

Messages in a Bottle: Historiographic Metafiction and the  
Voicing of Marginalised Groups in Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a  
Lion* and *The English Patient*

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## ABSTRACT

In this research, an attempt will be made to answer what the function is of Michael Ondaatje's postmodernist approach to history and memory in *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987) and *The English Patient* (1992), in particular with regard to voicing marginalised groups. This question will be approached from postmodernist theory on history, in particular historiographic metafiction. Postcolonial terms and concepts will be used to describe the marginalised groups present in both novels. The novels will be analysed from a postmodern perspective on history, and in the light of historiographic metafiction.

Key words: postmodernism, historiographic metafiction, postcolonialism, Canadian literature

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## INTRODUCTION

“I thought I had gone slightly mad with this thing, but in fact it took off,” said Michael Ondaatje (1943), highly successful Sri-Lankan-Canadian writer of several novels and poems, regarding his first work of prose.<sup>1</sup> Ondaatje started his literary career in 1967 (*The Dainty Monsters*), and his work ranges to the present day (*Warlight*, 2018).<sup>2</sup> *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, a collection of poems combined with prose and art, won the Governor General’s Award in 1970, and his novel *The English Patient* was the 1992 winner of the prestigious Man Booker Prize.<sup>3</sup> In Bourdieusian terms, then, Ondaatje possesses a considerable amount of symbolic capital in the literary field.<sup>4</sup>

Ondaatje has been named “one of Canada’s most important contemporary writers and one of the country’s biggest cultural exports,” a postmodernist author “best understood...as an artist who [draws] into question the very limits of...genres;” “a writer fascinated with borders.”<sup>5</sup> His work is characterised by a challenging attitude towards history, memory and genre, and by postmodern aspects such as fragmentation and intertextuality. With regard to *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, for example, it is noted that “[w]here the title of this text implies a ‘complete’ narrative of its hero, the events are ambiguous and fragmented.”<sup>6</sup> Linda Hutcheon, in

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<sup>1</sup> Louisiana Channel, “Michael Ondaatje Interview: We Can’t Rely on One Voice,” June 2015, YouTube video, 4:20. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gBVILOsetU>.

Hans Bak, “Michael Ondaatje: *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987),” *Canadian Literature*. Faculty of Arts, Radboud University. 2 March 2017. Lecture.

<sup>2</sup> Bak, “Michael Ondaatje.”

Michael Ondaatje, *Warlight*, (New York: Knopf, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Canada Council for the Arts, “Governor General’s Literary Awards: Past Winners and Finalists,” GGbooks.ca, accessed March 14, 2018. <http://ggbooks.ca/past-winners-and-finalists>.

The Man Booker Prize, “The English Patient,” TheManBookerPrize.com, accessed March 14, 2018. <http://themanbookerprize.com/books/english-patient-by-michael-ondaatje>.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

<sup>5</sup> James Procter, “Michael Ondaatje,” *Literature.BritishCouncil.org*, accessed March 14, 2018. <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/michael-ondaatje>.

Linda Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 81.

<sup>6</sup> Procter, “Michael Ondaatje.”

addition, sees Ondaatje as a typically postmodern author who takes the challenging of borders “one step further” than other Canadian writers.<sup>7</sup> His 1987 novel *In the Skin of a Lion* has, in effect, been called an “exploration of the boundaries between fact and fiction, life and art ... male and female.”<sup>8</sup> Such description of Ondaatje’s work is significant for this research, as it is focused on Ondaatje’s postmodernist approach, especially with regard to history.

When discussing the process of writing a novel, Ondaatje explained: “I want to not sound like myself. I probably do sound like myself, I can’t help that, but I do try to not to echo a style of writing or a trope ... I want, in fact, each book almost to be in a different language.”<sup>9</sup> Despite these intentions, Ondaatje’s novels *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987) and *The English Patient* (1992), written in succession, are closely connected by, for example, several characters featuring in both works. The novels are thematically similar as well, as they are both concerned with the critical exploration of boundaries between supposed historical facts and fiction, voicing those excluded from official history.<sup>10</sup> Both are, in addition, novels about “ex-centricity and its power through naming and language.”<sup>11</sup> They are indicative of Ondaatje’s postmodernist approach in literature, and offer a unique insight in the power of fiction.<sup>12</sup>

*In the Skin of a Lion* was praised for its “delicious” prose and poetic descriptions of working-class Torontonians excluded from the pages of history.<sup>13</sup> It was reviewed as “episodic, fragmentary, structurally loose and shifty.”<sup>14</sup> Ondaatje himself indicated he “wanted to talk about the people who were unhistorical – all those invisible professions that lay behind history.”<sup>15</sup> As a

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<sup>7</sup> Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 82.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>9</sup> Louisiana Channel, “Michael Ondaatje Interview,” 10:36.

