

Chapter V

Intertextuality and Identity in *The English Patient*

The English Patient by Michael Ondaatje is his award winning novel. The novel has many postmodern themes and techniques. This thrilling, romantic and fantasy novel won him Booker prize award and the first film version of it by Anthony Minghella won nine Oscar awards. The novel is known for its supreme rhythmic quality, lyrics and narrative impact which are incomparable to any other novel in English.

The background of the novel is based on the Second World War. The novel takes place in a deserted Italian villa named Villa San Giroloma and the Sahara desert. Canada, America, England and Asia are represented by bringing together characters from various nations with various identities negotiating their multicultural zones. The characters with their different identities meet in the deserted Italian villa named Villa San Giroloma and the story revolves around them. The villa is later converted into a war hospital. The confluence of these four characters Hana, a Canadian born Italian nurse, Caravaggio, a spy and a thief who is Hana's father's friend and her well wisher, a burned English patient - Almsy and Kip, an Indian, a Sikh who is posted at Italy as a member of the bomb diffusal squad and short, ecstatic and thrilling moments they share in the villa propel the story forward and later the theme evolves in accordance with the postmodern pretext.

The atmosphere presented in the novel is the picture of post war period. The novel highlights the multicultural unison of the four major characters portayed in the novel. The migrants do not belong to Italy but find a new life in the deserted home. The novel seeks to explore two aspects of circle and development. The group at San Girolamo are all exiles from their homeland. The burnt English patient also does not have any sense of belonging. The desert expeditions had made him feel alien. The theme of disillusionment and nihilism after the World War II is the highlight of the novel.

An Italian nurse Hana from Ondaatje's previous novel *In the Skin of a Lion* is posted at Italy during Second World War. Personally she is depressed because of her father and her husband's death. She voluntarily undergoes abortion and serves the soldiers in the Italian villa. Her father dies in a fire accident and her husband in the war. She is posted as a war nurse treating the dying soldiers in the deserted Italian villa. After the war most of the soldiers go back but Hana is compassionate towards one particular patient known as the English patient, the protagonist of the novel, who fell from a burning plane, charred beyond recognition. When the novel begins, the completely dying English patient is carried by the Bedouin tribes and brought to the villa. He is in a completely charred condition and they made a cradle of sticks and carried him to the villa. The novel deals with the protagonist, "a man with no face. An ebony pool. All identification consumed in a fire" (TEP 48). In seeking for the lost oasis called Zerzura he loses his own identity. His identity remains uncertain as different tradition overlay him.

Hana nurses him, washes him, feeds him and also reads to him. She has some devotion for this dying patient whom she considers as a saint. Hana, is a blessing in disguise to the English patient, who is grateful to her. His real identity is not known to her. She feels that her service to the dying English patient is a sort of devotion and dedication to the memory of her loving father. They are joined by an Italian thief Caravaggio, whose fingers are amputated by the Nazis. He also worked as a spy during wartime. He is Hana's father's friend and he didn't want her to waste her life and youth by serving the dying English patient in the lonely, deserted villa. He knows her from her childhood in Canada and has paternal affection to this young nurse. He sensed some sort of obsession in her which made her stay in the lonely villa. His mission was to save her from this man who calls himself English patient. His identity is later on unravelled by Caravaggio in the presence of Kip and Hana by administering morphine at frequent intervals. The patient blurts out the secrets of his entire

past under the influence of morphine. He is a Hungarian known as Count Ladislaus Almasy. He is a spy who worked for the Germans, a desert explorer, a good cartographer and a voracious reader of many books. He has an excellent knowledge of the desert. Being a good Cartographer he can draw maps for a mapless desert.

Life in the villa after the arrival of the patient goes on in this vein for some time. Hana nurses the patient and reads various books like Herodotus *Histories*, Kipling's *Kim* and *The Last of the Mohicans*. She also feeds him with cherries while reading and she dresses the burnt body with medicine. This routine is changed by the sudden arrival of Caravaggio. When Caravaggio joined them he wanted to win her trust and confidence for he meets her after a long duration. He narrates various tortures he underwent when he was caught by the Nazis. He also narrates various blood curdling incidents that chills one's spine. His arms were amputated when he was interrogated by the Nazis. Caravaggio is her father Patrick's friend and he appears in *In the Skin of a Lion*. One fine day when Hana was playing the piano in the library of the villa two people from the Italian bomb disposal squad enter the villa with the information that the whole villa was infested with bombs left by the Nazis. The piano played by Hana also had live wire of bombs and pencil mines which would blast at any time.

Kirpal Singh, who is an Indian, calls himself Kip does the defusing of bombs in the villa. He decides to stay outside the villa in a tent. Kirpal Singh is nick named as Kip when he joins the English. He admires the English ways and culture and adopts it. Hana admires Kip's brown skin, his simplicity and later falls in love with him. Caravaggio is relieved and feels happy that he has saved her from the dying English patient. They develop friendship in the villa and make themselves happy by celebrating when Kip defuses a bomb. Kip admires the patient for his good knowledge of the guns. Each character's identity is explored in the due course of the novel.

