

**“REJUVENATION Vs CONTRADICTION IN MICHAEL ONDATJEE’S  
THE ENGLISH PATIENT”**

A project work submitted to Madurai Kamaraj University in partial  
Fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of  
**Master of Arts in English Literature**

By

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## **Certificate**

This is to certify that the project work entitled, **Rejuvenation Vs Contradiction** in Michael Ondaatje's "THE ENGLISH PATIENT," submitted to Madurai Kamaraj University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **Master of Arts in English Literature** is a record of original research work done by **LAKSHMLA (Reg.No. B8T15953)** during the period (June 2018 - April 2020) of her study in Mary Matha College of Arts and Science, Periyakulam under my supervision and guidance and the project has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree / Diploma / Associateship / Fellowship or similar title to any candidate of any University.

Signature of the Guide

**(Mrs.S.NISHA)**

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Principal  
**(Rev. Fr. Issac PJ CMI)**

## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that the project work entitled, “**Rejuvenation Vs Contradiction in Michael Ondaatje’s The English Patient,**” submitted to Madurai Kamaraj University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **Master of Arts in English Literature** is a record of original research work done by me during the period (June 2018 –April 2020) under the supervision and guidance of **Mrs.S.NISHA**, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Mary Matha College of Arts and Science, Periyakulam and that it has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree / Diploma / Associateship / Fellowship or similar title to any candidate of any University.

Signature of the Candidate

**(LAKSHMI.A )**

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## **Abstract**

The psychological world of *The English Patient* is explored to deepen the understanding of schizoid states. The protagonist, Almásy, is a remote desert explorer whose triangular sadomasochistic affair with the married Katharine destroys them all. His damaged skin is understood as a symbolic representation of his psychological condition. For the schizoid, love consumes and leads to obliteration of the self, represented by the loss of identifying features, and to traumatic permeability (i.e., the loss of boundaries between self and other, and between the ego and repressed desires). Other schizoid themes are the animation of the inanimate, as in the depiction of the desert as a woman, hidden or buried identities, the digital and destructive experience of emotion represented by the conundrum of the bomb defuse, the sense that everything good is imaginary and might suddenly explode and the moral unevenness of the characters. Almásy collaborates with the Nazis so he can retrieve Katharine's three-year-old corpse, with which he has necrophilia contact in a cave. Fantasies of the lost object buried within the self, of being buried alive, and of being skinned alive are related to the schizoid condition. Hyper permeability is proposed as a core schizoid state, underlying schizoid withdrawal.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Literature is a form of shaping human expression and molding their life as mere exploration of mirroring reality. Not everything that are written in words, but that are organized and written are counted as literature. Those primarily informative writings that are technical, scholarly, and journalistic would be excluded from the rank of literature. Certain forms of writings are universally regarded as belonging to literature as form of an art. Literature can be better substituted as a catalyst to provide the world with information about the cultural and traditional conflicts during different centuries.

Canadian writing is stimulated by a renaissance of interest in literature and culture. In the nineteenth century, fiction writers focused on society. But there is a shift in the twentieth century as writers highlight the subject of self or identity in their writings. Canadian Literature is mainly divided into two parts. It is like a tree with two great roots. One is deeply rooted in the culture of France. The other is rooted in the traditions of England. Canadian Literature is a literary output arising out of a confluence of the two main streams in the English language of both British and American.

With great literary works sometimes comes disagreement due to a writer's outspoken nature about certain topics. When it comes to Mordecai Richler, his essays were thought-provoking and sometimes enraging as he wrote about nationalism, particularly as it involved speaking out against the Quebec separationist movement, anti-Semitism, and the Jewish community in Canada. Richler published the novel *The Acrobats* (1954). His subsequent novels, which manifest evidence of the poverty and anti-Semitism he

experienced during his early years, include *Son of a Smaller Hero*(1955) and *A Choice of Enemies* (1957), both dealing with angry, confused modern heroes. *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959), a bawdy and sometimes embarrassing account of a Jewish boy in Montreal and his transformation into a ruthless and amoral businessman, which was made into a film from his screenplay in 1974 and *The Incomparable Atuk* (1963), which contains amusing descriptions of the powerful men who control the communications industries.

The list of great Canadian authors is extensive and Leonard Cohen should be included on that list for his range of works from his first award-winning novel, *The Favourite Game* (1963), to his poetry and songs. Cohen was best known for his song-writing as he put his poetry pieces to music and rhythm. His most recognized piece was Hallelujah, which grew to worldwide popularity several years after it was written in 1984. It has since been translated into many languages and performed by over 200 vocal artists, giving it global exposure and new life every time. The Academy of American Poets recognized Cohen as a Renaissance man to most of his affectionate fans in his successful blend of poetry, fictional literature, and music.

Certain characters of children's literature have the power to capture the imaginations of people of all ages and tolerate as well-loved classics. J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter and C.S. Lewis's Pevensie children are some such characters. Anne Shirley is most certainly another. Lucy Maud Montgomery was born in 1874 in Prince Edward Island, the setting for most of her novels, including her beloved *Anne of Green Gables* series. In addition to 20 novels, Montgomery published over 500 short stories, 30 essays,

and hundreds of poems. She studied to be a teacher and completed her course work early and with honors. In 1935, King George V named her an Officer of the British Royal Empire as, prior to the 1970s, there were no Canadian civilian honors. The L.M. Montgomery Institute was established at the University of Prince Edward Island and is devoted to the study of her works, letters, and other aspects of her life as well as their cultural and historical significance. Twice she has had commemorative stamps designed in her honor, and her Prince Edward Island home has been declared a National Landmark.

In spite of many literary successes, Montgomery never felt as if she had truly written an exceptionally great book. The enduring love had worldwide for Anne Shirley and for the *Green Gables* series certainly proves otherwise.

Born in southern Ontario to a fox and mink farmer and teacher, Alice Munro takes the small-town landscape in which she grew up and uses it as the setting for many of the hundreds of short stories she has published in her impressive career. Munro's work is often fully absorbed in a literary tradition known as Southern Ontario Gothic, similar to the American literary genre of Southern Gothic in its focus on the people and traditions of the particular region. Because of this, she is often compared to William Faulkner.