<sup>10</sup> Procter, “Michael Ondaatje.”

<sup>11</sup> Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 103.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>13</sup> Anne Enright, “The Fallen Nun,” review of *In the Skin of a Lion*, by Michael Ondaatje, *The Guardian*, September 2007. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/sep/15/featuresreviews.guardianreview31>.

Carolyn Kizer, “Mr. Small Isn’t Here. Have an Iguana!”, review of *In the Skin of a Lion*, by Michael Ondaatje, *The New York Times*, September 1987. <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/00/05/14/specials/ondaatje-lion.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Kizer, “Mr. Small Isn’t Here.”

<sup>15</sup> Mark A. Uhlig, “From the Land of the Terrifically Believable,” *The New York Times*, September 27, 1987, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/00/05/14/specials/ondaatje-lion.html>.

result, *In the Skin of a Lion* was seen as a novel that effectively “decentres history” by means of “poetic imagination and ... tale-telling.”<sup>16</sup> *The English Patient* has been argued to be concerned with the same themes as its precedent, but dealing with them “in a more subtle, indirect matter.”<sup>17</sup> It was found to “surpass in power Mr. Ondaatje’s previous novels,” while being a product of these works at the same time.<sup>18</sup> The “intensely theatrical tour de force” was adapted into a motion picture in 1996.<sup>19</sup>

Hutcheon connects Ondaatje’s writing style in *In the Skin of a Lion* to her own concept of historiographic metafiction, arguing that “in this bio- or historiographic metafiction we experience ... [a] postmodern performance in our act of reading the fragmented text.”<sup>20</sup> She subsequently uses *In the Skin of a Lion* to illustrate her point about Ondaatje’s work. Bak supports Hutcheon’s claim, and, in addition, briefly discusses the novel’s focus on the marginalised groups of Toronto.<sup>21</sup> Bak notes:

The novel had best been seen as a piece of ‘historiographic metafiction’, a self-referential act of literary and historiographical revisionism, in which Ondaatje seeks to do poetic justice to the anonymous masses of laborers who actually built the city [of Toronto], but whose lives have remained unwritten, they have remained silent in the public record of the city, without a voice in official urban historiography.<sup>22</sup>

This quotation serves as an excellent indication of the *status quaestionis* from where this research will depart. Several scholars have looked into Ondaatje’s work and picked up on his

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<sup>16</sup> Enright, “The Fallen Nun.”

Uhlig, “From the Land of the Terrifically Believable.”

<sup>17</sup> Procter, “Michael Ondaatje.”

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, “Love and Death as the War Goes On All Around,” review of *The English Patient* by Michael Ondaatje, *The New York Times*, October 29, 1992.

<https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/06/28/specials/ondaateje-patient2.html?scp=39&sq=love%2520and%2520death&st=cse>.

<sup>19</sup> *The English Patient*, dir. Anthony Minghella, Miramax Films, 1996.

<sup>20</sup> Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 84.

<sup>21</sup> Bak, “Site of Passage,” 291-5.

<sup>22</sup> Bak, “Site of Passage”, 291.

postmodernist approach to writing history, which has been explicitly connected to Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction by some. It appears, however, that no research to date has thoroughly analysed the role of this way of writing history in Ondaatje's novels, nor does it seem to have analysed its connection to the voicing of minorities. As such, this research will attempt to answer the following question: what is the function of Michael Ondaatje's postmodernist approach to history in *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient* with regard to voicing marginalised groups? Hutcheon's theory on postmodernist history writing and historiographic metafiction, outlined in the works *A Poetics of Postmodernism* and *The Canadian Postmodern*, lends itself particularly well for this research. These works are therefore used as the perspective from which Ondaatje's novels are subsequently analysed. Bhabha's postcolonial term of 'the Other' is used to describe and analyse the marginalised groups present in both novels.

