

Chapter IV

Immigrant Voice and Multiculturalism in *In the Skin of a Lion*

In the Skin of a Lion is the third novel by Philip Michael Ondaatje published in the year 1987. This novel foregrounds the experiences of individuals who are displaced, disempowered and shattered due to their circumstances. The novel depicts the lives of immigrant workers and their contribution to the building of the city of Toronto in the early 1900. Their contributions in constructing the major places in Toronto by shedding their blood and sweat were never recorded in the official history. The author has commemorated their services in this novel. These laborers have contributed a lot towards creating the city but remained outsiders to the main stream of society. The novel explains the migrant's condition, their transformation, multiculturalism, transnational identity, diaspora, intertextuality and historiography. *In the Skin of a Lion* is a sequel novel to *The English Patient* and casts the same characters Caravaggio, Hana and also reveals the fate of Patrick Lewis who is the hero of this novel.

The main focus of the novel is the picture of Toronto in the year 1940. The construction of Toronto city and the construction of Prince Edward Viaduct commonly known as the Bloor street viaduct and the R.C. Water treatment plant and the sufferings of the immigrants who were employed in the construction work is the prime focus of the novel. The plot has incorporated many true facts or happening like the fall of the nun from the bridge, Nicholas the dare devil's adventure and the missing of Ambrose Small. The immigrants adaptation to culture and language acquisition is one of the highlights of the novel.

In the introductory part of the novel before the story starts the author has included two epigraphs, one from the Babylonian legend called the epic of Gilgamesh - "The joyful will stoop with sorrow, and when you have one to the earth I will let my hair grow long for your sake, I will wander through the wilderness in the skin of a lion" (ISL 1). Another epigraph is

from a Marxist critic John Berger's story - "never again will a single story be told as if it were one" (ISL 1). The novel has also a subplot stating that it is only a fiction. *This is a work of fiction and certain liberties have at times been taken with some dates and locales* (ISL n.p). These three important quotes help in understanding the story line and form a clear demarcation in structure when compared to other novels of Ondaatje.

Patrick Lewis grows up in a village called Depot Creek, Ontario as a motherless boy. His father Hazen Lewis is a lumbar jack and a dynamiter in feldspar mines. Patrick is familiar with the insects and their sounds in Depot Creek. He spends his early years in observing nature like "bugs, plant hoppers, and rust-dark moths. Patrick gazes on these things which have navigated the warm air above the surface of the earth and attached themselves to the mesh with a muted thunk. He had heard them as he read, his senses turned to such noises" (ISL 9). He was born in a region which is unknown and it did not appear in the maps until 1910. Though his family had worked there for twenty years and the land had been a homestead since 1816. Patrick creates an imaginary world in his mind:

He longs for the summer nights, for their moment when he turns out the lights, turns out even the small cream funnel in the hall near the room where his father sleeps. Then the house is in darkness except the bright light in the kitchen. He sits down at the long table and looks into his school geography book with maps of the world, the white sweep of currents, testing the names to himself, mouthing out the exotic. Caspian, Nepal. Durango. He closes the book and brushes it with palms, feeling the texture pebbled cover and its coloured dyes which create a map of Canada. (ISL 9)

Patrick like his father Hazen Lewis is watchful. Life was quiet and peaceful until some sudden change takes place in his home town. Suddenly he watches hundreds of immigrants arrive at the place with their lanterns to work in the mills. They are the Finnish loggers. He

notices the physical strength and their mastery of the local terrain. He is moved by the way the common fraternity transforms a collection of strangers into a community. Patrick experiences a sudden epiphany when he sees these loggers in the frozen lake with their burning sheaves of cuttails. “To Patrick it was a something joyous. A gift. He did not trust these strangers who skated in the icy river or their language” (ISL 22). He turns away and retreats into the trees carrying his own lamp into a private darkness. As a little boy he did not know that these strangers will have some association in his life later on.

Patrick was disappointed by his father’s obsession of working with dynamites. Patrick used to observe his father from far. His father died in the feldspar mines while working with the dynamites. He gets drowned in the pool and meets his death leaving Patrick alone. So Patrick with the knowledge of his father’s profession as a dynamiter migrates from rural part of Canada to the metropolis of Toronto. He becomes a migrant at the age of twenty one and feels a stranger in the new land where people spoke different languages and people belonged to varied cultures.

Patrick Lewis arrived in the city of Toronto as if it were land after years at sea. Growing up in a country had governed his childhood: the small village of Bellrock, the highway of the river down which loggers came, drinking, working raucous and in the spring leaving the inhabitants shocked with silence. At twenty one, he had been drawn from small town like a piece of metal dropped under vast arches of union station to begin his life once more ... He was an immigrant to the city. (ISL 55)

The picture of the railway seems as if he is in “the belly of a whale” (ISL 56). He was new to the place with all past locked away. He is a passive observer of the people who move around the union station. Patrick Lewis for a year works at various odd jobs as construction worker

and tannery worker and undertakes the job of a searcher of Ambrose Small, a missing millionaire in the year 1924.

The narrative shifts from private lives to national history. The construction of Bloor street viaduct shows the struggle that exists between culture and tradition. This is an important place in the city which connects eastern Toronto with its centre providing water, transport and electricity. The bridge in Toronto was under construction and was unfinished. It so happened one day that five nuns crossed the unfinished bridge ignorant of the impending danger. Perhaps the bus had dropped them near the bridge. Harris, the commissioner had come there to witness the progress of the bridge. One of the nuns fell down as the sudden gust of wind blows over her. As Harris watches in mute horror, a gust of wind lifts one of these women off her feet and flings her headlong into the vacant air.