Almasy's desert expedition in Lybia and his deep love for Katharine Clifton who develops an extra marital relationship with him forms a sub plot in the novel. Katharine and Almasy's love affair is known to Mr. Clifton who takes them in a plane to kill them. In the attempt Clifton dies and Katharine is injured. He hides her in a cave of swimmers known for ancient art and pictures. He goes out desperately to get some help for her recovery and unfortunately he is caught by the allies to show the desert. They are aware of him as a cartographer and his knowledge of the desert. After helping them he turns back to the cave and finds her dead. He decorates her body with paints and balms. Later he takes the unused plane hidden in the sand. He flies along with the body of Katharine. Unfortunately, the craft sets ablaze burning him beyond recognition. He falls from the sky like Lucifer's fall from heaven to hell. It was a miracle that only the book of Herodotus *Histories* remains safe. This was the time he was saved by the Bedouin tribes and brought to the villa. The story comes to an abrupt end when Hiroshima and Nagasaki was bombed by the USA. Kip is upset by the atrocious behavior of the west and decides to quit his job and leaves to India once for all. The patient breathes his last by clutching the book of Herodotus. Hana leaves to Canada and joins her step mother Clara Dickens. Kip leads a new life with his wife and children. He becomes a doctor in the Punjab region of India.

A number of important themes have been outlined by Ondaatje as the most important in the novel, such as race, ethnicity, identity, history, nationalism, colonialism, and war. The postmodern and postcolonial themes and techniques employed in the novel explore the ways in which they expound the themes and questions of the notion of identity crisis which is an aspect of multicultural society. Postmodern techniques such as narrative discontinuity, mini-narratives, fragmented story-line, decentered and dehumanized subject, the absence of a single truth, multiple identities form a backdrop in Ondaatje's *The English Patient*.

Identity of the characters is constructed in the novel with the help of postmodern tools. Postmodern authors focus on the formation of individual and collective identity. For the poststructuralists identity is unstable, changing and decentred. An individual may be identifiable as having a certain age, class, religion, ethnicity, or gender, but none of these can be regarded in determining individual identity. All the characters are in search of their individuality in a war torn age. Each character is in quest for his or her own identity.

Multiculturalism is one of the postmodern tools used in the novel. The characters from different cultural backgrounds join together in the villa and reconstruct their identity. The issue of identity is of primary importance in the cosmopolitan contemporary world characterized by blending of cultures and globalization. Hana is a Canadian, the daughter of Alice in *In the Skin of a Lion*. Patrick is the step father of Hana and friend of the thief Caravaggio. Almasy is a Hungarian and Kirpal Singh nick named as Kip is the Punjabi Indian who is fond of western culture.

Identity is a post modern construct: the ways an individual understands what it is to belong to a certain gender, race or culture. Identity is initially constructed by the discourses operating in society which naturalises certain ways of knowing what it is to belong to this social group. In *The English Patient* Ondaatje's writing in the 1990's about the Second World War questions the very notions of identity, showing how the dominant discourse of Western imperialism and civilisation have dispossessed those people of different races and cultural identities. (Anghel 75)

In Ondaatje's novel identity becomes a textual construct, as its characters perceive themselves not so much through their gender, race or culture, but through their experience. They appear in the narratives that have the form of memories or stories told to others, and are

defined by the shifts in their individual time, space, speech, rather than by belonging to a certain social group.

As an expatriate writer the author brings out transnational identities and cross-cultural meetings across the barriers. Confluence of multicultures like Indian, British and Canadian is one of the aspects dealt in the novel. Two Canadians in the villa Hana and Caravaggio, the Greek Almassy and the Indian Kip meet and form a relationship. In the personal recounts of the four occupants of the villa, Ondaatje ingeniously asserts the notion that all people are creatures of the past and try to define future events accordingly by incorporating a variety of nationalities into the novel. Hana and Caravaggio are Canadians, Kip is an Indian, and the English patient is a Hungarian. While depicting the last stages of the war, Ondaatje investigates the perception of identity through the transient movement of the characters. All the four main characters of the novel are in the process of re-evaluating and retrospecting their new identity after the war. However, the novel revolves around the mystery of the English patient who seems not to remember his name, and the main narrative of the novel is continuously interrupted by the memories that he is narrating to Hana and other inhabitants of the villa. It is obvious that the identity of the English patient is the central concern of the novel, and the identities of other characters are often revealed through their relation to the burned patient.

The story of the English patient is brought out by Caravaggio, who does it by administering morphine at frequent intervals. He does it in order to save Hana from the dying charred man. It is found that he is Count Ladislaus de Almassy, a Hungarian who joined a group of Germans, English and African explores in 1930, searching for the lost oasis Zerzura. They called themselves as 'Oasis Society', who became nationless. Almassy is found by the newly married Clifton's. Though there is some initial animosity between him and Katharine it later develops into a most passionate love affair. Their adulterous affair is found by Geoffrey

Clinton who flies with Katharine in a flight to the spot where Almasy was. Almasy collects his equipments and attempts to kill them.

Clifton dies in that attempt, Katharine is badly injured. Almasy leaves her in the cave of Swimmers and leaves to find some help. He is mistaken for a spy and is asked to show the way to mapless desert by the Nazis who agree to provide transport. Finding Katharine dead he decorates the body with coloured pigments and carries her body in the plane which is hidden there. He flies with her body and the old craft suddenly sets ablaze. He breaks open the cockpit and falls from the burning plane. Almasy has a miraculous escape when he breaks open the cockpit glass, parachutes to the earth and his body and helmet are aflame. At this juncture he is saved by the Bedouins. Caravaggio finds out that he is the spy who lived to help Rommel.

The English patient narrates to Hana and Caravaggio some of his desert explorations and his experiences in finding the lost oasis Zerzura. He happened to meet many desert explorers in Gilf Kebir plateau. There are some like Madox, John Bell, Kemal el Din, Carparius who explored the Lybian mapless desert. He was a good cartographer. He recalls the kind of food, heat and the sand storms he experienced. He has come across lot of people from various cultures:

We were German, English, Hungarian, African – all of us insignificant to them. Gradually we became nationless. I came to hate nations. We are deformed by nation- states. Madox dies because of nations. The patient exclaims during the expedition, Erase family name of Erase nations! I was taught such things by the desert. (TEP 138-139)

The tribes wanted to save him when they found him in such a pathetic state. But he wanted to erase names. By the time war arrived he wanted to slip across the borders after two years in the desert, “not to belong to anyone, to any nation” (TEP 139). People take up new cultural

identities after crossing the borders. Kirpal Singh tries to establish community and bond through the people in the villa.