Munro has won the Governor General's Award three times, her first time being for her first collection of stories, *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968), which immediately cemented her as a noteworthy writer. She has won the Giller Prize twice and her short story *The Bear Came Over the Mountain* (2001) published in her collection *Hateship Friendship Courtship Loveship Marriage* (2001) was adapted into a film called *Away from Her* (2007) starring Sarah Polley. The title story of the same collection has been

made into a film called *Hateship Loveship* (2014) featuring Kristen Wiig and Nick Nolte. Munro, now well into her 80s, continues to publish short stories in notable magazines such as *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic*. Munro received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013 for her outstanding contributions to the art of the short story. She was the first Canadian to receive the honor.

Philip Michael Ondaatje, born 12 September 1943, is a Sri Lankan-born Canadian poet, fiction writer, essayist, novelist, editor and filmmaker. He is the recipient of multiple literary awards such as the Governor General's Award, the Giller Prize, the Booker Prize, and the Prix Ondaatje is also an officer of the Order of Canada, recognizing him as one of Canada's most renowned living authors. His first novel, *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976), is a fictional portrait of jazz musician Buddy Bolden. *The English Patient* (1992), set in Italy at the end of the Second World War, was joint winner of the Booker Prize for Fiction and was made into an Academy Award winning film in 1996. *Anil's Ghost* (2000), set in Sri Lanka, tells the story of a young female anthropologist investigating war crimes for an international human rights group. His recent novels include *Divisadero* (2007), *The Cat's Table* (2011) and *Warlight* (2018).

Ondaatje immigrated to Montreal when he was 19 and received a B.A. in English from the University of Toronto in 1965 and an M.A. from Queen's University in 1967. His first collection of poetry, *The Dainty Monsters* (1967), is a series of lyrics that juxtapose everyday life with mythology. It was praised for its unique blend of primitive and domestic imagery. One of his most celebrated works, the 1970 imitation *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left-Handed Poems*. Often called a parable of the artist as outlaw, the work contains poems, prose, photographs, interviews, and even comic

books, which combined create a meditation on the nature of heroism and violence. His collection titled *Secular Love* (1984) contains poetry about the breakup of his marriage. His other poetry collections include *The Cinnamon Peeler* (1989) and *Handwriting: Poems* (1998).

Ondaatje along with Margaret Atwood is one of Canada's most important contemporary writers and one of the country's biggest cultural exports. However, he first achieved critical praise as a poet with early collections like *The Dainty Monsters* (1967), *Rat Jelly* (1980) and his long poem *The Man with Seven Toes* (1969). More recently he has returned to poetry with the publication of his long poem, *The Story* (2005). Set alongside water-colour illustrations by artist David Bolducan, this beautiful book aims to raise funds for the World Literacy Project in Canada. Through meditations on childhood, love and mythology, these poems reveal a preoccupation with language and rhythm that is pursued later in his typically economical, lyrical prose fiction. During this period, Ondaatje also produced a book of criticism *Leonard Cohen* (1970) and the films *Sons of Captain Poetry* (1970), about concrete poet Nichol, *Carry on Crime and Punishment* (1972), and *The Clinton Special* (1974). Ondaatje has also compiled a book of interviews with filmmaker Walter Murch entitled *The Conversations* (2002).

Ultimately, Ondaatje is perhaps best understood not as poet or novelist, but as an artist who has drawn into question the very limits of such genres. "His first book, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970), a salad of poetry, prose, hypothetical news stories and photo documentary about William Bonney, made him well known at home." (Ben 47). In his playfully titled *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1981) we are treated to some of the formal exuberance and experimentation for which Ondaatje is

critically respected. As its author has stated, the book is not interested in the real Billy the Kid. Often referred to as a collage, the collected works brings together, within a single, episodic narrative, songs, photographs, poetry, prose, interviews, a play, as well as the white space of blank pages. Where the title of this text implies a complete narrative of its hero, the events of the text are ambiguous and fragmented. Its protagonists, Billy and Pat Garrett are the product of plural perspectives which is a combination of history and legend that ultimately favors uncertainty in place of the whole story. “Like coral, Ondaatje’s narrative is built up slowly into towers and branches and hidden chambers, fashioning a delicate grisaille of memory and passion.” (Edmund 2)

In his first novel, *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976), Ondaatje continues his focus on folk heroes, creating a fictionalized biography of Charles ‘Buddy’ Bolden (1876-1931), a renowned jazz musician. Here Ondaatje develops the formal experimentation of *The Collected Works* to produce a prose poem that is also a parable of the twentieth century artist. Like Billy, Buddy exists outside official history and the narrative hints that this is a life only available to us through music, stories and rumors. As if to highlight the distorted boundaries between real and fictional lives, Ondaatje himself makes an appearance as a character within the text. Life and art, biography and fiction are not polar opposites in this text, but mutually constitutive categories.

In *Running in the Family* (1983), Ondaatje turns away from America and Canada in order to interrogate his own life and family history through a return to Sri Lanka. Written shortly after a visiting the country of his birth, the text, once more, blends different genres in a fragmentary collage of photographs, poems and stories.

*In the Skin of a Lion* (1987) fictionalizes the lives of those migrants and minorities that participated in the construction of Toronto in the early 1900s, but who have since been written out of the country's official history. In this distressing novel, Ondaatje dwells on the work, labor, and energy invested in Canada by those settlers who are imagined as outsiders. *In the Skin of a Lion* is a profound exploration of the migrant condition. It is a novel about the wearing and the removal of masks, the shedding of skin, the transformations and translations of identity.

*Anil's Ghost* (2000), Ondaatje's much estimated follow-up to *The English Patient*, returns us once more to the author's Sri Lankan homeland. Here the backdrop shifts from European World War to South Asian civil war and the horrors and traumas of post-colonial violence. The novel tells the story of Anil Tissera, a forensic anthropologist who has trained in the United States and in England. Anil returns to Sri Lanka to investigate a series of politically motivated murders on the island. Paired up with anthropologist, Sarath Diyasena, it is the discovery of human remains in the Bandarawela caves that drives their quest for the truth and which haunts both the novel and its war-torn landscape. The novel confirms his status as one of the world's leading storytellers.