Ondaatje's oeuvre has been the subject of extensive scholarly research, and *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient* are no exceptions. Simmons focuses on the role of art by analysing aspects of cubism in *In the Skin of a Lion*. It is argued that Ondaatje's use of a variety of perspectives is similar to a cubist painting in that both approach a certain subject from all angles at once, resulting in a paradox of unified fragmentation.<sup>23</sup> Simmons moreover claims that Ondaatje's writing style "disrupts the novel's coherence" because of its seeming lack of order and continuity.<sup>24</sup> Bak adds that exactly because of Ondaatje's approach to an urban novel, where the city is seen as "a fluid zone of perpetually shifting sites and signs," art is of particular significance.<sup>25</sup> Simmons, in turn, continues by arguing that the novel makes use of "frame-breaking devices that ... remind us of the text's status as a fictional construct," in effect pointing out a major postmodernist characteristic of Ondaatje's novel. Indeed, Hutcheon described postmodern literature as literature that is explicitly aware of its textual construction.<sup>26</sup> Simmons also sees a second way in which the gaps in Ondaatje's text can be interpreted. Analysed as being similar to "[b]lank sections of Cubist canvases," the gaps between paragraphs in *In the Skin of a*

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<sup>23</sup> Rochelle Simmons, "In the Skin of a Lion as a Cubist Novel," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (1998), 3.

<sup>24</sup> Simmons, "A Cubist Novel," 3.

<sup>25</sup> Hans Bak, "Site of Passage: The City as a Place of Exile in Contemporary North-American Multicultural Literature," in *Uneasy Alliance: Twentieth-Century American Literature, Culture and Biography* (New York, NY & Amsterdam: Rodopi b.v., 2004), 298.

<sup>26</sup> Simmons, "A Cubist Novel," 4.

Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 1.



*Lion*'s are interpreted as symbolising, for example, the passing of time.<sup>27</sup> Lastly, Simmons also claims that the lapses in Ondaatje's story create "an ambiguity of meaning" as well, which is, again, regarded as highly similar to the function of open spaces in cubist works of art.<sup>28</sup> Several academics have pointed at the significant role of history in Ondaatje's work, particularly in *In the Skin of a Lion*. Smorkaloff, for example, writes that Ondaatje "explores the unofficial passages of North-American history" by presenting various art forms that, in Ondaatje's own words, "betray official history and put together another family."<sup>29</sup> Smorkaloff argues that *In the Skin of a Lion* portrays writers as "unofficial historian[s]" who weave together the stories conveyed by these very art forms, among other things, creating an unofficial (hi)story in the process.<sup>30</sup> This unofficial history is found to treat "ethnic differentiation [as] a central, rather than peripheral or exoticist component of Canadian cultural discourse."<sup>31</sup> What Smorkaloff is describing, then, is essentially a postmodernist approach to history – without explicitly pointing it out as such.<sup>32</sup>

Lobnik discusses history in *The English Patient* by focusing the way oral history and "the elusive concept of memory" feature in the novel.<sup>33</sup> The latter, Lobnik points out, "lies at the core of Ondaatje's efforts to open a space for," what is again described as, "alternative histories, and fill the gaps still widely pervading historical and nationalist discourses."<sup>34</sup> Ondaatje's approach to history is one "largely ignored and marginalized" by Western historians.<sup>35</sup> His novel, as a result, brings "notions such process and transformation" to the fore.<sup>36</sup> Again, this sort of view on

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<sup>27</sup> Simmons, "A Cubist Novel," 4.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>29</sup> Pamela M. Smorkaloff, "Shifting Borders, Free Trade, and Frontier Narratives: US, Canada, and Mexico," *American Literary History* 6, no. 1 (1994): 94.

Michael Ondaatje, *In the Skin of a Lion*, (New York, NY: Knopf, 1987), 145.

<sup>30</sup> Smorkaloff, "Shifting Borders," 95.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>32</sup> For a detailed discussion of a postmodernist approach to history, see, for example, Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>33</sup> Mirja Lobnik, "Echoes of the Past: Nomad Memory in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*," *South Atlantic Review* 72, no. 4 (2007): 72.

