

A Theatre of Expressions

Narrative Remaking of Identities in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*

by Helga Marie Stigen Sørhagen



A Thesis Presented to
The Department of Literature, Area Studies, and European Languages
the University of Oslo
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the MA Degree
Spring Term 2007

In loving memory of

Marta Sørhagen

(1905-1994)

who read to me for hours

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	4
Introduction.....	5
1 A Labyrinthine Narrative: Narrative Structure and Wounded Identity.....	21
2 The Time Around Scars: Scars as a Narrative Technique to Unmake and Remake Identity.....	45
3 I Want To Come Home: Loss of Faith in Home and Nation.....	68
Conclusion.....	92
Works Cited.....	97

Acknowledgements

First of all, my sincere and heartfelt thanks go to my supervisor, Nils Axel Nissen. Thank you for agreeing to be my supervisor in the first place, for all your valuable comments and suggestions on my work and on other themes that came along, for prompt replies on e-mail at all times, and for all our good laughs! I will really miss it.

To my friends and fellow students at Blindern I want to say thank you for coffee-break-pep-talks in (and outside of) Kafé Niels, in the Common Room, visits to Åpent Bakeri, walks on campus and to town, trips to the library or Akademika, and for little notes on my desk in the study hall. My two years as an MA student have been greatly improved by your presence.

A special thank you goes to Kine, Selja, and Siri for reading and commenting on my drafts. Your help has been invaluable!

Two of my former teachers need to be thanked, as I am about to complete my thesis. To Marit Berstad, my English teacher in high school in Lillehammer: I would not have been studying English literature in the first place had it not been for your amusing and demanding classes in 1992-94. To professor Nicole Ward-Jouve at the University of York: I would not have been writing about *The English Patient* without the inspiring class you taught during the autumn term of 2000. I am greatly indebted to both of you.

Last, but not least, I wish to thank my wonderful parents, Aagot and Arne. Thank you for being there for me in every way possible, and for always believing in me and cheering me on. I love you!

Oslo, April 2007
Helga Marie Stigen Sørhagen

Introduction

Over the fifteen years that have passed since Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* was published and was awarded the Booker Prize in 1992, the novel has attracted the attention of readers and scholars in many parts of the world. It has been analysed in theses and dissertations as well as in articles and books. As a part of the ongoing literary debate, it has in particular been analysed and discussed as a postcolonial novel. It seems inevitable that the novel attracts readings focusing on postcolonial themes as it is set at the point when Western colonialism drew to an end, and with characters whose backgrounds and lives are entangled in the colonial world where they live. In *The Empire Writes Back*, postcolonial literature is defined as covering:

[A]ll the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. . . . So the literatures of African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries, and Sri Lanka are all post-colonial literatures. (Ashcroft 2)

According to this definition, Michael Ondaatje must be a postcolonial writer, as he is entangled in the colonial and postcolonial world by his origin and his present status as a Canadian author. Canada, however, seems to have an uneasy relationship with postcolonialism, not quite willing to engage in the postcolonial debate. According to Eva Darias-Beautell "the appropriateness of the postcolonial paradigm to refer to the Canadian context at large is still a point of controversy" (115).

Ondaatje rarely addresses his own colonial background explicitly. Revealed mainly through the issues he chooses to address in his fiction, it still deserves to be briefly mentioned

even though it is not a focus in my thesis. On the break-up of his parents' marriage, when only a child, he moved with his mother and siblings from their home near Kegalle in Sri Lanka to the capital Colombo. His mother left for England, the young Michael following her to London at eleven. At nineteen, he moved to Canada where his elder brother was already living. He has remained in Canada ever since, returning to Sri Lanka to visit for the first time only several years after the death of his father. He has said about himself: "In a way, I'm a very displaced person. I really envy roots" (quoted in Jewinski 112). Still, interviewed by Eleanor Wachtel, on being asked directly whether he feels Canadian he replies: "I feel Canadian. As a writer I feel very Canadian. I became a writer here" (260). In my opinion, however, his point of origin, or within what context he defines himself, is of little importance to the reader of his fiction, *The English Patient* included. As a writer, he manages to move readers with different backgrounds, living within different contexts, and with different experiences. Thus, the universality of his work reaches beyond the restrictions of birthplace and passport.

I first read *The English Patient* as part of a course in English and Related Literature at the University of York, but the novel has been part of the curriculum at the University of Oslo as well, where five master's theses have been submitted on *The English Patient* prior to mine. The topics of the theses have included an investigation of "women nursing in war," comparing Ondaatje's novel to *A Farewell to Arms* by Hemingway; one thesis focuses mainly on various narrative techniques employed in the novel; one examines space in the novel and in Anthony Minghella's filmed version; one analyses the narrative technique, characterisation and cultural identity in *The English Patient* and Forster's *A Passage to India*; and one has analysed the transfer of the painter Caravaggio's painting technique chiaroscuro to a literary text. All of these theses have also in various ways analysed aspects of identity. I hope that my

thesis will contribute to showing a new nuance of human identity as it may be found in this rich and suggestive novel.

My choice of primary text for this thesis has been motivated by several reasons, which, although different, are also entangled in each other. First of all, my subjective appreciation of *The English Patient* as a novel was a significant factor. The story as well as the language intrigues me. The beauty of the language, as well as the vague and blurred borders between past and present, between former self and present self, have inspired me to investigate further how a work of fiction can explore fragmentation, alienation, bewilderment, a sense of loss of self, in short the problematic nature of human identity, through a conscious use of narrative structure and imagery. I was particularly intrigued by the image of scars. The scars appeared to be everywhere: On the characters' bodies, within their minds, in the surrounding landscape, and even the organisation of the text itself. Blank spaces on each page in the book seemed to suggest scars. As I interpreted it, the presence of these marks, both literal and textual, could not be a mere coincidence. They seemed to signify something far more essential than simply revealing physical damage as a result of war. I wanted to investigate how they affected each character.

Do the scars change the characters' sense of self? And if so, how is this revealed in the text? In my opinion, it is no doubt that the scars in *The English Patient* represent the changed selves of the characters in the novel. This is reflected in the text through the fragmented narrative, the temporal shifts, the changes in focalisation, and the gradual piecing together of the pasts and presents of the characters, pointing towards a possible future after the war in which the marks, physical and emotional, have become part of a new whole. The only character whose scars hold no possibility of change in life are Almásy's, as they are so grave that their only outcome must be the transfer from life to death.

To associate scars with damage and irrevocable change is not unusual, and these associations can be tied in with the novel's setting at the end of a destructive war. The war has left its permanent mark on nurses, spies and soldiers alike. The vast number of individuals constitutes the nations involved, in need of reorientation after the violence and destruction of fighting armies.

Still, scars are not all damage. They are also healed wounds. There is irrevocable change, but not necessarily amounting to damage wholly beyond repair. I believe that the scars in this specific novel begin by creating a seemingly unbridgeable gap between the past and the present, reflecting the struggle to overcome the experiences of the meaninglessness of war. Towards the end of the novel, there is a clear feeling that the permanent marks have blended in with what the characters have become. They are humans, marked by life.

The title of my thesis is chosen to suggest the multifaceted way in which identity, its unmaking and remaking, can be traced in *The English Patient*. "A Theatre of Expressions" is borrowed from "her theatre of expressions," which is Almásy's impression of his lover. In my interpretation, "theatre" suggests the staging of many different expressions, in this case of identity, and as such I found it a fitting title for the whole thesis. The subtitle further specifies the object of my analysis: to uncover the narrative destruction and reconstruction of identities in the novel. From the first time I read *The English Patient* I felt that one of the most striking features of the discourse was how the incomplete narration of the characters functioned as a deliberate narrative device rather than standing out as a flaw in the story. Leaving the reader confused and only gradually able to form a picture of the characters, the story transfers some of the bewilderment of the characters to the reader of the novel. Both the organisation of the text and the violent imagery screamed what the characters seemed unable to express: Their consuming sense of purposelessness, their struggle to hold on to their own selves, and their desperate longing to collect the pieces of themselves to try to create a sense of belonging.

In analysing the novel, I have chosen to maintain the use of the English patient's hinted name Almásy throughout, a choice I believe requires some explanation. Obviously, much of the suspense in the novel evolves around the uncertainty about the patient's identity. His name is unknown to the characters as well as to the reader until page 134 when the heterodiegetic narrator mentions his name for the first time: "By the mid-1930s the lost oasis of Zerzura was found by Ladislaus de Almásy and his companions." It is by no means clear that he is talking of Hana's patient, however, but after this point, the name Almásy increasingly appears. Using the name Almásy the way I have chosen to do may suggest that it is always implied that the patient and Almásy are the same person. The patient's identity, however, is more ambiguous than the consistent use of his Hungarian alias hints at. His extraordinary ability to shield himself from the other characters' questions is a factor effectively destabilising a confident conclusion that he is the Hungarian count. It is, however, also perfectly possible to read Caravaggio's interrogation of the burned man as a successful investigation, finally exposing the true identity of the patient. In my interpretation, this is what Caravaggio does, and parts of my analysis, particularly with reference to the ironic end to Almásy's desire for anonymity, rest on this assumption. Finally, my main reason for settling on a consistent use of "Almásy" is that it functions as a device to make the analysis less confusing as to whom I am referring to in the course of my thesis. The cleverly suggested instability of the English patient's identity through a variety of labels and names will have to remain the achievement of the author.

For further clarity, I will give a short synopsis of the narrative. Ondaatje's novel is not easy to summarise, and Hilary Mantel, reviewer in *The New York Review of Books*, has made a comment on the attempt to retell the story of *The English Patient*, which I find illustrative: "To recount it – as one must to talk about it at all – is to falsify it" (22). Falsifying is a harsh

word to use, but it is clear that a summary cannot do justice to the complexity of the narrative structure with its labyrinth of memories blended in with the first narrative.

The novel tells the story of four people who end up in an Italian villa together towards the end of World War II. The villa has been serving as a war hospital. As the staff and patients have moved on to a safer location, the Canadian nurse Hana, whose name we are not told until Caravaggio enters, and her unidentified “English” patient (Almásy) remain, none of them willing to move on with the others. Eventually, an old friend of Hana’s father shows up and stays with them at the villa. His name is David Caravaggio, formerly a thief but during the war a spy and creator of fictional identities for the allied intelligence. Having had his thumbs severed during torture, he is no longer able to remain in service. He comes to the villa in search of Hana’s unidentified patient whom he believes to be the Hungarian count Almásy, a spy for the Germans during the war. Finally, the Indian sapper Kip (Kirpal Singh) is billeted to the villa and continues his work to defuse bombs and mines in the area around the villa and the nearby village. In the end, their sheltered community is violently disrupted and broken up by the news of the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and Kip leaving for India in horror and disgust. During their short months together, the characters share memories of their pasts trying to make sense of their wartime experiences. In between the slow pace of the everyday activities in the villa, Caravaggio works obsessively to reveal the patient’s identity, the patient is increasingly preoccupied with forceful memories from before the war, in which his lover Katharine Clifton plays a significant part, and Kip and Hana fall in love with each other.

My thesis is divided into three main chapters, each analysing damaged identities and their tentative reconstruction from a distinct angle with frequent interconnections between them. The first chapter, entitled “A Labyrinthine Narrative: Narrative Structure and Wounded Identity” after a quote from *Michael Ondaatje* by Douglas Barbour, aims at investigating how

the narrative structure of the novel reflects and enforces the sense of the characters finding themselves lost and bewildered. My claim is that the evident appearance of fragmentation, alienation and loss of the sense of self is mirrored in the fragmented structure of the narrative. Not only does Ondaatje present the reader with a story told in a non-linear fashion, extensively using analepses to break up the chronology, but he also breaks up the narrative physically on the pages by leaving shorter and longer spaces blank. Such spaces can almost be described as scars in the text. They are as impossible to disregard as extensive physical scarring on a human body. Equally, the characters seem to walk in a maze, the repetitions enforcing the sense of being stuck, walking the same paths again and again without being able to find the right way out of the confusion. I also address how the focalisation and the use of psycho-narration reveal the characters and their struggles. Psycho-narration is a term introduced by Dorrit Cohn as a narrative device that renders fictive characters' consciousness in third-person contexts, and will be further defined and explained in the first chapter.

For the discussion and analysis of the narrative structure, I have made use of narrative theory from Jakob Lothe's *Narrative in Fiction and Film*, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's *Narrative Fiction*, Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse*, and Dorrit Cohn's *Transparent Minds*. My emphasis has been on interpreting how the narrative structure reflects the shattered state of the characters where particularly terminology in relation to the chronology of the text, repetition, and the perception of time have been central to my analysis.

Previous works on Ondaatje have paid attention to the narrative structure of the text, often as an underlying current of the story rather than as an object of study in itself. Several of the theses submitted at the University of Oslo analyse the narrative technique to some extent, but with different approaches, depending on the theme of the discussion. Almásy's single possession after the accident maiming him for life, the copy of Herodotus' *The Histories* has been included in many of the previous analyses as a reflection of the fragmented narrative of

the novel. I have, however, chosen to exclude the “commonplace” book from my analysis, both because it has been thoroughly discussed before, and because I have felt that my study would not suffer from leaving it out.

In an essay on *The English Patient* Jan Kjærstad, the Norwegian author, claims, rather casually in my view, that the non-linearity of the narrative is almost conventional and leaves it at that. Others, however, have focused on the memories narrated in the analepses and the role these play in the characters’ attempts to make sense of their wartime experiences. Amy Novak and Carrie Dawson have both pointed to the way in which the fragmented narrative reflects trauma in the characters:

Trauma, writes Cathy Caruth, is “the response to an unexpected or overwhelmingly violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena.” (Dawson 51)

By analysing form and content in greater detail, I hope to show how the perception of time and the shifts in use between past and present tense create what I would claim is a rendering of alienated, damaged identities with mimetic qualities despite the non-realistic narrative. As with an impressionistic painting, Ondaatje’s way of writing at its best becomes a more vivid representation of the real world than does a minute, seemingly realistic copy, increasing our possibility to take part in the experience of the work of art. I also hope to define more closely what narrative techniques are used to create an overall sense of fragmentation in the characters.

The second chapter is entitled “The Time Around Scars: Scars as a Narrative Technique to Unmake and Remake Identity” an allusion to a poem in *The Dainty Monsters*, Ondaatje’s debut volume from 1967. By making this link to previous works by the author, I wish to point to the fact that scars are a recurring image in his work. The main object of the chapter, however, is to investigate further in what manner the physical scars fit into my analysis of how damaged identities are presented in the novel. Scars as an image have clear

connotations in our culture and literature. They function as a means to recognise somebody otherwise unfamiliar, to be recognised by, they imply permanent, irrevocable change, and they tell stories of how they were received. All these factors are included in the analysis of how the scars in *The English Patient* work; to show that they represent change within the characters, as well as on their bodies. At the same time, as I have stated above, scars are healed wounds. Thus, it is possible to believe that a permanently changed experience of self is not the same as a damaged self.

The theoretical basis for this chapter has been diverse. The introduction to Unni Langås' *Den litterære kroppen* has been a good overview of the history of the human body in the arts. Her discussion of the link between body and identity has provided me with some useful approaches to my analysis of scars in *The English Patient*. From Elaine Scarry's study *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, the term "unmaking" has been particularly helpful in describing the characters' response to the physical and emotional damage they suffer. Their identities, unmade by the war, are tentatively remade in the healing process reflected by the scars. Although Scarry links the human body closely to the unmaking of nations, I have found her study useful to the analysis of alienation and "unmaking" of the individual in Ondaatje's novel. Peter Brooks places identification through physical scars in a literary context by referring to Odysseus, recognised due to his scarred thigh by his nurse on his return home after years abroad. I have borrowed two key terms, "caught motion" and "caught memory" from Sam Solecki, a critic of Ondaatje's work, and editor of the collection of reviews and essays *Spider Blues*. Discussing *The Dainty Monsters*, Solecki argues that the scars in the poems represent caught motion and caught memory. I have found these terms valuable in my analysis.

Previously, several other critics of Ondaatje have commented on the physical scars and marks. Almásy's unrecognisable body with its possibilities to act as a catalyst for the

other characters' attempts to reconstruct themselves after the war has been commented on by Stephen Scobie, who shows that Almásy has become "all scar, all mark. And is thus himself unreadable. Or else, perhaps, multiply readable" (97). Referring to an unpublished seminar paper by Richard Van Oort, Scobie goes on to suggest that Almásy's "anonymity, and his (un)readability, make him the perfect blank screen onto which the other characters can project their own devious passions" (97-8). Mita Banerjee, comments on this narrative possibility in Almásy's mutilated body as well. I have used these ideas in my analysis of how Almásy's scars relate to the other characters and their need to recreate themselves. Thus, characters not visibly marked themselves are included in the analysis of the effects of the physical scars through their relation to Almásy. Birgitta Johansson links her analysis of scars and marks in *The English Patient* and other works by the same author more specifically to the pleasure and pain in human relationships: "Ondaatje's themes of alienation, scars, and fragments. . . . discuss the paradoxical qualities in relationships and family connections" (69). She interprets the scars in Ondaatje's work as a whole as impressions of love and lived life. What she does not discuss, and which I hope to show, is how the scars and marks reflect interior struggle within the individual character.

"I Want to Come Home: Loss of Faith in Home and Nation" is the title of the third and last main chapter. Taken from a letter written by the character Hana to her stepmother Clara at the very end of the novel, coinciding with the end of the war, it suggests that the theme of this chapter is focused on the human identity in relation to the concept "home." The damage to the characters' identities has led each of them to question the possibilities of "home." As I explain in the opening of the chapter, I use "home" and "nation" interchangeably. The characters Kip and Hana long to go back to their home/nation/culture. They long for the comfort, safety, and unity of belonging in a cultural context which defines and explains them. Their ruined faith in such unity does not prevent their yearning. All of the characters have a different approach to

the struggle of seeking a place to belong, but not finding it. Almásy voices hostility towards nations, his yearning being towards the desert which seems to serve as a spiritual home to him, while Caravaggio is the least visible character in this analysis, being the least specific in his longing for a return home. Included in this analysis are also the implications of mapping and naming, themes closely linked to the definition of belonging, as well as the exercising of power over others.

Of the three main chapters, this is the chapter most strongly connected to postcolonial theory. In order to discuss concepts like nation, culture, and home it is necessary to employ some of the vast amount of theories developed in this field, both generally, and on *The English Patient* specifically. Edward Said, Stuart Hall, Robert J. C. Young, and Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin have provided a general foundation for my analysis and discussion of how the characters are influenced by their loss of faith in home, the point of origin, and the cultural identity in which they ought to belong. The experience of alienation is thoroughly discussed by both Said in *Reflections on Exile* and Hall in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.” Said’s *Orientalism*, his extensive work on the binary opposition between the Orient and the Occident as created, developed, and preserved by the colonial powers has laid the ground for the terminology in which it is possible to talk about “the Other” as a person or culture subject to Western colonisation and oppression. As a rule, critics of Ondaatje have emphasised Kirpal Singh’s status as the Other, whereas Almásy is seen as a representative of the colonialist, a white, male aristocrat. They are both seen in relation to each other and individually. The ruined villa sheltering the characters is by several critics interpreted as a symbol of the failure of Western civilisation. This view is taken by for instance Nicholas B. Dirks and Johan Schimanski. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is also seen as a moment of truth in which all the suggestions of postcolonial themes culminate. Mapping and naming, which I also include in my analysis, are two significant themes discussed by various

critics. D. Mark Simpson and Marilyn A. Papayanis pay attention to this colonial practice. Mainly Almásy's role in the colonial enterprise is established through his desert expeditions, linking him firmly to the Western culture of defining borders, despite his declared desire to rid himself of these marks of culture and nation.