Ondaatje's next novel, *Divisadero* (2007), takes its name from a street in San Francisco, and is concerned with the intersections between what otherwise seem divided narratives. Ondaatje says that it's a story where each half reflects the other. One half focuses on a farm in California, the other on Southern France before the outbreak of World War I. But there is also internal division. The first narrative describes the disintegration of an already fragile family comprising a father, his biological daughter Anna, an adopted girl Claire and an orphaned boy named Coop. It is this story of division

that reverberates throughout the novel as Anna slowly discovers when she traces the life of writer Lucien Segura in Europe. Ondaatje's first novel in seven years, it received a mixed critical reception, with many praising Ondaatje's writing style, but with some complaining about the contrived connections between the two parts.

One man's overwriting is another man's poetry, but in my view Ondaatje allows himself much latitude in the direction of high-sounding prose. In its poetic vein his writing tends to self-parody, to be portentous, and to create an air of solemnity which tempts irreverence. (Nicholas 18).

His novel, *The English Patient* (1992), takes up these themes and issues in a more subtle, indirect manner. *The English Patient* published in 1992 won the Booker Prize and was adapted into a film by Anthony Minghella that won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 1997. "If community is premised on the sameness that is enabled by that which it excludes, and sees as a threat, then it must seek always to conserve itself and to render the future – which is hazardous in its uncertainty – calculable, predictable and determinable. In its search for stability and permanence, community must dominate time in such a way that it is overcome, that it withdraws from itself." (Mike 15).

In *The English Patient*, the past and the present are continually knotted. The narrative structure intersperses descriptions of present action with thoughts and conversations that offer glimpses of past events and occurrences. Though there is no single narrator, the story is alternatively seen from the point of view of each of the main characters. The novel opens with Hana, a young nurse, gardening outside a villa in Italy in 1945. The European theater of the war has just ended with the Germans losing ground up the Italian

countryside. As the Germans retreated, they left hidden bombs and mines everywhere, so the landscape is particularly dangerous. Although the other nurses and patients have left the villa to escape to a safer place, Hana decides to stay in the villa with her patient.

Hana does not know much about the man for whom she cares. Found in the wreckage of a plane crash, he been burned beyond acknowledgment, his whole body black and even the slightest touch painful to him. He talks about the Bedouin tribe who found him in the wreckage, cared for his wounds, and eventually returned him to a British camp in 1944. He does not know who they were, but he feels grateful to them nonetheless. To pass the time, Hana reads to the English patient and she assumes he is English by his manner and speech and also gardens, fixes up the villa, and plays hopscotch. Sometimes she picks up the patient's notebook, a copy of Herodotus's *The Histories* marked throughout with his own notes, figures, and observations, and reads to him or to herself.

One day, a man with bandaged hands named Caravaggio arrives at the villa. He is an old family friend of Hana's father, Patrick, and had heard about her location while he was recovering in a hospital a few miles away. In Canada, where Caravaggio knew Hana years ago, he was a thief. He tells her how his skills were legitimized in the war and how he put them to use working for British Intelligence in North Africa. He tells her that the Germans caught him after an attempt to steal a camera from a woman's room. They tortured him and cut off his thumbs, leaving his hands mutilated and nearly useless. Although he has recovered somewhat, he is still addicted to morphine. In the villa, he reminisces with Hana and mourns with her over the death of her father in the war.

As Hana plays the piano in the library, two soldiers come in and stand alongside while she plays. One of them is Kip, an Indian Sikh trained as a sapper, or bomb-defuser, in the British army. After hearing the piano, Kip has come to clear the villa of bombs, knowing that the Germans frequently booby-trapped musical instruments. Kip and the English patient get along very well, as they are both experts in guns and bombs and enjoy talking to each other and sharing stories. Kip makes camp in the garden of the villa and becomes a part of the family that now exists there. He goes off into town every day to clear more bombs from the area and to bury fellow sappers who have died. Kip's job is extremely dangerous. He feels a strong attraction to Hana, and soon they become lovers.

Asked about his past, the English patient begins to tell the others his story. His real name is Almasy, though this is not definitively confirmed until Chapter IX. He spent the years from 1930 to the start of World War II exploring the North African desert. His job was to make observations, draw maps, and search for ancient oases in the sands. Along with his fellow European counterparts, Almasy knew every inch of the desert and made many trips across it. In 1936, a young man from Oxford, Geoffrey Clifton, and his new wife Katharine, joined their party. Geoffrey owned a plane, which the party found especially useful in helping to map the desert. The explorers, Almasy, and the Cliftons got along very well. One night, after hearing Katharine read a passage from his book of Herodotus, Almasy realized he was in love with her. They soon began a torrid and confused affair. Everywhere they stole glances and moments, and they were possessed with each other. Finally, in 1938, Katharine broke off their affair, telling Almasy that Geoffrey would go mad if he ever found out. Although their affair was over, Almasy remained disturbed by her, and he tried to punish her for hurting him by being

particularly mean to her in public. At some point, Geoffrey somehow found out about the affair.

World War II broke out in 1939, and Almasy decided to close up their camp and arranged for Geoffrey to pick him up in the desert. Geoffrey arrived in his plane with Katharine. Geoffrey attempted to kill all three of them by crashing the plane into Almasy, who was standing on the ground. The plane missed Almasy, but the crash killed Geoffrey, left Katharine severely injured, and left them with no way to escape the desert. Almasy placed Katharine in a nearby cave, covering her with a parachute for warmth, and promised to come back for her. He walked across the desert for four days until he reached the nearest town, but when he got there, the English army would not help him get back to Katharine. Because Almasy had a foreign-sounding name, the British were suspicious and locked him up as a spy, prevented him from saving Katharine.

Almasy was eventually released, but he knew it was too late to save her. He worked for the Germans, helping their spies make their way across the desert into Cairo. After he left Cairo, his truck broke down in the desert. Without transportation, he walked to the cave to get Katharine. He took her dead body and placed it in a plane that had been buried beneath the sand. The plane malfunctioned during their flight and caught fire. Almasy parachuted down from the plane, his body covered in flames. That was the point at which the Bedouins found him and cared for his burns.

Little by little, the English patient tells this whole story. Caravaggio, who has suspected the English patient was not really English, has his suspicions confirmed. He fills in gaps for the Almasy, telling him that Geoffrey Clifton was really an agent of

British Intelligence and that Intelligence had known about Almasy and Katharine's affair the whole time. They knew Almasy had started helping the Germans and planned to kill him in the desert. They lost him between Cairo and the plane crash, and now, of course, he is unrecognizable.