Walking on the bridge were five nuns ... the nuns had, with some confusion at that hour walked the wrong way in the darkness. The nuns were moving toward thirty yard point on the bridge when the wind began to scatter them. They were thrown against the cement mixers and steam shovels, carrying from side to side, in danger of going over the bridge. One of the nuns was lifted up and fell against the compressors ... She disappeared into the night by the third abutment, into the long depth of air which held nothing, only sometimes a river or a dropped hammer during day. A nun had fallen off the Prince Edward viaduct before it even was finished. (ISL 33)

A Macedonian immigrant by name Nicholas Tamelcof saves her miraculously. He jumps from the bridge and catches the falling Nun before she falls into the river. Nicholas was swinging in mid-air beneath the central arch, reaches out to catch the "black- garbed bird, a girl's white face" as she spills out of the sky towards him (ISL 32). His one arm was fractured in the attempt. He treats her giving first aid and refreshment in a nearby restaurant

called, The Ohrida Restaurant. The nun transforms herself into an ordinary woman; naming herself as Alice after the Parrot she sees in the restaurant, she disappears from there. She transforms herself from a religious nun into an ordinary woman, later an actress marrying Cato, a Finnish immigrant and a political activist. This miraculous incident would be remembered by both Nicholas and the nun. This helps them find their identity. “In the eyes of Commissioner Harris the viaduct serves as the power of capital to transcend the world of lived social relations. The bridge translates its human material into a monument of pure civic prestige” (Spinks 145). Ondaatje observes the division between capitalists and their exploitation of laborers. Because of the capitalists vision many people were able to get jobs and the city was a well planned and modern city. Nicholas Tamelcof who was once a builder now owns a bakery and makes use of the bridge he once constructed to transport his bakery products.

Patrick Lewis is a stranger in the city and is in search of a new possibility. He begins his life as a searcher for a missing capitalist multi millionaire whose name is Ambrose Small. Ondaatje has blended both fact and fiction in narrating Toronto’s history. Ondaatje recreates the past history where as many as fifty thousand people were involved in searching Ambrose Small. Many fantasy stories regarding the whereabouts of Ambrose Small goes on in the city. He is called the Jackal of Toronto’s business world. He worked up his way into a millionaire from nothing. He became the owner of a chain of theatres. Later he sells the theatres, leaves the estate to his wife and disappears. A lucrative ransom was announced by the state and Small’s family. There were many rumors of his disappearance with Clara Dickens, an actress.

Patrick in his quest for Ambrose Small finds his own identity in the alien land. He meets Alice the nun who fell from the bridge. She helps him to find Clara Dickens who is the wife of Small. He develops an illicit love affair with Clara. Clara abandons Patrick as a broken hearted man to join her husband Small. Small in turn tries to kill Patrick by burning

him. He is consoled by Alice and a love affair develops between Patrick and Alice. Alice dies accidentally when she picks up a bag which contained explosives. The bag which she carries had dynamite set by the capitalists purposely thus killing her. Her daughter Hana becomes Patrick's adopted daughter. She is the war nurse in the sequel novel *The English Patient*. Patrick gets a phone call from Clara in the end of the novel. She reveals the death of her husband Ambrose Small. She requests him to pick her up from Marmora. So Patrick leaves with his adopted daughter Hana and drives down to Marmora to see Clara.

Patrick's life is related to the industrial society of Toronto after his immigration. It depicts Commissioner Harris dream of a new water plant across Lake Ontario. A tunnel is being dug and many immigrant workers from various parts of the world are involved in constructing the tunnel. Ondaatje focuses upon the inhuman way of sufferings meted out to the immigrant workers:

Work continues. The grunt into hard clay. The wet slap. Men burning rock and shattering it wherever they come across it. Filling hundreds of barrels with liquid mud and hauling them out of the tunnel. In the east of the city a tunnel is being built out under the lake in order to lay intake pipes for the new water works. (ISL 105)

Patrick gets transformed as he becomes aware of Marxist ideology through the puppet show secretly organized by the fellow immigrants in an unfinished water plant.

Patrick Lewis transforms from a silent immigrant into a revolutionary. He escapes prison. He gets imprisoned for having set fire to Muskako hotel. In the penitentiary he meets Caravaggio, the thief who comes as an immigrant. They mingle with the elite Toronto to procure access to the harbor. They set out to bomb the water works which serve as the major source of water supply to the city. He is helped by Caravaggio to blast Commissioner Harris water treatment plant. He is caught by Commissioner Harris who compromises by revealing

the he is also an immigrant confronting the same hardships. His mother was a caretaker and he worked hard to attain the current position.

One of the postmodern themes is the character's quest for identity. His focus is on the marginalized immigrant from various places who are struggling to build a new life for themselves. In Patrick's quest two women play a prominent role in finding his identity in the alien, new world of Toronto city. He immigrates to Toronto as a grown up twenty one year old man in search of a new life and possibility. From an innocent little boy in Depot Creek the author shows the protagonist growth to manhood. Patrick's "ambivalent relationship with the world around him is the theme of opening pages of the novel" (Spinks 142).

Patrick does various jobs and finally he is employed as a searcher to locate the whereabouts of a multimillionaire Ambrose Small. One who finds the missing millionaire was promised a great ransom by the authorities. Patrick meets Clara Dickens and falls in love with her. The lonely motherless boy welcomes this relationship. Clara introduces Patrick to Alice Gull, the fallen nun turned actress. He is heartbroken as Clara deserts him to join Ambrose Small. He comes to know through Clara's mother about their whereabouts in Depot Creek which is a lush green rural part of Canada where he spent his childhood with his father. He encounters Small who hurts him. He returns back to the industrial town of Toronto again as a construction worker in the tunnel. He moves with the fellow immigrant workers, cries with them, feels their pain, laughs when they laugh.