He first appears as an introvert and self – sufficient man. The birthday celebrations and brief love affair between him and Hana comes to an end when USA drops bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The fundamental barriers between the brown and white races are very obvious to Kip. He abandons the villa and the short lived relationship and leaves to India and settles down as an Indian. The novel’s epilogue shows that he has re-established himself as an Indian in Punjabi village. He serves as a local doctor in India.

Kirpal Sigh, the Sikh who becomes a sapper in the British army represents cultural hybridity which rejects national borders, but in the end he finds his own identity as an Indian. He finds himself to be an alien away from his nation and family. He is more attached to the alien British culture rejecting his family and traditions. Joining British army in England he serves Lord Suffolk, Morden and other officers. His brother on the contrary is anti-colonial and hates British as he was imprisoned when he rebelled against their colonial rule. Kip feels the bomb squad as his family, Suffolk being his surrogate father. The English re-christen him as Kip, and he becomes an ardent lover of the English and their culture. “His expertise, technological knowledge, sense of discipline and orders, and courage in defusing bombs, gain him respect and establish in him a confident sense of identity in his adopted land” (Bolland 289).

Kip gets a blow when his Lord Suffolk and Morden die. However, Kip is possessive of the British. The incompatibility between the colonizer and the colonized is evident when Kip soils a paper with butter. They all laugh at him by calling him Kipper grease. The colonizer wants to keep the colonized under their thumb. “The young Sikh had been translated into salty English fish” (TEP 87). He says the English are hanging the Sikhs “who

are fighting for independence” (TEP 2). During the journey he realizes his identity, abandons Italy, and goes back to Punjab.

Kip defused many live wires of bombs implanted by the Nazis when they left. The whole land was full of bombs which the bomb disposal squad disposed. Kip, after joining Italian sappers had come to this villa for his mission. Hana and Caravaggio are surprised by his culture of eating with his right hand, using knife only to cut onions. His smartness, his early rising and his enthusiastic nature attracts the twenty years old nurse Hana. She loves Kip and adores him. Caravaggio, the uncle who had known her from childhood is relieved by this affair for he wanted to remove her devotion from the ghastly, ghostly ebony English patient. Kip loves English tea and he befriends the English patient who was a knowledgeable person regarding different kinds of rifles. The four become very close to each other. When Kip defuses a huge bomb with the help of Hana, the celebrations begin but Caravaggio had some suspicion about the patient who calls himself English. He wants to find out his identity and save Hana for Patrick's sake. The whole army left, the doctors and nurses left, only Hana refuses to leave the villa tied down to the English patient. All the characters in the novel suffer psychologically.

The use of identity and nationalism is explored through a number of themes like the body, mapping, sexual relationship, which are associated with postmodernism: the problematizing of history, intertextuality, the crossing of boundaries and disruption of conventional narrative form. (Bolland 300)

In *The English Patient* the multicultural themes work to undermine the concept of homogeneous cultural identity on which nationalism is founded. Intertextuality is defined as the shaping of the texts' meanings by other texts:

Intertextuality represents an attempt to synthesize Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotics which deals with his study of how signs derive their meaning within

the structure of a text and with Bakhtin's dialogism which is an examination of the multiple meanings, or 'heteroglossia' in a text. (Irwin 228)

The deserted Italian villa has many dark rooms with paintings, a library with lot of books and a piano. The whole villa is full of bombs left by the Germans. The variety of books read by Hana lends itself to intertextual reading. She reads Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, Kipling's *Kim*, *The Last of the Mohicans* and the Book of Herodotus *Histories* brought by the patient. The book had many notes, scriblings made by the patient. The Biblical stories engraved in the paintings serves as an intertextual reading. The villa was a nunnery before war. She writes in her diary about Caravaggio's affection and care for her from the childhood. She is happy to see him in this dangerous, deserted villa.

Herodotus *Histories*, Stendhal's *The Charter House of Parma* and Kipling's *Kim* are some of the intertexts found in the novel. Herodotus deals with Egyptian legends but it is a great means of understanding and getting to know the desert. Almasi enriches with personal notes drawing maps which represent his own footprints and geography. *The Charter House of Parma* deals with Napoleon's invasion of Italy. *Kim* is the best example of colonial literature. *Histories* deal with the expeditions in North Africa, the charter house with Tuscan landscape in which the deserted villa is situated. *Kim* is the parody of Kip's life. This intertextual relationship assumes significant roles at the end of the story. *Kim* is the story of a British boy who immerses in Indian culture whereas Kip is an Indian who engulfs in British culture. The phonic similarities of Kip and Kim whose childhood and adolescent life is spent in India. *Kim* is loyal to the Lama and is contrasted with Kip's loyalty to Lord Suffolk. But Kip's attitude changes towards Asia in the end after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The sapper's manual which helps Kip to defuse bombs serve as an intertextual reading. The paintings by Michael Angelo in the Sistine chapel where Kip finds out the face of Isaiah, the

gardens, trees and fountains on the walls of the villa, the rustic statue of Virgin Mary are some more intertextual readings in the novel:

Almasy, the English patient, acts as an intertextual writer who receives and reconstructs texts according to his own sense of himself and the world.