The focus of the novel shifts to Kip, and we are told his entire story. Although Kip's brother always distrusted the west, Kip went willingly to serve in the British army. He was trained as a bomb defuser under Lord Suffolk, a true English gentleman, and was then virtually welcomed into an English family. Kip soon grew quite skillful at his job, able to figure out both the joke and the character of each bomb he tackled. Lord Suffolk and his group were blown up defusing a bomb, and Kip decided to leave England and become a sapper in Italy.

Kip has felt emotionally removed from everyone in his job as a sapper. When he meets Hana, he uses her to once again connect to humanity. All the residents of the villa celebrate Hana's twenty-first birthday, and Kip grows comfortable as her lover. When August comes, however, Kip hears on the radio of the atomic bomb that the United States has dropped on Japan. He becomes enraged, knowing that a western country would never commit such an atrocity against another white country. He takes his gun and threatens to kill the English patient, whom he sees as a symbol of the West. Kip does not kill Almasy, but takes off on his motorcycle, leaving the villa forever. Years later, he is a doctor in India with a family of his own. Though he is happy and fulfilled in his new life, he often wonders about Hana.

Next chapter which is entitled as ‘Chain of Introspection’ deals with the identity crisis that ruled each and every characters nominated in the novel and how the causes of multiculturalism affected them so badly, their reaction towards identity and the way each expose it. Chapter III bursts out with the heading ‘History of Blood Smears’ which is a brief description of the after effects of war and the consequences that led to violence, depression, political, economic, racial as well as nationality imbalance which is explained in fragmented state. The horrors of the war and how life is being valued in the perceptions of each is presented. The final Chapter IV is the summing up of all the events that are presented in the project from the beginning to the end and the goal of the project as well.

## CHAPTER II

### CHAIN OF INTROSPECTION

Nationality and identity are interconnected in *The English Patient*, functioning together to create a web of inescapable structures that tie the characters to certain places and times despite their best efforts to evade such confinement. Almásy desperately tries to elude the force of nationality, living in the desert where he creates for himself an alternate identity, one in which family and nation are irrelevant. Almásy forges this identity through his character, his work, and his interactions with others. Importantly, he chooses this identity rather than inheriting it. Certain environments in the novel lend credence to the idea that national identity can be erased. The desert and the isolated Italian villa function as such places where national identity is unimportant to one's connection with others. Kip, who becomes enmeshed in the idea of Western society and the welcoming community of the villa's inhabitants, even dismisses his hyperawareness of his own racial identity for a time.

The ostentatious intertextuality of *The English Patient*, it is argued, exhibits “postcolonial impatience”: the tension between recognition by postcolonial subjects of the imperialistic narratives by which they are constrained, and their impulse to repossess their own stories, between acknowledgement of inherited cognitive maps and irritation at being blueprinted by these dominant discourses. (Jacobs 92)

Ultimately, the characters cannot escape from the outside reality that, in wartime, national identity is prized above all else. This reality invades Almásy's life in the desert and Kip's

life in the Italian villa. Desperate for help, Almásy is locked up merely because his name sounds foreign. His identity follows him even after he is burned beyond recognition, as Caravaggio realizes that the 'English patient' is not even English. For Kip, news of the atomic bomb reminds him that, outside the isolated world of the villa, western aggression still exists, crushing Asian people as Kip's brother had warned. National identity is, then, an inescapable part of each of the characters, a larger force over which they have no control.

Identity is largely determined by the relationship between the self and other. So identity is a social construct. We identify ourselves as a member of an ethnic groups or nation which provides us with a sense of belonging. The individuals are parts of one collective body known as a nation. Everyone has a nationality. This idea is defined by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*. He states "It is an imagined political community and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." (Anderson, 6) Nation provides the people, the sense of belonging and identity through a shared territory which they won. So the people of that particular nation have a right to separate from the other people on the basis of the borders. In this context, Anderson's theory may be useful while discussing the belonging of the character to their imagined community that is the villa San Girolamo. *When you leave me, forget me.* (152). This is another form of identity crisis which is evoked in another name called Ownership that breaks the freedom of being independent in which they are locked up in the hands of fate that plays a vital role. This type of ownership plays a part in the lives of, not only the English Patient. But also in the lives of Kip, Hana and Caravaggio.

Questions concerning the identity of the English patient form one of the main narrative threads and lend the novel a sense of mystery. This mystery may also be seen as elemental to the period under discussion as millions in Europe had their identities erased and others claimed incorrectly not to be guilty of war crimes. The English identity is also cross examined and the title brings this to the forefront of the readers' mind. Through Kip, Englishness and its association with Imperialism and racism is highlighted as is the hypocrisy of those who claimed to be fighting for equality while denigrating those that were not white.

Cultural identity has an origin and history. It also changes in time as people develop and acquire new preferences. It is not only about 'being' in the past but also about 'becoming' in the future. The characters in the villa are from different countries and having different nationalities and different cultural backgrounds. But here in the villa their nationalism and personal identities are crushed. Their belonging to the new place and their newly formed identities are confused. The novel attempts to investigate the context and the background of the World War II and the newly formed community in the villa. Each character is affected by the issue of identity crisis. Nicholas B. Dirks in an essay "In Near Ruins: Cultural Theory at the End of the Century" discusses the symbol of ruins in 'The English Patient,' he writes "The ruin was a sign of loss, of absence, stood for wholes that could never again be achieved if even conceived." (Nicholas, 8) However the ruin is a sign of loss or absence and in the same way character's identities are also in ruins and lost.

The centre of the novel is the protagonist English patient who is burned beyond the recognition and lost the memory of who he is or from where he comes. His personal identity erases along with his burned skin colour. His loss of memory shows his crushed identities. He is not properly identified because the colour of his skin as a racial mark is burnt away. He is Hungarian yet mistaken as an Englishman who hates the English. Due to his English dress and manners and vaguely European accent and his talk about, “flower beds in Gloucestershire,” (163) he is considered as The English Patient. Hana, a Canadian nurse who takes care of the burnt man in the Pisa hospital comes across The English Patient, as a man without identity:

*In the Pisa hospital she had seen the English patient for the first time. A man with no face. An ebony pool. All identification consumed in a fire. Parts of his burned body and face had been sprayed with tannic acid that hardened into a protective shell over his raw skin. The area around his eyes was coated with a thick layer of gentian violet. There was nothing to recognize in him. (48)*

English patient looks like a burned animal taut and dark and a pool for Hana. He is the last patient in the villa San Girolamo. He has with him a copy of Herodotus, which reminds him his own loss of identity.