Alice Gull brings love into his life when he is tortured by the memory of Clara. Alice and the restaurant owner invite him to the pantomime show arranged by the immigrant workers in a hall in the waterworks. They do this secretly for the authorities did not permit such gathering among the working class people. Through the puppet show organized by Alice Gull and fellow immigrants Patrick realizes the sufferings of the voiceless immigrants and determines to fight for their cause. He realizes that he does not have individuality in the

adopted land which he thought he owned. Having realized his identity he becomes a political activist. This becomes a crucial turning point in the novel. Alice bangs her hand so forcefully and noisily without talking. Alice's presentation brings a great effect not only with the audience; it had a great impact upon Patrick who decides to give voice to the voiceless immigrants. Patrick feels that he himself is moving like a puppet while the performers on back stage were "theatrical and seemed to have locked within metamorphosis" (ISL 125). This gives him an urge to involve himself actively rather than being a passive observer.

The nun's fall from the bridge makes it a historical moment which invests man's commitment to social struggle. The nun finds her identity in Lake Ohrida Restaurant; she sees the twilight interior as another country and a new life full of pleasures and sensuousness. She turns decisively from her spiritual image. She goes out of the restaurant with her new identity as Alice Gull. "What she will become she becomes in that minute before she is outside, before she steps into the six-a.m morning" (ISL 44). Later on when Patrick meets her she is Alice Gull who is an actress and co-worker of Clara.

Nicholas too experiences some sudden rupture and transformation. Throughout his life he is filled with the memory of the nun, the bridge and the world around them. The identity of the Macedonian construction worker is artistically described. Nicholas Tamelcoff saved the nun who fell like "a black garbed bird" (ISL 33) shows the expatriates quest in an alien world. Nicholas is described by Ondaatje as:

He is the happiest at the daily chores- ferrying tools from pier down to trestle, or lumber that he pushes in the air before him as if swimming in a river.

He is a spinner. He links everyone... He sits on a coiled seat of rope while he eats his lunch on the bridge. It does not matter if it is day or night, he could be blind folded. Black space in time. (ISL 37)

His valuable contribution in constructing the major places of Canada in its urbanization is not mentioned in historical and archive records. Nicholas lives at the heart of Toronto migrant community.

Nicholas has a personal and social bond with the community. Harris vision is depersonalized and materialistic. His love for community makes him take a great risk in saving the nun by losing one of his arms. The nun not only got her identity but Tamelcoff too gets his identity. Nicholas finds learning English very difficult before he comes to Canada. In the year 1914 he comes there because of a spell cast upon him by the language. The first travelers to North America were called 'Judas goats', who narrated the story of North America. His imagination for the green pastures compels him to leave Macedonia after it was destroyed by the Balkans. He adopts this cultural transformation to suppress his past tragedy. Just like other migrants before him he becomes "a vault of secrets and memories" (ISL 50).

He enjoys his daily chores happily. Nicholas is a spinner. He meets them as they cling-braced but wind against the metal they are riveting or the wood sheeting they hammer into—"but he has none of their fear" (ISL 37). He is very famous on the bridge and is known as a daredevil. "He knows his position in the air as if he is mercury slipping across a map" (ISL 38). Nicholas constructs the bridge and disappears. He becomes a baker and leads a happy married life.

Carravaggio is an Italian thief who becomes friendly with Patrick in the prison. He is a short term burglar who steals paintings like Jeffrey paintings. He takes his name after a famous Italian Renaissance painter. He is saved by Patrick when he was about to be killed. He escapes from the prison by painting himself blue like the blue roof top. This is an artistic way of escaping the prison. One of the jobs given to the prison workers was to paint and he paints the blue roof matching the sky and evades the prison authorities by painting himself blue. He meets a boy in Trenton who helps to remove his paint. He has his identity as an

intelligent thief in a multicultural society. He makes his escape good by moving from Trenton to Bobycagon and from, Purdy to Wilkinson. He finds his identity in the company of thieves not to learn robbery but to study how they lived their lives. Behind the shadows of these men he learns to be comfortable.

The various immigrants' self discovery helps them to understand their cultural origins. The immigrants in North America device their new identity. Ondaatje observes them as cultural hybrids. The dialects and gestures played out on the screen provide these new comers with a new language and new set of social convention. "Most of the immigrants learned English from recorded songs or, until the talkies came, through mimicking actors on stage" (ISL 50). Plays in Toronto frequently ground to a halt when the entire crowd bellowed phrases from speeches heard at earlier performances. This is one of the ways in which the immigrants learn the language of the new place where they settle.

Migration is one of the themes explored by Ondaatje. After the Canadian Multicultural Act in 1988 many construction workers and skilled labourers emigrated from central and eastern province of Europe. These immigrants migrated due to various circumstances like war, natural disaster, in search for better opportunities in greener pastures. They suffered from displacement, alienation, relocation, nostalgia and many other reasons. *In the Skin of a Lion* exposes such diasporic encumbrances that run throughout the novel. These immigrants try to develop a sense of belonging in the new place. These migrants are unable to assimilate with a new culture. This leads to misunderstanding and transgression of law. The novel deals with heterogeneous, marginalized groups of people from various places like Macedonia, Hungary, Polish, Lithuania, Italy and Finland. When Patrick arrives in the city as an immigrant he felt himself new:

Now in the city he was new even to himself. He saw his image in the glass of Telephone booths. He ran his hands over the smooth pink marble pillow that

reached into the rotunda. The train station was a palace, its richness and caverns an intimate city. He could be shaved, eat a meal or have his shoes coloured. (ISL 56)

Patrick notices in the station a man well dressed with three suitcases, shouting in another language. Two days later he saw the same man again showing his reluctance to move into the new city. The city plays an important role in the life of Patrick who is a migrant and the well dressed foreigner. Both are transformed by the city.

