

## **Dissociating Traumatic Self : A Psychoanalytic Reading of Ondaatje's *The English Patient***

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In Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, identity is reconstructed among four characters who are avoiding many lost aspects of their previous lives in an Italian villa during World War II. They need to escape the trauma created, their old identities, names, bodies, and places to begin anew. The reconstruction of identity takes place, regardless of the characters' attempts to escape separate versions of their identities. The novel is mostly about resisting the Eurocentric view of the world, focusing on human relationships and human resilience. Eventually, after the bombs are dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, the English patient is assumed by the reader to die in the Italian villa. The surviving characters Kip, Hana, and Caravaggio decide to return to the countries where they were born, where they feel that they belong. This gives one explanation of how the reconstruction of identity takes place, regardless of the characters' attempts to escape separate versions of their identities. The four characters have different reasons why their lives have led to the San Girolamo Villa, they are linked through World War II and their experience with trauma. According to Lois Tyson "individual identity and its cultural milieu inhabit, reflect, and define each other. Their relationship is mutually constitutive and dynamically unstable" (280). Creation of identity relies on culture as well as individual will and desire. In a sense, a complete individual self does not exist, because a subject's identity is reconstructed through a collage of names, stereotypes, body image, the imagination, memories, relationships, environment, books, and "history."

The chaos of the war still operates through trauma in the characters themselves. As a result of their experience with World War II, Kip, Hana, Caravaggio, and the English patient all have endured great trauma. The characters find that it is easier to escape their trauma than to face it. In the beginning of the novel the characters are not mentally or physically capable of facing their lost selves, loved ones, innocence, youth, worth, or honour. The characters' identities are being shaped and reshaped by their attempts to escape from their names, their bodies, and their environment. However, it does not matter how deeply the characters bury their trauma, because it resurfaces due to real events, such as the catastrophic explosions of two nuclear weapons on Japan. After leaving the villa, Kip, Hana, and Caravaggio all remember and yearn for the time that they spent together in Italy but accept and are satisfied with their choice to leave it. While in Italy, it is clear that all four characters try to save, learn from, and attach to one another in a time of war, when they are defeated in every possible way; they have lost family, lovers, friends, their innocence, a sense of usefulness, body parts, their confidence, security, youth, a trust in nations, children, ignorance, and/or their lives.

In an interview, Ondaatje states that "there are a lot of international bastards roaming around the world today. That's one of the book's main stories. Those migrants don't belong here but want to belong here" (Wachtel 257). The characters in the novel become refugees and attempt to escape their names/labels, bodies, and environment in order to belong in the villa that becomes their temporary residence. Kip, Hana,