

**TEXTUALIZING WAR IN MICHAEL ONDAATJE'S *THE ENGLISH PATIENT***

Laxmi Negi

*(Research Scholar, Gurukul Kangri University, Haridwar, Uttarakhand, India.)***ABSTRACT**

This paper talks about the various aspects of war and its outcomes as discussed in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*. The treatment of the sensitive topics of war gets a mature handling with Ondaatje. The paper comprehensively deals with the various reasons behind war and its aftermath effects on mankind. The prime focus is on the study of socio-physio-psychological snapshots and the projection of the brutal outcomes of war. Loneliness, frustration and traumatic existence on the lives of the characters are depicted and studied under the backdrop of World War II.

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**INTRODUCTION**

War in general terms is a state of conflict planned and executed by the leaders on national and international level. It basically runs for a remarkably long time. Oxford dictionary defines war "a state of competition or hostility between different people or groups."<sup>1</sup> The major characteristic of war is that it always deals with extremity of violence, destruction and devastation. On the political or official level the aftermath of war only deals with materialistic loss and the death toll of soldiers along with the injured ones. However the losses any war brings to the lives of human beings in the form of acute physical and psychological pain is never measured or recorded officially. This is the major concern of Michael Ondaatje. He basically tries to bring to light that concealed and never discussed grief of human beings in his novels.

**MICHAEL ONDAATJE'S TREATMENT OF WAR: A THEMATIC OVERVIEW**

War and aftermath of war is one of the prominent themes with which Michael Ondaatje has dealt in his novels. He gives a comprehensive treatment to the concept of war and its most probable outcomes in his Booker winning novel *The English Patient*. The major point which matters is the causes of war and second that is of the prior concern of the author is its outcome or aftermath. Ondaatje does complete justice with both the aspects. All the major characters, incidents and places or settings contribute a lot to do justice to the theme.

The protagonist Almsy is a victim of war who physically and psychologically suffered to a great extent. To quote a critic named *Bussy*, "Disguising his Hungarian national identity beneath the distortion of his body, the English patient prevents hostility from



the other characters, which are aligned with the opposite side of the war effort.”<sup>2</sup> Along with Almasy other characters viz. Hana the young Canadian nurse, Kip or Kirpal Singh the Indian sapper in British army and Caravaggio the thief, are all the major victims of war.

The most important outcome of war is that it always leaves a never ending impression on the lives of those human beings who have especially faced it directly. Like the Civil War in Sri Lanka, World War II has also made the characters of *The English Patient* experience life in the bitterest way. War has destroyed their lives in all possible ways. They are broken hearts due to war. They are handicapped due to war as in the case of Caravaggio. Moreover this handicap is not only physical. Since, after getting his thumbs cut, Caravaggio has almost lost his nerves, and his confidence as a thief. Here it is important to mention that Ondaatje portrays the character of Caravaggio in a negative way. On the other hand, he represents him as charming as a thief whose charm has been taken away by war. Hana is compelled to live with the stories of Herodotus given to her by Almasy and Kip since at the end of the novel whosoever she meets, loves, cares goes far away from her due to war. A critic rightly observes in the following words:

When war occurs, life changes and would not be the same again. The characters in *The English Patient* change after the nightmare of war. Almasy cannot live without concealing his identity. *Caravaggio* would never be able to use his hands as efficiently as before, a scar which will remain forever. These are but the physical sides which are less torturous than the longer lasting emotional wounds..... just like *Katharine* when she joins *Almasy's* party of travellers.<sup>3</sup>

Madox is one of the minor characters of *The English Patient* whose pure soul is tortured because his countrymen are involved in mass killing in the name of war. Jan, Hana's only female friend, dies in war all of a sudden without having any intimations or ideas about it. Caravaggio also keeps suffering with the war trauma after his thumbs are cut off. He finds himself unable to calculate the reason of this brutal

punishment awarded to him. Hana the heroine of the novel who is alive would also forever remember how her friend Jan dies after chancing on a mine. Life becomes so vulnerable or unexpected that one can't expect anything for the very next moment during war. Hana loses her friend Jan after lending money to her. It is possible that people may forget their physical wounds once but so far as the psychological wounds are concerned, they go away with the persons only. Almasy lives with the memories of his beloved Katherine from the beginning till end and dies as well.