Second, the books with missing pages have gaps of plots, missing incidents like landscape ravaged by storms and bombs. Third, they provide tales and situations parallel to the occurrences of the novel. Fourth, they represent the discontinuous writing in differing modes like the novel itself. (Behera 8)

The novel serves as wealth of intertextual reading like the *Last of the Mochicans*, *Kim*, *Paradise Lost*, Herodotus' *Histories*, Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, *Tempest*, *The Charter House of Parma* etc. Hana quotes from several books and forms a relationship among herself, Kip and the Patient. An orphan boy of western descent, Kim roams with the Lama through India. The problem of identity is central to Kim as it is to Kip.

The history of Herodotus brought out by the charred patient serves as one of the intertextual readings. The book is very precious to him. When he died he clutched the book. It was a miracle that the book alone escaped damage when its owner was charred. When he was saved and brought by the Bedouins he brought the book with him. The book is read by Hana and the patient is always interested in hearing the history of historical Almasy's desert exploration. The text has many papers attached by the patient during desert explorations. They serve as pastiche. The paintings of Caravaggio and the paintings of David, Goliath from the Bible are some of the intertexts found in the novel.

The English patient has always made Katherine encoded into the text, encoding her in metaphor, as if it were impossible to do anything else or to preserve her in any other way. He describes his writing of a scholarly monograph of recent explorations in the Libyan Desert:

I was coming closer and closer to the text as if the desert were there somewhere on the page, so I could even smell the ink as it emerged from the fountain pen. And simultaneously struggled with her nearby presence, more obsessed if truth be known with her possible mouth, the tautness behind the knee, the white plain of stomach, as I wrote my brief book, seventy pages long, succinct and to the point, complete with maps of travel. I was unable to remove her body from the page. I wanted to dedicate the monograph to her, to her voice, to her body that I imagined rose white out of a bed like a long bow, but it was a book I dedicated to a king .(TEP 235)

The English patient admits to Caravaggio, "Her gardens were the gardens I spoke of when I spoke to you of gardens" (TEP 236). Here is Katharine encoded as text, buried and preserved in metaphor, like an ancient and mysterious artifact is preserved under the desert. Katharine is an exceptional woman like Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*.

The description of soldiers before starting for war is delineated validly in the novel. The prayers they make before going, and making cross with two pieces of wood on a dead soldier are excerpts from the Bible. Many quotes from the Bible prove that the book is filled by Ondaatje with lots of references from other books. Ondaatje is a voracious reader and has been proved when the characters allude to these references. The library of the ancient Villa has lot of books.

Mr. Clifton has an inferiority complex since his wife Katharine is beautiful. He makes her read *Histories* of Herodotus to the soldiers. At first she hates Almas; later on she falls in love with him. One of the stories narrated by Katharine Clifton parodies their lives. In the story Gyges betrays but in this story Almas betrays. The theme of betrayal is one of the dominant themes explored by Ondaatje. There are many subplots and stories which make the narratology interesting.

The novel contains symbolism in its larger historical frame of reference. Histories suggest connection between Second World War and the war between Greeks and Persians. The graphic works present in the story serve as murals in which the characters understand themselves and their relationship. The allusions and intertextual reading of *Kim* is a sort of renovation with different endings. The story of Candaulus, Gyges and Katherine in the desert form a parody to Almasy, Clifton and Katharine. Almasy says to Caravaggio, “This was in no way a portrait of Clifton but he became a part of the story” (TEP 234).

Graphics and free paintings provide an environment where the characters take interest in the sullied villa. The building evokes Italian renaissance. Kip finds respite from his hectic work of defusing bombs. Almasy describes his desert exploration in great detail. Books play many roles for the characters in the novel. Hana reads books and dissolves herself into it after treating the dying soldiers. She finds it as a sort of exception, to forget her father who died of burns in France. Hana takes off her uniform, cuts her hair and takes care of the burned patient. “She would sit and read the book under the waver of light. She would glance now and then down the hall of the villa that had been a war hospital, where she had lived with other nurses before they had transferred gradually, the war moving north, the war almost over” (TEP 7).

The novel has many intertexts and one is Kipling’s *Kim*, a novel about colonial India in which mapping is essential to Britain to establish its colonial power. Kip represents Kim and the old Lama, is represented as the English patient. Kip resists western culture but Kim becomes a part of Indian culture and chooses to be a poet of the “Great – Grams, of the English in India. Kip calls the paintings of queen of Sheba as Queen of sadness” (TEP 116). The painting found in the villa such as David with the head of Goliath represents David Caravaggio.

The English patient himself is based on the historical count Almásy, a Hungarian who as part of a group of explorers mapping the Libyan desert in 1930's. Almásy views mapping as an instrument of colonial domination. The villa was original Bruscoli belonging to the renaissance poet, Poliziano, and the center for renaissance culture and art. Cartographies, paintings of Michael Angelo, Pica dell Mirandola, Toscanelli, Savranolla all destroyed in great fire parallels destruction during World War II. History is based on revolts which reproduce in different contexts.

Kip returns to India and becomes a doctor. He is a skilled artisan in defusing bombs. He was a disciple of Lord Suffolk and Mr. Morden who are surprised when Kip enacts peter pan instead of English play. His fondness for music and child like nature enabled him to befriend many Britishers. Kip represents the whole of Asia and not just India. Hana imagines the whole of Asia through the gestures of this one man. Kip at last chooses India as his cultural identity. He is satisfied with the memories of Hana but is never upset about her absence.

The aversion towards the colonizers arises when he hears the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is announced in the radio. Kip thinks that when it comes to dropping the nuclear bombs the target is on the brown race and not on the white race. This shows the arrogance of western imperialism. Kip is shocked by the brutal bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, tries to take revenge on the white race by shooting the English patient. Kip admired everything that was English. He unknowingly succumbs to the slavish nature of his leaders Lord Suffolk and Morden. At last he understands reality and disowns them.