Annick Hillger, Carrie Dawson and Banerjee approach their discussion of *The English Patient* from a specifically national point of view. The loss of faith in national identity and the problems of returning are thoroughly discussed from various angles. Hillger emphasises the specific Canadian context, arguing that Ondaatje's novel offers an alternative reading which challenges the Canadian use of Odysseus' homecoming as an image of the return home, that is, to a national identity. Banerjee on the other hand, takes a more general turn, arguing that:

Through the war, Hana, Caravaggio, Kip and Almásy have been unhomed, severed from their native countries. At this juncture, they start querying the very nature of received boundaries and concepts. The solace of human relationships survives where political concepts have been deprived of significance. (68)

Both Hillger and Dawson interpret Hana's performance of the French National anthem as a crucial event in this discussion. In a sad and exhausted way, the singer unconsciously mocks the contents of the song because she no longer believes in the words she sings.

For the inclusion of the Canadian context of national identity, I have made use of Eva Darias-Beautell and Hillger. Darias-Beautell discusses contemporary Canadian fiction in relation to postcolonialism as well as postmodernism. Traditionally, Canadian literature does not place itself within postcolonialism. Darias-Beautell argues that:

[G]iven the Canadian emphasis on national identity and the great number of texts that touch upon (the myth of a) national unity – paradoxically based on the simultaneous affirmation of multiculturalism (in the form of the mosaic structure) and bilingualism – a discussion of the notion of nation as a cultural construct, and one intimately linked to the colonial enterprise, seems paramount. (120)

The definition of postcolonial literature from *The Empire Writes Back* quoted in the first paragraph of this introduction supports the inclusion of Canadian literature and its search for

national identity in postcolonialism. Ondaatje, however, is normally included as one of Canada's postcolonial authors because of his Third World background.

Despite the frequent postcolonial approach to Ondaatje's work, not all critics are convinced by this way of approaching such themes. In 1985 Arun Mukherjee analysed the author's poetry and his autobiographical novel *Running in the Family*, questioning how Ondaatje "managed to remain silent about his experience of displacement and otherness in Canada," and she went on to claim that there is "no trauma of uprooting evident in his poetry; nor is there a need for redefinition in a new context; the subjects that preoccupy so many immigrant writers" (50-1). What she particularly disliked about *Running in the Family*, in which the author, with his wife and children, travels back to Sri Lanka in search of his roots, was Ondaatje's lack of attention to his own privileged background in the colonial hierarchy. While being an engaging portrait of an eccentric family, pieced together by poems, pictures, longer passages of coherent narrative, episodic in its structure like his other fiction, it avoided the discussion of politics. The disappointment Mukherjee voiced, though, seems to me to express an unfair expectation of what a writer with his background should write about.

Not yet published, and thus not reviewed as Mukherjee criticised the author for not performing his duty as an author with Third World background, *The English Patient*, can also be described as being in no way political in its ambition. Thus, it might be criticised on the same terms. As Hilary Mantel claimed in 1993:

Ondaatje wins all (well, some) admiration as he slips from the grasp of literary criticism. He wins none (at least from me) when he sneaks from responsibility – as a storyteller, as a thinker, one who cleaves always to what is private, hidden, ambiguous; who slips away from statement. This is a hard thing to say, because in Ondaatje's books there is the powerful pulse of human sympathy, a pull toward benevolence. Pulse, pull – it's not enough. Sometimes ambivalence is immoral. When souls burn, the quietist stinks with the rest. (23)

Evidently far more positive towards Michael Ondaatje, Douglas Barbour admits to the author's disinterest in taking political stands:

Ondaatje has tended to resist overt politicalization of his texts, and his texts have tended to resist the usual forms of political exploration. Yet, because of his choice of subjects, they also refuse to become truly apolitical. . . . Nevertheless, he does not ignore the political in his work; rather he seeks to place it in a human, fallible context, complicated by the force of powerful and contradictory emotions. (211)

Nonetheless, it seems that most literary critics are happy to explore the thematic possibilities in Ondaatje's work without being particularly disturbed by its apparent lack of political statements, concentrating rather on other aspects of his art.

A significant number of critics identify Michael Ondaatje as a "postmodern" writer.

This interpretation of his work is grounded amongst others in his play with genres, transgressing the boundaries between them to create new art. Again referring to Barbour:

By following his own desire to "start each new book with a new vocabulary, a new set of clothes," Ondaatje has consistently moved into new textual territory, traversing modes of late modernism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism in his continuing search for the new. (9)

Postmodernism has indeed some interesting approaches to the analysis of identity which I pursue in my thesis. As Christopher Butler points out:

What postmodern theory helps us to see is that we are all constituted in a broad range of subject positions, through which we move with more or less ease, so that all of us are combinations of class, race, ethnic, regional, generational, sexual, and gender positions. (56)

The consciousness of our dependence on the context in which we are raised and live is useful when attempting to identify the mechanisms governing our perception of self, and our actions in life and in fiction.

Linda Hutcheon places Ondaatje's work into historiographic metafiction. By this, she means "those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (5). This is obviously applicable also to *The English Patient*, which was not yet published at the time. Ondaatje does use historical characters, though with little attention to the real character behind the borrowed

name and vague framework. This applies particularly to one of the main characters, Almásy: “Count László Ede Almásy de Zsadány et Törökszentmiklós. . . . was born 22 August 1895 in the family castle. . . . and died in Salzburg 22 March 1951” (Tötösy de Zepetnek 117). Several other characters in the novel, particularly members of the desert expeditions, have borrowed their identities from real persons as well. Ondaatje says in “Acknowledgements” to the novel:

While some of the characters who appear in this book are based on historical figures, and while many of the areas described – such as the Gilf Kebir and its surrounding desert – exist, and were explored in the 1930s, it is important to stress that this story is a fiction and that the portraits of the characters who appear in it are fictional, as are some of the events and journeys. (305)

The shape of the acknowledgements suggests that *The English Patient* is not pure fiction. By openly admitting to his use of historical facts, Ondaatje blurs the boundaries between history and fiction. On this background, Hutcheon’s term historiographic metafiction applies to *The English Patient*, suggesting its status as a postmodern work. I will not be emphasising postmodernism in my reading of the novel, but simply refer to the theory as a possible way of understanding Ondaatje’s use of history, fragmented text, and intertextuality. Of these, the fragmented text will be focussed on in the analysis in the first chapter of my thesis.

The overall organisation of my thesis has fallen into place quite naturally. It seems inevitable that the thesis should open by offering an analysis of the framework provided by the narrative structure. This work of construction sets the premises for the development of the more detailed analysis of the scars, and the longing for unity. The narrative, although providing some outlines for the story told, is also marked by a lack of demarcation. To borrow Almásy’s words about the desert, I would say that it is easy to lose a sense of demarcation in the *narrative*. Through the use of anachronies in the text, the sense of time is blurred. The effect I believe the narrative structure to have on the reader’s sense of the characters’ state of mind paves the way for a detailed analysis of two other expressions of destruction resulting in fragmentation and alienation; scars and homesickness.

What I hope to be able to show in the course of my thesis is how the ever present human search for unity and belonging is displayed in *The English Patient* through the narrative structure, through imagery and thematics. The novel offers a particularly good opportunity to investigate problematic sides to how identity is perceived, and how we often have to accept that our ideal of life may be impossible to achieve. Few people are never troubled by the inconsistencies of their lives, and I do believe that most people recognise such struggles, including the wish to be in harmony with one's own self. Ondaatje's novel offers a range of such topics to discuss, making the story relevant also to people with no experience of trauma or war. Whether the scale be small or large, dramatic or common, it is part of the human experience sometimes to feel out of place, severed, and alienated from the rest of the world, and even from ourselves.

1

A Labyrinthine Narrative: Narrative Structure and Wounded Identity

“I don’t believe stories are told from A to Z anymore; or, if they are, they become very ponderous.”

Ondaatje to Wachtel (1994)

As *The English Patient* was about to be published, Douglas Barbour was publishing *Michael Ondaatje*, a combined biography and examination of Ondaatje’s collected works up to that point. In the afterword, entitled “The English Patient,” Barbour made the following comment: “As the complexly ordered fragments of the novel accumulate, their pasts, their present, and their possible futures intertwine in an intricate collage that can best be described as labyrinthine” (207). The description of the narrative as labyrinthine is suggestive of the possibilities of interpretation lying in the peculiar narrative of the novel. My particular interest is to investigate how the narrative structure may contribute to creating the sense of loss, fragmentation, and unstable identities in the characters of the novel.

In the introduction to *Narrative in Fiction and Film*, Jakob Lothe comments on the relationship between people and the need for narrative patterns:

Human beings have a deep-seated need to establish narrative patterns, something that is again connected with the tendency we have to see life

as a story – a temporally limited line of development from beginning to end, from birth to death, in which we like to find each stage meaningful and to justify the choices we make. (3)

The discourse, though, is not necessarily structured chronologically. In *The English Patient*, the chronology is constantly challenged by the characters' memories, revealed to the reader through analepses of various durations, often as fragments only. Such anachronies are crucial in attempting to explain how the narrative structure works in relation to the characters' sense of self. The term "anachronies" is introduced by Gerard Genette in *Narrative Discourse* to describe the discrepancy, which frequently occurs between another of his terms, "first narrative," or the "main story," and how the discourse, the actual text in front of us, is organised. I will employ Genette's terminology in my analysis to explain both the mechanisms of the narrative structure and its effects. Equally, Dorrit Cohn's previously mentioned *Transparent Minds* is a useful tool for the discussion of how the characters' consciousness is revealed. Into the discussion about how the sense of time is experienced, I will include some reference to the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur.

Returning to the narrative structure, I will discuss the point on chronology further.

Ondaatje states:

I don't believe stories are told from A to Z anymore; or, if they are, they become very ponderous. . . . We discover stories in a different way. I discover something about you after knowing you X number of years, and then after thirty years I will find out some other changes that occurred five years earlier. That sense of discovery, of memory, and how we reveal ourselves to each other – none of that is chronological. (Wachtel 258)

A narrative, then, may contain flashbacks, or analepses of various kinds, and prolepses pointing toward future events. This is true of *The English Patient*, as the first narrative is frequently broken up by an extensive use of analepses, prolepses, and by constant shifts in the narrative voice between third person narrative and first person narrative. There is also an

irregular change between the use of past and present tense in the first narrative, that is, there is no consistent pattern in the novel as to the use of past or present tense. The characters and their everyday occupations may be observed by the narrator through the use of the past tense and then a sudden shift to the present tense. The effect of these shifts seems to me to be a blurring of borders between the experience of past and present events. The present tense often slides into an analepsis, thus emphasising how memories of the past exist immediately below the surface of the characters' consciousness. Ondaatje's statement in the interview further points to the realistic quality of an anachronistic narrative. I believe this realistic portrayal of experience and time creates an interesting parallel for our reading. The anachronies offer a realistic portrayal of the characters' fragmented sense of self, which has been destroyed by traumatic experiences. Each character of the novel has to try to come to terms with this trauma in the course of the novel, in order to be able to return to society after the war.

In the introduction, I established the first narrative as the events taking place in the Villa San Girolamo at the end of World War II. Hana, Almásy, Caravaggio, and Kip, the four main characters, live together in this partly destroyed villa in North Italy from roughly April 1945 to August 1945 (*EP* 13, 284). Randi Stangebye argues for an inclusion of Katharine Clifton as a fifth main character in the novel, her argument being that Katharine's consciousness, as well as that of the four characters living in the Italian villa is revealed through the use of psycho-narration, the effects of which will be discussed later in this chapter. Even if this is the case, and even though Katharine undoubtedly occupies a significant position in the story, I disagree with Stangebye as to allowing her the status of a main character. Her presence is only made possible through Almásy's memory of his previous life in Cairo and the Libyan Desert in the 1930s. Thus, she is really not a main character in her own right. A sign of her importance, however, is the fact that one of the chapters is entitled "Katharine." She is the only character whose name appears in a chapter heading. While not

granting her status as a main character, I will place her in the position as the main character of Almásy's memory. Her status as his lover determines many of his actions, leading towards the end of his life in the ruined Italian villa.

Genette's terms "order," "duration," and "frequency" are useful for the analysis of how readers experience time in the text. Simultaneously, the terminology provides tools with which to discuss the novel's narrative structure in relation to the fragmented identities of the characters, and to how the perception of time influences them. An important fact to bear in mind is that:

The temporality of written narrative is to some extent conditional or instrumental; produced in time, like everything else, written narrative exists in space and as space, and the time needed for "consuming" it is the time needed for *crossing* or *traversing* it, like a road or a field. The narrative text, like every other text, has no other temporality than what it borrows, metonymically, from its own reading. (Genette 34)

This reminder makes clear that time in *The English Patient* is a construct. As we read, we realise that on the pages, the fictional time-span is only a perception created by the narrative.

In *Narrative Fiction*, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan argues that time is one of the most basic categories of human experience, but considering time in relation to a text, she also states the following: "Strictly speaking, it is a spatial, not a temporal, dimension. The narrative text has no other temporality than the one it metonymically derives from the process of its reading" (44). Even so, she acknowledges the fact that as long as its "pseudo" nature is remembered, time may be a useful construct in the study of story-text relations. Bearing in mind these clarifications of the possibility of discussing time in the text, I will discuss how the depiction of time in *The English Patient* is relevant to an analysis of identity.

Including the analepses and prolepses, the narrative of *The English Patient* creates a sense of time, spanning from 1930 in Egypt and the Libyan Desert to post-war India and Canada in the late 1950s. There are also brief glimpses beyond this point, as both Hana, Kip, and Almásy relate or think about events at earlier points in their lives. These are not specified

by references to certain years, though. Revealing Hana's age to be thirty-four on the second to last page of the novel is the source of the calculation of the time-span. The first narrative comprises just a few months in 1945, at the very end of the Second World War. To create the sense of a significantly longer time span, the analepses are central. The analepses are narrated in third-person (often, but not always, employing psycho-narration to reveal consciousness), first-person, and through dialogue.

I will claim that the narrative of *The English Patient* is characterised by the unsaid as well as by anachronies. The gaps in information prevent the reader from forming a "whole" picture of each of the characters unless she is willing to undertake the task of filling the gaps by using her own imagination, as Wolfgang Iser advocates in his article "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach." Both the first narrative and the analepses reveal the characters' past and present selves only in fragments. The effect of this technique is that, rather than filling in missing information as to who they are, the analepses contribute to a sense of bewilderment shared by the characters and the readers alike, creating a sense of alienation in the characters. The pieces of their lives disguised from the reader are out of reach for the characters too, for whom the information left out is both real and disturbing. The information given is not of a nature to enable the reader to form a clear picture of either the characters or their pasts, and much, then, rests on the reader's willingness to engage in the game of piecing together an incomplete picture. Amy Novak expresses this well: "[T]he splinters of memory that make up the narrative of *The English Patient* and the fragments of images and sentences that compose these memories do not provide a clearly defined representation of the past" (207).

There are at least two ways in which to interpret the anachronistic narrative of *The English Patient*. Firstly, as Ondaatje points out above, it is a realistic trait of human beings that we think in fragments about our pasts and presents intermingled. In the course of a day,

the mind wanders, sometimes consciously, at other times subconsciously in the space of our memory. Secondly, linking our perception of time to our perception of self, the narrative of *The English Patient* may serve to underline the fragmentation and bewilderment suffered by the characters in the aftermath of war. In this chapter I choose to focus on the latter, but I will underline that these views are not mutually exclusive. They can both be applied simultaneously.

Novak argues that the narrative of Ondaatje's novel is a narrative of trauma, pointing to the characters' struggle to piece together their memories to make sense of their traumatic experiences:

Research on trauma offers a theory of narrative that explains why the fragments of memory that make up the text of *The English Patient* are unable to encounter and pin down the past they seek to illuminate. The narrative stages the struggle to bring forth and give meaning to that which escapes our ability to know and comprehend. (213)

Therefore, the story of each character is presented in a fragmented and labyrinthine manner.

The trauma, the way I see it, is that the characters are no longer able to see themselves as having whole identities. Their wartime experiences have unsettled their sense of self, and their fragmented memories are a sign of their struggle to reassemble the pieces: the narrative structure emphasising this struggle by not only depicting the characters' bewilderment, but also denying the satisfaction of creating a whole picture for the readers.

Hana's and Caravaggio's pasts, as well as Almásy's, appear mainly in dialogue, although the form of these dialogues varies. Hana and Caravaggio engage in what can best be described as everyday conversation. Their prior knowledge of each other allows the conversation to take on an intimate quality. Caravaggio's avuncular feelings toward Hana allow him to introduce themes which she shrinks back from, notably her father's death and the loss of her child. The same mechanism applies to her approach to Caravaggio. She confronts him directly with both his severed thumbs and his morphine addiction.

Almásy's analepses or narrated memories are different, although they too appear in the course of conversation with the other characters. They go on in passages of various lengths, rarely interrupted by questions or comments from the homodiegetic narratee. The place of the narratee is at various times taken by Hana, Caravaggio, and Kip. Increasingly, however, Caravaggio becomes the most important of the narratees. It seems, eventually, that structurally the two characters, Almásy and Caravaggio, become mutually dependant on each other. This is supported by the fact that when their function in the text is ended, they vanish, phantom-like, into thin air. Ondaatje himself comments on the characters' picture of their role in the others' lives thus: "I think everyone thinks they're healing everybody else, in some way, but they're all wounded" (Wachtel 253). Accepting this statement, it seems that the characters choose to emphasise their image of themselves in the more desirable position of a helper rather than a person in need of help.

In *The English Patient* as in much other literature, prolepses appear with less frequency than analepses. Their occasional appearance points toward the long-term effects of the characters' stay in the Villa San Girolamo. The first prolepsis appear very early in the discourse: "He whispers again, dragging the listening heart of the young nurse beside him to wherever his mind is, into that well of memory he kept plunging into during those months before he died" (4). He will certainly die. The suspense lies in what will happen up to that point, and how it will happen. As the story reaches this point, Almásy's death is only alluded to, not narrated explicitly. The satisfaction of knowing how, or even *if*, is not granted. Awake in the night, he seems to gradually disappear from the text:

He stays awake in any case this night, to see if the figure moves towards him. Ignoring the tablet that brings painlessness, he will remain awake till the light dies out and the smell of candle smoke drifts into his room and into the girl's room farther down the hall. If the figure turns around there will be paint on his back, where he slammed in grief against the mural of trees. When the candle dies out he will be able to see this. His hand reaches out slowly and touches his book and returns to his dark chest. Nothing else moves in the room. (298)

It does not say for certain that Almásy dies at this point, but this is the last account of him. What follows next is a breach in the coherence of the text, or blank space on the page, effectively illustrating an analepsis of many years as the first narrative briefly reveals the present state of Kip and Hana some time in the 1950s.