The novel focuses on the trauma of the immigrants. An act of metamorphosis and adaptability to new milieu and culture takes place after overcoming many hurdles. The expansion of Toronto city by the immigrant labourers is one of the postmodern and postcolonial concepts of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is one of the thrust areas of the novel where the migrants form a confluence of varied cultures from different nations settled in the new land. Canada is a land of immigrants. Toronto is focused in the novel as a major area of class struggle. The key sites that lead to the development of Toronto is the Prince Edward via duct or the Bloor street viaduct and the water works. “When Patrick enters the city it is a city of linguistic and cultural diversity. Canada was a place ruled by Franco-Anglo bicultural or Anglo imperialism” (Seimerling 97).

The unhygienic working conditions of the tunnel workers unravel the miserable plight of the immigrant workers. They worked in dark tunnel below Lake Ontario and many became a prey to the dangerous waves. The physical labour created pain in their body and the difficulty of banging the walls of the caves is excruciating. There was no possibility of taking any rest. “Each blow against the shale walls jars from the palms into the shoulders as if the body is hit” (ISL 105). Along with the unhygienic conditions they have to put up with their low salaries. They do not communicate with each other as they come from various linguistic backgrounds. As they remain silent they are compared to the beasts of burden. “The brain of

a mule is no more and no less knowledgeable than the body of a man who dug into a clay wall in front of him” (ISL 112).

They turn back from work in the dark. Thus the labourers were unrecognized and marginalized. They ate were they had to urinate. They spoke through gestures and non-verbal communication as they did not know the language. These immigrants learned the language by imitating the actors and actresses. Patrick came home late to his small dwelling and exhausted goes to feed the Iguana. Next morning at six o clock without washing the clothes takes the unwashed clothes, eats breakfast for ten minutes and leaves for work. “Michael Foucault points out the Marxist ideals of how the capitalists make use of the cheap labours and exploit the marginalized.They become slave to the tyranny of the clocks” (qtd in Wojceich n.p).

Patrick had to work later in a tanning factory where the hides of animals were mixed with dye. The workers were tarred with the colour and only little water and less time was given for them to bathe. The smell was so foul that Alice was afraid that they might catch some contagious disease like pneumonia and die. The actresses in the pantomime show passed the skins of animals with pelts of animal in them. Each character narrates the problems by wearing the skins of animals. Skin is a symbol of identity.

But they must turn and kill the animals in slaughter houses. And the smell of the tanning factory goes into their noses and lungs and stays there for life. It brutalizes. It’s like sleeping with the enemy. It clung to Hana’s father. They get burns from the galvanizing process. Arthrities, rheumatism. That’s the truth. (ISL 130)

The shift system invaded their private lives. Most of them were young and longed for freedom. They not only suffered physically but also psychologically. This leads to frustrations and depressions as enacted in the puppet show where Alice acting as a puppet

bangs the floor with a thud and a loud scream. The silent suffering of the voiceless people because of the tyranny of the capitalists and their outbreak of suppressed emotions triggers rebellion in the hearts of the workers.

Cato, a Finnish immigrant worker writes to his lover about the plight of the poor immigrant loggers and about the dangers that lurk in felling logs. The camp in which they dwell is described thus:

The only heat in this bunkhouse is from a small drum stove. In the evenings the air is thick from the damp clothes in the rafters above the fire and from Tobacco smoke. To avoid suffocating the men in the upper bunks push the moss chinking between the logs. I write from a table hammered permanently to the floor. The log bunks are nailed into the walls. Fires die out at night and men wake with their hairs frozen to damp icicles on the wall. (ISL 154)

The loggers do not enjoy freedom and comfort and they are constantly exposed to severe cold. They live in the overcrowded cramp lodging without any privacy. The suffering of the workers both physically and psychologically exposes lack of comfort and their mental agony. Most of the immigrants either die without telling their stories or live with psychological scars in this capitalist world. Daniel Stoyonof's hands are chopped off in a slaughter house. They become victims of various diseases and die. Cato is shot dead. Hazen Lewis dies by dynamite explosion. When Patrick confronts Commissioner Harris about the number of the deaths of the immigrants he simply answers, "There was no record kept" (ISL 248).

The immigrants were from Eastern Europe and belonged to the working class who were exploited by the English speaking upper and middle class Canadians. Their stories had to be told orally for they don't speak the language of the host country. Even class struggle is fought by the English speaking people like Patrick and Alice. Canadian authorities have imposed law on the foreigners not to speak any other language other than English. "They will

be jailed” (ISL 139). There is a cultural gap. It is only in gestures, sentiments and small words they could communicate.

Patrick had discovered the Macedonian word for Iguna, ‘*gooshter*’ and finally used it to explain his requests each evening at the fruit stall for clover and vetch. It was a breakthrough. People corrected his pronunciation. Four women and a couple of men then circled around him trying desperately to leap over the code of language between them:

Patrick felt suddenly he was surrounded by friendship, concern was smiling, feeling the tears on his face falling towards his stern Macedonian style Moushtache.... He looked up and saw the men and women who could not know why he wept now among these strangers who in the past had seemed to him like dark blinds on his street, for he was their alien. (ISL 117-18)

Alice tries to bridge the gap between the minority population by talking in Finnish or Macedonian. Unfortunately she dies before the story ends. These silent people join together to form solidarity to fight against all odds. Cato, Alice Gull’s husband turns many people against the capitalists. He is murdered when Alice was on her family way. Her daughter Hana gets to know of her father’s worth only after his death. Patrick realized that the loggers who sliced the ice with cattails in their hands were the Finnish immigrants. “Now in his thirties he finally had the name for that group of men he witnessed as a child” (ISL 157). He is a stranger to the cultural codes and norms of the new city. When Patrick is released from the penitentiary he finds that many people have joined in rebellion. By 1938 many immigrants were deported out of the city.