Kip considers the brown man as a representative of the whole of Asia. "American, French I don't care. When you start bombing the brown races of the world, you are an Englishman" (TEP 286). Kip hears the news in the radio. "A new war. The death of a civilization" (TEP 286). Caravaggio gives a parting hug. He looks at the photograph of his

family. "His name is Kirpal Singh and does not know what he is doing here" (TEP 287). Kip is fixed as an icon of ageless India. The novel has overtones of ideology and form. *The English Patient*, is a dialogic post colonial text in which, the brilliant use of graphic and literary art and the juxtapositions of multiple points of view, Ondaatje relates the relationship between culture and history.

Almasy and his men of many nations, believed "how their lives could mean something of the past" (TEP 142). Almasy gave up desert for a woman he loved, and Madox was shot because he had to fight on his own. They become rivals for winning Katharine. It is compared with King Arthur and the young knight winning the hands of Queen Guinevere in the Arthurian legend. Kip is the parallel young Lancelot and Hana is the parallel to Queen Guinevere. Caravaggio, the benign uncle thinks that Hana is bewitched by the burned patient and has come as an angel to rescue her. Caravaggio searches for the photograph he was snapped when he acted as a spy. "It is compared to searching for a shadow, he thinks of the story he told someone's child years ago about the person who searched for his shadow- as he is now looking for this image of herself on a piece of film" (TEP 38).

She wants Caravaggio to remain as her own uncle whom she saw in Toronto. Caravaggio encourages Kip to love her. He is happy to see them love each other. He had his own selfish desire to save this young girl from the dying English patient. Hana finds books as a sort of relaxation and companionship. "She peered into her book, trying to revenge herself" (TEP 52). Caravaggio's paintings fulfill one or more functions in the novel. It provides the theme, and the techniques to the discontinuous kind of narrative. The close analysis of each character and their interior monologue appear as the verbal stream of consciousness or inner voice of the characters.

The novel is full of technical details drawn from non literary texts projecting a war time atmosphere. It is replete with desert winds, dust storms, and methods of archaeology,

cartography and bomb defusing techniques. The villa was a nunnery before the Germans conquered, presents religious contexts. Hana who has lost her father in the war finds the English patient to be a father figure. These literary and non literary texts form the sub texts to the novel. History and fiction, archaeology and myth are combined to form a kind of metafiction. A text becomes polyphonic with mixture of voices within and outside the texts. They are dialogically and intertextually arranged and the novel approximates what Almassy calls “We are communal histories, communal books” (TEP 261). According to Clare Bandabur the narratology of the novel is poetical:

A complex musical collage like a wind-chime made up of many – sided mirrors. Each of its characters refracted over and over against paintings, myths, legends, songs stories, so linked together that the slightest breeze causes them all to sound various gentle, sometime discordant and melancholy tones. (95)

The evolution of Biblical archetypes serves as a mirror for the relationship between Almassy and Kip. The paintings draw the characters into the story. The text is filled with paintings like David and Goliath that relates to Kip’s disillusionment of western religion. The abstract cave paintings are related to the sophisticated paintings found in the villa.

The novel has binary oppositions in Derridian sense. The past is contrasted with the present in the novel. The medieval war is contrasted with the Second World War. The pre Christian world of Herodotus, the Biblical episode of Isaiah, the Italy of Medici, and Knights of the crusaders, create as elaborate negative tapestry against the recent Second World War scenario. Hana is compared to the Shulamite woman in the Bible who was brought to kill the enemy sKing. Kip is compared to Kim, a young English boy in India who changes into an Indian boy. Caravaggio is a combination of the Renaissance portrait of King David. The reference to Herodotus history shows the importance of history in *The English Patient* and

the novel illustrates typical postmodern concern to question history's supposedly authoritative version of the past. Herodotus' *Histories* becomes a model of the way in which history is reconstructed in the novel:

The ends of earth are never the prints on the map that colonists push against, enlarging their sphere of influence. On one side servants and slaves and tides of power and correspondence with the geographical society. On the other the 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. (TEP 141)

Ondaatje has shown a particular reference to history, by challenging official versions of the past by problematizing the relation between history and fiction. This makes the novel a historiographic metafiction. Linda Hutcheon in her *A Poetics of Postmodernism* says:

This separation of the literary and the historical that is now being challenged in the postmodern theory of art, and recent critical readings of both history and fiction have focused more on what the two modes of writing share than on how they differ. (105)

This is one of the postmodern art forms that deals with history, parody and textual play. Alamy's written diary serve as an intertextual reading. Though the novels have historical discourse yet they claim their status as fiction.

The book of Herodotus *Histories*, which is brought by the patient make the novel as a historiographic metafiction. The dual role of Herodotus *Histories* shows that the novel questions the authoritative portrayal of the past in history. As a historian Herodotus poses a question of how history is related to fiction and the difficulty in realizing difference between history and fiction. Alamy views Herodotus as:

I see him more as one of those spare men of the desert who travel from oasis to oasis trading legends as if it is the exchange of seeds, consuming everything

without suspicion, piecing together a mirage. 'The history of mine' Herodotus says, 'has from the beginning sought out the supplementary to the main argument.' What you find in him is the cul-de-sacs within the sweep of history-how people betray each other for the sake of nations, how people fall in love.... (TEP 118)

Called both father of lies and father of history Herodotus' sources were oral-stories and reports from soldiers who had fought in the Persian wars, from Athenian and Spartan family traditions, from priests and other men at Delphi or in Egypt. What modern historians accept as accurate record co-exists with a rich content of facts but such accounts are frequently accompanied by few skeptics who disclaim the truth. There is instability in the narrative modes where the passages contrast with the patient's hand written notes. Almsy, the English patient's use of research on the desert points out the problematic relation between truth and fiction in historical discourse. Herodotus *Histories* is a collection of legends, diary entries, memoirs and even rumors presented in various modes.