*And in his commonplace book, his 1890 edition of Herodotus' Histories, are other fragments-maps, diary, entries, writings in many languages, paragraphs cut out of other books. All that is missing is his own name. There is still no clue to who he actually is, nameless without rank or battalion or squadron.(96)*

Bolland also comments on the character of the patient as “his physical appearance, images the erasure of national identities.” (Bolland, 32) He works for Western project and poses the unmapped desert resulted in the destruction of his own features, the map of his identities.

After the plane crash, the English patient lies in the villa under the care of Hana. Hana is a twenty years old Canadian nurse. She is torn between her youth and maturity and has suffers psychologically. She has lost her father during the war and also the father of her unborn child. She cannot bring her child into such world. She has aborted. These psychological stress and sufferings make her life confusing one. She loses the meaning of her life; “she would remain with the one burned man they called the English patient.” (51) She tries to seek some kind of meaning in her life. Instead of going to home in Canada to her step mother Clara, she prefers to stay in Italy, cares for the burned patient, the father figure, and her despairing saint.

The issue of identity crisis is also presented in the novel through the character of Kip, the sapper. He is the only non- English member in the villa. His real name is Kirpal Singh. Like the patient, Kirpal is a young Sikh and also a sapper in the British army. Both of these characters represent the cultural hybridity which reject the national borders. By rejecting his family traditions and contrasting with his more anti-colonial brother, he joins the British army in England and becomes a part of an Engineer unit. In England he finds a new family in the bomb disposal squad. It is commanded by Lord Suffolk who becomes a surrogate father to Kirpal. Lord Suffolk has a technological knowledge, a sense of discipline and courage in bomb defusing, which help Kirpal in establishing his

sense of identity in the adopted land. Lord Suffolk's nicknaming to Kirpal Singh as Kip shows the attempts of the English to colonize him and to make him more English:

*The name had attached itself to him curiously. In his first bomb disposal report in England some better had marked his paper, and the officer had exclaimed, "What's this? Kipper grease?" and laughter surrounded him. He had no idea what a Kipper was, but the young Sikh had been thereby translated into a salty English fish. Within a week his real name, Kirpal Singh, had been forgotten. He hadn't minded this. Lord Suffolk and his demolition team took to calling him by his nickname. (87)*

Kirpal willingly accepts his nickname which indicates his assimilation into the British culture. His cultural identity rooted in the Indian heritage is damaged and is forced to act in a way the Englishmen behave. Kip realizes that the British will never accept him truly, it doesn't matter for them how truly he has assimilate into the English culture. This feeling leads him to alienation. The British wants Indians to fight from their side but are unwilling to communicate with them. Kip thinks that The English expect Indians to fight for them but won't talk to the Indians.

The English Patient teases to Caravaggio, as his name sounds very absurd, Caravaggio replies, "At least I have a name." (Ondaatje, 116) It is better to have a name or identity than having no name or no identity. Hana forms a close affinity with Indian Kip. They share their cultural kinship Even they celebrate Hana's twenty-first birthday. Caravaggio watches the English patient and wants to reveal English patient's identity for Hana's sake.

From the beginning of the novel, the English patient's identity never comes to a final definition. His identity is erased and he becomes the anonymous English patient. Caravaggio gives morphine to the English patient, the patient rides on the boat of morphine. The effect of morphine makes the patient to tell the stories of the Almasy desert explorer. For Caravaggio "English patient is not English." (163) He is a Count Ladislaus de Almasy, a Hungarian who worked for the Germans and British during the war. John Bolland in his book *The English Patient: A Readers Guide*, writes in this connection:

*He had joined the group of German, English, Hungarian and African explorers in the early 1930s searching for the lost Oasis of Zerzura. They were an "Oasis society." (Bolland 28)*

Madox is one of the members of their exploration team. Like Almasy Madox's identity is also crushed. He kills himself because he is disappointed by the English nationalism and national identity. He hates such kind of nationalism which respects the war than the civilization. Like Madox, Almasy is also betrayed by his English social identity which is based on the western nationalism. Almasy knows that mapping of the desert is an instrument of colonial domination and power:

*The ends of the earth are never the points on a map that colonists push against, enlarging their spear of influence. On one side servants and slaves and tides of power and correspondence with the Geographical Society. On the other first step by a white man across a great river, the first sight (by a white eye) of a mountain that has been there forever. (141)*

The European mapmakers compulsively carve their names on sand, trees and on fossils for possessiveness. But Almasy wants to erase his name and place. He wants to erase his identity that he got from Britishers. "I wanted to erase my name and the place I had come from. By the time war arrived, after ten years in the desert, it was easy for me to slip across borders, not to belong to anyone, to any nation.(139). Almasy hates the names and national borders which he acquires from the Britishers. Ondaatje here focuses on the English colonialism as act of naming.

In the novel Michael Ondaatje presents the extreme colonialist British character through Geoffrey Clifton who shows obsession with naming and sexual possessiveness. While on expedition, Clifton tries to domesticate the exotic things. He names the base camp site as Bir Messaha Country Club without the consent of natives. He says, "I name this site the Bir Messaha Country Club" (142) "He has named his plane Rupert Bear." (143) He even constantly praises his wife's beauty with words. The perfect British colonialist Geoffrey Clifton always controls the situation through names and language. It is a type of colonial domination by the colonizer. Geoffrey Clifton, the British Intelligence, knows that the desert may be some day is a theatre of war. Naming and mapping are the signs of the power and a tool of colonialism. So, he supports the naming. But in contrast, Almasy hates the naming. He thinks that the desert constantly changes and names do not last long there. Colonizers try to colonize the deserts. Almasy considers Clifton as a man rooted in the English machine. Clifton cares for the family genealogy. He has a family genealogy going back to Canute. Katherine Clifton also hates to die without name."Just as she loved family traditions and courteous ceremony and old memorized poems. She would have hated to die without a name." (170)

English patient announces that he and Kip are international bastards. In the international migration Kip erases his cultural identity and possess a new hybrid identity. The English patient is also burned beyond the recognition and found nameless without any identity. At the end of the novel Kip hears the news from the radio that the atom bombs are dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Kip angrily almost kills the English patient. "Although he is the man from Asia who has in these last years of war assumed English fathers, following the codes of Westerners like a dutiful son." (217) Kip participates in to the war on behalf of England like a dutiful son. He has not trusted his brother and by breaking his family tradition. Kip angrily addresses to the English patient as a representative of the West. He says "I grew up with traditions from my country, but later, more often, from your country. Your fragile white island that with costumes and manners and books and prefects and reason somehow converted the rest of the world." (283).