During war there is no assurance in life, since it becomes absolutely unexpected and unpredictable. *The English Patient* is replete with incidents of this sort. In the very beginning the short but warm and happy meeting of Hana with her friend Jan converts into a horrible accident. It is a big emotional shock for Hana. There are other incidents as well in the novel which keeps on throwing the emotional challenges to the characters of the novel. Whether it is the dying English patient Almasy, or the brave soldier and minor Kip or Kirpal Singh, they both suffer from the emotional challenges which have been created in their life because of war. War is always so cruel that it does not give anybody time to recover. People keep on facing challenges in their life created by war throughout their life. They lose all their near and dear ones. Ondaatje has been very penetrative to observe these changes in the lives of human beings.

Almost all major characters in the novel are suffering from loneliness generated by the death of the close ones of the characters. Almasy has lost Katherine, his beloved; Hana decides to dedicate the rest of her life with the dying patient after she confronts the deaths of all people close to her. She loses her father when she was nursing the injured patient. However the circumstances after war were negative enough to leave her way even here with desperation. It is not enough with war it also makes people to be disloyal to their own country. People when under extreme pressure are left with no other way but to be disloyal. Almasy who had been working in the novel for his country as a cartographer, and being experienced as well adjusted himself to survive by helping the Germans in war. War causes eternal



changes in life. However these changes are not favourable at all. Ondaatje's characters in his novel *The English Patient* experience these changes and their lives become full of miseries. It has made them lose their talent forever. They have met with brutal punishments in their lives because of war. Rashmi Gaur comments on the utter and severe devastation due to war in the novel in the following words:

The spirit of war broods over the novel and images of death and devastation permeates its world. The desolation is clearly present in the surroundings of the villa. Retreating German forces mine the houses... sing every conceivable object-wooden boxes, pipes, vehicles... We have images of death, diseases and senseless devastation: typhus epidemic breaking out, people bombed inside tunnels and ships freshly mined underwater. Madox kills himself in silent protest against war, Almasy is arrested and can't reach Katherine with help in time, Hana withdraws within herself, Caravaggio's thumbs are cut off and Kip lives by defying the bomb wire.<sup>4</sup>

The destruction and devastation which comes along with war does not discriminate among countries which are involved. It equally hits all the places wherever it takes place. Ondaatje reveals the involvement of cities as well villages in the war. Everywhere human beings suffer due to war. Even the so called developed nations as well suffered a lot due to war:

It was worst in the cities. Bomb disposal units barely trained...During three weeks...dismantled 1,403 high-explosive bombs... Italy was worse than Africa, the clockwork fuzes nightmarishly eccentric...As Sappers entered cities they walked along avenues where corpses were strung from trees or the balconies of buildings. The Germans often retaliated by killing ten Italians for every German killed. Some of the hanging corpses were mined and had to be blown up in midair...The Germans often retaliated by killing ten Italians for every German killed.<sup>5</sup>

The destruction which war brings with it becomes secondary when compared to the inhuman feelings of hatred and revenge with the so called enemies. Ondaatje observes this burning sense of revenge of human beings towards each other. The way human beings are outraged with the feeling of revenge is noteworthy. Above given quotation by the novelist clearly expresses that two different sides become so obsessive with the killing and destruction that for every one murder of their side they revenge by killing many more from the opposite side.

Ondaatje gives plenty of instances in the novel to show the height of vulnerability of human beings. He becomes a visionary while dealing with the different deaths or through the experiences of Hana with the war victims. Hana and her profession becomes a mouthpiece of the novelist to convey that the concepts which people use to motivate themselves to be engaged in any kind of war become absolutely nothing. In order to condemn war in all possible ways he tends to insist that there is nobody who favours war, the very people who are responsible to fight and to lead also do not like it at all. In the novel it is observed that they also understand the destruction behind it. Ondaatje through both of his novels wants to bring the fact in life that war and death do not discriminate between different nations. Any nation and its natives have to suffer extremely during war.