<sup>34</sup> Lobnik, "Echoes of the Past," 74.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 73.

history, in which the process of writing and interpreting holds a central place, is distinctly postmodern.<sup>37</sup> In fact, Lobnik discusses a myriad of aspects of *The English Patient* that are strongly related to Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction.<sup>38</sup> It is pointed out, for example, that, in Ondaatje's work, "the past emerges as something perpetually reactivated and unfolding its dialogic force within the novel ... the author draws on remnants of the past ... and reinscribes these broken and fragmentary pieces."<sup>39</sup> Historiographic metafiction sees history not as a product, but rather as a dynamic process, hence connecting to Lobnik's description of the past as "something perpetually reactivated."<sup>40</sup> The way Lobnik describes the author as gluing historical fragments together correlates with the powerful role of the novelist as a rewriter of (often unnamed) history or teller of stories.<sup>41</sup>

While Lobnik implicitly related one of Ondaatje's novels to historiographic metafiction, other scholars have discussed it explicitly. Ty, for example, focuses on 'the Other' in Canadian literature and categorises Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* as historiographic metafiction, claiming that it is "an early example of [a] movement towards 'global' Canadian postmodern fiction."<sup>42</sup> This claim seems to imply that later Canadian works of fiction, or works by Ondaatje for that matter, are expected to continue this movement. This would correspond with Lobnik's analysis of *The English Patient*. Ty mentions Heble, who, without relating it to Hutcheon's concept, argues that Ondaatje's novel contains "self-reflective gestures ... [which] simultaneously contain an imaginative reconstruction of the past which insists that history *could have happened* [author's emphasis] as Ondaatje presents it."<sup>43</sup> In other words, Heble argues here for the historiographic metafictionality of the novel, but without naming it as such. Ty supports this, claiming that *In the Skin of a Lion* gives the European labour immigrants in the story "individuality and historic

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<sup>37</sup> Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 13.

<sup>38</sup> As outlined in, for example, *The Canadian Postmodern* and *A Poetics of Postmodernism*.

<sup>39</sup> Lobnik, "Echoes of the Past," 96-7.

<sup>40</sup> Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 86.

Ibid., 96.

<sup>41</sup> Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 104.

<sup>42</sup> Eleanor Ty, "Representing 'Other' Diasporas in Recent Global Canadian Fiction," *College Literature* 38, no. 4 (2011): 100.

<sup>43</sup> Heble quoted in Ty, "Representing 'Other' Diasporas," 104.

importance.”<sup>44</sup> These labour immigrants may also be described as “ex-centrics,” types of characters that are usually transplanted into the centre of historical postmodernist novels.<sup>45</sup> Although Ty and Heble thus mention key aspects of a distinctly postmodern approach to history, neither engage with this further.

Some scholars, either implicitly or explicitly, acknowledge Ondaatje’s postmodernist approach to history but aim their research at different aspects of either *In the Skin of a Lion* or *The English Patient*.<sup>46</sup> Adhikari, for example, touches upon several aspects of a postmodernist historical approach. It is argued that “[t]he demarcating line between the role of the scientific historian as a recorder of facts and the poet as creator of plausible facts has been blurred,” in effect describing what Hutcheon calls the “attempts [of historiographic metafiction] to demarginalize the literary through confrontation with the historical”, furthermore “problematiz[ing] the very possibility of historical knowledge.”<sup>47</sup> Adhikari does not further engage with the aspects of historiographic metafiction pointed out here.

The few scholars that explicitly refer to Ondaatje’s novels as postmodern works of historiographic metafiction do not seem to engage with the role of the concept in the stories extensively, nor do they engage with more than one novel.

The theoretical foundations of this research are discussed in the following chapter, after which Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient* are, respectively, analysed by means of close reading in the light of, particularly, Hutcheon’s theory. Elements of historiographic metafiction and postmodernism are located and subsequently analysed while paying particular attention to its connection to marginalised groups. It is expected that the voicing of marginalised groups is a nearly inherent consequence of Ondaatje’s postmodernist approach to history, as an interest in the marginalised is a main characteristic of postmodernist literature.