Another prolepsis reveals how Hana, in retrospect, will interpret her relationship to Kip: “Later she will realize he never allowed himself to be beholden to her, or her to him” (128). Caravaggio remembers Kip well enough to almost mistake another Indian for him after the war, in Toronto: “Caravaggio will remember the slide. He could walk away, never see him again, and he would never forget him. Years from now on a Toronto street Caravaggio will get out of a taxi and hold the door open for an East Indian who is about to get into it, and he will think of Kip then” (208). In a prolepsis within an analepsis where Kip tells Hana about his brother, the rebellious brother foresees that Kip will lose his faith in the English:

“Ah, but my brother thinks me a fool for trusting the English.” He turns to her, sunlight in his eyes. “One day, he says, I will open my eyes. Asia is still not a free continent, and he is appalled at how we throw ourselves into English wars. It is a battle of opinion we have always had. ‘One day you will open your eyes,’ my brother keeps saying.” (217)

At a later point in the novel, this prophecy is fulfilled as the atomic bombs are dropped on Japan in August 1945. Thus, the prolepsis both points towards events taking place within the story, and it points to the future outside of the first narrative. At the same time it underlines how the characters are affected by their experiences together many years after the end of the war. Their identities are still to a large extent linked to the fragmentation experienced during the war.

The very last pages of the last chapter make a formidable leap in story-time, several years after the end of the first narrative, this being the best example of an ellipsis in the novel. This point leads me to comment on duration in *The English Patient*. Genette defines four narrative movements which create variation in the pace of a story:

These four basic forms of narrative movement, that we will hereafter call the four narrative *movements*, are the two extremes that I have just mentioned (*ellipsis* and descriptive *pause*) and two intermediaries: *scene*, most often in dialogue, which. . . . realizes conventionally the equality of time between narrative and story; and what English-language critics call *summary* – a form with variable tempo. . . . which with great flexibility of pace covers the entire range, included between scene and ellipsis. (94)

The previously mentioned ellipsis removes all information about what has happened between the end of the war in 1945, and the years after. Thus, it allows the story to end, not with the characters still temporarily staying in Italy, but having returned to their homelands, without having to relate in detail how their post-war lives have been so far. The last fragment of the first narrative shows how both Hana and Kip share emotional bonds to their mutual past, as well as a sense of alienation from the place assumed to be their homes. Kip is reunited with his Indian cultural background, but appearing detached from his present life, and Hana is alienated from her peers in post-war Canada.

The duration of the first narrative varies mainly between scene and summary. This allows the possibility to view the characters from different angles, sometimes from the angle of the heterodiegetic narrator, sometimes from the psycho-narrated consciousness of the other characters, and sometimes as implicit self-commentary through the dialogues. The shift in tempo gives more immediacy to the first narrative. All the scenes are found in a number of lengthy dialogues between the characters in their present time in Italy. The summaries are used alternately in the first narrative and the analepses, the most substantial parts being analepses particularly relating to Kip's life prior to being billeted in the Villa San Girolamo. The choice of summary to describe Kip's past has by many critics been interpreted as a sign of his status as a colonial subject, marginalised through denying him a voice. Novak, particularly, comments on this: "[T]he largest portions of Kip's memories, confined by the logic of Colonial history, remain primarily in the third person" (221). The summaries of Kip's near past as a sapper in training thus covers a story-time of months and weeks, allowing for a

larger coherent portion of his past to be known to the reader, while at the same time seemingly creating a distance to his character compared to the immediacy of the dialogues between Hana and Caravaggio. I am not wholly convinced by Novak's claim, a point I will return to in the last chapter of this thesis.

Unlike Kip, Hana and Caravaggio are frequently engaged in scenes in the form of dialogues. These, naturally, create a sense of presence. They are always part of the first narrative as they take place during the time when the characters are living in the villa together, their duration equalling the length of the conversation. The subject of these dialogues, however, are mainly the past, both the immediate past during the war, but also their common past in Canada years before the war. Thus, the scenes achieve a complex effect by both relating in fragments the characters' attempts to restore their identities after the war, trying to remember who they have been, and by creating an intimacy between the reader of the novel and the characters revealing their grief and loss.

The dialogues in which Almásy engages often start as scenes, and move gradually toward summary which, as Genette points out, can be of variable tempo. The summaries in the first narrative, and most of the analepses relating to Kip, move at a consistent pace. It is, however, impossible to decide on a narrative rhythm which can be taken to be the norm in this novel. Towards the end of the novel, as Caravaggio feeds Almásy morphine to force him to go on telling his story, the summaries change pace and become almost hectic. Precisely the constant changes in duration, as well as the changes in narrator and focalisation are important factors in making up the diversity through which the physical and emotional damage of the characters are revealed.

Different variants of summary allow for the many shifts in tempo in *The English Patient*. The deliberate use of these temporal changes is linked to the content of the narrative, whether they focus on the everyday life in and around the villa, or whether they are part of

analepses. Each different pace creates a different mood in the narrative, acquainting the characters with each other and themselves in longer and shorter passages. One example is how the increasingly hectic quality of the narrative up to the point of revealing Almásy's "true" identity before he dies also increases the suspense and a feeling that there is little time left and that the end is near. The suspense, however, is not fulfilled by a spectacular revelation of fraud and true identity. It culminates in Caravaggio's resignation of his own view to the fact that Almásy's true identity is insignificant. This is an example of how Ondaatje plays with the reader's expectation of closure. Instead of closure, the concept of identity is left open and floating.

In the course of the first narrative of *The English Patient*, certain phrases and events are repeated. Genette reminds us that the repetitions and their frequency are a mental construction: "what we will name here 'identical events' or 'recurrence of the same event' is a series of several similar events *considered only in terms of their resemblance*" (113). Further, he divides the various forms of narrative repetition into singulative, repetitive, and iterative, the norm being the singulative; what happens once is told once. Analysing frequency shows that the norm is modified in many degrees, allowing for things that have happened many times to be told once, or that a thing that has only happened once is told several times.

Although the first narrative stays with the rule of the singulative narrative as the norm for the most part, it deviates from the established course on several occasions, underlining the impact of events and emotions by repetitive narration. Rimmon-Kenan comments that: "Strictly speaking, no event is repeatable in all respects, nor is a repeated segment of the text quite the same, since its new location puts it in a different context which necessarily changes its meaning" (57). Thus, although the repetitive narrative points back to an event from various angles always slightly different in time and place, it serves to underline and emphasise the importance of the event it keeps returning to. In short, repetition signals importance. The

repeated narrative of Hana's decision to stay as the rest of the hospital moves on to a safer location underlines its significance to the development of the story on several levels. It shows her personal plight and the fact that the whole narrative is based on her decision to stay.

There is clearly a significant difference between the iterative narration of an every day activity, which naturally falls into the pace of each day, and the repeated narration of a single event. The narration of everyday activities lends the first narrative a calmness with a sense of routine in stark contrast to the inner turmoil of the characters' minds, for instance: "Every four days she washes his black body" (3). Hana's habit of making notes in the library books on thoughts and events important to her is part of the singulative narrative, as each time it is narrated it is a new recording, although the actual writings resemble each other: "She opens *The Last of the Mohicans* to the blank page at the back and begins to write in it" (61); "She pulls down the copy of *Kim* from the library shelf and, standing against the piano, begins to write into the flyleaf in its last pages" (118); and "She walks in front of the shelves in the library, eyes closed, and at random pulls out a book. She finds a clearing between two sections in a book of poetry and begins to write there" (209). Her notes in the books are brief thoughts on Caravaggio and Kip, and short summaries of things Kip has told her of India. By jotting them down, replacing the books back into anonymity, she appears to have paid sufficient attention to the thoughts and ideas which have occupied her mind, and she can leave them inside the book on the shelf.

The analepses are often examples of the repetitive narrative. All the characters return to particularly important moments in their lives several times, either in thought or in speech. Hana's decision to stay behind when the rest of the hospital moves is one such moment: "She and the Englishman had insisted on remaining behind when the other nurses and patients moved to a safer location in the south" (13); "But the nurse and the patient had refused to leave" (28); "Then, during the celebrations of some local victory, somewhat plaintive in this

hill town, she had said she was not going back to Florence or Rome or any other hospital, her war was over” (51). Her decision is emphasised through psycho-narration, and through the observation of others. Closely linked to her decision is the repeated reference to the violence and death surrounding the hospital and the nurses. This repetition contributes to a sense of endless suffering and meaninglessness culminating in Hana’s decision to quit.

Equally, her dealing with the aborted child and the death of her father are events in the past repeatedly narrated from various angles, here from a conversation with Caravaggio some time after his joining her in the villa:

“I lost the child. I mean, I had to lose it. The father was already dead. There was a war.”

“Were you in Italy?”

“In Sicily, about the time this happened. All through the time we came up the Adriatic behind the troops I thought of it. I had continued conversations with the child. I worked very hard in the hospitals and retreated from everybody around me. Except the child, who I shared everything with. In my head. I was talking to him while I bathed and nursed patients. I was a little crazy.”

“And then you father died.” (82)

Later, she is speculating to herself: “Did her father struggle into his death or die calm?” (90), and then: “She cannot bear to talk of or even acknowledge the death of Patrick” (92). Another example is narrated from Kip’s point of view: “He knows the depth of darkness in her, her loss of a child and of faith. He is always coaxing her from the edge of her fields of sadness. A child lost. A father lost” (271). The examples above are crucial events her life. By frequently narrating them, their importance to Hana is underlined even more strongly, contributing to the realisation of how shattered she is by what has happened to her. Her breakdown is closely linked to her loss of father, lover, child, and faith. The repetition ensures a reminder of her shattered self throughout the novel.

This kind of repetition applies to all the characters, Almásy being the most obvious example. His act of telling what happened to him in the plane crash, and subsequently the events which initially caused the accident, is repetitive in itself as he several times returns to it

at his own initiative. The first encounter with the accident comes at an early point in the novel: “I fell burning into the desert. . . . I was perhaps the first one to stand up alive out of a burning machine” (5). A little later: “When I came out of the air and crashed into the desert. . . .” (18). The accident, its reasons and effects, is resumed in the chapter called “A Buried Plane” in which Caravaggio is interrogating Almásy about his past. The accidents in 1939 and in 1942 are mutually dependent on each other, and the repetition of the events are closely linked. The repetition of one of them, regularly leads to the other: ““When you crashed in the desert – where were you flying from?”” (167). Almásy has returned to collect the now dead Katharine from the Cave of Swimmers, carrying her in his arms: “We moved like this towards the northeast gully, where the plane was buried” (171).

On the same page, the first accident, the reason why Katharine was left in the desert, is mentioned: ““She had been injured. In 1939. Her husband had crashed his plane. It had been planned as a suicide-murder by her husband that would involve all three of us” (171). He returns to the plane crash a few pages on: “And three years later, in 1942, I walked with her towards the buried plane, carrying her body as if it was the armour of a knight” (174). A more detailed account of the accident follows on the next page:

He slips into the harness of the oil-wet parachute and pivots upside down, breaking free of glass, wind flinging his body back. Then his legs are free of everything, and he is in the air, bright, not knowing why he is bright until he realizes he is on fire. (175)

Further on in the narrative he returns to first the accident, in 1939:

The Moth came skimming over the plateau. I was waving the blue tarpaulin. Clifton dropped altitude and roared over me, so low the acacia shrubs lost their leaves. The plane veered to the left and circled, and sighting me again realigned itself and came straight towards me. Fifty yards away from me it suddenly tilted and crashed.” (256)

The last repetition of the event comes towards the end of the novel, not long before Almásy dies: “I carried Katharine Clifton into the desert, where there is the communal book of moonlight. We were among the rumour of wells. In the palace of winds” (261).

The accidents' structural significance to the novel is obvious. As much as Hana's decision to stay in the villa, they are absolutely necessary to the plot. Without them, there would be no enigmatic patient for Hana to care for. The frequency of their appearance in the text is a reminder of their importance, as much as the repetition of Hana's tragic loss is an underlining of her mental state. And each time, they are narrated differently, sometimes in third person, sometimes in first person, sometimes in the past tense, other times in the present tense. These various angles, points of view, and grammatical tenses in which these events are narrated are a significant quality in creating the sense of time and sense of self in *The English Patient*. The constant shifts evoke the confused minds of the characters as they exist in a mental space where the past is as real and as vivid as the present.

The parts of the story narrated in the present tense have a feeling of immediacy, of being in the middle of what happens, at the time of the events. This change in the verbal tense is present throughout the novel, at an irregular pace. By "irregular pace," I mean that there is no consistency as to when the temporality changes occur. An example of this is the analepses narrating the events leading towards Caravaggio's arrest and subsequent loss of thumbs alternating between the past and the present tense:

He *leaves* the party in a car. It *crunches* over the slowly curving gravel path leading out of the grounds, the automobile purring, serene as ink within the summer night. For the rest of the evening during the Villa Cosima gathering he *had been* looking at the photographer, spinning his body away whenever she *lifted* the camera to photograph in his direction. Now that he *knows* of its existence he can avoid it. He *moves* into the range of her dialogue. . . . (36, my italics)

This passage shows the shift in tense within a few sentences. The rest of the section is told in the present tense, whereas the next passage, continuing the analepsis, is again narrated in the past tense: "Finding her room had been more difficult. He had entered the villa and silently passed the half-lit seventeenth-century murals along the corridors" (37). The effect of this narrative is an underlining of Caravaggio's sense of presence in the immediate past. The

events he relates led directly to the amputation of his thumbs, and thus, the past events are at all times part of his present suffering. I believe this effect to be the most important achievement of this type of shift in verbal tenses.

Another variant is the change of tense where one expects consistency over time. The opening of the novel is a good example of this. Over the first four pages, the narrative focuses on Hana and Almásy, both nameless and thus anonymous to the reader. The first section begins in the present tense: “She stands up in the garden where she has been working and looks into the distance” (3). The present tense places the reader right there with her, *in medias res*. The narrative goes on using the present tense as we are introduced to the daily routine: The nurse caring for her patient, the patient talking, telling her about his accident. She reads to him, and then, there is an unexpected shift in time:

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 the other nurses before they had all transferred out gradually, the war moving on, the war almost over. (6-7)

All of a sudden, the life in the villa seems to be a thing of the past, but at the same time, Hana’s consciousness is strongly present through psycho-narration, blurring the line between the expectation of past and present.

The analepses narrating the sapper Kip’s past leading up to his arrival at the villa are, at least to begin with, told in the past tense, whereas his new life as part of the first narrative is in the present tense. This creates a more traditional distinction between Kip’s experiences in the past, and his present life in and around the villa. Some of his memories, however, are more acute, and remembering them, he thinks in the present tense:

She douces a lace handkerchief with the contents of a small bottle of eau de cologne and passes it to him. “Wipe your face with this. Lord Suffolk uses it to refresh himself” She begins a rambling story about how she met Lord Suffolk. Not a word about the bomb beside them. He had been slowing down, the way one, half asleep, continually rereads the same paragraph, trying to find a connection between the sentences. She has pulled him out of the vortex of the problem. She packs up her satchel

carefully, lays a hand on his right shoulder and returns to her position on the blanket above the Westbury horse. She leaves him some sunglasses, but he cannot see clearly enough through them so he lays them aside. Then he goes back to work. The scent of eau de cologne. He remembers he had smelled it once as a child. He had a fever and someone had brushed it onto his body. (202-3)

Narrating the memory of Miss Morden's helping hand in the present tense, long after she has been killed by a bomb shows the importance of the moment, and the impact of the care she shows, creating a circular memory to a childhood incident, triggered by the smell of the perfume.

Almásy is the only character in the novel narrating substantial parts of his story in the first person. These passages are mainly narrated in the past tense, as memories of the past. At times the past is narrated in the present tense. The present tense indicates a strong consciousness of the past suggesting that Almásy's mind is increasingly taking him back in time. Alternatively, he becomes so engaged by his memories at times that he feels himself to be on the spot once more. Unlike Kip, however, there seems to be no pattern indicating that the use of present tense refers to events of greater significance than the narrative in the past tense.

The overall implications of these constant shifts are in my opinion several, and they can be interpreted on various levels. The changing of tense reflects the interrupted state of mind of the characters. Neither the characters nor the reader are allowed to rest safely in one narrative mode. The slight confusion following each new variant of tense or focalisation together with the change of time and space offers only gradually increasing knowledge of each character and who they are. The emphasis through repetition, diversity of focalization, and tense, show how the characters have been damaged by their experiences, both physically and mentally. I believe that Ondaatje's narrative structure is particularly well suited to revealing this kind of damage and confusion.

Another level is the relationship between the perception of time and the construction of time. I find a quotation from the novel an interesting key to this reading:

The Villa San Girolamo, built to protect inhabitants from the flesh of the devil, had the look of a besieged fortress, the limbs of most of the statues blown off during the first days of shelling. There seemed little demarcation between the house and landscape, between damaged building and the burned and shelled remnants of the earth. (43)

The lack of visible boundaries between the villa and its surroundings reflects the novel's lack of boundaries in time. The narrative technique employed in the description of time, shows that the characters carry with them their past at all times in their present lives. The distance to past experiences is erased, memories appear and vanish again, and turning points in their lives are told several times, seen from various angles and perspectives. This effect is achieved through the many shifts in tense. I find it particularly interesting that despite these changes, the narrative manages to preserve the sense of chronology. Events remain in their natural order, even as the tenses change. Ondaatje is not dissolving time as a mental construct or as perceived reality. Rather, he actively uses the many variations in time to allow for the story and the characters to appear elusive and fragmented.

The Norwegian author Jan Kjørstad argues in an essay on *The English Patient* that there is nothing new about the often-commented on non-linearity of the narrative in this novel (39). He claims that this feature is almost conventional, and that Ondaatje's real achievement lies in the fact that he manages to keep the layers of the story separate, never sliding into each other. Whether new or not, the non-linearity of the narrative in this novel, combined with the mixing of verbal tenses has significance in its breaking down of the demarcations between past and present. Both blur the possibility of "reading" the characters, and at the same time give a realistic picture of the characters' experience of time, themselves, and their lives.

The effective use of time and the effacing of boundaries between the past and the present are in close relation to Ricoeur's concept of "human time," which he introduces in the

extensive, three volume work *Time and Narrative*. According to Ricoeur, we experience time in two different ways, chronologically (or cosmologically,) and phenomenologically. The phenomenological time is experienced in terms of the past, present and future, and “human time” is an integration of the cosmological and phenomenological perception, or experiencing of time.¹ Kim Atkins, in an article on Ricoeur, summarises an aspect of his analysis of time, which I find particularly helpful to describe the way the shifting verbal tenses work in *The English Patient*:

Dates and times can be disconnected from their denotative function; grammatical tenses can be changed, and changes in the tempo and duration of scenes create a temporality that is “lived” in the story that does not coincide with either the time of the world in which the story is read, nor the time that the unfolding events are said to depict.²

By rendering a blending of the expectations of linearity with the human experience of time on different levels at different times, Ondaatje presents an essentially realistic narrative in its depiction of time perception. The time experienced by the characters, then, is chronological, because they are all fully aware of where they are – and most of them of who they are supposed to be – at the same time as it is anachronistic, as they are simultaneously intensely aware of their memories, longings, and desires.

Through the analysis of the narrative so far, I have suggested the use of psycho-narration. This technique implies that the narrator knows his characters immensely well. A few instances in the novel, however, complicate this view. The narrator’s insight into the characters’ minds seems to vary, a couple of times showing explicit awareness of his limited knowledge: “How much she is in love with him or he with her we don’t know” (127). This statement on the narrator’s part refers to Hana’s and Kip’s developing relationship. At the

¹ Kim Atkins. “Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005).” *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Accessed March 27, 2007. <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/t/ricoeur.htm>>.