It is obvious that everyone hates war. Even commanders do not behave without worry, pressure and fear. It is because we tend to generalise that only peasants suffer the most. However it is ironic that only the people who are involved in fighting the war are shown to be suffering. *Ondaatje* does that to show us that in war not only the peasants suffer but also the soldiers, miners, nurse, victims, prisoners and even the commanders as well. This is done to serve as a bitter reminder of the overall hate for the war.<sup>6</sup>

Ondaatje reveals war and its atrocities to the extent and tells how it makes everybody suspicious of each other. People who are holding the higher designation cannot escape from it. They are so scared of their enemies that stop thinking humanly at



all whenever it comes to punish them. The chopping of Caravaggio's figure represents the same thing. Caravaggio's thumbs are cut off out of brutality which takes place in human beings because of their own self created terror. People understand that just as they have been brutal to their enemies they can also be treated in the same way. Here it is observed that one of the major reasons of war Ondaatje wants to convey is the sense of inferiority or superiority in human beings. The ones who believe in giving pain to others on the contrary are the cowards who cannot afford to be punished or be treated in the same way. However on the other hand, Ondaatje does not become partial to show only one side of the coin. He puts forward the genuineness in the relationship among four people of the villa. Even after being strangers to each other they share love, knowledge and trust.

The fact that Almásy defected to the Germans poses a doubt in our minds.

Why did the protagonist defect to the enemy of the English yet did not win our scorn over him? This is because he is forced into doing that when the English refused to help him save Katharine. It signifies how heartless, cruel and wrong the whole war is. When war occurs, both sides are wrong. Therefore, whose side a person is on is irrelevant, because war is fickle? <sup>7</sup>

In order to relieve their wounded soul, people ultimately start finding solace in seclusion. Therefore war tends to make people anti-social. The setting of the novel is also used by Ondaatje to reveal the loneliness of the lives of the people. Phrases like "the abandoned Italian Villa" conveys the psychology of the human brains as well. However this antisocial attitude becomes important for people to survive. War time is very challenging since everyone needs to maintain the peace of mind in order to survive. Hana, Kip, Almasy and Caravaggio all are trying their best to maintain the calmness of their mind in their own ways. Hana turned to book reading since this is the only work which distracts her attention from her traumatic memories of war. Caravaggio and Almasy keep themselves addicted with morphine so that they could not be haunted by the distressing war memories. In the words of an unknown critic:

The isolation in the monastery is the same as the isolation within the soldier. In times of difficulty and danger, if one is able to preserve calmness and coolness in oneself, one is able to survive, just like the people living in the monastery. The brief period when *Hana* stayed in the monastery is like the soldiers' stay in the battlefield, brief, yet tough and hard to forget. However, it tells the individual that such suffering will not last and will pass soon. One will leave the present phase of life and enter the next, notwithstanding his reluctance or eagerness. Such is the progression of life until death. <sup>8</sup>

War made people learn the value of the things which seems invaluable in our daily life. It makes people meet with scarcity of lives and people start value thing which do not value for them in normal days. Ondaatje very keenly observes the scarcity which results after war. Hana decides to live with the dying patient in the abandoned Italian Villa meets with so many challenges. She is left with very little food when she lives in the villa with the English patient Almasy. Therefore when Caravaggio also joins them in the villa she requests him to arrange for food by getting some eggs. Moreover when the eggs given to her by Caravaggio fall on the ground she picks up the crushed eggs and cook them for the English patient.

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Being a Diaspora himself, and spending the crucial years of his life in different nations of the world, gives him a vast and clear understanding of the concept of war. The most important thing which ultimately Ondaatje wants to convey through his novels is that no matter how valid the causes of war are, it always brings nothing but destruction, ruin and



ultimate loss of mankind. To quote a critic named Bussy, "Disguising his Hungarian national identity beneath the distortion of his body, the English patient prevents hostility from the other characters, which are aligned with the opposite side of the war effort."<sup>9</sup>

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During war there is no assurance in life, since it becomes absolutely unexpected and unpredictable. *The English Patient* is replete with incidents of this sort. In the very beginning the short but warm and happy meeting of Hana with her friend Jan converts into a horrible accident. It is a big emotional shock for Hana. There are other incidents as well in the novel which keeps on throwing the emotional challenges to the characters of the novel. Whether it is the dying English patient Almsy, or the brave soldier and minor Kip or Kirpal Singh, they both suffer from the emotional challenges which have been created in their life because of war. War is always so cruel that it does not give anybody anytime to recover. People keep on facing challenges in their life created by war throughout their life. They lose all their near and dear ones. Ondaatje has been very

penetrative to observe these changes in the lives of human beings.