However, the novel differentiates Kip as a racial outsider. He faces the problem of identity crisis. The issues of identity crisis and sexual desire are explored through the relationship between Almasy and Katharine. The English patient is a nameless and faceless man without having identity and who wants to erase name, and hates nations and borders. He works as a spy and a map marker. He is also colonized by British intelligence spy Geoffrey Clifton. Katharine hates to die without a name but she also dies without a name. Though a colonizer, her identity is also crushed. Hana is psychologically wounded and faces the identity crisis this novel.



## CHAPTER III

### HISTORY OF BLOOD SMEARS

War is a destructive force on several levels, the most visible being the damage to places, structures, and bodies. Kip works to replace all the bridges the Germans have destroyed in their retreat. Cities are booby-trapped with bombs, making many areas uninhabitable. The villa is missing sections of its roof and walls so that some rooms are littered with leaves and debris. Kip can only imagine the streets of Asia full of fire from the atomic bombs. The physical damage to places and buildings mirrors the damage war does to bodies. In the extreme heat of the nuclear explosions in Japan, Kip imagines withering bodies. Hana sees so many soldiers arrive at the hospital missing portions of their bodies, some burned or with wounds being eaten by worms. The gore she witnesses leaves her numb. Caravaggio's paws for hands are a reminder of the lasting physical loss he can never fully hide. War's destruction is obvious and unmistakable.

However, war has destructive powers that are less visible. The dead may be the most visible example of destruction, but they cease to be visible once they are buried or blown apart. Patrick is simply gone, as are Lord Suffolk, Mrs. Morton, and so many others. But war also causes psychological and emotional scars. Hana is described as shell-shocked. She is withdrawn and traumatized. She recognizes the same symptoms in Kip when he speaks of the bomb exploding at Erith, which killed his mentor.

Looking back over his experiences, the English patient believes loyalty to nations has created the war and all of its destruction. He blames nationalism, seeing it as the ultimate cause of the destructiveness of war. He believes his friend Madox has died because of

nationalism, and people betray each other for the sake of nations. He wishes to Erase nations! The greatest example of war's destructive capabilities in the novel is the advent of nuclear warfare. It is described as the end of Western civilization. It destroys more than just Kip's faith in the goodness of the West. It is the end of any pretense of benevolence, or good intentions, toward the world by the West. The use of nuclear weapons is the death of a civilization.

Bombs represent the tremendous capacity of human intelligence for evil. Each bomb or mine is carefully designed to inflict the greatest damage possible, to cleverly and mischievously maim and kill the greatest number of people. Lord Suffolk likens disarming bombs to playing bridge, because the bomb maker and the sapper must anticipate each other's moves, like opponents across a table. Kip tries desperately to discover the "trick" of the bomb, and he learns that bomb makers often include a second *gaine* an initiating charge to explode an hour after the first is disarmed. As the war progresses, bomb designs are evolving to evade disarmer's attempts. The enemy uses their intelligence to devise more and more devious ways to kill, like a mine in a metronome, set to explode when the musician turns it on. In the novel, bombs encapsulate the use of human intelligence, playfulness, and creativity for a deadly, evil purpose.

The villa symbolizes the destruction of the war on the main characters. It has been bombed by the enemy and is missing entire sections of its roof and walls. Some of its damage isn't immediately visible. Hana can walk down the hallway as she might in a normal house, only to open a door and find herself looking out at the garden through a filthy room with the exterior wall blown away. The villa is crumbling in places, and the

elements leave damp beds and corners strewn with leaves. The villa also contains unseen dangers. It has been mined, so it could be deadly at any moment, not unlike the capacity in the main characters to turn on one another in pain given the right circumstances as Kip does when he points the rifle at the English patient. After the war, the villa is in near ruins, as are its residents. The villa isn't really habitable anymore, and, by extension, the characters' lives here are clearly temporary. Yet they stay, perhaps because it reflects their own state so well, or perhaps because they wish to make it work to prove they can go on despite their own damaged states.

Kip's turban represents difference. The turban is a visible mark of a Sikh's identity as a Sikh, and a covering for the person's long hair. When Kip and Hardy first enter the villa at night, Hana is initially alarmed to see two soldiers with guns in the room. She immediately relaxes when she notices Kip's turban. She recognizes it as an identifier of a Sikh, an Indian man. Readers can deduce that Indians are Allies. Kip's turban identifies him mostly as other, however. He is different from those around him. The turban distances him. In the novel, he removes his turban only once, with Hana when they wash their hair. This removal of his turban shows the intimacy between Kip and Hana and her respect of his identity both as a man and as a Sikh.

One of the soldiers, an Indian Sikh, sets up a tent in the garden. At first he will not come into the house at all, instead is occupied with dismantling the mines around the villa and leftovers from the war. Hana watches him bathe in the garden, and it's clear that she is attracted to him. The other soldier named Hardy has left but the Indian sapper reminds the chagrin of Caravaggio. Caravaggio wanders at night and the sapper follows him, but Caravaggio tells him never to follow him again.

The Indian sapper came to the villa because he heard the sound of Hana's piano-playing. During the war, the receding German army left pencil mines within musical instruments so that returning owners would be wounded. Hana loves the physicality of the sapper's movements and his intrinsic sensuality. Caravaggio, however, thinks he is too hard to please that he washes his hands too much. The sapper counters this by calling Caravaggio Uncle, and responding that in India, you wash your hands all the time, and before all meals.

Caravaggio creeps up on Hana, who is asleep in the library. Hana tells him that she almost had a baby a year ago, but had an abortion because of the war and the death of the father. She was in Italy at the time and the combination of the war, her work in the hospitals, the death of her father, and the abortion all have pushed her to a place where she is more comfortable with death than with life. For a long time she used to talk to the baby in her head, but then she stopped because there was so much imminent danger during the war that she could no longer live in her head.