² Kim Atkins. “Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005).” *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Accessed March 27, 2007. <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/t/ricoeur.htm>>.

very end of the novel, he comments on his lacking insight into Hana: “She is a woman I don’t know well enough to hold in my wing, if writers have wings, to harbour for the rest of my life” (301). The implications of these two comments by the author/narrator are threefold. Firstly, it shows with all possible clarity that the narrator does not have unlimited access to the minds of his fictional characters. Secondly, it raises the awareness that this is indeed fiction. Thirdly, in my opinion, it contributes to the realism of the rendering of character in the novel. The fictional characters are presented as a realistic mixture of openness and enigmatic traits. They are allowed to hide parts of themselves from the narrator and the reader alike.

Although there are evident examples of the narrator’s admittance of failing to know the characters well enough, the most widely used technique employed to convey the characters’ consciousness in *The English Patient* is psycho-narration. This technique demands an extensive insight into the characters on the narrator’s part, and its particular benefits are in Cohn’s words:

Not only can it [psycho-narration] order and explain a character’s conscious thoughts better than the character himself, it can also effectively articulate a psychic life that remains un verbalized, penumbral, or obscure. Accordingly, psycho-narration often renders, in a narrator’s knowing words, what a character “knows,” without knowing how to put it into words. (46)

Another benefit is the “almost unlimited temporal flexibility” which allows the technique to, in variable length depending on the effect aimed at, summarise a character’s development over time, or to stretch moments of immediacy (34).

In *The English Patient*, the use of this technique follows the focalisation closely. As the narrator focuses on each character, psycho-narration reveals that character’s consciousness. Thus, the reader’s fragmentary knowledge of the characters consciousness follows closely the narration of everyday events, as well as memories of the past. One example of this occurs early in the story, revealing in part Hana’s mental state, the sensations of the moment, and her everyday existence in the villa:

The book lay on her lap. She realized that for more than five minutes she had been looking at the porousness of the paper, the crease at the corner of page 17 which someone had folded over as a mark. She brushed her hand over its skin. A scurry in her mind like a mouse in the ceiling, a moth on the night window. She looked down the hall, though there was no one else living there now, no one except the English patient and herself in the Villa San Girolamo. She had enough vegetables planted in the bombed-out orchard above the house for them to survive, a man coming now and then from the town with who she could trade soap and sheets and whatever there was left in this war hospital for other essentials. (7)

The combination of the movement of Hana's thoughts and the simple facts of life in the villa is a good example of how the narrator, through psycho-narration acquaints the reader with the inner life of the character as well as the milieu in which she moves.

Equally, Caravaggio's desperation as Hana and Kip play a prank on him, evoking memories of captivity and torture, is an example of how psycho-narration works in the text to reveal not merely the narrator's distanced observation of a reaction, but the interior struggle in the fictive character:

Caravaggio began to shake within the boy's grip, sweat already all over him, unable to struggle out. The glare of light from both lamps now on him. He somehow had to climb and crawl out of this terror. *Confess*. The girl was laughing. He needed to calm his voice before he spoke, but they were hardly listening, excited at their adventure. He worked his way out of the boy's loosening grip and, not saying a word, left the room. (223-4)

Focalised through Caravaggio, the narrator's use of psycho-narration gives a powerful glimpse into the fragility of the character's mental state, unnoticed by the playful youngsters, but real and horrifying to the older man. It is clear that Caravaggio's plight is narrated with intimate knowledge of his mind, not simply as an outside observation of his reaction.

In the dialogues in the text, the level of consciousness must be said to be very high, as the characters choose what they wish to share with the others and what they wish to leave out or disguise. All the characters engage in shorter or longer talks with each other. The contrast of this mode with psycho-narration is obviously the directness of the information provided through the dialogues. These "scenes" resemble pieces of a play acted out with the reader as

audience. As Manfred Pfister points out in *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, dialogue in drama needs to convey the kind of information about the characters which in novels are provided by the entire narrative. Even so, the dialogues in a novel have some of the same functions as they reveal what the characters think and feel about themselves and others both explicitly and implicitly in direct discourse. In *The English Patient*, these dialogues tend to take a turn back in time.

The dialogues involving Almásy must be commented on as a separate feature of the narrative. The length of the passages narrated by Almásy is what sets them apart significantly from an ordinary dialogue, thus making first-person narrative a useful term for these scenes. His consciousness is explicitly divided between the present time and the past. In the analepses, his memories take the form of a story consciously told, but tend to move beyond the point of being conscious of the present. His narrative seems at times to move him back into the past he is remembering. There is another awareness to Almásy's memories than to the other characters' memories. Their reflections about the past are integrated into their daily commitments. Almásy, confined to the bed, is left to live as much in the past as in the present.

In the fourth chapter, entitled "South Cairo 1930-1938," Almásy begins systematically to recall the events taking place in North Africa before the war. The homodiegetic narrator is aware of his audience. He is telling them a story, seemingly in chronological order as the title of the chapter suggests. Then comes a passage that differs from the rest of the narrative until now:

In the desert the most loved waters, like a lover's name, are carried blue in your hands, enter your throat. One swallows absence. A woman in Cairo curves the white length of her body up from the bed and leans out of the window into a rainstorm to allow her nakedness to receive it.

Hana leans forward, sensing his drifting, watching him, not saying a word. Who is she, this woman? (141)

Though sometimes falling into private musings of the kind mentioned above, Almásy seems for the most part aware of the fact that he is telling his story to somebody. There is always an intent listener to his narrative. Yet, the change in his narrative towards the very end, as he talks of himself in third person, suggests an altered consciousness as to who he is. It may even suggest general uncertainty as to whether he is in fact Almásy, as Carrie Dawson suggests (50). In the middle of a passage he shifts position from a conscious story telling in the first-person to talking about himself in third-person. The change appears unexpectedly in the middle of a passage:

During those final nights in Cairo, months after the affair was over, we had finally persuaded Madox into a zinc bar for his farewell. She and her husband were there. One last night. One last dance. Almásy was drunk and attempting an old dance step he had invented called the Bosphorus hug, lifting Katharine Clifton into his wiry arms and traversing the floor until he fell with her across some Nile-grown aspidistras.

Who is he speaking as now? Caravaggio thinks. (244)

These shifts in Almásy's narrative create confusion, emphasising the elusiveness of his identity, even as Caravaggio seems to work steadily towards identifying him as the Hungarian aristocrat. Caravaggio is intrigued by this change: "He is still amazed at the clarity of discipline in the man, who speaks sometimes in the first person, sometimes in the third person, who still does not admit that he is Almásy. 'Who was talking, back then?' "*Death means you are in the third person*" (247).

Summing up what I have found, and relating the finds to identity in the novel, I believe that both the changes between narrator, focalizer, and consciousness and the shifts in time from the first narrative to the analepses and prolepses all contribute in various ways to emphasise alienation, disrupted identity, and struggle to come to terms with life the way it is now. The time aspect allows for a more intimate knowledge of the fictional characters, not merely revealing their present state. Through the analepses, the characters are developed with more depth, each of them carrying not only a past, but a conscious rendering of how this past

has influenced their present, as well as revealing a desire to return to that past. Ondaatje's merging of the everyday events with the characters' intense contact with their thoughts and feelings creates a constant focus on their sense of self.

This way of rendering consciousness, revealing only fragments, contributes to a sensation of destruction in the characters. The narrative explicitly renders traumatic experiences in their immediate past, and the manner of breaking the story up in longer and shorter passages, constantly shifting focus underlining the disrupted consciousness of the characters. Divided by blank spaces in the text, these breaks demand attention as the reader feels the interruption of the reading. People do not experience thought process and memories in long, uninterrupted, chronological passages, but in moments of various lengths, alternating with every day events. Ondaatje, then, achieves a mimetic effect, both with the way human consciousness works in non-linear movements, and with the narration of character affected by trauma of grief and war. The broken, interrupted narrative may be said to mirror the interrupted states of minds revealed in most of the characters of the novel. Douglas Barbour describes the narrative structure as labyrinthine. This image shows clearly how the narrative, as well as the characters, moves as if inside a maze, having to try several paths to find the exit to a state where it is possible to achieve an overview. The pertinent question is if any such overview exists.

2

The Time Around Scars: Scars as a Narrative Technique to Unmake and Remake Identity

We remember the time around scars,
they freeze irrelevant emotions
and divide us from present friends.

Ondaatje, *The Dainty Monsters* 1967

The epigraph from Ondaatje's first published volume of verse suggests an interesting approach to the analysis of the meaning of the scars in *The English Patient*. To "freeze irrelevant emotions" and to "divide us from present friends" are two of the effects scars may have on the person carrying them. The permanent nature of a scar freezes emotions, relevant or irrelevant, and may link them closely to the infliction of the scar. How profound the freezing is depends on many circumstances, and as the poem indicates, irrelevant emotions, episodes that would otherwise have been forgotten, may gain significance simply through the permanent mark. The power to cause separation from present friends is clearly also there. Depending on the nature of the scar, it may have the power to define a person into a certain group, or to separate from it. By referring to other works by Ondaatje, scars as a metaphor become part of a larger context not only relevant to *The English Patient*. In the novels *Running in the Family*, *In The Skin of a Lion* and *Anil's Ghost*, scars have a significant

position in the process of identification. One such instance of identification occurs early in *In the Skin of a Lion*:

“Where did you get that scar?” He pointed his thumb to the side of her nose. She pulled back. . . . “I got about twenty scars,” he said, “all over me. One on my ear here.” He turned and leaned forward so the wall-light fell onto the side of his head. “See? Also this under my chin, that also broke my jaw. A coiling wire did that. Nearly killed me, broke my jaw. Lots more. My knees . . .” He talked on. Hot tar burns on his arm. Nails in his calves. (39)

This example shows how the scars are used as a way of telling personal history, constituting memories of various events, big and small, in a life. Turning the attention back to *The English Patient*, however, I read the literal scars as marks of identity, because of what they come to represent in the course of the novel. They are inflicted, they produce a history about the infliction, they alter the course of the bearer’s life, and they cause distance from what the character was prior to the scars.

The remarkable juxtaposition between pleasure and pain in *The English Patient* is particularly visible in the relationship between Almásy and Katharine Clifton. In their love affair, the scars exist at the point where pleasure and pain meet, almost with a sado-masochistic flair to it. Pain and displacement as well as pleasure are revealed through imagery and a “violent” language, emphasising accidents, war, sexual violence, and trauma. In the midst of all the emotional turmoil, the characters are drawn to each other, in need of company, of love, and of belonging, while attempting to patch themselves up.

As regards Ondaatje’s use of scars as a metaphor, Birgitta Johansson claims the following: “Inherent in the concept of love is the notion of figurative and literal impact. The scar represents the legacy of this impression on body and soul” (73). To her, the juxtaposition of violence and pleasure constitutes purity in the human relationships of Ondaatje’s fiction. Agreeing that the combination of these opposites creates a particular effect, I nonetheless feel with regard to *The English Patient* that the meaning of the scars creates tension about identity

within each character, not just by linking them to other characters. The way the physical scars influence the sense of self in *The English Patient* is what I aim to discuss in this chapter. Scars reflect both destruction and potential healing.

This reading applies particularly to two of the main characters: Almásy and Caravaggio. These two characters are the ones visibly injured by the war, directly and indirectly. Almásy in a war-related accident, Caravaggio during torture under interrogation, having been arrested for being a spy. The analysis will include Katharine Clifton. Although not a main character in the novel, she takes up substantial part of some of the chapters through Almásy's analepses. The narration of their relationship drives the story forward. Her presence in Almásy's memory is vital to the tension of his pre-war memories. As she is so closely linked to Almásy, a discussion of the interpretation of his mutilated, or scarred body, will have to include her, also because she carries physical scars shedding light on other types of scars than the merely violent ones. Where it is natural to include the characters Hana and Kip, this will be done, but these characters do not have injuries visible on the surface. Therefore, their relevance to the analysis of scars will be attached to how they relate to Almásy and Caravaggio.

Evidently, scars can have a number of meanings. Clearly, they are all "caught motion" in that they are inflicted by some incident. In the event producing them, development is arrested. A scar creates a blank space, a kind of dead end. After the infliction of a scar, there must be change in some way. A visible scar demands attention. Either one must accept its presence and yield to its permanent alteration of the body, or one must actively attempt to disguise it and pretend it is not there. Either way it influences one's perception of self. The nature of the incidents producing the scars may vary a great deal, and so will the way they are interpreted. Some scars are random marks of childhood games, an unfortunate slip of a knife, and graver accidents, while others come about through planned vaccinations, voluntary or

involuntary operations, and tattoos. Marks such as these will add to the personal history of the human being carrying them, as if the history is physically printed on the bearer's body.

War and torture, the main object here, comes in a category of its own. Wounds and scars of war and torture are inflicted at will, but not by consent from the receivers. In the analysis of these scars, Elaine Scarry's study *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* introduces a terminology helpful to explain the way civilisation and human beings are being influenced by such extreme conditions. The structure of torture and war unmakes the civilisations in which it happens, and on an individual level, it unmakes the personal identity of the people hurt by it. I find "unmaking" to be a good term to apply to the alienated characters of *The English Patient*, and the scars are the physical marks of this unmaking. Scarry shows how civilisation is destabilised by war, as the structure of war is destructive and will have a profound effect on how society, that is all the people living in it, interpret themselves. I find that her analysis of how society is destabilised can be transferred to an individual level as well. This application is interesting to the analysis of characters in *The English Patient*. She writes:

War destroys persons, material culture, and elements of consciousness. . . . The losing country must erase part of the slate and begin to re-imagine itself, re-believe in, re-understand, re-experience itself as an intact entity, but one not having some of the territorial or ideological attributes it had formerly. (92-3)

Relating this to the characters, it is evident that although they, more or less by accident, belong to the winning part of the war, individually, they have lost the structure of themselves and their belonging in the ordinary world. Their ability to adapt to this is reflected in their scars. Almásy is too injured to stand a chance to survive. Caravaggio on the other hand, although losing his thumbs, is not fatally wounded and towards the end of the novel has every chance of surviving, if he adapts to the changes he has been through. The scars, then, produced by the war, are the visible signs of unmaking on the individual level. By accepting

the change, adapting to it, and adding it to personal history, memory and thereby identity, the characters, like miniature wounded civilisations, will be able to go on.

All the abovementioned types of scars thus add to a personal history and through this to identity, but in various ways, sometimes neutrally, sometimes positively, and sometimes negatively. Through a detailed analysis of the physical scars of the characters in the novel, I hope to show the effect of scars on a deeper level of identity. I will argue that major injury may lead to, or enforce a sense of alienation from society and “present friends,” but also that vaccination scars can contain meaning in a wider context than just the experience at the time it was given.

In the space between the various degrees of involuntary wounds and injury, scars and mutilation become unstable markers of identity, as they alternate between revealing and disguising. How reliable, then, is a scar as a mark of identity? What information can it give apart from just being a memory of a certain incident of the past? Is it possible to claim that a particular scar has created a certain identifiable effect on one of the characters? Or is it more unstable and elusive? I believe this uncertainty to reflect the instability of identity as it is depicted in *The English Patient*. The various changes, great and small, inflicted on each character and on the landscape surrounding them, tell a silent story of permanent change, of alienation, and of unmaking, to use Scarry’s terminology. The instability is also reflected in the tone and voice of the narrative. At one point Caravaggio asks himself about Almásy: “*Who is he speaking as now?*” (244), and this sense of confusion is maintained throughout. Not just for the narratee Caravaggio, but for the reader of the novel too. At times telling his story in first-person narrative, at other times in third-person, Almásy maintains the enigma surrounding him from the start, raising questions about his reliability.

The broken and fragmented pieces of memories used to reconstruct the past and the present mirror the physical damage. All the characters narrate their memories of the past in

short passages, sometimes sliding unconsciously between past and present. At other times, the changes are marked as physical gaps in the text, like textual scars. Permeating the text, they never allow for the comfort of a consistent pattern, creating a textual enforcement of the mood of disruption and alienation. As analysed in the previous chapter, the constant, but unsystematic change in focalization and tense creates uncertainty on the part of the reader. Often, the changes are marked by a physical leap from one fragment to the other. The gap on the page indicates change, but what the change implies does not become clear until well into the next fragment, and not always then. A long gap is often, but not as a rule, followed by a complete change of time and scene, whereas a gap the size of about a line is followed by some continuation of the previous theme, although sometimes through a different focalizer, or a new angle. The changes may occur within a longer, uninterrupted narrative as well. There is, however, no system to this. With no pattern, abrupt, and sudden, the gaps demand attention. As with a very visible scar or mutilation on somebody, it attracts the attention of the on-looker.

Before going into a more detailed discussion about *The English Patient*, I will present some theory on the body in literature, also on scars, including criticism and reviews of Michael Ondaatje's work I have found helpful to my analysis. Scars and their meaning is nothing new in literature, philosophy, and religion. There is a long tradition of attributing significance to scars on the body in the Western culture. Christ's marked hands and side, for example, identifies the ultimate sacrifice in Christian faith, but older than that is the ancient Greek myth of Odysseus and his scarred thigh, recognised by the old nurse. Prior to the twentieth century, the body was mainly analysed within a philosophical and religious context, focusing on the relationship between the human body and the possibility of purity in relation to Christianity, and the relationship between the human body and the mind and what the connection between these really or ideally ought to be.

Philosophers such as Descartes and Kant have greatly influenced our thoughts on the relationship between mind and body. Psychoanalysis and gender studies are more recent approaches to the interpretation of the human body in the arts. In the introduction to *Den litterære kroppen*, Unni Langås gives an overview of these changing approaches to the body and summarises the various implications thus (my translation): “The body is an ambivalent phenomenon. It is a place to link our identity to, and a place to which the identity cannot be tied. Thus, the theory of the body cannot be phrased once and for all” (15). This could be said of the meaning of scars as well. Ambivalence is an obvious effect of the diversity of incidents producing scars. This is also a reason for excluding what may be labelled “emotional scars” in *The English Patient*, mainly represented by the character Hana. An analysis of her scarred mind might make use of psychoanalytical literary critique. As this is not my object here, I simply mention this to underline the possibility of analysing the emotional scars and their effects on identity.

The appearance of emotional scars is at best revealed through dramatic change in behaviour, linked to traumatic events of the past. Although it is evident in the novel that Hana is traumatised by her experiences as a nurse during war, the exact nature of her possible scars is difficult to pin down. She is described as “shell shocked” and it is hinted that she may be contemplating suicide: “She stood by the window and her fingers clutched the hair on her head with a tough grip, pulling it. In darkness, in any light after dusk, you can slit a vein and the blood is black” (62). She does not, however, carry any physical damage from the war, and her sense of loss and of alienation is best revealed in her response to Almásy’s and Caravaggio’s visible, physical injury.