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Ondaatje's views that no war can be brought to its winning end with hatred, and the more sardonic we become to end a war the graver we tend to make it. Both the major novels of Ondaatje deals



from the beginning till the end to condemn hatred to end a war. Since a war does not get its fuel from our leaders but it is the common man that allows making a burrow in it and keeps rearing the same.

Kip realizes it after the bomb dropping event on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and therefore represents the voice of any common man from Asian continent who realizes the oppressive policies of British towards the so called brown races of world, "You and then the Americans converted us with your missionary rules. And Indian soldiers wasted their lives as heroes so they could be pukkah. You had wars like cricket. How did you fool us into this? Here listen to what you people have done"<sup>10</sup>

Giving a comprehensive view of war Ondaatje brings the irony behind the concept of war at one place where war is a result of egos, differences of human hearts, culture, language, and ethnicity and so on. On the other hand, while being trapped in war the characters in the villa love each other and care for one another without any discrimination. Therefore even after the fact that all the characters in the villa are having their personal traumas related to war, however it is but war which has brought them together. It is the coincidence made by war because of which all people that have their traumatic experiences come in harmony with each other. While coming in the villa they all are tortured souls due to war and having different backgrounds.

However, 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. The characters have lost and are lost.<sup>11</sup>

Ondaatje reveals all sorts of ruins which war brings with it. No matter how hard people try to bring their life to normal they are not able to do so without sacrificing something very important in their life. Ondaatje also tries to convey that nothing is able or worthy enough to compensate the losses brought

by war in the life of common people who in fact have nothing to do with it. They keep losing their loved ones again and again. Their continuous efforts to adjust with the circumstances ultimately become less effective. War proves to be more powerful in all the ways by destroying the lives of common people.

Nevertheless Ondaatje understands that the hatred and judgmental outlook which people carry with them at times prove to be more intense when compared to the feeling of love and care towards each other. Characters of *The English Patient* meet each other as stranger and start loving and being familiar to each other, live like a family, but are ultimately destroyed and parted because of war again. Kip and Hana part again after the news of the bomb dropping event of USA over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The author wants to convey the biggest fact that aftermath of war made to suffer even those who actually deserve to be awarded. Hana is the main example of this; she is left broken hearted by Kip on the news of bomb dropping without having any fault of her own. She was left alone again by Kip who was her ultimate hope for happiness in life just because she belongs to Europe.

Eventually the shock over the adjustment to the war and its aftermath causes the characters to return to the countries that they abandoned before World War II because it is easier to fit into the inaccurate limitations of their names, labels, bodies, place, and "history" than to live as an "other."<sup>12</sup>

Ondaatje reflects the fact that war not only causes trouble directly in lives of common person but it also tends to affect indirectly as well. Kip, the Asian in the villa suffers a lot not exactly because of war nevertheless it is no denying the fact that his sufferings got intensified because of war even when it occurred in a different location. Kip joins British Army after the commencement of World War II, works honestly for them, puts his life into danger many a time however does not get acknowledgement since, "his dark skin and turban, singled him out from the crowd."<sup>13</sup> (Bussy, p. 27). Kip has suffered his entire duration in British army due to the discrimination between British and Asian People.



He has longed for true love, respect, and acknowledgement in British Army for his daring work of saving their life by diffusing bomb but could not ever get the same. He remarks out of disgust, "The English! They expect you to fight for them but won't talk to you."<sup>14TEP</sup>

Therefore as a result the people who have been discriminated also get tainted no matter that they do not realize that the garbage they have suffered from others also states accumulating in them in course of time. *Bussy* observes the changes taking place in the body and soul of Kip and writes, "Kip does not realize just how much of himself is tainted by such stereotypes until the end of the novel when World War II comes to an end with the dropping of two bombs on an "other" nation..."<sup>15</sup>

Ondaatje shows the different ways in which war suppresses people. Kip, who joined the British Army against the wish of his elder brother, suffers a lot due to the discrimination there because of his different nationality. However, he does not ever recognize it, or in other words to admit even to himself during war and intense condition. Therefore when war was over and he was back to his country in India and Hana is recalling every moment of the day when Kip left, "she sees him the field, his hands clasped over his head, then realizes this is a gesture not of pain...and Kip is a hundred yards away from her in the lower field when she hears a scream emerge from his body which had never raised its voice among them."<sup>16</sup>

War brings Hana and Kip close to each other and thereafter become a cause as well of their breakup. The development of love between Hana and Kip takes place out of genuineness but their breakup is only and only is the result of war. *Bussy* analyses the start and end of their relationship in detail and also conclude that it is but war which keeps destroying the emotional, social and private life of human beings. War takes away the dreams, hopes and aspirations of human beings.