Herodotus *Histories* is concerned with establishment of empires of Persia all over Asia and Europe leading to the establishment of Grecian empire. The English patient draws numerous historical references. He is Almsy who is the parody of the historical Almsy. Ondaatje draws a parallel between original facts and history. The discovery of the lost Zerzura, an oasis in the Lybian desert and the cave paintings, his espionage for Rommel are all based on historical records. Ondaatje's combination of history and fiction exemplifies a strategy for postmodern fiction, the use of the characters and situations refer to the relationship between history versus reality and fact versus fiction.

Almsy who was involved in the desert exploration was aware of earlier expeditions, the Senussi raid of the Great War, Williamson's view of the Zerzura in 1838 and the Cambyses lost army in the fifth century B.C. The Villa San Girolamo was originally the villa

Bruscoli belonging to the Italian artists and cartographers like Michael Angelo, Pico della Pirandello, Tuscanelli in attendance. His account of the Savarranolla destroying the great civilization with fire is a proof of the World War II. This incident in the novel shows how the imperial west has its hand in the nuclear holocaust.

The novel records real and imaginary voices and events evoking the multicultural situations. The story is a fiction and most of the characters are fictitious and some geographical locations like Gilf Kebir are historical. The colonial presence is portrayed through record of geographical expeditions, allied troops that promote multi ethnicity and intertextuality. Pre- war period is analyzed in the novel. The last part of the soldiers' struggle in the villa is brought out by the author. The story is presented through the lives of two couples. Alamsy and Katherine Clifton represent pre -war period, Kip and Hana represent the war era.

The historical Almassy reveals multi ethnicity during the desert explorations in finding an Oasis called Zerzura. Being a Hungarian he speaks English fluently. He can also speak German and Magreb dialects. The theme of betrayal is highlighted through this incident where he worked for the English throughout but betrayed them by helping the Germans cross the desert. The setting of the novel is in Italy, North Africa and England. There are many maps and places found in the novel. Mapping becomes one of the chief elements in the novel. Count Ladislaus Almasy the historical figure and the Hungarian Almasy are cartographers. They can draw maps for the mapless desert. The memory or autobiographical construction especially by the English patient is related to drawing maps.

The chapter 'South Cairo 1930-38' focuses on the English geographical society. The English patient recalls his experiences in the desert. The desert expeditions comprised a number of European explorers to find the unexplored space. Almasy being nationless forgets his name and identity.

The beauty of Herodotus *Histories* lies in its mingling of vast scope and small stories, in its lack of discrimination between truth and fiction, in its all-consuming generosity. But that accounts only for Herodotus's book as an idea in the novel. It must also be recognized as an object in the novel. The English patient does not just talk about Herodotus but he holds the book, caresses it, and carries it with him through all calamities.

The book he brought with him through the fire—a copy of *The Histories* of Herodotus that he has added too, cutting and gluing in pages from other books or writing in his own observations—so they are all cradled within the text of Herodotus. (TEP 16)

The English patient's copy of the Herodotus *Histories* is swollen to twice its original thickness by these other texts with which it is interleaved and over-written. The narrative of the present is given frequent analepsis or flashbacks through which the characters are revealing each other's development. With the sense of historical progress and civilization at the end, the characters return to their past to stabilize their lives.

The Greek resistance to the imperial yoke is a parallel to the Indian *résistance* to English empire in the novel. There are multiple subplots, one is Gyges Candaules episode where the incompatible king wants his soldier to admire the beauty of his queen by seeing her naked. The queen finds out and slays Candaules and marries Gyges. Almasy betrays Clifton by falling in love with Katharine and betrays the allies to the Germans. The use of double referent is characteristics of postmodern fiction. Ondaatje's use of historical Almay's finding of Zerzura oasis, cave paintings, mapping of Libyan desert, espionage to Rommel from history are a parody to Almasy the English patient. His combination of the historical and fictional exemplifies postmodern fiction. Mimicry and parody are present in the novel. Cultural identity is mimicked just "as he mimics wood thrushes found in Essex" (TEP 112).

The English patient remains in the territorial margins of the English society slipping from enemies.

Story-telling is the most important occupation of the characters in the book. Telling each other about their individual past, the characters become a small community of war-sufferers, united by their experiences, in which earlier prejudice is finally overcome by the sense of communal self-awareness: Hana cooks for the whole group, Caravaggio steals food and wine, Kip cleans the area of mines and later organizes a party, and they all take care of the English patient. In the end it does not matter to them who the patient really is. Hana says: "I think we should leave him be, it doesn't matter who he is. The war's over" (TEP 166). The result of the story-telling proves to be less important than the process. Though the mystery of the English patient remains dominant throughout the novel, the reconstruction of the chronology of events allows an explanation of that mystery significantly. With the help of their mini-narratives the characters of the novel create their new selves.

In the case of the English patient the Herodotus *Histories* is his single preoccupation. It seems that the only reason for his still being alive is the necessity to tell his story to his audience. In this way he is able to re-live, and re-read it once again. Like an author creating a text, he arranges and re-arranges the most important episodes of his life like the death of Katharine, events of their relationship, his discovery of Zerzura oasis. Due to his fragmented narrative his life as well as his identity becomes a text that can be read and re-read, a construct that may be re-arranged and manipulated for achieving the desired effect. Thus enriching the text with multidimensional perspective.

Collage or montage is therefore considered the primary form of postmodern discourse. The audience also participate, along with the author in the production of meaning in the text. Minimising the authority of the writer creates the opportunity for the reader to participate in deciphering meaning in a cultural context. The author who merely creates raw

materials for the text leaves it open to the readers to form a new meaning in any way they wish. The text provides an excellent example of ambiguity and renders itself to various interpretations.