Patrick, an English speaking Canadian appears as a stranger in his own land among the Macedonians. “The people on the street, the Macedonians and Bulgarians, were only his mirror” (ISL 117). The protagonist is focused on a different perspective as an alien and antagonist in his own land but still away from them. What makes him alien is when he joins

the class struggle between the labourers and the capitalists. A working class country boy from remote Canada is much an outsider like the other immigrants.

Patrick begins his life as a searcher of Ambrose Small. This gives an opportunity to mix with the working class community. Canada was a place ruled by Franco-Anglo biculturalism or Anglo imperialism. It was a city full of linguistic and cultural diversity. His identity develops with Greek, Macedonian, Russian and Italian immigrants. "Ondaatje's exploitation of the working class experience challenges notions of Canadian identity as a racially neutral society in which a multicultural society is built" (Lowry 66).

Patrick, the displaced individual moves through a network of many cultures in which cultural difference between Canadian and foreigners are seen in terms of labourers and the rich. Ondaatje concentrates less on the people like the officials, city planners and commissioners who are recorded in official history. He concentrates more on the poor and the marginalized who built the city. He revises the civic history. The official history actually exists. Ondaatje uses the materials recorded from the past and uses it in his fiction as evidence. He records the unofficial history of a small community in Toronto. The narrative is presented in such a way that the story is not only told to the little girl but to the readers as well.

One of the postmodernist styles is to use incidents from mythology as a parallel incident or parody in the story. In the novel *In the Skin of a Lion* the mythical story of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* recorded in the Epigraph of the novel relates with the narrative of Patrick's life. The story is retold with Patrick as the hero who wanders through the city as an immigrant. He had been an alien, a third person. Though born in the country he is ignorant about what is happening there. He is a passive observer. The epic narrates the story of the king of Mesopotamia who encounters men and Gods alike in his adventure. Gilgamesh leaves his family and friends. As a punishment for his oppressive nature the Gods create a

counterpart for him, Enkidu. He sets the trapped animals free and is the man of the wilderness. Gilgamesh is encountered by Ishtar to marry him. So the Gods want to put an end to Enkidu and he is killed. The broken Gilgamesh wanders through the wilderness aimlessly. He kills the lions envying their happy state and wears the skins of the lions symbolic of the title of the novel. Patrick's quest is modelled upon Gilgamesh's search for his identity and Caravaggio is represented as Enkidu.

The epic of Gilgamesh is retold and recreated in the figure of Patrick Lewis who wanders through the city as an angry outsider and an enemy of the establishment. "He has always been an alien, the third person in the picture. He is the one born in this country who knows nothing of the place.... He was a waker, a corrector" (ISL 163). Patrick remains a searcher gazing into the darkness of his own country. Ondaatje uses different frames of the myth of Gilgamesh giving different facets of the hero on different characters of the story. Gilgamesh is an adventurer. Patrick too is a searcher. The epic is actually about a heroic king of ancient Mesopotamia and is rich with adventures and encounters with strange creatures. The central role of the epic suggests human relations and feelings like love, friendship, revenge, regret and fear of death. Gilgamesh treats the people of Uruk in an oppressive manner. Likewise Commissioner Harris treats the immigrants in an oppressive manner.

Devastated by his friend's loss he sets out to find eternal life. The quest becomes futile. The Sumerian and Akkadian myth is incorporated by Ondaatje in his epigraph. This story parallels Patrick who is Gilgamesh and the thief Caravaggio is Enkidu and the novel can be called a parody. Patrick's quest for encountering the ruling class becomes futile. This myth serves both as a pastiche and parody to the plot and serves as one of the postmodern tools in the novel.

Alice Gull dies a futile death in the hands of an anarchist. Patrick swims the water works to blow the water works become futile when he is caught once again. His blowing of Muskako restaurant is of no avail. His attempts to take revenge on the capitalists becomes futile. The title of the poem refers to the Sumerian legend where Gilgamesh mourns the death of his friend and wanders aimlessly. Patrick mourns the death of Alice Gull and wanders to take revenge on Commissioner Harris. Dream and reality, fact and fiction are fused in the novel.

Ondaatje has mythologized the history of Toronto which is the main focus of the story. The construction of the important places in the city like the waterworks, tunnels are given priority by the officials. The city is humanized in its transformation. "Harris saw the new building as the human body" (ISL 220). "The book expresses and celebrates the new aspect, the new viaducts, underground tunnels, subways, train ways, waterways and even motorways" (Pereosa 189).

Commissioner Harris is a visionary who builds and plans the major places in Toronto. His identity is narrated in the novel through a non-linear narratology. His tweed coat as observed by Tamelcoff is five times the salary of five bridge workers. In the last part of the novel Patrick like Cato and Gilgamesh is angry with the ruling class and plans with Caravaggio to blow up the dream come true water purification plant constructed by Harris. He reaches there with the help of Caravaggio and is caught. Patrick thinks that Harris is responsible for Alice Gull's death. Patrick's anger is just like Gilgamesh anger towards the Gods for killing Enkidu. He wants to destroy the waterworks for Alice Gull just like Gilgamesh's killing of the pride of Lions. Gilgamesh realizes that it is difficult for human beings to achieve immortality.

Patrick too realizes his helplessness and he swoons into a state of slumber. On waking up he realizes that Harris has some humanity in him as he does not hand him over to the

police. A nurse takes care of Patrick and Harris removes all the dynamites Patrick had planted. Patrick arrives at a compromise when Harris says that his mother was a caretaker and belonged to working class. Harris worked hard to improve his state, to rise to this level. “I was practically born in a city hall. My mother was a care taker. I worked up” (ISL 242). There was a lot of space to be communicated between the workers and the ruling class. When Patrick tries to put a full stop to their conversation he replies “Then it will be a nightmare” (ISL 239). Patrick an active rebel becomes passive when he is made to realize by Harris that he was indirectly responsible for Alice Gull’s death. He begins the rebellion and leaves it to the rest of his fellowmen to continue the struggle.