The disruption of their lives, due to the war, is the cause of the new and drastic reconstruction of identities. The relationship between Kip and Hana is fuelled by, but not limited to, sexual desire that allows an escape into someone else's identity, for just

a moment. They experience the tender intimacy between people that they lacked during the war and that they have come to need. Consequently, they also try to shed the superficial stereotypes of their bodies by sharing them and discovering that they are both worthy of love and respect.<sup>17</sup>

Though Ondaatje states in his novel that war was responsible to bring the characters in the villa to each other however he does not highlight it as something good or honourable. He condemns war completely and highlights his novel with incidents which help to reveal the destructive and shocking outcomes related to it. Ondaatje's effort to criticise war and its background gives him a high place as a postmodern novelist who do not believe in any concept based on violence in any form. In the novel we find that Hana, Caravaggio, and Almsy are on the side of imperialism. Yet they have also suffered a lot due to war.

War is not portrayed as leading to a victorious outcome in the novel, even though three out of the four characters have worked for the "winning" Allies. Although Kip, Hana, and Caravaggio aligned themselves with the Allies, a political and national debate switches to a racial one when the bombs are dropped on Japan. Instead of experiencing triumph, Hana, Caravaggio, and *The English Patient* are ashamed, and Kip becomes angry at the actions of the Allies.<sup>18</sup>

Caravaggio also agrees with the comment made by Kip that "...they would never have dropped such a bomb on a white nation"<sup>19</sup> (Ondaatje 286). Here according to *Bussy*, "Kip's otherness is evident through his location in a white nation and through his decision to leave Europe immediately after he hears the news of the bombs."<sup>20</sup> (*Bussy* 34)

Ondaatje reveals the human approach of people on the stronger side and shows the sense of embarrassment on the bomb dropping event of their continent on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Here with the negative response of Caravaggio, Hana and Almsy, Ondaatje wants to convey the message that any human being with a human approach cannot ever appreciate the act of violence and bullying.



Therefore, when Kip blames their race for the injustice their leaders are doing to the Asian continent, instead of opposing they unanimously agree with him. Especially Caravaggio agrees with his comment that they would not have dropped such a bomb on any nation belonging to their race.

Kip in *The English Patient* after hearing the news of bomb dropping on Japan comments with utter resentment, "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"<sup>21</sup>

Kip realizes the sense of bullying of the imperialists over the dark and brown races screams out indignantly, "People think a bomb is a mechanical object, a mechanical enemy. But you have to consider that somebody made it."<sup>22</sup>

War results in the form of a sense of otherness in the characters of *The English Patient's* characters. Whenever war occurs it gives birth to the sense of otherness as well as inferiority in the people of different nations basically the non- white nations. This sense of otherness is so intense that the characters suffer throughout their lives. Kip even after serving the white nations so honestly and dedicatedly does not get due recognition there. This partial behaviour of the white people always keeps hurting Kip. He is so oppressed with this sense of alienation that gradually he develops a strong feeling in him that no matter how hard he works for a white nation, no matter how great the intensity of risk taken by him to save the lives of these white people he cannot ever win love and respect in their heart and mind for him.

This was the reason which ultimately converts Kip into an introvert who has become hostile as well to the world. In the novel the Kip whom readers meet is entirely different from the one which is portrayed at the end of the novel at the news of bomb dropping on Japan. *Bussy* names this sense of superiority as Euro centrism. In the case of Kip this sense of otherness has its strong roots in the psychology that the news of bomb dropping on Japan shakes him entirely and he starts screaming out of anger. This was the time when the reader becomes aware about the roots of anger growing so strong in

Kip and realizes his almost unpredictable behaviour on the news.