The story-telling is mostly in third-person narrative voice, therefore the reader, too, becomes involved with the community at the Villa San Girolamo, he becomes part of the group; at the same time, he becomes a co-author of the text, participating in the creation of the coherent story, in the process of montage of its fragments. The scattered story-line and the absence of clarity urge the reader to join the story-telling activity, and make up one's own version of the sequence of events.

The novel is an intricate collage of myriads of graphics, literary and musical elements woven into an elegiac poem. In this multilayered novel there is a connection between art and culture that is related to imperialism. Edward Said in his *Culture and Imperialism* demonstrates the importance of the relationship between art and culture to the signification of texts. Modernism on contrary to the traditional idea of art as imitation focuses on art as an autonomous body. There is disruption of narrative structures present in the novel. Ondaatje's style in forming postmodernist writing finds ambivalence. There are non European races especially the Indian sapper Kip who understands the opposition that exist between the colonizer and the colonized.

The novel offers a mixture of styles, discourse and text types ranging from realistic to the postmodern. Realistic descriptions have their moorings in details of time, place and sequence. "In the side pocket she found pieces of equipments to do with the bomb disposal , which she didn't wish to touch. Wrapped up in a small piece of cloth is the metal pile she had given him, which was used for tapping maple sugar out of a tree in a country" (TEP 29).

Hana is excited over the symbol of 'White Lion' she sees on the battlements near Pisa hospital. The author brings some connectivity between the White Lion and the patient. There

is a mixture of factual and technical registers with the complex allusiveness of mythical stories contained in the *Histories*. There are scientific texts describing the parts of bombs. Kip is attracted by paintings and statues. Places for lovers in the cave of swimmers and the walls with attractive prehistoric paintings that are non verbal signs shows modern world's destructive force due to avarice and brutality.

Disruption of time is a postmodern concept employed in the novel. Periodic intervals are pinpointed in the novel The explorations of Gilf Kebir, the love affair between Katherine and Almasy in Cairo and the Second World War scenario in France shows disruptions of time:

Psychological time is valued more than the chronological time, character structure time in individual ways according to their experience, memories location in loved or loveless tales. History often becomes idiosyncratic images and action. The novel is rooted in the linguistics of the narrative text pursuing the levels of sounds, syllable, vocabulary, grammar, image metaphor, allusion history and culture which impinge on the making of sliding significance in the text. Language is self-consciously analyzed and sufficiently manipulated to expose the element of choice and artifice. Metaphors are used as an act of perception. (Rai 161)

Almasy directs Hana to read Kipling's *Kim* and says, "Your eye is too quick and north American. Think about the speed of the pen. What an appalling, barnacled old first paragraph it is otherwise." (TEP 5). Dramatisations of the narrative shift is reflected in the part played by Hana, Katharine and Almasy as writers recording private associations, feelings and impressions into books like Herodotus *Histories* and *The Last of Mohicans*.

Hana's reading of the text is filled with gaps and the reader is expected to interpret. The privilege of reading books and their magical power is pointed out. Books are important

for Hana .This was the time in her life that she fell upon books as the only door out of her cell. They became her half world. Hana's narrative voice makes her realize that she has a life of her own. The ending of the novel describes random play of events. The emotions between Hana and Kip are restricted:

Hana moves and her face turn and in regret lowers her hair. Her shoulder touches the edge of a cupboard and a glass dislodges. Kirpal's left hand swoops down and catches dropped fork an inch from the floor gently passes it into the fingers of his daughter, a wrinkle at the edge of his eyes. Behind the spectacles. (TEP 301-302)

The postmodern narrative techniques dismantle traditional narrative patterns.Hana's individuality is heightened and becomes obvious through signs which show her thinking and her actions. The woman who is alone in the house, independent, courageous in treating the burned patient is one who has outmoded the traditional patriarchal systems into a liberated one. The postmodern concept of liberal feminism is discussed through Hana's characterization.

The novel depicts multiculturalism. Culture plays a significant role in the story. Kip is caught up in fixed stereotypes and conventions of orientalism and European colonialism. Ondaatje relies upon disproportionate levels of realistic representations when it comes to Kirpal Singh. There is a contrast between fixed and fluid signifiers and signified in portraying Hana and Kip. Kip is seen as 'the other' for he is always formal, never entering the villa except for some reasons. He represents his Indian heritage. "I grew up in India uncle. You wash your hands all the time. Before all meals. A habit. I was born in the Punjab" (TEP 76). "His habits of brushing with tooth powder and Caravaggio's comments as a rare animal who eats the same food with right hand his fingers carrying to the mouth" (TEP 87).

The multiethnic group in the villa share a common space. Their dwelling can be compared to a glass bowl or a spider's web. The villa was a haven at the time of war and devastation.

The colonial presence is explained through expeditions of geographical society, intertextuality, multiplicity of landscapes spaces, situations and a polyphonic vision of characters. The novel begins with an epigram from geographical society meeting held at London. (Ramirez 42)

The acknowledgement says that the characters are based on historical figures and Gilf Kebir, an explorer in 1930's. The fictitious characters were based on certain facts.

The post World War period is projected through the chapters, "The Villa" and "In Near Ruins" shows the post world war era and the shell shocked characters are brought together in the villa from various cultures. Carravaggio after his amputation of his thumbs never spoke to anyone but realizes his identity in the villa. He also brings out the identity of the patient by administering morphine. The plot of the novel revolves around the complicated relationships that are developed in the novel. Hana found solace by caring the patient who has hoards of knowledge. She is brought back to normalcy by literature. The patient was a father figure to Hana. By treating him she feels that she serves her own father who died in a fire accident. She feels that she gets the experience of travelling with Kim and Fabrizio in *Charter House of Parma*. The English patient had attached quotes from the Bible in his books. They were glued to the text. This is an instance of pastiche. It was a miracle that the book alone was safe. The patient is a man of few words. Hana understands him by reading books to him.