Patrick is happy with the new working class community. He grows in the new land away from his Anglo Irish roots. In a new English society he develops a sense of cultural awareness and identity. Cato’s letters teach him the identity of the Finnish loggers. His relationship with Hana and Alice help him to form a community and to find his identity in a multicultural society. While searching for his identity he lands up finding out the histories of those immigrants neglected by the nation’s history. They are women, workers and immigrants who are neglected by official history. Patrick takes up the skin of a lion and becomes the narrator of their history.

Oral history is one of the themes explored in the novel. Patrick attends a Macedonian celebration. There he finds out the history of an actual bridge construction worker who worked in the tunnels and the bridge. He is Nicholas Temelcof whose work is not recorded by the officials. Ondaatje focuses on history and identity as postmodern concepts. The history that the author focuses is conventional history. Ondaatje’s fiction deals with few historical working class immigrants and official history is made into a fiction of the present day. These characters join together to form a new society politically and culturally. They find a space for themselves.

Patrick finds the history of Alice Gull during his search for Ambrose Small. He identifies her as the nun who fell from the bridge. Through her and through photographs he reads the official history of Toronto. He learns from Alice about the history of Cato, her husband who is one of the Finnish Loggers whom he witnessed as a little boy in his native place Depot Creek, Ontario. They arrived there to cut logs to construct the bridge and the water works. He narrates this incident to Nicholas Tamelcoff who leaves his job as a construction worker and later he owns a bakery. He could recall that incident which remains fresh in his memory. He was called a dare devil who could do wonders as a construction worker. Thus memory plays a vital role in Ondaatje's works. Through memory, the characters retrieve their identity and shape their own history in their new found land.

The novel's narrative is planned in a modern non-linear circular motion. When the novel opens it is a story narrated by Patrick to his adopted daughter Hana while driving to Marmora and in the end it is she who drives when Patrick narrates the story. Reader, writer and Hana who is in the car participate in the dialogic process of hearing the author's story.

This is a story a young girl gathers in a car during the early hours of the morning. She listens and asks questions as the vehicle travels through the darkness. Outside, the countryside is unbetrayed. The man driving could say, 'In that field is a castle', and it would be possible for her to believe him. ...She stays awake to keep him company. (ISL Intentional prologue n.p)(italics as per original)

The story telling is adapted to give aesthetic effect to the novel. Metaphorically Patrick Lewis acquires a lion's skin and tells the history of Toronto's past and present while driving to Marmora and Hana stays awake to keep him company. She hears the story of Toronto and Clara while Patrick taught her driving. The novel's narrative technique is that of loss and recovery of oral tales, secrets, narratives of dislocation and planning a territory.

The novel has different types of history which is related to the lives of individuals and to that of the society. A single narrator relates to the reader the history of a multicultural society and its relation to the past. It explores the hidden stories of early Toronto as recorded in the official history blending fact and fiction. The novel's quest goes along with Patrick's search for Ambrose Small, and for Clara and to the tragic search for Harris waterworks. His search for vocabulary connects him with the people for whom he cries and feels their pain. The novel is replete with sociological and psychological insights.

In the Skin of a Lion is based on Marxist ideologies. Marxism is based on the concept that rich powerful bourgeoisie who exploit the proletariat. The sociological theme and Marxist ideology is embedded in the novel. In the novel there is a class struggle between the haves and have-nots, rich and the poor, those in power and the powerless, voiced majority and the voiceless immigrants. Marxism takes into account the class struggles among the working classes, the proletariat and the middle class capitalists known as the bourgeoisies. For Patrick and other migrants, the disparity between them and the higher ups, which included Commissioner Harris has been a scouring pain. These class struggles are highlighted throughout the book in different ways such as the working conditions of the labourers, and the fact that there were no records kept of the workers who died.

In the novel the proletariat were exploited with poor working conditions and less wages. People were exploited by the upper middleclass who utilize them for cheap labour and fewer wages. They were paid one dollar a day. This is the plight of workers who work in the bridge, tunnel and the tannery workers who take the skins of animals for dyeing. They were really dying with contagious diseases due to unhygienic conditions. At last Patrick encounters Commissioner Harris at the water works which is his dream come true; he says that there were no records kept regarding how many died in constructing the city. Patrick is furious when he says that the cost of the tiles is more than half their salaries put together. This

incident in the novel is a highlight of division of labour and the class consciousness between the high and the low, and between the rich and the poor. When Patrick tries to react vehemently upon the so called upper-class, Harris replies, “you don’t understand power” (ISL 248).

The author repudiates the rich by giving voice to the voiceless immigrants. The hapless people were neglected in history. Alice Gull expresses to Patrick her bitterness about the rich exploiters thus:

I’ll tell you about the rich’ Alice would say, the rich are always laughing.
They keep saying the same things on their boats and lawns; Isn’t this grand!...
But they keep you in tunnels and stockyards. They don’t toil or spin.
Remember that ... understand what they will always refuse to let go of. There
are a hundred fences and lawns between the rich and you. (ISL 138)

Alice encourages Patrick to act as a political activist. Patrick says that “a man is a mere hammer, drill and flame” (ISL 28). The rich motivate people like Harris to exploit the laborers. Harris explains to Patrick that though they are all made of the same stuff still he belongs to the dwarfish section of the society where they cannot compete with the powerful rich people. People express their anger by forming a union and by fighting for their rights.

Cato was murdered because he triggered the people against the rich. Patrick loves Hana as his own daughter. Hana is the narrator of the story and a passive listener. People gather in the waterworks on Sundays to express their anger through puppet show. Language is a very important problem to overcome in the immigrant society. They become powerless when they are asked to speak the colonizer’s language. They listen to songs and watch movies to acquire the new language. The puppets in the mime show express their helplessness by banging and screaming loudly with a thud. This impresses Patrick who reacts

for the first time in life by going to the stage. He begins to socialize with the fellow immigrants.

