill Ambassador for the UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and founder of The Khaled Hosseini Foundation, a non-profit that provides support for refugees around the world. With novels that have been hailed as ambitious, spectacular, compelling, heartbreaking, and powerful, this is a unique opportunity to delve into the mind of this literary great.

This online event series also includes access to:

IN THEIR ELEMENT

Three 90-minute lectures by leading scholars, thinkers, and artists exploring related topics:

- **Mozhdah Jamalzadah**, an acclaimed Afghan singer and talk show host, dubbed “the Oprah of Afghanistan” (Tuesday October 6, 7 PM) discussing the progress and struggles of women in Afghanistan.
- **Kamal Al-Solaylee**, a celebrated author and journalist (Tuesday October 20, 7 PM) discussing Brown representation in literature and who’s stories are given space and under what conditions.
- **Nahlah Ayed**, award-winning journalist and host of CBC Radio’s Ideas (Tuesday November 3, 7 PM) discussing the role that journalists play around narratives in war torn countries.

THE ELEMENTS OF STORY BOOK CLUB

Three facilitated 90-minute small group discussions lead by Diaspora Dialogues, where attendees will engage with other readers and dissect *A Thousand Splendid Suns* in depth. (Thursdays October 15, 29, and November 12, 7 PM).

BLINK AND YOU’LL MISS US

A series of micro-film poems by Afghan and Canadian filmmakers commissioned especially for this series. A visual collaboration between two filmmakers, Shahrbanoo Sadat and Baqir Twakoli, using only a smart phone, who will create 18-21 micro-films in response to four poems written by Aria Aber. Each microfilm will work as a standalone piece and edited together as part of a larger film, making a visual anthology of the poems.

THE ELEMENTS OF STORY series is presented online. A full series pass (includes the In Conversation, all of the In Their Elements lectures, Book Club access and Blink and You’ll Miss Us) can be purchased for \$30 and just the In Conversation event for \$20 at canadianstage.com.

THE ELEMENTS OF STORY is Co-Produced by Canadian Stage and the Toronto International Festival of Authors in Association with Diaspora Dialogues. David W. Binet is generously underwriting the In Conversation series.

ABOUT CANADIAN STAGE

Canadian Stage's mission is to be the leading contemporary performing arts organization in the country. A collision of disciplines and cultures, Canadian Stage reflects the dynamism and complexity of Canada and is a vital artistic force locally, nationally, and internationally. In its over thirty-year history, Canadian Stage has employed thousands of artists and developed and produced hundreds of new productions. Many of the plays developed by Canadian Stage have been awarded and nominated for Canada's most prestigious literary and performing arts honours, including Governor General's, Chalmers and Dora Mavor Moore Awards. Throughout the theatre season, nearly 100,000 patrons attend performances and workshops in our three Toronto venues. Throughout our history, Canadian Stage has provided outstanding education and outreach programs cultivating a diverse audience demographic.

ABOUT TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF AUTHORS

The Toronto International Festival of Authors (TIFA) is Canada's longest-running literary festival, a charitable, non-profit cultural organization. It creates literary festivals, programmes and events that bring together people of all ages to be inspired and empowered through a celebration of authors, books and stories. It generates diverse and exciting conversations across communities in the city, the nation and internationally, to foster new thinking about what it means to be living in today's world, and champions the best of Canadian and international publishing to audiences and industry. TIFA acknowledges that the land on which the organization conducts its work is the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee, the Wendat and the Mississaugas of the Credit.

ABOUT DIASPORA DIALOGUES

Diaspora Dialogues (www.diasporadialogues.com) supports diverse writers across Canada turn their craft into a career through mentorship, professional development, and opportunities to present and publish their work. Launched 15 years ago, DD has engaged over 700 culturally diverse and/or Indigenous writers and artists, emerging and well-established, from literature, spoken-word poetry to theatre and performance, with occasional dance and music performances as well. DD's mentoring programs have one of the highest success rates in the country: almost 75-100% of alumni go on to publish or have plays produced in major theatre festivals, as well as win awards such as the Toronto Book Awards, Governor General's Literary Award and the Dora's.

ABOUT THE ELEMENTS OF STORY PARTICIPANTS

Aria Aber was raised in Germany. Her debut book *Hard Damage* won the Prairie Schooner Book Prize in Poetry and a Whiting Award. Her poems are forthcoming and have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *New Republic*, *Kenyon Review*, *The Yale Review*, *Poem-A-Day*, *Narrative*, *Muzzle Magazine*, *Wasafiri* and elsewhere. A graduate from the NYU MFA in Creative Writing, where she was a *Writers in Public Schools* Fellow, she holds awards and fellowships from Kundiman, Dickinson House, and the Wisconsin Institute of Creative Writing. She is currently a Stegner Fellow in Poetry at Stanford University.