Hana, "found love as a liberating force, so naturally fell in love with Kirpal Singh" (Halder 113). "This union gave them a sense of security and sanity after the war" (Halder 136). They expressed concern by passing food on leaf. Carravaggio was a motivating force

for them. They became close to the English patient and Kip admired the dying man's wisdom. The old teacher teaching the young student is similar to Kim and the Lama in Kipling's *Kim*.

The plot has a spell bounding revelations of facts and dreams, of adventures and love. Katharine episode reveals him as a spy who helped Germans. Katharine's body is pigmented which seems to be a work of cartography. The whole novel is a blending of both fact and fiction.

The turning point in the novel happens during the burning episode. Kip does not want to accept the Hungarian but considers him as English, a symbol of aggressive colonial power. The submissive nature of the Asians makes them slaves to the colonizers. The opposition of the colonizer and colonized started as early as Shakespeare's time. For example in the play *The Tempest* Caliban makes use of Prospero's language to curse him for possessing his island reveals the total incompatibility between the colonizer and the colonized. Kip is stupefied by the nuclear bomb episode and he leaves for India. He travels in his bike through the coast of Italy thinks of Hana but reaches a different world to which he really belongs.

The image making capacity of Ondaatje is shown when he pictures trees on the wall so that his novels can be called poetic novels. The images propel the novel forward and make the movement of the story fluid. The search for Zerzura symbolizes the search for love in the arid desert. "The novel resembles T.S. Eliot's modern Waste Land, in prose" (Halder 114). The novel contains images posted from the war torn world. Ondaatje's language is rhythmic, fluid, and lucid that it attracts reader's attention. His art of storytelling is noteworthy.

"Ondaatje has created a paradoxical figure, the patient who is static throughout but the journey takes place through mental landscape" (Anghel 75). He whispers again and again, dragging the heart of the young nurse into the well of memory he kept plunging into during

those months before he died. The novel is “a series of chronologically scrambled narrative fragments held together by an intricate network of recurrent images” (Cook 35).

Memory plays an important role in the novel. The struggle to recapture some memory is focused. Another recurrent theme is the need to map or choreograph some aspect of reality. Works of art such as novels and murals play an important role in the novel. Hana feels that art can give shape or objective to the narrative. Kip finds that art can substitute for the life he has left behind. Work of art helps all the characters to find their identities. Kim serves as a blue print to understand the English patient and Kip. The work of art provides a original pattern. Art has the capacity to give meaning and order. Candaules episode has given different meaning and values to various readers. The structure of the novel is complex which includes flash back blurring the boundaries between the past and present. There is both personal memory and historiography commenting on their similar nature. There is the presence of heterodiegetic narrator in the novel who narrates the stories. Different diegetic levels are connected by means of flashbacks and imagery

The themes and episodes are reminiscence of the past. The spilled wine prompts Carravaggio to remember the past and thus referential secondary meaning is emphasized. Carravaggio recalls Kip’s friendship and Hana recalls Kip’s relationship. All the characters have nostalgic reminiscence of memory losing reality. The English patient describes human beings as communal histories. The novel is narrated in third person. The novel is a text of memory where the narrative is fractured or discontinuous. The narrative slips and shifts between east and west, but instead of a multicultural romance Kip becomes a hater of Europeans and follows the advice of his fanatic brother. “Never turn your back on Europe. The deal makers. The contract makers. The map drawers. Never trust Europeans he said. Never shake hands with them” (TEP 284-85).

Characters immerse themselves in each other's experience. Almasy ornaments the dead body of Katharine with saffron's, ochre, blue, ashes of acacia and stones to make her eternal and her body is thus transformed into a text of desert explorations. Of all the recurrent motifs in the novel the imagery of regression or backtracking is probably the most pervasive. The characters self integration is evident in their preoccupation with their shadows and mirror images or the echo of voices. The characters struggle to map or choreograph their environment.

The patient appears as an artifact or a collage made of fragments of different ingredients. "He is in Todorov's terms a hybrid of identities while others are confused by the blurring of identities. The patient creates his own myth. He can be called the Odysseus of the desert" (Anghel 82). A striking characteristic of this novel is its fragmentary, non linear structure which is closely connected to the central role of memory. The novel has brilliant imagery that run across the pages in a mosaic of fractured narratives. This is the base for its cinematic adaptations.

The novel offers mixtures of styles, discourse text types ranging from the realistic to postmodern. The passages are mythical, poetical and symbolic releasing a new significance. The novel combines factual and textual registers with allusions to mythical stories in the *Histories*. "The novel belongs to the tradition of apocalyptic literature. The novel ends destructive climate of atom bombs" (Pesch 118). The nuclear apocalypse is present throughout the novel. The timeless coincidence overlapping the past, present and future helps in giving non-linear movement to the novel. The novel transforms the spatial movement into temporal dimension. The patient's trauma of the past is reconnected with the present.

The deconstructed story is constructed using other stories. The patient narrates his stories and listens to *Histories*. Travelling back in time he gives a

polytrophic image always choosing diverse or inverse ways. Falling in love presupposes both construction and destruction of identities. (Anghel 74)

The novel has multidimensional themes that form the structure. The tale is sensational and intensely passionate. The novel ends in oppression towards imperialism. Thus many post modern themes and techniques employed by the author in the novel is a proof of his merit.