With reference to scars, emotional as well as physical, Kip is the most sane and healthy character in the novel. Revealed mainly through third person narrative, he exists in the margins of the small community of the villa, never allowed space in dialogue the way the

other three main characters are. As a result, a deeper understanding of his character is revealed mainly through psycho-narration and as second hand information from the other characters and the narrator. To draw an analogue to Pfister's analysis of characterisation techniques in drama, Kip is characterised explicitly through commentary by other characters, and by the narrator in what would be the secondary text or stage directions in drama (Pfister 184-90). He is a character with very few lines, but like the other characters, he too interprets Almásy according to his own need for substituting loss in his life. The significance of Almásy's role in Kip's life is best revealed in the breakdown of his illusions about England and the West as he learns of the American nuclear bombs over Japan.

In literature as in life, physical scars identify at least two concrete parts of human life. One is already mentioned as a memory of the incident producing them. Personal stories linked to scars and marks often create significant moments of "irrelevant emotions," and incidents become significant because they have left a mark where they might otherwise be forgotten. Secondly they may serve as an indisputable way of verifying a person's identity. Missing persons can be identified by known marks, and a personal mark, with a personal memory attached to it, cannot be copied or its validity opposed, as with Odysseus' homecoming.

The literary critic Peter Brooks uses the myth of Odysseus' return home to express a more specific theory on the relationship between scars in literature and narrative:

It is as if identity, and its recognition, depended on the body having been marked with a special sign, which looks suspiciously like a linguistic signifier. The sign imprints the body, making it part of the signifying process. Signing or marking the body signifies its passage into writing, its becoming a literary body, and generally also a narrative body, in that the inscription of the sign depends on and produces a story. The signing of the body is an allegory of the body become a subject for literary narrative – a body entered into writing. (3)

Almásy and Caravaggio's scarred bodies can be seen as bodies entered into writing. Each of their marks produces and contributes to a story. Like paper with writing on it, their bodies have been inscribed. But unlike Odysseus' scar, their scars both provide identity and deprive

of it. Particularly in Almásy's case, the scars have an ambiguous potential with reference to the revelation of identity. It can be argued that the injury has erased all history from him, all identity. Destroyed, he has become a blank space, and both the other characters and Almásy himself are granted the possibility of rewriting according to their wishes or needs, ideas also expressed by Stephen Scobie:

[T]he English patient's desire to erase his name leaves him indeed nameless, professing ignorance of his own identity, and with his body reduced by fire to an all-encompassing scar. It is an ironic and bitter reversal of figure and ground: leaving no mark or scar upon the desert, he has become all scar, all mark. And is thus himself unreadable. Or else, perhaps, multiply readable. (97)

Caravaggio's scars, at least at first sight, function more traditionally as marks of identification, placing him in relation to his personal history before the war broke out:

His status had been double-checked, and confirmed in messages from London. There was *the cluster of known scars* on him. So the doctors had come back to him, nodded at the bandages on him. A celebrity, after all, wanting silence. A war hero. (*EP 27, my italics*)

Identifying him as an ally and a hero, the scars save him from persecution and disgrace. Old scars place him safely among friends. His new scars are the marks of his status as a hero, but they are also more problematic in terms of his own sense of self and of alienation from the man he used to be, and the society he used to move in.

As a narrative technique, the scars create blank spaces, or silences in need of content. The events in which the scars were inflicted become part of the intricate pattern forming the whole picture. Like a snowball rolling, the scars attract new layers of events and meaning until they are entangled in the story. They become as fixed to the text as to a body. In that sense, they inflict the identity of the narrative as much as the identity of the bearers. Amy Novak analyses the narration of memory in *The English Patient*. She argues that the fragmented narrative of memory of the past, closely linked to the events of the present, is a strategy employed to cope with trauma: "Traumatized by the past, the characters of this novel

seek to cope with their traumatic experience by drawing the event into a narrative space that will contain and position the past” (207). Her analysis focuses particularly on the interpretation of personal memory as a way to make sense of the present through narrating the past. In this landscape, I believe the physical scars to be visible manifestations of the impossibility of connecting the past and the present. They have created a permanent gap, impossible to bridge, between what happened before the war and what is real here and now. This in turn influences the characters’ ability to patch back together their pre- and post-war selves.

The scars and marks can be said to have palimpsestic qualities in *The English Patient*. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* defines palimpsest thus: “A surface, usually vellum or parchment, which has been used more than once for writing on, the previous writing having been rubbed out or somehow removed” (631). On parchment such as this, the original writing would at times shine through the new writing, making it possible to decipher what had been written there before. The origin of the word makes it useful in describing other activities in which something is erased, but shining through the new “print,” as is the case with the characters in Ondaatje’s novel. They can be described as human palimpsests, where scars have rubbed away bits of the past in a manner making it impossible to read as a linear personal history. In this movement, the identity of the characters is, if not destroyed, then at least influenced in a way which leads them on detours to reconstruct the past partly erased by the present. The narration of the fragmented analepses becomes this attempt to restore and recreate oneself.

In *Spider Blues*, a collection of reviews and essays on Michael Ondaatje’s work up until 1985, Sam Solecki writes the following about the image of scars in poems from *The Dainty Monsters* and *Rat Jelly*: “Here, as elsewhere in Ondaatje’s work, a physical scar represents caught motion, just as a mental scar or an emotional scar is caught memory. In

other words, the scar literally incorporates and memorializes an emotion, an act, or an experience” (105).

The key terms here are “caught motion” and “caught memory.” I believe that these terms can be used to shed light on the appearance of scars in *The English Patient* as well. This is essentially another way of investing scars with narrative properties and identity through the recollection of events of the past and the present. The caught motion of the scars creates an irrevocable link between the motion producing the scar and the mark it has left. In the cases of Almásy and Caravaggio, this means that the accident in which Almásy is transferred from the explorer and acknowledged Hungarian man Almásy to a mutilated body with a false identity is caught and preserved. The significance of the event is underlined by how frequently Almásy returns to it in his memory. Similarly, the story of the torture during which Caravaggio’s thumbs were severed is narrated in different ways, as if to enforce its significance by approaching it from various angles at various times. This caught motion, or arrested development becomes an obstacle in their lives, but it works on different levels for the two characters.

Almásy’s destroyed body seems to be the unavoidable end to his doomed love affair with Katharine Clifton. From the moment of Geoffrey Clifton’s attempt at a suicide-murder of himself, his wife, and her former lover, what matters for Almásy is to recollect Katharine, both in the literal sense of returning her body to civilisation, and in remembering her. Even as he realises that he will be unable to rescue her while she is still alive, his only ambition is to fulfil his promise to take her out of the desert. There seems to be no thought in him of anything beyond that point, and thus, the accident destroying Katharine’s dead body and burning him to a blank space with no past or future is a natural, if highly dramatic end to his life. The fact that he does not die is an ironic solution. He has nothing left to live for, as it appears, his life as a desert explorer in pieces, his lover and friends dead. Still, his

unidentifiable body has a function in the story and needs to survive in order to allow Hana, Kip, and Caravaggio to use his lacking identity for their own means:

Like history, the faceless patient is everything and nothing, everyone and no one at the same time. As an empty space to be filled, he is, like the desert, a void onto which the personality of the watcher is projected; at the same time, however, he evades all attempts on the part of other to contain him, to fix him into language. (Banerjee 152)

Almásy is positioned as a centre of the novel. But rather than interpreting him as the main character, I read his position as that of a catalyst through which the other characters are able to redefine themselves. To Hana, he is an escape from her own destruction. His very anonymity guarantees her freedom to interpret him the way she needs to. She shows no interest in discovering his true identity. Her vocation as a nurse grants her the privilege, and the duty, to care for him for no other reason than the fact that he needs it. Imagining Almásy as a “despairing saint” (3), she repeats this to Caravaggio as he confronts her obsession with the unknown man:

“You’ve tied yourself to a corpse for some reason.”
“He is a saint. I think. A despairing saint. Are there such things? Our desire is to protect them.”
“He doesn’t even care!”
“I can love him.”
“A twenty-year-old who throws herself out of the world to love a ghost!” (45)

By classifying Almásy as a “despairing saint,” Hana provides him with a halo and marks him as a particularly worthy subject to nurse. Hana uses her unknown patient to escape from the breakdown she experiences as young men are destroyed and dying around her. He is the “despairing saint” of the victims of war, and her wish to protect him is closely linked to her memories of patients she could not help. As Scobie states: “[H]ana, obsessively nursing him as her only patient, sees him as the image of every man who has died under her care in the course of the war; and most obviously, she sees him as Patrick, her father, dying of burns” (98). In Almásy, she has a refuge so long as she does not know who he is. She can project her

grief of not having been able to nurse her father onto Almásy and care for him the best way she can. She needs to keep him and to love him, because she has lost so many others.

This in turn inspires Caravaggio to attempt to restore or reinvent Almásy's identity in order to save Hana from attaching herself too closely to a dying person: "He needs to know who this Englishman from the desert is, and reveal him for Hana's sake. Or perhaps invent a skin for him, the way tannic acid camouflages a burned man's rawness" (117). But Caravaggio is himself destabilised by the loss of his thumbs. The loss of thumbs is a fitting picture of losing one's hold on life. In order to secure the grip of the hand, the thumbs are vital. Caravaggio, then, has lost both the grip of his hands and his grip on life. Also, as a spy, he has been "playing" with identities:

Working in Cairo during the early days of the war, he had been trained to invent double agents or phantoms who would take on flesh. He had been in charge of a mythical agent named "Cheese," and he spent weeks clothing him with facts, giving him qualities of character – such as greed and a weakness for drink when he would spill false rumours to the enemy. Just as some in Cairo he worked for invented whole platoons in the desert. He had lived through a time of war when everything offered up to those around him was a lie. He had felt like a man in the darkness of a room imitating the calls of a bird.

But here they were shedding skins. They could imitate nothing but what they were. There was no defence but to look for the truth in others. (117)

Caravaggio's approach to the question of identity is that life in the villa is a place revealing everything. He embraces the idea of truth in himself and others and it seems that indirectly, Caravaggio is as much in need of redefining himself as any of the other characters are. It says "they could imitate nothing but what they were." This statement points to the fact that although Caravaggio is concerned with the welfare of Hana, he is aware that the revealing goes both ways, and that he is shedding skin too.

When he appears for the first time, in the second chapter "In Near Ruins," it is evident that he is shattered and destroyed by what has happened to him: "He was a large animal in their presence, *in near ruins* when he was brought in and given regular doses of morphine for

the pain in his hands” (27, my italics). Exposed to Hana’s gaze the way she is exposed to his, he is unveiled to be as broken as she is, and utterly different from what he used to be when they knew each other before the war: “Caravaggio, who had been her father’s gregarious friend in Canada, in those days was capable of standing still and causing havoc within the caravan of women he seemed to give himself over to. He now lay in his darkness” (47). A couple of other analepses following this underline the change she senses in him: “Caravaggio would disturb you by simply enfolding you in his arms, his wings. . . . But now he lay in darkness, like her, in some outpost of the large house” (48). Perhaps the best illustration of the change in him comes with an analepsis provoked by his present behaviour: “In her childhood her classroom had been Caravaggio. He had taught her the somersault. Now, with his hands always in his pockets, he just gestures with his shoulders” (49). There is a stark difference between the confidence and playfulness of a family friend teaching a girl to do the somersault and a broken, middle aged man hiding his deformed hands in his pockets, voluntary or involuntary restraining his repertoire of expressions to suite his new, reduced self.

The “caught motion” of the torture has frozen the liveliness and the gregariousness Hana remembers. Still, according to his own musings, he now seeks intimacy instead of avoiding it: “All his life he has avoided permanent intimacy. Till this war he has been a better lover than husband. He has been a man who slips away, in the way lovers leave chaos, the way thieves leave reduced houses” (116). Because of his wartime experiences with the lost thumbs as a defining moment, Caravaggio is himself reduced. When he expresses the thought that they “could imitate nothing but what they were,” this points as much to himself not being able to pretend anymore (117). His ability to move within any number of circles, identities, and houses is destroyed, caught in the motion of amputating his thumbs. There is no doubt that Caravaggio is aware of his change himself. In a conversation with Hana a short time after

his arrival in the villa, he acknowledges the direct link between his scars and the damage to his perception of self:

His hands held together like a human bowl. She reaches for them while her face goes up to his cheek, then nestles in his neck. What she holds seems firm, healed.

“I tell you I had to negotiate for what they left me.”

“How did you do that?”

“All those skills I used to have.”

...

He raises his hands up as if to cup the quarter-moon.

“They removed both thumbs, Hana. See.”

He holds his hands in front of her. Showing her directly what she has glimpsed. He turns one hand over as if to reveal that it is no trick, that what looks like a gill is where the thumb has been cut away. (54)

“All those skills I used to have” is a statement recognising that they are no longer there. They are a thing of the past, and the removed thumbs are the gap making it impossible to reach back to what used to be.

With his scars and his morphine addiction, Caravaggio turns to Almásy for an intense interrogation to uncover the truth in the unidentifiable man. Behind the noble quest to save Hana, there is an almost manic continuation of his work as a spy, to resolve the enigma surrounding a spy working for the enemy. Caravaggio is convinced that once Hana knows whom her patient is and what he has done, she will recover from her “shell shock.” As it happens, it is Caravaggio, and not Hana, who is released from temporary obsession through the interrogation. In the course of the morphine-induced investigation, Almásy gradually reveals pieces of his story. And like Caravaggio’s sense that the morphine promises “false limbs,” it enables Almásy to breach the barrier to the past, across his scars from the accident. The two characters, locked in a narrative symbiosis through Almásy’s recount of his past, and Caravaggio acting as the narratee, eventually move in different directions. Morphine has allowed them to temporarily substitute parts of themselves, but as Almásy’s story reaches the end, they no longer need it. Almásy refuses to take more, and although it is not stated

explicitly in the text, it is implied that the end of his narrative coincides with the end of his life. Caravaggio for his part realises that his project to identify Almásy is a cul-de-sac: “This man he believes to be Almásy has used him and the morphine to return to his own world, for his own sadness. It no longer matters which side he was on during the war” (251).

The contents of the quote ending the last paragraph begin the next: “It no longer matters which side he was on during the war.” The irony of Almásy’s unidentified person becomes fully clear towards the very end of the novel. Caravaggio has revealed him to be a Hungarian count, a desert explorer in an international expedition prior to the war, and a spy for the German forces as the war progresses. Kip, who has firmly believed Almásy to be English, realises that what does not matter anymore is which side he, Kip, was on during the war. As the American nuclear bombs hit Japan, English to Kip finally becomes the enemy it has always been to his brother. Like Hana and Caravaggio, Kip has interpreted Almásy according to his own needs. Substituting his mentor, Lord Sussex, with Almásy, Kip has read the unidentifiable human on the bed according to his own need for identification and sense of belonging.

To sum up the meaning of Almásy’s scar in relation to the analysis of identity in the novel, my argument is that it has multiple functions. Firstly, as it is the main feature making him unidentifiable, it contradicts the common perception that a scar on a human body is a mark of recognition. The accident has clearly left him with no marks to identify him by. There are no longer any traces of other, minor scars that might have been there. This blank space, though, is not without its own narrative identity, because secondly, the ruined body tells a tale of a violent accident, including fire, transferring whatever might have been into a human wreck, actually challenging the use of the term human palimpsest, as there is no trace of anything but the scar. In the character Almásy, these two levels are combined. The erasure of marks to identify him by is reflected in what could be amnesia, or perhaps a lack of will to

know or acknowledge his own identity. It may also be that the convenient loss of memory helps him to avoid facing up to events better forgotten. However, as his scar is clearly a result of fire, he is not completely without history. He has been burned in a way common to pilots found in the desert in wartime. The reliability of these faint traces of history is questioned by the fact that his official identity is randomly labelled English. This in its turn makes an interesting observation, concerning the level of coincidence, or indifference in creating an English identity for a Hungarian spy for the Germans. On the third level concerning Almásy's scar, it becomes an aid for other characters at loss in a world gone mad. Dealing with trauma of violence and bereavement, for various reasons, they use the enigmatic patient to handle their own fragile identities.

Caravaggio's scars are more directly linked to a traditional interpretation of scars equalling correct identification. The trouble taken to compare and recognise Caravaggio contrasts the way Almásy is given an English identity, almost with a shrug. But whereas Almásy is perhaps consciously avoiding the truth of who he is, Caravaggio is certainly conscious of the change in him resulting from the torture:

For months afterwards he found himself looking at only the thumbs of people, as if the incident had changed him just by producing envy. But the event had produced age, as if during the one night when he was locked to that table they had poured a solution into him that slowed him.
(59)

Here, he directly voices the disruption, including alienation from other people produced by envy.

As my analysis has shown so far, scars are open to different interpretations depending on how they are inflicted, the characters' response to them, and the space they are granted in the text. A characteristic common to all of them regardless of size, shape, or the manner in which they were received, common to all of them is the fact that they are fixed marks of change, quietly bearing witness to lasting alteration. In a textual landscape where fragments of

history and memories float between the characters, the scars stand out in a way that make them impossible to ignore. Novak argues that in the fragmented narrative of *The English Patient*, particularly the narrative of Almásy: “[p]ast and present bleed into one another, and meaning comes only through a sliding and shifting play of signification, which threatens to destabilize it” (209). I am not wholly convinced by this claim. Or rather, I find it too general. Clearly, there are numerous examples of memories of the past blending in with the present situation. I think, however, that the presence of the scars, which is not mentioned by Novak as a significant part of the movement between dealing with the present time trauma through the narration of the past, contributes to barring the possibility of the past and present bleeding into one another. This is not to say that the scars in any way prevent the memories of the past from taking up a significant space in the text, but the destabilisation happens as the past and the present cannot exist in an uncomplicated, sliding movement precisely because the scars so forcefully create a before and after. This is a typical situation in which I find the term palimpsest useful to describe what the scars do to the identity of the characters by shattering it, creating barriers, and irreversible changes.

So far, the “before and after” has been mainly concerned with the barriers the scars have created between the pre- and post-war selves of Almásy and Caravaggio. It is evident from the nature of Almásy’s injuries that they are linked to his post-war history and his relationship to Katharine Clifton as much as they are linked to war. Their relationship is passionate, from the very beginning bordering on the destructive as if to suggest the outcome from the start: “[S]he walked over with the government aide Roundell and shook my hand, asked him to get her a drink, turned back to me and said, ‘I want you to ravish me.’ Roundell returned. It was as if she had handed me a knife” (236). Their mutual marking links them to each other, divides them from present friends as it were. In the midst of their party of friends

and a husband, bruises, scars, and pain become a means of communication between them, underlining the impossibility of their affair:

He would step into an embrace with her, glancing first to see what moveable objects were around. He would meet her with others in public with bruises or a bandaged head and explain about the taxi jerking to a halt so that he had hit the open side window. Or with iodine on his forearm that covered a welt. Madox worried about his becoming suddenly accident-prone. She sneered quietly at the weakness of his explanation. Maybe it's his age, maybe he needs glasses, said her husband, nudging Madox. Maybe it's a woman he met, she said. Look, isn't that a woman's scratch or bite?

It was a scorpion, he said. *Androctonus australis*. (154)

The others present, their friends and her husband, are completely at loss about what really goes on between Almásy and Mrs Clifton. Almost perversely, marking is their secret code, transcribed onto the other's body. Again, the phrase "divided from present friends" applies to the situation and his reply that the scratch or bite comes from one of the world's most venomous scorpions implies the underlying passion and danger.