Caravaggio and the Sikh take a trip to the valley together and talk about Hana. The sapper says his nickname is Kip, because his first bomb disposal report in England was covered with butter and the officer had jokingly said that it was kipper grease. His real name is Kirpal Singh. Kip also meets the English patient, who tells Hana that they're getting along famously. Hana simply notes to herself that there are too many men in the house now.

Kip finds a large mine in a field north of the villa and is surprised by its scale and complexity. Hana asserts on helping him take apart it and she holds the wires while he assesses the mine and cuts the right wire. He manages to defuse the mine, but it's a

sweaty, intense experience and one that leaves him frightened and beleaguered by nightmares. Hana holds him so that he feels safe, but Kip has lost his equilibrium. He feels aggravated that Hana stayed with him while he restrained the bomb because now he feels like he owes her that he is somehow responsible for her.

Later that night, Caravaggio, Hana, Kip, and the English patient have a party in the patient's room. Kip dances with them until they all hear a faint explosion in the distance. Kip says it couldn't have been a mine, but then he smells the scent of cordite and excuses himself without revealing his suspicions. Kip runs to the place where the mine went off and finds Hardy, the other soldier, amongst the dead. He buries him and returns to the party to find Caravaggio and the English patient asleep, but Hana still awake. Kip is secretly resentful at Hana's casualness earlier the afternoon while he dismantled the mine for involving herself without a thought that her life could have ended so easily. All he wants to do now is touch Hana, to feel her, but he is plagued by fear and insecurity. Finally he makes his move: he dismantles the patient's hearing aid and touches Hana's shoulder.

Caravaggio asks Kip whether he would be able to fall in love with Hana if she were less intelligent than him. In other words, if he knew she was his intellectually inferior. He says that Hana is in love with the English patient because he knows things because he's a talker who can seduce with words. Caravaggio says that they should all leave that they're risking their lives in the villa for no reason. Hana responds that they can't leave the Englishman, and Caravaggio says she is stupid for risking Kip's life for the sake of a man who is already dead. Hana through a subtle physical movement shows that she's allied

with Kip - and that Caravaggio's words affect her little. One night, Hana sneaks into Kip's tent, and they become lovers.

The love triangle between Caravaggio, Hana, and the English patient is complicated by the arrival of the Indian sapper, Kip. In the last chapters, there was no contest for Hana's affections for she was attracted only to the patient, for he represented death and the spiral of darkness that Hana found so alluring. Caravaggio, with his chastisements and philosophizing, offered little but the vague abstractions that Hana always hated. Kip, however, is the antithesis of the English patient alive, taciturn, in the prime of his life. The chapter thus gives us a sense of Hana's imminent internal conflict and impending journey. If she begins this chapter dead inside, with no use for men, as she puts it, By the end, she will walk without a false step into Kip's tent so that she can be his lover. She will leave the safety of the villa, if even only for a night.

The demolishing of the mine in the garden becomes a symbolic moment in the main characters' journeys. Having fallen in love, Kip clearly wants to be as far from the bomb as possible and resents not only Hana's nonchalance towards it, but also the fact that he's dismantling it in order to save her. After all, he comes to the villa solely to warn Hana about the possibility of the mine in the piano. He stays because he wants to ensure her safety and de-mine the area, which puts his life at risk, since he would expect Hana to leave the condemned property at his request. Why Hana doesn't leave is tied in to our analysis of her character in the last chapter that she's afraid to leave the patient she's become so dependent on for a fleeting sense of purpose. She's afraid to leave her refuge from the world. She's afraid to reconnect.

Caravaggio, meanwhile, is obviously in love with Hana, and now with Kip beginning to take over the role of the virile man, he can do little but chastise them both for remaining at the villa, and attempt to mask his jealousy. At the same time, however, he unwittingly drives them into each other's arms by daring Hana to abandon her doomed love for the English patient to rediscover life in some form. It seems that everyone is learning from each other. In Caravaggio, Hana sees a man who can sink into love, someone who can fill up with deep and passionate feelings. In her own heart she finds nothing but coldness. But around Kip, she begins to feel the fire of the chapter title that inkling is the embers of life which might kindle. Thus she pursues it, telling Kip that she actually feels happy with him. She's surprised by such happiness.

Of course, there is still an absence of conflict in the novel. At this point, Hardy has died but certainly not as a direct consequence of anyone's actions, meaning that there is no guilt on any of our protagonist's shoulders. Caravaggio is not jealous enough to be motivated to sabotage a relationship between Kip and Hana, and the English patient is curiously absent through much of the chapter which is merely a projective surface for Hana's feelings. So where is all of this leading? Indeed, one of the more subtle aspects of *The English Patient* is its willingness to challenge traditional narrative structure, which often relies on planting incidents and paying them off later, all in the effort of heightening a central conflict. There is no central conflict here, because no one is in danger.

At the same time, we could sense the beginnings of plants that might pay off later. We realize that there are active mines around the property that can kill any of the characters at any given time. In the novel, Hana is starting to open her heart to Kip and make him vulnerable. Should he die, it would likely send her into a spiral from which she

would never recover, as she has just spent most of her adult life obsessing about death. And what about Caravaggio or the English patient? Surely they must serve some larger purpose than as mere foils to Hana and Kip's story? As we continue, let us see not only how each character serves Hana's arc, but also how Hana serves their individual journeys. For Ondaatje's novel is less about a central character's journey and much more a dream novel where characters can take us on tangents for the purposes of achieving a greater impressionistic effect, one that suggests how a dying, burned man manages to bring all these characters together and change the course of all their lives.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **SUMMING UP**

Migration has always been a part of human history and civilization. People on a large scale have migrated to other places either forcibly or on their own for better prospects or other reasons. Due to globalization however, the intensity of this movement has increased manifold and has led to the emergence of new communities. Migrants face challenges in the new worlds and face exploitation, alienation, emotional distress, loneliness, etc. However, migration is not always perceived in the negative sense, as a lack, or a disadvantage. Many times it also becomes an opportunity for forging of new relations and a better future in a new world. Also, migration does not imply a neat break from the past; rather the migrant inhabits and takes part in two or more cultures simultaneously. This has led to the emergence of an alternative model to the earlier assimilationist one that demanded a melting of difference on the part of the travellers. The alternative model

views identity as always in a movement and a flux which must be understood in the transnational or transcultural context. The focus on Transnational or Transcultural identity has led to greater understanding of the way people operate across geographic, political, national and cultural borders, simultaneously inhabiting the two worlds with similar levels of attachment and commitment.