The water works filtration plant where these workers gather is not just a sanitized filtration plant but a place where the migrant workers look for their own histories. He is enraged by the power mongers exploitation of the poor and sets the Muskako hotel ablaze by blasting dynamite. Alice Gull is killed when she is blown by dynamites. When Patrick returns from the penitentiary he finds that revolution has already started brewing in the place. The novel portrays how a community as a whole crosses the borders to another country, language and culture for survival.

Ondaatje has mythologized the history of Toronto which is the main focus of the story. The immigrant construction workers who constructed bridges viaducts and tunnels means a lot to the labourers of the city. The city is humanized in its transformations. "Harris saw the new building as a human body" (ISL 220). Ondaatje as an immigrant to Toronto from his native country Sri Lanka has thoroughly explored the immigrant history of Toronto. The novel focuses on the diaspora of labourers from various places, language and culture. Anglo- Americans and Irish dominate the place as natives. Patrick Lewis moves from his Anglo Irish roots to multicultural new city Toronto. He discovers the new world. "A silent man, new in an alien world with new language and culture adapts and transforms himself. The Macedonians and Bulgarians were his only mirror" (ISL 112).

Patrick who starts his journey as a searcher of capitalist Ambrose Small ends up searching the truth regarding the poor immigrants who were left unrecorded in the official histories. The oral history which is a prominent theme in the novel brings lot of immigrants into focus. Women, workers, immigrants who were silenced in the official histories of Canadian Literature is focused. Patrick takes up the skin of a lion after being incensed by Alice. He takes the responsibility for the narration of lives of those multitudes who have been

left nameless in official history. The history of Toronto is not a conventional history but an amalgamation of factual records and oral narratives.

Intertextuality, polyphony and historiography are the major themes explored in the novel. The various characters work individually and collectively to form political, cultural and social world. The relations between the actors and audience are the quest for identity and community. Migration is the act of imposed or voluntary, so a transformation takes place by wearing different skins metaphorically meaning to take different identities. The tannery workers were in contact with the skins of wild animals and the dye from the skins get absorbed in their skin. Patrick understands the sufferings of the fellow immigrants through the pantomime show organized by Alice Gull. Patrick feels himself as a moving puppet in the alien world. He confronts the rich people whom he is planning to destroy for the sake of taking revenge for the wrongs meted out to the fellow immigrants.

The characters respond to the trauma of dislocation with affirmation. They contribute to the metamorphosis of political and social framework of the new city which they inhabit. The strategy of staging the migrant experiences and the silent trauma they undergo in the hands of capitalists clearly unravels the silent trauma they face. The author is trying to bridge the gap in the actual history through the fictional characters.

Majority of the immigrants are working class people. They are exploited by the rich and middle class English speaking people. Their stories are told in the form of oral history by Patrick Lewis. The English speaking activists like Alice and Patrick fight on their behalf. The cultural gap exists between them due to language barriers, they communicate through broken gestures, sentiments and single words.

The term 'other' is shown to be relational to the minority. The concept of 'self' refers to the elite capitalists and 'other' to the marginalized immigrant workers is the major focus of the novel. Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her

critical work *Can the Subaltern Speak?* discusses the concept of the 'self' and the 'other' that exists between the capitalists and the labourers and between the colonizer and the colonized. Alice Gull bridges the gap by talking in Finnish or Macedonian. Cato's murder and rebellion everything was oblivious to Patrick because he remained a searcher unaware of what is happening. "And all his life Patrick had been oblivious to it, a searcher gazing into the darkness of his own country, a blind man dressing the heroine" (ISL 164).

When Patrick came to Toronto he found the immigrants being exploited. But when he returns from prison he found many rebellious dissident groups were already voicing out themselves against the capitalists. "In 1938 over 10,000 foreigners were deported out of the country" (ISL 209). It appears through this conversation that cultural conflicts are always unavoidable. Patrick changes his mind when Harris crows down saying he also actually belonged to the working class community once. Harris is helpless as he is answerable to the persons in "real power" (ISL 254). He does not blow up the waterworks and sleeps for quiet a long time and Harris does not hand him over to the police. The nightmare is presented in such a way that it does not end in darkness but in light.

The novel begins with the narrator, Patrick narrating the story from his memory to his adopted daughter Hana. He drives with her to Marmora to see Clara. Ambrose Small, the missing millionaire is dead and Clara is alone. She wishes to patch up with Patrick Lewis with whom she is in love. Patrick goes with Hana to meet Clara Dickens. Hana listens to the oral history of Toronto as Patrick drives. When the novel ends Hana drives her step father's Ford and learns the history of Toronto. Ondaatje uses Patrick as a mouth piece to narrate the oral history of the lives of immigrants in Canada, especially in Toronto. Various chapters in the novel are related to socio-political themes that make the novel a classic. The intentional prologue gives a clue to the various stories told in the novel.

The novel covers two decades while delineating the lives of characters. It is divided into two books; books are divided into chapters and chapters into sections. The narration is elliptical. In one chapter Tamelcoff is a bridge worker. In the other chapter he is a baker. In one chapter Hazen Lewis is a lumbar jack and in another chapter he is a dynamiter in feldspar mines. Patrick begins as a searcher, later he works in tunnels, tanneries as a labourer. The chapter 'The Bridge' introduces the nun. In the chapter entitled 'The Searcher' the nun becomes Alice Gull, a transformed woman. Only in the final book a connection is established between the fragmented narratives.

Many images like light, darkness, falling, balance and explosion design the atmosphere of the novel. Many metaphors and symbols contribute to the meaning of the novel. History and historiography influence the individual's relation to society. The novel focuses on the role of language and narrative in the individual's relation to both history and society. The main focus of the novel is social injustice. The single narrator binds and focuses on a community that is based on oral narratives. The narrative is non-linear. The characters mutually respect each other, love their fellow migrants, there is a strong bonding among themselves as immigrants, labourers and ruling class.