What the markings also underline is their fundamentally different ways of identifying with their surroundings:

[S]he loved family traditions and courteous ceremony and old memorized poems. She would have hated to die without a name. For her there was a line back to her ancestors that was tactile, whereas he had erased the path he had emerged from. He was amazed she had loved him in spite of such qualities of anonymity in himself. (170)

These differences and the change happening in both of them in the course of their relationship are illustrated on several occasions. She seeks affirmation; he shrinks from giving or receiving it. As a result, she marks him, identifying him as her lover through this secret code of violence and passion:

"What do you hate most?" he asks.

"A lie. And you?"

"Ownership," he says. "When you leave me, forget me."

Her fist swings towards him and hits hard into the bone just below his eye. (152)

His claim that he hates ownership is contradicted in the way he approaches his relationship to Katharine, clearly expressing a desire to own and to keep her to himself: “Her life with others no longer interests him. He wants only her stalking beauty, her theatre of expressions” (155). Further the way he seeks to map Katharine’s body and the way he is almost fetishistically attached to her marks and scars suggests that his hate of ownership is dismissed when convenient:

How does this happen? To fall in love and be disassembled. I was in her arms. I had pushed the sleeve of her shirt up to the shoulder so I could see her vaccination scar. I love this, I said. This pale aureole on her arm. I see the instrument scratch and then punch the serum within her and then release itself, free of her skin, years ago, when she was nine years old, in a school gymnasium. (158)

Every part of Katharine becomes loveable to Almásy, identifying her as his lover. Thus, the traditional interpretation of scars as a mark of recognition applies to Katharine’s vaccination scar. It is something for her lover to know her by. It even takes on a resemblance to sexual intercourse in his imagining of the injection.

Additionally, the vaccination scar is a physical mark linking Katharine Clifton to her status as a member of a well-organised civilisation. It is a mark of wealth, as well as health, and places her in line with countless other English children lining up for a mark of approval from the authorities. This mark of approval, although small, is also a mark approved and accepted by the bearer. Katharine defines herself as a member of her class, accepting their codes of civility, education, and system of values. In the relationship between herself and Almásy, I believe the seemingly insignificant scar from the vaccination holds a whole story of her perception of herself, and of Almásy’s perception of her. The vaccination scar represents all the things he detests about conformity, and yet he loves it as part of Katharine. This adds to the tension of their relationship and is an analogue to Almásy’s paradoxical passion for both the solitude of the desert and for mapmaking. He desires to explore both Katharine and

the desert with all their secrets and marks, but in order to do so he is forced to share them both.

The end of both Katharine Clifton and Almásy reflects their perception of self in a tragic and ironic way. Their roles are inverted. Katharine, who emphasises the value of tradition and who “would have hated to die without a name,” is disintegrated above the desert, her earthly remains scattered, erasing her completely from the memory of the world. As she is lying down in the cave, ready to let Almásy leave her to get help, she says: “Kiss me and call me by my name” (173), emphasising one last time how important it is to her to be recognised and remembered. Essentially, she is the one who fulfils Almásy’s dream, whereas he is returned to the civilisation, forced back from the anonymity he cherishes:

Such glory of this country she enters now and becomes part of. We die containing a richness of lovers and tribes, tastes we have swallowed, bodies we have plunged into and swum up as if rivers of wisdom, characters we have climbed into as if trees, fears we have hidden in as if caves. I wish for all this to be marked on my body when I am dead. (261)

Instead of being marked by all his experiences, his identity is stripped by the fire extinguishing every trace of identification on his body. He is both erased and restored, whereas Katharine vanishes from the surface of the earth.

As a narrative technique, then, scars have multiple functions. They create suspense relating to how they were inflicted, and in the narrating of the events producing them they provide stories within the first narrative. The enigma of what has happened helps to drive the story forward, and the all-covering scar of the character Almásy allows for the other characters to reveal their own stories and struggles, creating a unit of the fragments of each identity. The injuries and scars create a co-dependence between Hana and Almásy, Hana and Caravaggio, and Caravaggio and Almásy.

As a marker of individual identity, the scars do several things. They identify the bearer, in this case Caravaggio as a Canadian thief working as a spy for the allied forces, and

Almásy as a pilot having been in an accident. The scars alter the course of the injured characters' life. Almásy, almost erased already, will cease to exist, and Caravaggio will need to find a new way for himself after the war. The missing thumbs will forever bar him from returning to his pre-war profession. These are the surface interpretations of the scars. On a deeper, personal level, the scars represent the destabilisation suffered by the characters in the face of the atrocities they have gone through. Almásy, with the wrong identity, unable to perform his most important task in collecting the dead Katharine Clifton has lost his desire to live, and the fire consuming every trace of physical identification reflects his all-consuming inner struggle and pain.

Almásy's scars also work as a catalyst for the struggles of trauma and alienation suffered by Kip, Hana and Caravaggio. Precisely the fact that he is unrecognisable gives each of them the opportunity to fill what remains with the content they need to see there. Hana needs a patient to care for, to make up for her inability to care for her father, her lover, and her dead child. Kip needs to hold on to the idea of the English gentleman, personally representing the superior qualities he believes to be true of the English culture. Caravaggio needs to dive into an enigma, to try to solve this final mystery of identity, to "invent a skin" for the faceless man before him.

Katharine Clifton's scars contain a different meaning altogether. They coincide with her preference for order and stability. She firmly defines herself within a culture appreciating conformity, and her vaccination scar is a mark of conformity and recognition of the society in which she has grown up. Her attempts to mark Almásy can be interpreted as a wish to define him within her own value system. His preference for anonymity and his disregard for the rules of society are frustrating to her, and she violently reacts by marking him, as if to remind him of where he belongs.

Despite the many variants of scars, both in real life, and in *The English Patient*, they all contribute to the understanding of how individual identity is influenced by forces outside the self, whether society at large, or other individuals. By using extreme situations and emotions, Ondaatje points to the fragile nature of human identity, and how it may be destabilised by external forces. Physical scars as marks of permanent change allow for an exploration of what signifies change. Visibility satisfies the need for a concrete reference point in a landscape filled with suggestive, elusive effects of human experiences. Juxtaposing the suggestion that scars tell stories of identity at a more profound level than the mere event producing it with the image of scars as representing blank, silent spaces of removal or imprint, *The English Patient* holds up a realistic image of individual experience of both belonging and alienation.

3

I Want To Come Home: Loss of Faith in Home and Nation

“Emil Daniels summed up the situation for most of them when he was asked by one of the British governors what his nationality was – ‘God alone knows, your excellency.’”

Ondaatje, *Running in the Family* 1984

As the Second World War, as well as the novel, moves towards the end, Hana’s twenty-first birthday is being celebrated. By the dinner table, the following conversation takes place: “‘When the war with Japan is over, everyone will finally go home,’ Kip said. ‘And where will *you* go?’ Caravaggio asked. The sapper rolled his head, half nodding, half shaking it, his mouth smiling” (268). This incident points directly to a question present throughout the whole story. Where is home? And what is home, is it a place or a feeling? Within the characters’ experience of their pasts, revealed to the reader through analepses, there is a mixture of looking back, a homesickness, and a longing to get away from their present situation. It is perhaps particularly applicable to the two youngest characters, Kip and Hana. As the story progresses, they are the most occupied with their families and homes. However, in Almásy’s hostility towards the idea of nations, and his simultaneous longing for the desert,

there is also a kind of search for home. Caravaggio is the most difficult character to place in this discussion. Thus, he will have a less significant place in this chapter than the last.

I will now look into how the novel voices ideas of “home” through the characters’ different responses to this elusive concept. I will be using the term “home” and the term “nation” almost interchangeably. My reason for treating these two terms synonymously is my impression that people tend to think about them interchangeably. Obviously, the meaning of the word “home” is often pinned down to be the specific house on the specific street in the specific town where one lives. When generally staying at home, but being away briefly, “home” refers to this particular place. Moving abroad, however, the meaning of the term “home” expands, including the whole country where one comes from. Working in London for a year in 1999-2000 I met many Norwegian women, married and settled in the great city of London, who referred to Norway as “home.” Some of them even tried to move back, only to realise that Norway had changed, and they themselves had changed and that the place they called “home” did not really exist any more.

In *The English Patient* I feel that the same mechanisms are at work, making the home as in house, town, and country merge, allowing for the interchange of the two terms. The homesickness embodies the longing for the people one loves, one’s childhood street, and one’s country. However, the novel in many ways contradicts the comforting idea of the existence of such a place. Firstly, this is expressed through the fact that all of the characters somehow have mixed backgrounds. Although their nationalities are Indian, Hungarian (as it turns out), and Canadian, their backgrounds are more colourful than they appear at first sight. In fact, their backgrounds illustrate the postcolonial term “hybridity” in a powerful way. Neither of them can claim to have a “pure” heritage in terms of culture, or biological or geographical descent.

In his essay “Reflections on Exile,” Edward Said gives voice to the experiences of being forced to live away from one’s native place. Although not immediately applicable to the characters of *The English Patient*, some of his points are useful also in this context, where living away from “home” is not an enforced condition, but at least to some degree voluntary, as is the possibility of physical return to the realm of one’s first “home.” Said makes a clear distinction between exiles, that is people who for some reason are forced away from their home, and expatriates, who have made a voluntary choice to live abroad, but he emphasises that exiles and expatriates may share feelings of estrangement, the significant difference being the possibility of return. Relating Said’s essay to the characters in *The English Patient*, it appears that the three characters Kip, Hana, and Caravaggio are neither exiles, nor expatriates. They are volunteers of war, who will eventually be able to return to India and Canada respectively. They are, however, affected by feelings of homesickness, and at least Kip and Hana will experience a degree of estrangement on their return to their homelands. Almásy wishes to remain an expatriate: his yearnings are attached to the desert and the people he has loved there, rather than to his native place.

Along with the ideas of home, nation, and point of origin, I find it natural to include the themes mapmaking and naming. In Western culture, we are taught from early childhood to define ourselves within the boundaries of maps. We learn to find our home on the map, and to recognise the exclusive shape of our homeland, and we are expected to be willing to defend its borders at the cost of our lives. Maps and borders are close to sacred in Western culture. They define the inside and the outside. In *The English Patient*, mapmaking applies in particular to Almásy, underlining his association with the colonial enterprise, creating tension between his self-professed hatred of nation-states and what his actions speak. At the same time, it underlines how heavily invested Western culture is with defining borders and identifying geographically our desired points of origin. Closely linked to mapmaking is the

practise of naming. Naming somebody, or something, is a way of recognition, and it can be a way of exercising power. Those who name another have taken it upon them to define who, or what the other is. The link between name and identity is a strong one in our cultural consciousness, as I will show as this chapter progresses.

Kip, obviously, is Indian, but he is also a Sikh, belonging to a religious minority in India where the large majority are Hindus. Also, at this point in history, India is still a British colony, implying a number of issues connected with national and cultural identity. Almásy is Hungarian, and being middle-aged in 1945, his life as a boy, adolescent, and young man will have been as a subject of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. He will also have experienced Hungarian independence from 1918, following the outcome of the Great War. Hana and Caravaggio are Canadian, and as such, they are citizens of a country built by immigrants from many parts of the world, though most notably from Europe. Originating geographically from Europe, however, does not make Hana and Caravaggio feel at home in Italy. Although the name Caravaggio signals Italian roots, Caravaggio has no wish to remain where he is:

“I’m not staying here much longer. I want to take you home. Get the hell out of Dodge City. . . . The trouble with all of us is we are where we shouldn’t be. What are we doing in Africa, in Italy? What is Kip doing dismantling bombs in orchards, for God’s sake? What is he doing fighting English wars? . . . We should all move out together.” (121-2)

Nothing apart from her being Canadian is said of Hana’s origin in *The English Patient*, but from *In the Skin of a Lion*, published a few years before *The English Patient*, we learn of Hana that her stepmother Clara and her stepfather Patrick are Canadian, whereas her dead mother Alice is of Macedonian descent, and her biological father, dead before her birth, was Finnish. Thus, her origin is as mixed as any of the others’.

Finally, Canada, as a young nation has been much concerned with the quest for self and for a national identity. This is particularly clear in Darias-Beautell’s *Contemporary Theory of Canadian Fiction*, and in Annick Hillger’s *Not Needing All the Words*. These

accounts of contemporary Canadian literature in general, and Ondaatje's work in particular will provide some of the ground for my analysis here, as I believe that such quest for self and trust in national identity not only applies to the Canadian experience. It may be a particularly popular theme of Canadian authors, but the theme is universal and resonates within people from many different parts of the world.

As Darias-Beautell comments, Canadian fiction, though much concerned with origin and the quest for self, has not wholly embraced postcolonial theory as relevant to all Canadian literature, despite its own colonial past:

Canadian cultural production – caught, as it increasingly is, in the debates around identities, marginalities, and difference – is no exception [to the postcolonial condition]. Yet the appropriateness of the postcolonial paradigm to refer to the Canadian context at large is still a point of controversy. (115)

A line is very often drawn between Canadian literature written by white Canadians, and fiction by authors with Third World connections, such as Ondaatje, whose fiction is largely read against postcolonial themes. Wanting to avoid a discussion merely attempting to show how *The English Patient* fits into either Canadian national literature, or the wider context of literature addressing issues connected with colonialism and postcolonialism, I will return to my initial suggested theme of “homesickness” in the novel.

The Villa San Girolamo provides the four characters with a shelter, but one which can hardly be described as a home. The broken, shattered walls, missing staircases, lack of furniture, and the characters' fragile mental state give the place an atmosphere of a dead end, without the qualities often attributed to the place called “home.” War has through various turns landed them there, but they will not stay forever. As Kip says: “When the war with Japan is over, everyone will finally go home” (286). At an early point, the narrator's description of the villa evokes a picture far from indicating home: “From outside, the place seemed devastated. An outdoor staircase disappeared in mid air, its railing hanging off. Their

life was foraging and tentative safety. . . . They were protected by the simple fact that the villa seemed a ruin” (14). In the last months and weeks of war, their existence seems distanced from the world, as if they and their immediate surroundings are a perverted Garden of Eden, where everyone and everything hold its breath while waiting for the next step. Johan Schimanski points to the fragility of the relationships in the villa:

On the macro level, it [the novel] also appraises the possibility of negotiation and of sociality between the four characters, who represent different identities in a global community; indeed, it hints at the failure of this sociality, ending as it does with Kip’s departure. (129)

As Kip leaves, it is evident that the unity has failed.

The framework around the four characters, which the Villa San Girolamo offers, lacks the defined boundaries naturally associated with a house. The ongoing war has destroyed its walls, the surrounding garden, and the works or art formerly adorning it. The ruined villa and its surroundings have several effects. The narrator early states: “There seemed little demarcation between house and landscape, between damaged building and the burned and shelled remnants of the earth” (43). The transgression between in and out, or opening of borders reflects the destruction of existing culture and institutions, and through the breakdown of old “borders” signals the possibility of change. Nicholas B. Dirks comments on the significance of the villa in this way: “The majestic mansion built by culture was hollowed out by the middle of the century, destroyed from within by the convulsions of war, dismantled from without by the relentless historical logic of decolonization” (4). The destruction of the villa and landscape is a picture of the decay of European cultural dominance in the world. Europe destroys its own culture, thereby disrupting the alleged legitimacy of dominance over the colonial world.

Dirks also points to the fact that ruins in Western culture are often a source of pride in a great past. They are monuments of the ability to construct imposing buildings, something to look up to and admire. In peacetime, great ruins are admired destinations for culturally

interested tourists. Their status as sources of pride is, however, closely linked to their age. Recent ruins, obviously, will hold other, more complicated meanings, as is the case with the Villa San Girolamo. Its destruction is a result of the ongoing war, and thus, it cannot be a symbol of pride, but of sadness, violence, and danger. It holds no interest, even for the brigands roaming the area in the aftermath of occupation and battle (14). The villa is uninteresting to anyone but the characters living there, emphasising their status as outsiders on the edge of society. They are not interesting to anyone anymore.

The characters' contact with the surrounding world is minimal, by their own choice as well as by the fact that they seem to be shunned by the locals. Kip, whose profession as a sapper routinely brings him to highly dangerous missions in the area around the villa, is the only character who moves away from the immediate presence of the villa, but he solely meets other sappers in a secluded world made up of sappers: "The sappers kept to themselves for the most part. . . . they had a hardness and clarity within them, their decisions frightening even to others in the same trade. . . . The sappers never became familiar with each other" (110). The other characters live their lives in a way even more secluded from the rest of the world. Even so, the possibility or feeling of unity within the small community is challenged by the world through the backgrounds of the characters, particularly visible in the opposition between Kip as the colonial Other and Almásy as a representative of the colonial power. Ondaatje treats this tension with great subtlety, though. There is no confrontation. Almásy rather sees Kip as a young soulmate:

"Kip and I are both international bastards – born in one place and choosing to live elsewhere. Fighting to get back or to get away from our homelands all our lives. Though Kip doesn't recognize that yet. That's why we get on so well together." (176-7)

When Kip learns of the nuclear bombs over Japan, he realises this opposition, however, and turns all his anger towards Almásy. Now Almásy really is the international bastard in the

worst sense possible, representing Western culture's betrayal of Asia, pulling Kip away from his former implicit desire to balance his existence between East and West.

Waiting to get the results from the application to join the sapper unit, Kip feels himself scrutinised by Miss Morden. Wrongly judging the meaning of her gaze, he "sensed he would be admitted easily if it were not for his race" (188). This is an instance in the novel of blunt, upfront mentioning of the racial issue. Mostly, however, it is far more subtly treated. Contrary to his fears, Kip is chosen for the unit and is included in the close-knit community of Lord Suffolk, Miss Morden, and Mr Hart. However, despite his pleasure in their company and friendship, he remains an outsider to everyone else: "Few remembered the Sikh who had been with Suffolk's unit" (196). By not mentioning his name, the narrator emphasises his anonymity. He is just "the Sikh." Further on, this becomes even more explicit:

He was accustomed to his invisibility. In England he was ignored in the various barracks, and he came to prefer that. The self-sufficiency and privacy Hana saw in him later were caused not just by his being a sapper in the Italian campaign. It was as much a result of being the anonymous member of another race, a part of the invisible world. (196)

This passage directly confronts the marginalisation experienced not only by Kip, but generally by the minority in any community. Robert J. C. Young introduces the theme of marginalisation thus:

It has been said that there are two kinds of white people: those who have never found themselves in a situation where the majority of people around them are not white, and those who have been the only white person in the room. At that moment, for the first time perhaps, they discover what it is really like for the other people in their society, and, metaphorically, for the rest of the world outside the west: to be from a minority, to live as the person who is always in the margins, to be the person who never qualifies as the norm, the person who is not authorized to speak. (1)

Kip is accepted and noticed by Lord Suffolk and his unit, but being invisible to everybody else, he is deprived of a voice, and his invisibility complicates the possibility of feeling at home. Kip constantly attempts to uphold his affiliation with British culture. Underneath his

positive attitude towards Englishness, however, lies the memory of his Indian home and of the revolutionary brother who offers a contrast to the younger brother, emphasising the complexity of Kip's background.

Within the development of his relationship with Hana, Kip is increasingly given space to tell parts of his own story. Several critics of *The English Patient*, however, have commented that he is given less room to speak for himself than the other characters. Novak, for instance, claims the following:

The narrative economy of the novel replicates the relegation of the colonial world to a silent position. In the exchange of memories that pass amongst these characters, Kip primarily remains apart, a silent witness to the histories of other people. Large portions of Kip's past, while referred to, are not heard at all. (221)

Her point seems to be that because large parts of the narrative relating to Kip are told in the third person rather than as part of dialogues, the character Kip is more distant and harder to get close to than the other characters. Thus, he is marginalised in the narrative.