Michael Ondaatje is one such writer who repeatedly explores the nuances of transcultural identity with utmost sensitivity and honesty. Having himself faced the complexities of migration, and cultural dislocation, Ondaatje draws from his personal life to write about the experience of transcultural movement. While moving across the globe, he has broken the shackles of remaining confined within the cultural boundaries. Rather he has moved to embrace the opportunities that diversity and mobility bestowed upon him. With his profound transcultural sensitivity he spins stories around the issues of identity, history, language, location, family, etc. Ondaatje's novels are self reflexive which reflect the incidents and dilemmas he has faced in his life as also the empowerment which he has inculcated after negotiating those problems. Ondaatje's contribution thus towards the development of transcultural literature is significant, not only in his choice of topic, vision and scope, but also in his promoting of a wider global literary perspective.

Having an appeal with history in the modern postcolonial world of ever shifting social spaces, Ondaatje's focus however is on the unrecorded marginalized histories. Hence repeatedly he returns to the themes of identity and individual histories to blur the boundaries between history and fiction. Through the idea of blurring of borders and maps of different countries, Ondaatje seems to wish to erase the concept of nationalities. He would rather project the world as a family where different ethnicities may coexist

without any conflict or having to assimilate into Meta cultures. *The English Patient*(1992), Ondaatje's most celebrated work projects a multicultural and transnational perspective. By putting together characters as varied as the English patient, a Sikh Kirpal Singh, a Canadian nurse Hana and an Italian thief Caravaggio. Ondaatje creates a transcultural reality where even the characters consider themselves as the 'International Bastards'.

The indeterminacy of identity becomes a plea for being a nationless world. The unsolved mystery surrounding the true identity of the burned patient unravels the anxiety with which any such person is viewed who cannot be slotted in term of national identity. Through this metaphor Ondaatje tries to remove the conflict between the first and the third world nations. The introduction of a Sikh character Kirpal Singh, his recruitment in the British army as a sapper, and his integration amongst other characters even though he is not a part of them speaks volumes for Ondaatje's talent as a transcultural writer. Ondaatje's drawing of characters from various backgrounds and forcing them to family indicates possibility of healing of physical as well as psychological wounds caused due to war. Through this notion of multicultural family on a transnational plane, Ondaatje hints at a global perspective of unity among nations. The historical events in the background, the World War II and world values presented in the novel give the story a global perspective, in addition to its local setting. In this respect, Ondaatje presents the characters' sense of belonging in the idea of a global community.

Since Ondaatje is a poet, there are nuances of his poetic style in his prose. The readers note his skill at exploiting elements of humor, extravagant metaphors, and sudden shifts of perspective. The intertextual nature of Ondaatje's narratives as well as his explorations

of personal, family, community, and national identities are the main highlights of his writings. He paints landscapes with minutest details. He is able to create images with words. Ondaatje's signature gift of fragmented, non-linear narrative, mixing of fact with fiction, poetry with prose, memoir, history and biography projects hybridity which highlight multiple hues of identity in literature. The split in narrative reflects his own fragmented self yet successfully inhabiting multiple cultures.

In *The English Patient* also, Ondaatje attempts a portrayal of female psyche in the shape of a shell-shocked nurse Hana. Overwhelmed by the violence she witnesses during war as she tends to the injured soldiers most of who are dying and also because of her father's death to whom she was not able to reach in time, Hana retreats to her shell. She chooses to cage herself with an unidentified burned English patient in a destroyed villa, even as war is raging outside. Ondaatje in these works attempts to highlight woman's emotions, love and dilemmas. Without assuming an outrightly feminist point of view, Ondaatje's portrayal significantly reflects his sensitivity to the female issues and concerns.

Ondaatje's postcolonial themes of deracination and displacement caused by geographical, sociological, political as well as psychological and linguistic factors, converge on the subject who, displaced, marginalized and divided, grapples with the burden of being the outsider and the desire to belong in a new setting. His works do not build on earlier conceptions of diaspora in which the diasporic people suffer nostalgia, alienation and constantly yearn for homelands. Perhaps this is what makes Ondaatje's fiction as well as his scholarship are of great relevance in the today's age of globalization. The migrants live in between both cultures, retaining identities, permanently in a flux, simultaneously inhabiting two worlds, enjoying both the states of comfort, happiness as well as despair

and alienation. Migration is simultaneously considered as a nightmare of loss and displacement as also the fulfillment of desire, opportunity and success. Thus the initial loss followed by the remaking of identity in transcultural spaces points towards much hope of a future. The twists and turns of life are incorporated into the migrants' lives, making life both possible and meaningful. Constantly negotiating, the migrants are moving towards a coming to terms with the transcultural identities.

Ondaatje's novels thus are rich accounts of human experience and respond to dilemmas and challenges of migration. Ondaatje is not a forerunner of an essentialised, unitary or fixed identity. Rather he presents identity which is constantly on the move, always fluid, in the process of formation. These identities undergo diverse experiences for their dynamic construction. His novels rewrite history of people from the margins to record their assimilation, recognition and contribution towards the world at large. His characters may be victims of historical events or ordinary incidents. Ondaatje's commitment however always is to provide voice to those individuals who are marginalized. He aims to restore the name and identity of those who have lived or died in anonymity. Ondaatje emphasizes that there is a need to recognize dimensions of identity within a larger framework. His characters are not in conflict with each other. Ondaatje is a man of solutions. He projects identity as a concept of home as well as, reinvented from the transnational position. Here the movement is viewed not as an absolute disjunction from home or roots. Home, nation and culture are not fixed but extend the concept of territory which is spatially and psychologically fluid. The identities are free and exist in transnational spaces where boundaries are transcended. The individuals become more empowered and their vision is strengthened as they negotiate their identity crisis.

Ondaatje's transcultural constitution thus develops an orientation towards the world at large and shows his readers a new path towards a transcultural attitude and mode of being. In his works, through his characters, he demonstrates the ability to negotiate between different cultural identities, depending on specific individual capabilities, attitudes and backgrounds. Ondaatje thus broadens the cultural boundaries going beyond the notion of a separate, fixed, or essentialised identity to indicate ways by which a transcultural community may come into existence.

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