Baqir Tawakoli started in the filmmaking and cinema industry as a writer, director, camera man, and producer. He directed a short film documentary called *Four Seasons of Bamiyan* and worked as a crew member and a director in many films. Baqir also joined a group of young people to open Rowzana Film Production in 2014; he considers this a great achievement for Bamiyan City. Rowzana produces content in the field of education under four artistic sections: cinema, photography, theater, and music. He continues to support young film makers as a consultant and advisor in screenwriting and documentary filmmaking. He lives in Toronto where he is writing a novel and exploring the worlds of poetry and fiction that have interested him since he was a teenager.

Kamal Al-Solaylee is the author of the national bestseller *Intolerable: A Memoir of Extremes*, which won the 2013 Toronto Book Award and was a finalist for the CBC's Canada Reads and the Hilary Weston Writers' Trust Prize for Nonfiction. His second book, *Brown: What Being Brown in the World Today Means (to Everyone)*, was a finalist for the Governor General's Literary Awards for Nonfiction, the Trillium Book Award and won the Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political

Writing. He was previously a theatre critic at *the Globe and Mail* and has written reviews and features on arts and politics for all major Canadian publications. He holds a PhD in English and is a professor of journalism at Ryerson University.

Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan. The son of a diplomat in the Afghan Foreign Ministry and a teacher, in 1976, the Foreign Ministry relocated the Hosseini family to Paris. In 1980, the family were unable to return to their homeland due to a communist coup and the invasion of the Soviet Army and were granted political asylum in the United States. Recognized as one of the bestselling authors in the world, Hosseini's books, *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed*, have been published in over seventy countries and sold more than 40 million copies. In 2006 Khaled was appointed a Goodwill Ambassador for [UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency](#). Inspired by a trip he made to Afghanistan with the UNHCR, he later established [The Khaled Hosseini Foundation](#), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, which provides humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan. He lives in Northern California with his wife and two children.

Mozhdah Jamalzadah is a Kabul-born, Vancouver-based singer-songwriter, media personality and women's rights activist. She's been called the Oprah of Afghanistan for having had a talk show debating taboo subjects like child marriage, violence against women and divorce in post-Taliban Afghanistan; and the first Afghan to perform at the Obama Whitehouse. She has guested on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* and won several "Best Artist of the Year" awards in more than one country. Her biography, *The Voice of Rebellion*, written by Roberta Staley, just released October 2019, and she made her acting debut in the movie *Red Snow*, written and directed by award winning Canadian director Marie Clements.

Nahlah Ayed, the host of CBC Radio's Ideas, is an award-winning veteran foreign news reporter who spent nearly a decade in the Middle East covering the region's many conflicts and later in London where she covered major stories from Russia's annexation of Crimea, Europe's refugee crisis, and the Brexit vote and its fallout. A graduate of Carleton University's Master of Journalism program, she also holds a master's degree in interdisciplinary studies (Philosophy, English and Science) and a Bachelor of Science in genetics from the University of Manitoba. In 2012, her memoir, *A Thousand Farewells: A Reporter's Journey from Refugee Camp to the Arab Spring*, was shortlisted for the Governor General's Award. Nahlah was born and raised (mostly) in Winnipeg, Canada.

Samra Habib is a Pakistani-Canadian writer, photographer and activist. She's the author of the national bestselling book, *We Have Always Been Here, a Queer Muslim memoir*—winner of the 2020 Lambda Literary Award and Canada Reads. As a journalist, she's covered topics ranging from Islamophobia and the rights of refugees to fashion trends. Her writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The Advocate*, and her photo project, "Just Me and Allah," has been featured in *Nylon*, *i-D*, *Vanity Fair Italia*, *Vice*, and *The Washington Post*.

Shahrbanoo Sadat is a female scriptwriter, producer and director based in Kabul, Afghanistan. Her debut film, *Wolf and Sheep*, won the top award at Directors' Fortnight-Cannes Film Festival 2016. The film was developed with the Cannes Cinefondation Residency in 2010 when Shahrbanoo was 19 years old – the youngest person ever selected for the residence. She premiered her second feature, *The Orphanage*, at the same section at the Cannes Film

Festival in 2019. Both *Wolf and Sheep* and *The Orphanage* are part of her pentalogy project (5 feature films) based on nwar Hashimi's autobiographical text of 800 pages. Shahr studied documentary filmmaking at the Kabul workshop of "Atelier Varan" in 2009. Her first short feature, *Vice Versa One*, was selected at Directors' Fortnight-2011. In 2013, she opened her own production company Wolf Pictures in Kabul.

Yasmin Fedda is an award-winning filmmaker and artist whose films include *Ayouni* (2020), *Steal from the Capitalists* (2015), *Queens of Syria* (2014), and *Breadmakers* (2007). Her films have been BAFTA-nominated and screened at numerous international festivals including Sundance & Edinburgh Film Festival, been broadcast on television, and screened at galleries. Yasmin is also a film teacher and Lecturer in Film Practice at Queen Mary University London.

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