Novak fails to mention how this technique creates an explosive contrast between the assimilated Kip, and the horrified, awakening Kip after the bombing of Japan. Additionally, Kip and Hana reveal their thoughts to each other as their relationship develops, thereby creating another sense of closeness to Kip as well as to Hana. He talks of home, of family traditions, of his brother who refused to follow them, and of his own adaptability, providing insight into important parts of his personality: "[I]t was just that I hated confrontation. . . . I didn't argue with the policeman who said I couldn't cycle over a certain bridge. . . . I just stood there, still, until I was invisible, and then I went through. . . . That is what my brother's public battles taught me" (200). His disgust for confrontation leads him into acceptance of his position in the margins of the Western society. As previously mentioned, he eventually prefers the enforced solitude in the barracks. As his name Kirpal Singh is abruptly shortened to Kip, his reaction is telling: "He hadn't minded this" (87).

What Novak also seems to ignore is the effect of psycho-narration for the revelation of Kip's character. Her emphasis on his lack of participation in dialogue throughout the novel is an oversimplification of the narrative situation seen as a whole, deriving the way I interpret it, from a desire to give extra force to arguments in favour of a postcolonial reading of *The English Patient*. Through psycho-narration, Kip stands out as vividly as the other characters, the heterodiegetic narrator refraining from passing any judgement on either him or the other characters. Their inner lives are related with no prejudice. Craig Seligman even argues that Kip is "the most convincing personality of the four" (41). It seems to me that Kip has become a victim of critics' desire to interpret him as a victim as much as being an actual victim of colonial suppression and racism. By this I do not mean to contradict that as an Indian, he is obviously integrated in the colonial experience. I simply wish to point to the fact that this is not all he is.

Consciously, or subconsciously, Kip seems to try to find his way in between his Indian point of origin and his learned appreciation of English culture. His work as a sapper becomes symbolic of the difficult task before him. The act of balancing in a field of actual, unexploded mines and bombs reflects the balancing in a minefield of emotional and cultural markers. In order to fit into the European culture around him, he needs to emphasise his knowledge of English culture. His emotional eruption on learning about the atomic bombs over Japan suggests not only shock at the catastrophe itself, but also exploding "mines" within him, filled with sensations of estrangement and marginalisation. Also the cultural minefields manifest themselves mainly in his realisation of how he has been adapting to English values, apparent to him only after the dropping of the nuclear bombs:

I grew up with traditions from my country, but later, more often, from *your* country. Your fragile white island that with customs and manners and books and prefects and reason somehow converted the rest of the world. You stood for precise behaviour. I knew if I lifted a teacup with the wrong finger I'd be banished. If I tied the wrong kind of knot in a tie I was out. (283)

His efforts have been useless, as he realises that he is forever placed among the banished, and this is also where he finally feels his loyalty to belong.

His own skilful and successful defusing of bombs and mines, both as a sapper and as a colonial subject, is only enough to avoid small disasters. The nuclear bomb, however, is a reminder that there are greater forces at work, forces impossible for one person to “defuse.” The literal bombs exploding, destroying their surroundings, reflect Kip’s slim possibilities of belonging. This possibility is twice destroyed by bombs and mines, at the same time physically and symbolically tearing apart the sapper’s circle of friends. The first time, it shatters his English “home” in killing Lord Suffolk, Miss Morden, and Mr Hart. The second time, it destroys his trust in Western values and also turns him against his friends in the Villa San Girolamo:

[T]he very catastrophe of the dropping of the atomic bomb is comprehended by Kirpal Singh not in terms of a mere backdrop against which his own life unfolds, but results in his reinsertion of his private life into world politics. His decision to return to India is a politization of the persona, the refusal to view Hana as an individual dissociated from the culture she inhabits. (Banerjee 219)

Seemingly, Kip returns to his point of origin, takes up his profession as a doctor as expected by family tradition, and at his table “all of their hands are brown. They move with ease in their customs and habits” (301).

This might seem to support the first of the two views on “cultural identity” identified by Stuart Hall:

The first position defines “cultural identity” in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective “one true self,” hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed “selves,” which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. (110-1)

With this definition in mind, we may assert that Kip has managed to return to where he “truly” belongs. Ondaatje, however, does not allow this notion to become a confirmation of the comforting order of national or cultural identity. The tendency to view “home” as a place

of unity and belonging, without any sense of dissatisfaction is somewhat thwarted by Kirpal Singh's powerful memories of Italy, and particularly of Hana. Returning home does not answer all questions, or silence all regret. Kirpal Singh's "restlessness" at home is foreboded in a prolepsis while he is still in Italy, lying in Hana's arms:

If Kip had been asked whom he loved most he would have named his ayah before his mother. . . . All through his life, he would realize later, he was drawn outside the family to find such love. . . . He would be quite old before he recognized that about himself, before he could ask even himself that question of whom he loved most. (226)

The narrator thus creates a realistic anticipation that although he has arrived at home at last, this will not provide the fulfilling sense of belonging at all times. It can only partly satisfy expectations of unity.

The novel's depiction of Hana's relationship to the concept of "home" follows a trait similar to Kip's. Her homesickness, however, is even more apparent and acute throughout the whole story. This is made clear through her references to home when left alone with her thoughts, and when she talks to Kip. To her, home is both her mother Clara, Danforth Avenue, Toronto, and Canada: "She has missed Clara with a woe but is unable to write to her" (92). Later, with Kip, she feels homesick again:

She feels displaced out of Canada during these nights. He asks her why she cannot sleep. She lies there irritated at his self-sufficiency, his ability to turn so easily away from the world. She wants a tin roof for the rain, two poplar trees to shiver outside her window, a noise she can sleep against, sleeping trees and sleeping roofs that she grew up with in the east end of Toronto and then for a couple of years with Patrick and Clara along the Skootamatta River and later Georgian Bay. (128)

She longs explicitly for the things that created a sense of comfort to her as a child. Her return to Canada, however, does not indicate that she is able to find the comfort of encirclement she seems to long for in her musing on "Maman" in the opening paragraph of her letter to Clara: "*Maman is a French word, Clara, a circular word, suggesting cuddles*" (292). I interpret her use of words like "circular word" and "cuddles" as both an expression of actual homesickness

for her mother, but equally as a desperate wish to return to a place where she feels embraced by her surroundings. She states: “*I am sick of Europe, Clara. I want to come home*” (296). Her wish to come home, then, is also a wish to escape from the disintegration of the world she sees around her. For, as Hillger points out: “Like Kip, she looks on the European continent and realizes that she has witnessed the ‘death of a civilization’” (134).

Even before the apocalypse of the atomic bombs, however, Hana’s wartime experiences have deprived her of her belief in the possibility of national unity. Hillger, as well as other critics point to the significant and striking difference in her performance of the “Marseillaise” at sixteen and at twenty-one. The song is referred to for the first time early in the story right after Caravaggio has come to stay in the Villa:

“You sang out, your left hand to your heart. *Alonson fon!* Half the people there didn’t know what the hell you were singing, and maybe you didn’t know what the exact words meant, but you knew what the song was about. . . . Your father’s eyes looking up at you, miraculous with this new language, the cause pouring out so distinct, flawless, no hesitations, and the candles swerving away, not touching your dress but almost touching. We stood up at the end and you walked off the table into his arms.” (53)

The scene Caravaggio remembers expresses our expectations of a performance of the French National anthem: idealism, unity, love, the willingness to make sacrifices, and belonging. Five years later, the performance has altered dramatically:

She was singing it as if it was something scarred, as if one couldn’t ever again bring all the hope of the song together. . . . Singing in the voice of a tired traveller, alone against everything. A new testament. There was no certainty to the song anymore, the singer could only be one voice against all the mountains of power. That was the only sureness. The one voice was the single unspoiled thing. (269)

A comparison of the two episodes makes evident a striking change in Hana’s life. As time has passed, her wartime experiences have pulled her away from the belief in unity, but it simultaneously evokes in her a powerful yearning for home, away from the war. This mixture of fear, longing, and disillusionment is found in her fragmented memories, taking her back to home in the midst of war:

She feared the day she would remove blood from a patient's face and discover her father or someone who had served her food across a counter on Danforth Avenue. . . . Reason was the only thing that might save them, and there was no reason. The thermometer of blood moved up the country. Where was and what was Toronto anymore in her mind? (50)

Danforth Avenue and Toronto are at the same time far away and vividly present in her dread of what may happen to people she knows, and as a place of happy childhood memories.

Chanting "I'm the Mohican of Danforth Avenue" in a moment of playful happiness with Kip, she indulges in a wishful return to a seemingly uncomplicated past.

As Hillger points out, however, quoting Carrie Dawson: "[T]he song [the 'Marseillaise' sung for the second time] is a requiem expressing Hana's inability to put her faith in the nation as a locus of socially grounded subjectivity" (143). Implicit in Hana's performance is a subconscious knowledge that her wish to return to Canada will not necessarily provide the sense of unity she longs for. Contrary to literature in Canada emphasising the homecoming as a manifestation of the Canadian nation, Ondaatje both evokes the alluring idea of homecoming and contests the realism of it in *The English Patient*: "The text. . . . questions the notion of home as a fixed point of origin where the essence of self is firmly rooted" (Hillger 221). Caravaggio's observation, however, also includes Kip: "[He] realized she was singing with and echoing the heart of the sapper" (269). Hana's requiem is also Kip's. The implication of this is that Kip trusts nations no more than Hana does.

This is in line with Darias-Beautell's findings in contemporary Canadian fiction, including *The English Patient*:

The fictional identities posited there are marked by their hybridity, and, because of that, constantly under (de)construction. The texts [of contemporary Canadian fiction] often defy a concept of identity in terms of nation and/or national language, an equation that cannot possibly work in the postcolonial world. (151)

Darias-Beautell claims by this, that Canadian fiction, including Ondaatje's work, is increasingly in line with postcolonial theory by emphasising hybrid identities over the "old

fashioned” unity of identity marked by nation and language. Here Hall’s other definition of cultural identity makes a meaningful contribution to the understanding of the forming of identity taking place within Kip and Hana:

Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of “becoming” as well as of “being.” It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture and power. (112)

Hana and Kip, then, must return to their point of origin without experiencing that home, or the nation, can provide a unified sense of belonging. Kip and Hana must be able to incorporate the experiences and knowledge of all of their personal history with the way their home has become to make a space for themselves in the future.

David Caravaggio appears less concerned with ideas of home, nation, and culture than the other characters. As pointed out in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, he asks Kip where he will be off to after the war. Equally, he expresses strong emotion about the fact that they are participating in a war in which none of them have a share. While musing about his mental and physical state after having lost his thumbs, he reveals himself to have avoided intimacy:

He is a man in middle age who has never become accustomed to families. All his life he has avoided permanent intimacy. Till this war he has been a better lover than husband. He has been a man who slips away, in the way lovers leave chaos, the way thieves leave reduced houses. (116)

From this quotation, one may wonder if Caravaggio’s sense of the concept of home is of somewhere to run away from. Although he returns to Toronto after the war, there is no reference to his expectations on what such a return means. Both “home” and his wife, Giannetta, briefly referred to on page 40 and in the quote above, are significantly absent in his desperate wish to get away as Almásy’s identity becomes clearer:

Caravaggio wants to rise and walk away from this villa, the country, the detritus of a war. . . What Caravaggio wants is his arms around the sapper and Hana or, better, people of his own age, in a bar where he knows everyone, where he can dance and talk with a woman, rest his head on her shoulder, lean his head against her brow, whatever. . . . (251)

The woman he longs for may or may not be his wife, and his enigmatic relationship to home and origin is maintained.

One character that neither returns home, nor wishes to, is Almásy. In him the most openly critical and hostile opinion against the idea of national identity is voiced. Interestingly, it is he who most frequently uses the term “nation.” Part of an expedition to explore and map the desert, Almásy is by most critics read as a representative of the wealthy, white, male colonialist. As a privileged aristocrat, he had the means to go where his fancy would take him. Voluntarily living in an alien country, he is an example of the expatriate mentioned by Said, and Marilyn Papayanis sees Almásy as an example of what she calls a modern expatriate, a man following a tradition rooted in the colonial culture of the European nations:

The political was left behind in the home country; the liberated subject, now free of the cultural baggage of home, sought in the periphery an arena in which to confront private perils, pursue private amours, recover levels of the self repressed at home. (207)

Away from home, Almásy and his companions are at liberty to seemingly cast off their identities as citizens of a particular country. As presented by Almásy, national identity becomes dangerous and threatening to himself and the other members of the expedition, whereas the desert becomes a place open to the possibility of nationlessness. Compared with the desert tribes who belong there, the Europeans become insignificant:

There were rivers of desert tribes, the most beautiful humans I’ve met in my life. 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 died because of nations. (138)

To Almásy the desert offers a place in which to lose himself. Its vast spaces seem to him unspoiled by conflicting interests between nations. He claims: “In the desert it is easy to

lose a sense of demarcation” (18). Borders become unimportant, restraints disappear. By this statement he does, however, reveal himself as a representative of Western colonialism. Novak claims that Almásy’s narrative expresses “a colonial worldview that sees the non-Western world as empty and unexplored. As an explorer of the African deserts, the patient embodies this colonialist Eurocentric framework” (218). Also Dirks supports this view of Almásy’s interest in the desert. It is essentially the interest of a colonial agent: “He is also the exemplar of colonial knowledge and the epitome of colonial adventure. An expert on the desert, he knows the Bedouin as only colonial agents could” (2). Almásy’s view of the tribes he encounters in the desert is not so much the unprejudiced gaze of a person who has freed himself from all ideas of origin, culture, and nation. It is, using Said’s terms from *Orientalism*, the Orientalist’s gaze on the Other, fascinated with the perceived difference of this people.

Almásy’s romantic interpretation of the desert as a place with no nations may to some extent reflect how the desert has been viewed symbolically in Christianity as well as in Islam and Buddhism. The entry for “desert” in *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols* explains how the desert, holds two essential meanings: “It is the primordial undifferentiated state; or it is a superficially sterile crust under which Reality must be sought” (285). Particularly the latter part of this definition points towards the tradition of hermits in the desert, seeking to “confront their own nature and that of the world with the help of God alone” (286). Although *The English Patient* by no means advocates a religious motivation for the fascination with the desert, Almásy’s search for Zerzura resembles the search for a deeper meaning, or hidden wisdom, in the barren landscape. And indeed, his withdrawn attitude is a reminder of the hermit. The anonymity he longs for is partly gained: “By the time war arrived, after ten years in the desert, it was easy for me to slip across borders, not to belong to anyone, to any nation”

(139). But even at this point, Almásy uses his anonymity in the service of a nation, and thus contradicts his claimed personal desires through his actions.

As many critics have pointed out before me, Almásy participates in an expedition working to satisfy the needs of nation-states. They work to map the desert in a time expecting the need for maps for war between the same, detested nations. Almásy claims that his friend Madox died because of nations, but he fails to recognise his own and Madox' involvement in the manifestation of nations, legitimising them through the mapping of "unexplored" territory.

D. Mark Simpson comments on this imperial emphasis on mapmaking:

A network of references to maps compels a critique of the imperial will to fix place and secure its populations, present or absent. Mapmaking offers itself, uneasily, as one among the imperial arts, whereby territory, property, empire are imagined, inscribed, maintained. (226)

Almásy, then, is heavily invested in the world he wishes to free himself from. Towards the end of his narration he openly questions his role in the deaths of Madox and Katharine Clifton, connecting it now to the mapmaking which has proved an important tool for war between nations. Papayanis argues that this remorse comes too late for him to achieve full absolution. She reads his destruction in the accident in the desert as a symbolic end to the modernist expatriate:

As the political invades and appropriates the personal, the line is drawn between younger protagonists who return "home" and their older counterparts, spiritual heirs to the modernist expatriate figures whose narratives, in a sense, perish with them in the periphery. (209)

Although he realises that mapmaking cannot co-exist with his desire to be free of nations, his deep involvement with the construction and upholding of the colonial enterprise prevents his return "home." He belongs too firmly to the "old" world, and perishing in the periphery, so to speak, is the only option. There is no room for him in the modern world emerging from the Second World War. As he ends his story, his claim that "[a]ll I desired was to walk upon such

an earth that had no maps” emphasise the unavoidable failure of the mapmaker’s wish for a nation-less world (261).

Another aspect of Almásy’s interest in mapping regards his lover, Katharine. On several occasions throughout the story, he acts or thinks about her in terms of mapping and naming. His claim to hate ownership seems to follow naturally from his hate of nations. However, his passion for mapmaking in the desert, seemingly undisturbed by the implied value it holds to nation-states, and his “mapping” of Katharine’s body lends little credibility to his initial ideals:

[H]e came up to her, closer, and she thought for a moment he was going to embrace her. Instead he put his right arm forward and drew it in a gesture across her bare neck so her skin was touched by the whole length of his damp forearm. (152)

The movement of his arm resembles a gesture of conquest. It is a symbolical claim, a claim later voiced in his interest in her scars, and in the naming of the indentation on her throat as “the Bosphorus” (236). A colonialist and a conqueror in profession and in love, while at the same time rejecting having any such interests, it is no wonder that he eventually fails to rescue his wounded lover by positioning himself wrongly in relation to her. Pointing to the link between claiming, mapping, and subsequently naming, this introduces another angle from which to approach themes of identity, national and cultural as well as individual: the meanings of names and the practise of naming.

The English Patient provides a number of approaches to naming. Most discussed by critics are the naming of places in connection to the colonial cartography practice, the abridgement of Kirpal Singh’s name to Kip, and Almásy’s failure to name Katharine correctly when attempting to rescue her from dying in the desert. Additionally, Barbara H. Reitan has analysed the symbolic meaning attached to the meaning of the first names of the central characters in the novel. There is no arguing that the habit of lending meaning to names is deeply embedded in human consciousness. Here, I am not referring to the etymological

meaning of individual names, although, as Reitan has shown, when consciously used in fiction, this may shed light on personality and character. I rather wish to point to the significance of name as a marker of identity, and the act of naming, as a way of claiming something or somebody. This marking, as Dawson points out, is valid only because agreed upon by society.

Again, *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols* offers an interesting opening into the symbolic meaning of names in different cultures, underlining how deep our cultural faith in the power of names runs. Names have been thought to contain divine or magical properties, with the possibility of evoking uncontrollable powers. Thus, the naming of God, for instance, has been forbidden to all other than the High Priest in for example Judaism. The same belief has provided any number of euphemisms for dangerous powers in many cultures. One interpretation of the symbolic power of names is particularly interesting to this analysis:

Belief in the power of the name was not something exclusively Chinese, Egyptian or Jewish, it is part of primitive thought-processes. To know a name and to utter it correctly is to be able to exercise power over a person or thing. (694)

Thus, when Katharine Clifton begs of Almásy “call me by my name,” it is not only a desire to hear his voice saying her name, it is also a more profound wish for him to penetrate into the core of who she is. Her life is at stake, and if he can but name her right, she will be safe. As it turns out, he is unable to name her correctly.