The distinctness of the images used by Ondaatje...help the plot move forward. Take, for example, the Hiroshima image. The repeated use of the image highlights the logic behind the radical change in Kip—his attempt to shoot the patient and his sudden flight. At the same time, the particular image reveals that the anti-war text is interpreted through their experiences.<sup>23</sup>

However Kip is not the only one who comes to the conclusion that relocating may aid one's emotional health and contribute to the development of his or her identity. Moreover this otherness is not partial or particular to one nation as it is felt by the European people as well in the case of Hana and Caravaggio. In the words of *M Bussy*:

Before the bombs are dropped, Caravaggio argues that the war infects their lives and impedes their chances of recreating their new selves. It is hard to escape everything that the war has brought to the characters' lives, when the places that surround them are damaged as well. For example, the library is laced with bombs and missing portions of its roof.<sup>24</sup>

Caravaggio calculates the reason of war in an ironical way and says that people are so obsessed with this concept that if they dare to leave their so called native places and decide to live in other countries they start causing unnecessary troubles which in most of the cases results in war, be it within the international fronts or boundaries within a particular state. Caravaggio ironically remarks in the novel, "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?"<sup>25</sup>

In most of the cases war takes away the ability of reasoning in human beings. The armies become so obsessive during a war that they ultimately stop reasoning and finding out why they are involved in a war after all. They become so obsessed about killing others that eventually they start harming their own people as well in the name of



war. The destructive consequences of war, not only affect the human beings but it also affects the natural surroundings of any war affected area. In spite of being a western himself Caravaggio shows his hatred towards war and tells about its destructive consequences not only on human beings but on the surrounding and nature as well. He states in the novel, "A farmer on the western front cannot prune a tree without ruining his saw. Why? Because of the amount of shrapnel shot into it during the last war. Even the trees are thick with diseases we brought."<sup>26</sup>

The jeopardized circumstances due to the war in Sri Lanka and Europe frustrates Ondaatje to the extent and he expresses his desire of moving away from the chaotic situation, "Caravaggio, who is Canadian, takes responsibility, claiming that all four of the characters brought the disease of war. He understands that he has participated in the war, but finds no reason to remain living among its ruins."<sup>27</sup> (*Bussy* 36) Ondaatje indignantly blames the leaders of armies for the war atrocities and states clearly that soldiers who have got no personal interest to be indulged in a war keep sacrificing their lives out of the indoctrination of their leaders whereas they keep themselves busy, "...somewhere else to cause trouble..." "We should all move out together"<sup>28</sup> Ondaatje concludes indignantly.

Ondaatje highlights the facts that no matter people get into war after having discriminations but so far as war itself is concerned, it does not discriminate between two parties or people of two different backgrounds. Whenever it takes place it destroys human beings equally without discriminating. Hana, Caravaggio, and Almasi are some of them. So far as Caravaggio is concerned, "war has unbalanced [Caravaggio] and he can return to no other world as he is, wearing these false limbs that morphine promises."<sup>29</sup> Caravaggio has lost everything like the other characters due to war. It has made him handicapped from his body and minds both. *Bussy* states:

The "world" war has handicapped Caravaggio. He can no longer steal what he needs without thumbs or nerve, and he has developed a dependency on morphine as a result of his injuries. While he is on morphine, which he shares with the

suffering English patient, Caravaggio is described as becoming numb to the "world." The time at war has made a very independent man dependent on morphine and on three other characters residing in the Villa San Girolamo. The effects of war and place on the characters are not only traumatic, but limiting to identity. However, they become part of the process of identity reconstruction. Although Kip, Hana, Caravaggio, and the English patient can hide from and deny being part of the "world," they will eventually have to come to terms with its existence.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore the dealing of Ondaatje with the theme of war ultimately divulge his desire to condemn war in all its forms and he tries to convey his message universally that all sorts of war whether civil or international always results in violence and it is nothing but loss of humanity. He also goes to the extent of conveying the message that no war can either be glorified or justified. The concept of war between people on the basis of differences must be slammed universally. By making war one of the prominent themes he also conveys the message that a true and genuine leader of any nation will never put his people into war or justify the atrocities brought by it anyhow. He also condemns war from every point of view and strongly voices against it by bringing forth all the desperation and losses of human lives, values, and ethics and so on. This is how he shows that any war becomes meaningless when it is only destroying the lives of its own countrymen. He also points out the fact that no matter who wins on the front there is no winning ultimately.

Ondaatje wishes to bring in light the ironical truth regarding any war which has been rationalized by the political leaders that there is no sense in getting involved in a war in the following words:

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? This was treacherous opera. People hardened against those around them – soldiers, doctors, nurses, civilians.<sup>31</sup>



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