In the Skin of a Lion has lot of intertextual references. The novel opens with multiple epigraphs, dedications and acknowledgements which form a collage. The first epigraph is taken from the "Epic of Gilgamesh" a Sumerian, Akadian legend. The protagonist Patrick Lewis is the parallel to Gilgamesh. Patrick becomes violent when his beloved Alice Gull is killed by the unfortunate explosion of the dynamite. Gilgamesh outbursts of his emotions at the demise of his friend make him a searcher of immortality.

John Berger, a Marxist postmodernist's epigraph forms a study of intertextuality in the novel. It says, "Never again will a story be told as if it were only one" (ISL n.p). Alice Gull's reading Joseph Conrad's letters serve as intertext. "This gives her an initiation into

culture” (ISL 135). Patrick’s search in the library archive hunting for the picture of Alice Gull’s and Nicholas Tamelcoff’s fall from the bridge serves as another intertext. The library archives also reveal Toronto’s history. The past of Alice as a nun who fell from the bridge who had a miraculous rescue by Tamelcoff is exposed through the photograph in the newspaper article found in the library. There were lots of photographs in the Riverdale library. Hine’s photographs betrayed official history. Joseph Conrad’s messages reach us through the novel. *“Only the best art can order the chaotic tumble of events. Only the best can realign chaos to suggest both chaos and order it will become”* (ISL 152). (Italics as per original)

Alice Gull’s love for Fats Waller’s song serves as an intertext. “Needed no star/wanted no moon/... With love” (ISL 152). Nicholas Tamelcoff a daredevil construction worker experiences a sudden epiphany when he saves the nun from falling. “He floats at the three hinges of the crescent-shaped steel arches. These knit the bridge together. The moment of cubism” (ISL 34). This is an allusion to John Berger’s essay ‘The Moment of Cubism’. “Cubism had its influence on the writer which means how one should not perceive an object as if it is one” (Spinks 141). “Up jumped you with love, Al purdy, Anne Wilkinson, Hine, Wild geese, Judge Shead are all quoted in the text by Ondaatje” (Lowry 66). Caravaggio was comfortable in another person’s house hiding in the book shelves with Trollope and H.G Wells. Harris quotes Baudelaire to show how the city changes. “The form of a city changes faster than the heart of a mortal he would quote all his journalists and he dreams the city like Pomphrey’s dream of a byzantine city” (ISL 114).

The intertextual readings include archival records, photographs, mementoes, script for radio and theatre, popular songs, films, atlases, newspapers, clippings, letters, tall tales, blue prints and dreams. All these documents are not presented directly to the readers. They are embedded into the text within the narrator or the characters. Daniel Stoyanof’s participation

in arts and tales form intertextual reference in the novel. “He participates in silence but the audience joins him at the end in uproar clap in unison” (ISL 117). Allusions from the Bible like ‘Judith and Holofernes’ and ‘St Jerome and the Lion’ serve as intertextual reading.

Displacement is one of the major themes in the novel. Patrick, the displaced individual finds love through Clara and Alice. Patrick rejects silence and he becomes a political activist because of these two women play a crucial role in his life. All the working class immigrants found in the novel are displaced individuals who find their identity and form a society in the new found land.

The theme of breaking silence and giving voice to the marginalized is another theme in the novel. The characters remain like puppets in the new land. The law did not permit them to speak their native tongue but only the colonizer’s language. They were like walking shadows. Activists who are learned like Alice Gull, Cato bring some transformation by motivating people to show that they are human beings and not mere objects. The pantomime show where the immigrants gather secretly is an eye opener for Patrick whose emotional intensity gets the better of him when the puppet bangs the stage with a thud and a loud scream. He gets triggered into active rebellion and forms a fellowship with fellow immigrants.

Photography is a technique used by Ondaatje as a collage in all his novels. In this novel alone he uses four thousand photographs retrieved from the archives to create his hero Patrick Lewis. The history of the city as well as the history of the immigrants are constructed through photographs. He rewrites the myth of Gilgamesh as a parody to Patrick Lewis life in the city. Harris’s construction of the Bloor Street viaduct and Toronto water works is a parody of Gilgamesh building of the Temple. These two buildings are brainchildren of Harris. Many immigrants would have lost their lives as soldiers, guerillas, political activists and freedom fighters had they not joined Harris in constructing Toronto. The Nun’s fall from

the bridge and Tamelcoff's magical flight from the bridge and the miraculous escape of both from the bridge has dream like quality. Michael Ondaatje has adopted cinematic techniques.

The theme of betrayal especially betraying official history is another major theme in the novel. The novel ends with characters moving to reunite with their broken families. They try to establish a balance in their personal lives. It is a novel about how the voice of the marginalized explodes. It is about those in power and how they try to manipulate the underprivileged. Ondaatje has the potential to expose truth through art. It is a metafiction where it fictionalizes and comments itself as another fiction. It blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction. History repeats itself in the form of fiction. The novel is about particular people who become the part of the narrative.

Ondaatje makes a clear demarcation between official history and true history. The immigrants who work in tunnel, tannery and bridge learn the language of the 'other'. He uses many metaphors and allusions in the story. Puppet show is one of the metaphors used in the story. The tiny puppets represent the immigrant community. Their costumes represent different nations. Though Patrick's effort becomes futile at the end he realizes his identity. He becomes a story teller just like Gilgamesh who is in quest for identity. The title shows how Patrick assumes responsibility and power to safeguard the rights of the exploited by wearing the skin of a lion.

Thus the novel is open to the readers to comprehend the multi-layered narrative structure to decipher its meaning. Various themes and techniques have been employed by the author to makes the novel postmodern in content and structure.