His inability to do so is grounded in his own desire for anonymity. Several critics comment on this, among them Hillger: “A confused and desperate Almásy tells the soldiers about Katharine. But he calls her ‘my *wife*,’ while stating at the same time that her ‘husband was dead,’ thus negating his own self” (137). Able to identify weapons for the Bedouin, and objects placed before him as a child by his aunt, his incorrect naming of who he is in relation to Katharine underlines his contempt for social rules and courtesy. Having claimed her for himself, he fails to recognise the mechanisms of society, and the end of it is Katharine’s

lonely death in a desert cave, anonymous, nameless. The irony, mentioned in the previous chapter as a contrast between the lovers, is the fact that Almásy, with his abhorrence of naming, in the end has his name forced back on him by Caravaggio. He is correctly named, caught at last within the boundaries of nation, culture, and history.

Almásy's claiming, mapping, and naming of Katharine Clifton in many ways resembles that of a coloniser's practice of renaming landscape and places as if, by being discovered by a Western culture, they are seen for the first time and thus in need of a name. Almásy comments on this, claiming to distance himself from other discoverers' practice of creating monuments over themselves by having features of land named after them: "*Ain, Bir, Wadi, Foggara, Khottara, Shaduf*. I didn't want my name against such beautiful names" (139). His enthusiasm over the "original" names prevents him from wishing to attach his own, unlike so many of his fellow explorers: "Still, some wanted their mark there. . . . Fenelon-Barnes wanted the fossil trees he discovered to bear his name. He even wanted a tribe to take his name, and spent a year on the negotiations" (139). Even as he ridicules the desire of leaving one's mark, Almásy is contaminated by association.

Renaming with no respect for the individual has been a common practice in many places, one example being immigrants to the United States from countries with un-English names who, on their arrival at Ellis Island, had their native names anglicised. The change of first names into nicknames or pet names, however, has wholly different connotations, communicating intimacy and love toward that which is named. With Kirpal Singh, both these forms of naming blend, creating an uneasy mixture of colonial oppression alongside the closeness and intimacy of friendship and love. The narration of Kirpal Singh uses four different variants of his name in addition to sometimes referring to him as "the Sikh," his full name, his last name "Singh," his first name "Kirpal," and the abridged version around which

most of the discussion has evolved: Kip. Each of these variants implies different sides of his identity.

During his months in the Villa San Girolamo, “Kip” appears as a boyish and innocent nickname, in stark contrast to the dangerous profession he exercises on a daily basis. For his role as Hana’s friend and lover, and the youngest of the three men in the villa, however, the boyish quality of the nickname seems more fitting. The uneasiness of the name stems mainly from the manner in which it is given him, and it is not in any way possible to disregard the colonial viewpoint implied in the change of his full name:

The name had attached itself to him curiously. In his first bomb disposal report in England some butter had marked his paper, and the officer had exclaimed, “What’s this? Kipper grease?” and laughter surrounded him. He had no idea what a kipper was, but the young Sikh had been thereby translated into a salty English fish. Within a week his real name, Kirpal Singh had been forgotten. He hadn’t minded this. (87)

Kip’s disinterested response to the humiliation of the degradation of his name, from a real name to the name of a fish, is part of his assimilating abilities. Turning the tables, focusing on his preference for a nickname rather than the use of surname, he avoids confronting the degradation implicit in the change of name. In Novak’s analysis, she emphasises that “[h]e does not know and name the world, but is rather marked and known by it” (221). I agree that he is marked by it, but rather than showing imperial knowledge, I take the renaming of Kip to show imperial arrogance.

Also, as pointed out above, the use of his name by Lord Suffolk as well as the other character staying in the villa complicates the meaning of his name. The colonial aspect of it is reduced in his association with Hana. His nickname takes on an association of youth compared to the older men Almásy and Caravaggio. It still, however, has a demeaning tinge to it, as Kip is in fact the only man in the villa who has the full use of his limbs, and who is able to make a valuable contribution to end the war as he sticks by his dangerous trade as a sapper.

What finally emphasises the colonial meaning of the name Kip is the total removal of it as Kirpal Singh, and not Kip, returns to India. Alone, after he has attacked Almásy as the main representative of the bombers, he renounces the Western world: “His name is Kirpal Singh and he does not know what he is doing here” (287). As Hana attempts to talk to him the next day, he no longer responds to the name she uses, “Kip,” and in the narrative, he has become “the sapper” (288-9). At home, in India, he is Kirpal, father, husband, and doctor, the young man Kip removed except for his memories of Hana, Caravaggio, and Almásy.

Summing up this chapter must necessarily show that home, national identity, and cultural identity are important, but problematic concepts to define identity by. The place of origin, although vividly present particularly in Hana and Kip, is an uneasy mixture of memory of the past, homesickness when divided from it, longing for actual geographical features, people, habits, and the comforting sensation of being “in place.” The “homesickness” which I have pointed to in *The English Patient* in some respects resembles that stronger feeling of estrangement and displacement expressed by Said, the significant difference being that none of the characters living in the Villa San Girolamo are forced to stay on after the war. They may return if they wish. As it happens, however, their experiences of the world, of violence, decay, and loss during their time in Europe has inflicted their ability to regard their native home, nation, and culture as places of complete unity. As the story closes, there is a feeling that they will never be completely find “home,” as parts of them will for ever belong to their shared past in the Italian villa.

Almásy represents another way of yearning for unity. His desire to “walk upon such an earth that had no maps” is such a wish, but his wish is not linked to his point of origin. In Almásy’s mind, the desert represents such a place of unity. This unity, however, is a utopia, which destruction he has been part of in handing it over to the power of the very nations he abhors. Dying, he has been unable to remain anonymous in the place he has regarded as

home. Hunted down and identified as a Hungarian expatriate, restored to his original name, he is forced back into the cultural sphere he has wished to free himself from.

Into the desire to define “home” and identity come naturally the themes of mapping and naming. Preoccupation with where one’s point of origin is demands maps and names. As Edward Said states of exile, it is “the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home” (173). The native place and the true home needs to be defined, and the way they are geographically defined are by borders and names. Mapping and naming, however, can also be used to define others, and to complicate their identity. This, as discussed above, is particularly linked to colonialism, both in terms of mapping and naming places and people. Ultimately, this chapter shows, I believe, the truth of Stuart Hall’s point of cultural identity (included in this the concepts of home and nation) as a matter of becoming. It is something which constantly changes with the self’s response to events in the surrounding world, and in the patching together of personal experiences of the past and the present. In this sense, “home” becomes more of an emotional possibility and space than a geographical one.

Conclusion

My aim as I set out to write this thesis was to find sufficient evidence in *The English Patient* to justify my claim that the sensations of bewilderment, fragmentation, alienation, and temporary loss of the sense of self are reflected in the narrative techniques Ondaatje employs in the novel. I believe that through analysing the effect of the narrative structure, the choices made about shifts in time, tempo, and focalisation as well as the extensive use of psycho-narration, I have managed to make this a valid claim. On the more detailed level, I believe that my analysis of the scars and marks as well as homesickness and a tentative remaking of identity makes it safe to argue that this literary work manages to reveal not just violence, damage, and death wrapped in beautiful imagery and poetic language. It also points towards a more hopeful ending where the twists and turns of life are incorporated into the characters' lives, making life after radical changes both possible and meaningful.

Apart from Almásy, whose injuries imply that he will not survive for very long, the other characters, Kip, Hana, and Caravaggio survive the war and return to their respective points of origin. Despite the alienation they experience as an effect of the war, they seem to have been able to recover enough to go on. Kirpal Singh, for instance has become a doctor, a married man, and a father. He has, in effect, become a pillar of society. Hana, too, seems to be a person whose participation in society is significant. It is on the inside, hidden from view, that their feelings of alienation persist. Thus, there is suspense between their surface abilities to return to an apparently normal life and their hidden displacement and continuing emotional bond to their pasts, preventing them from committing fully to their present lives. This

suspense, or continuing breach between themselves and their present surroundings, resembles the breach they experience between their pre- and post-war selves in Italy. To maintain the terminology of the second chapter of the thesis, they can be described as permanently scarred by their wartime experiences, or rather, they are “wounded without the pleasure of a scar” (RF 96).

Scars, although leaving permanent marks and thus implying irrevocable change, also imply healing. Thus, another conclusion made possible by an analysis of scarring and permanent marks on both body and soul is the fact that healed wounds, physical as well as mental, are possible to live with. They prevent returning to what used to be. What they in fact emphasise is the truth that change is part of living, the past never possible to grasp and hold on to, the places we call home never staying as they were but moving with changing times. Thus, the scars are simply magnifiers of processes that go on constantly, everywhere, in peacetime as in war.

The angle from which I analyse the disrupted sense of self in the third chapter forms a tentative closure. Despite the fact that the novel itself resists the expectation of closure, the theme of homesickness becomes acute as the novel as well as the war draws to a close. The approaching end opens up for the analysis of entangled sensations of lost faith in the unity of nation, home, and self and the persistent wish to unite the fragments of life, collect the shards, so to speak, and place them in order once more. Such an act of reconstruction may not enable the piecing together of the whole picture. Some pieces may not fit anymore, others may be lost. My suggestion is that the narrative of *The English Patient* enables an incomplete reconstruction of the faith in unity. The sense of alienation is only in part substituted by the longed for sense of belonging.

It seems to me that the temptation to criticise Ondaatje for being too unclear, too unpolitical, and too slippery stems from the uneasy feeling of being left in the dark. Rather

than criticising this evasiveness as a flaw in his abilities as a writer of prose, I suggest that the uneasiness is a result of its uncanny resemblance to the uncertainties of our own lives. In real life, we are more or less constantly aware that we cannot know where life is taking us despite our plans and expectations. Thus, as readers, we tend to find great comfort in the confinement of fictional lives. At least, we ought to be able to grasp and understand fictive characters. The inability to do so is emphasised by the narrator in a direct comment on the character Hana towards the very end of the novel: “She is a woman I don’t know well enough to hold in my wing, if writers have wings, to harbour for the rest of my life” (301). Hana is a construct, a fictional character, but she slips away from the narrator’s grasp, just the way the narrative makes both her and the other characters impossible to define and confine.

Gaps in the information provided by the narrative is humorously described by Laurence Sterne in *Tristram Shandy*:

No author, who understands the just boundaries of decorum and good-breeding, would presume to think all: The truest respect which you can pay to the reader’s understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself. For my own part, I am eternally paying him compliments of this kind, and do all that lies in my power to keep his imagination as busy as my own. (Sterne quoted in Iser 189-90)

Ondaatje certainly seems to strive towards this form of politeness towards his readers. At no point in the discourse of *The English Patient* does he offend his audience by presuming them unable to imagine for themselves. As Iser points out, however, the reader’s imagination may also be exhausted by being left too much in the dark: “In this process of creativity, the text may either not go far enough, or may go too far, so we may say that boredom and overstrain form the boundaries beyond which the reader will leave the field of the play” (190).

Obviously, there will be disagreement as to when an author either bores or overstrains his reader’s ability to imagine. *The English Patient*’s mixed reception, I suspect, has to do with how the various reviewers and critics relate to the gaps in the text. Where some delight in the

freedom of interpretation, others feel irritated and frustrated by what may seem a lack of substance.

Both Hilary Mantel and Craig Seligman point to what they perceive as weaknesses in the information provided. Seligman, for instance, misses a moral evaluation of the characters' occupation, particularly mentioning Caravaggio: "Caravaggio never causes the author any moral qualms; Ondaatje seems content to let him steal from the rich (or, in the *The English Patient*, from the unseen and the unwritten about) and leave it at that" (39). Additionally, he criticises the author's lack of attention to the effects of the physical wounds, desiring a more realistic portrayal of their everyday effect on, for instance, Caravaggio. This seems to provide a good example of Iser's reading process. The gaps in the text are filled by the readers' imagination. Within the framework of the text, there are inexhaustible possibilities of interpretation. Each reader, filling the gaps with his or her own images and interpretations, will ensure a variety of readings of the same text as long as the author has ensured the presence of such gaps. As such, Seligman and every other reader must make of the wounds what they think important.

By leaving the wounds and scars so little "interpreted" in the novel, the author allows his readers great freedom in the reading of them. The marks may represent damage in the sense of self as I argue in my analysis. Simultaneously, they may represent healing although with a breach from what used to be. They tell stories, and they create new truths and stories of the characters, their abilities to accept the change determining the outcome of the healing. Yet others may simply read the scars as the natural effect of war and violence. The power of interpretation is wholly in the hands of the reader who turns to the novel for pleasure, the book reviewer, and the professional reader and literary critic.

Despite disagreeing with both Mantel and Seligman in their strong objections to *The English Patient*, I too have questions left unanswered by the text. What does Hana feel when

Almásy dies. Does she grieve? Does she feel free, at last? Does she meet her stepmother Clara when returning to Canada? Does Caravaggio return to his wife? What will he do for a living, having his main tools for stealing destroyed? These may seem trivial, and even tabloid questions to have, but they signal an abrupt end to the reader's journey with the fictional characters. The only thing we are allowed to know of their future is the fact that Caravaggio, at some point, will be reminded of Kip, and that Kip and Hana also remember each other well in the future. The characters disappear from the novel like random acquaintances in real life. Rumours of how they are may reach us, but we will never know for certain. We will never know for sure how they are able to live with their wounds, external and internal, or if they will ever settle and feel at home where they are, despite their experiences of grief, loss of self, and alienation from society.

As I am about to complete my thesis on *The English Patient*, Michael Ondaatje's new novel, *Divisadero*, is being published in May this year, according to information provided on The Borzoi Reader Online. After 1992, he published only one work of fiction prior to this most recent novel, *Anil's Ghost*, in 2000. The publisher, eager of course to sell a new publication, promises: "Breathtakingly evoked and with unforgettable characters, *Divisadero* is a multilayered novel about passion, loss, and the unshakable past, about the often discordant demands of family, love, and memory. It is Michael Ondaatje's most intimate and beautiful novel to date."³ Many of the adjectives used to describe the contents of this new work of fiction could also have been used about *The English Patient*. It will be interesting to see if the author continues, as I believe he has in the past, to successfully reflect the mental state of the novel's characters through the narrative structure as well as the imagery.

³ *The Borzoi Reader Online*. Accessed April 5, 2007. <<http://www.randomhouse.com/knopf/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780307266354>>.

Works Cited

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge, 2005.

Atkins, Kim. "Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005)." *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Accessed March 27, 2007. <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/r/ricoeur.htm>>.

Bache, Nina C. "Space in *The English Patient*." MA thesis. University of Oslo, 2004.

Banerjee, Mita. *The Chutneyfication of History*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2002.

Barbour, Douglas. *Michael Ondaatje*. New York: Twayne, 1993.

Borzo Reader Online, The. Accessed April 5, 2007.
<<http://www.randomhouse.com/knopf/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780307266354>>.

Brooks, Peter. *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1993.

Butler, Christopher. *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: OUP, 2002.

Chevalier, Jean and Alain Gheerbrant. *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*. Trans. John Buchanan-Brown. London: Penguin, 1996.

Cohn, Dorrit. *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983.

Cuddon, J. A., ed. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. London: Penguin, 1999.

Darias-Beautell, Eva. *Contemporary Theories and Canadian Fiction: Shifting Sands*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000.

Dawson, Carrie. "Calling People Names: Reading Imposture, Confession, and Testimony in and after Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 25 (2000): 50-73.

- Dirks, Nicholas B, ed. *In Near Ruins: Cultural Theory at the End of the Century*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998.
- Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Padmini Mongia. London: Arnold, 1996. 110-21.
- Hillger, Annick. *Not Needing All the Words: Michael Ondaatje's Literature of Silence*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2006.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Iser, Wolfgang. "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach." *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. Ed. David Lodge. Harlow: Longman, 2000. 189-205.
- Jewinski, Ed. *Michael Ondaatje: Express Yourself Beautifully*. Toronto: ECW Press, 1994.
- Johansson, Birgitta. "'Cruel, Pure Relationship: An Aspect of the Narrative Technique in Michael Ondaatje.'" *From Runes to Romance: A Festschrift for Gunnar Persson on his Sixtieth Birthday*. Ed. Mats Rydén et al. Uppsala: Swedish Science Press, 1997. 65-79.
- Kjærstad, Jan. "Boken av sand." *Menneskets nett: Essays, artikler, tekster*. Oslo: Aschehoug, 2004. 33-44.
- Langås, Unni, ed. *Den litterære kroppen: Artikler om kropp og tekst fra Edda til i dag*. Kristiansand: Høyskoleforlaget, 2005.
- Lothe, Jakob. *Narrative in Fiction and Film: An Introduction*. Oxford: OUP, 2000.
- Mantel, Hilary. "Wraith's Progress" Rev. of *The English Patient*, by Michael Ondaatje. *The New York Review of Books* 14 Jan. 1993: 22-3.
- Mukherjee, Arun P. "The Poetry of Michael Ondaatje and Cyril Dabydeen: Two Responses to Otherness." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 20 (1985): 49-67.
- Nikolaisen, Marit M. "Women Caring in War: Hemingway's Catherine and Ondaatje's Hana in Fiction and Film." MA thesis. University of Oslo, 2004.
- Novak, Amy. "Textual Hauntings: Narrating History, Memory, and Silence in *The English Patient*." *Studies in the Novel* 36 (2004): 206-31.
- Ondaatje, Michael. *Anil's Ghost*. London: Picador, 2000.

---. *The Dainty Monsters*. Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1967.

---. *The English Patient*. London: Picador, 1993. Abbreviated *EP*.

---. *In the Skin of a Lion*. London: Picador, 1988.

---. *Running in the Family*. London: Picador, 1984.

Papayanis, Marilyn Adler. *Writing in the Margins: The Ethics of Expatriation from Lawrence to Ondaatje*. Nashville: Vanderbilt U P, 2005.

Pfister, Manfred. *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993.

Reitan, Barbara H. "A Postmodern Picture: Imagery, Intertextuality and Identity in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*." MA thesis. University of Oslo, 2005.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. 3 vols. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985.

Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. London & New York: Routledge, 2002.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin, 2003.

---. *Reflections on Exile*. London: Granta Books, 2001.

Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford: OUP, 1985.

Schimanski, Johan. "The Deperiodicized Patient: Ondaatje and the Contemporary." *Identities and Masks*. Ed. Jakob Lothe, Anne Holden Rønning, and Peter Young. Kristiansand: Høyskoleforlaget, 2001. 125-41.

Scobie, Stephen. "The Reading Lesson: Michael Ondaatje and the Patients of Desire." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 53 (1994): 92-106.

Seligman, Craig. "Sentimental Wounds" Rev. of *The English Patient*, by Michael Ondaatje. *The New Republic* 15 March 1993. 38-41.

Simpson, D. Mark. "Minefield Readings: The Postcolonial *English Patient*." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 53 (1994): 216-37.

Solecki, Sam. "Nets and Chaos: The Poetry of Michael Ondaatje." *Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje*. Ed. Sam Solecki. Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1985. 93-110.

Stangebye, Randi. "Den enigmatiske pasienten: Spatialitet, temporalitet og historiefortelling i Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*." MA thesis. University of Oslo, 2000.

Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven. "Ondaatje's *The English Patient* and Questions of History." *Comparative Cultural Studies and Michael Ondaatje's Writing*. Ed. Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2005. 115-31.

Wachtel, Eleanor. "An Interview with Michael Ondaatje." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 53 (1994): 250-61.

Young, Robert J. C. *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: OUP, 2003.