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<sup>44</sup> Ty, “Representing ‘Other’ Diasporas,” 103.

<sup>45</sup> Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 94.

<sup>46</sup> For example, Robert D. Stacey, “A Political Aesthetic: Michael Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion* as ‘Covert Pastoral’,” *Contemporary Literature* 49, no. 3 (2008): 439-69.

<sup>47</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 108 & 106.

## CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Since this research will consider Michael Ondaatje's arguably postmodernist approach to history and analyse *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient* from the perspective of historiographic metafiction, it is key to first outline relevant notions of postmodernism, as well as Hutcheon's theory. Postmodernism is often viewed as being "ahistorical".<sup>48</sup> A curious point of view, since postmodernism is profoundly interested and thoroughly engaged with history. Hutcheon, for example, describes postmodernism as "resolutely historical."<sup>49</sup> Perhaps it is postmodernism's challenging attitude towards history that has caused it to appear as ahistorical to some critics. On the whole, it takes a position highly critical of the notion of history, the process of historiography, and the assumption of possessing knowledge about the historical past. This perspective is not a rejection of history, but rather a "problematizing return," as Hutcheon calls it.<sup>50</sup> Postmodernism takes a critical approach towards the dominant conventions and traditions of liberal humanism. Lyotard, for example, voices a profoundly postmodernist distrust towards the so-called master narratives of history.<sup>51</sup> From this critical revisiting of modernist assumptions about history, roughly six major characteristics of a postmodernist view on history may be distinguished.

Firstly, and perhaps most crucially, postmodernism rejects the belief in one historical truth and the existence of supposed historical 'facts.' As Hutcheon points out, "the implication [of postmodernism] is that there can be no single, essentialized, transcendent concept of 'genuine historicity'".<sup>52</sup> Postmodernism thus greatly problematises the possibility of objective knowledge about the past in the present. The reason for this critical attitude towards 'historical truths' is the supposed constructedness of history. Postmodernism does not believe in the notion of history as "'how things actually happened', with the historian in the role of recorder."<sup>53</sup> Instead of recorders, historians are seen as gatherers of history, weaving together a history oddly akin to a fictional narrative. This process, in which history is assembled, unified, and created, relies on

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<sup>48</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 87.

<sup>49</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 4.

<sup>50</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 88.

<sup>51</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 6.

<sup>52</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 89.

<sup>53</sup> Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 14-5.

what Hutcheon calls “[i]maginative reconstruction or intellectual systematizing.”<sup>54</sup> This process allows for “historiography’s explanatory and narrative emplotments of past events,” which ultimately “construct what we consider historical facts.”<sup>55</sup> In other words, historical facts are not objective reports of what happened at a certain moment in the past, but rather historiographic creations; stories made up out of fragments that were connected into a coherent narrative by a collector or gatherer of history, rather than simply a recorder. In Hutcheon’s words, “to write history is to narrate, to re-present by means of selection and interpretation.”<sup>56</sup> This perspective corresponds with White’s claim that “[h]istoriography ... is a poetic construct.”<sup>57</sup> From this point of view, then, history is hardly different from historical fiction. Both types of texts are constructed narratives inspired by, or built upon, historical sources or events.

Indeed, a second major feature of a postmodernist outlook on history is that it sees history and historical fiction as highly similar. Hutcheon elaborates on this as follows:

They have both been seen to derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality.<sup>58</sup>

Postmodernism does not only see historical fiction as closely connected to historiography, but art on the whole as well. With postmodernism, “gone . . . is the modernist belief that art can really be autonomous or separate from the world, the familiar humanist separation of art and life no longer holds.”<sup>59</sup> Hutcheon argues that, in the Canadian postmodern novel in particular, “the aesthetic and the social, the present and the past, are not separable discourses.”<sup>60</sup> It is argued that, as a

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<sup>54</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 92.

<sup>55</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 92.

<sup>56</sup> Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 66.

<sup>57</sup> Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 66.

<sup>58</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 105.

<sup>59</sup> Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 10.

Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 7.

<sup>60</sup> Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 14.

result, works like Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* cross the conventional border between historical non-fiction and the novel. White, in addition, notes the similarities between the author and the historian by means of shared aspects like ““emplotting strategies of exclusion, emphasis, and subordination of elements of a story.”<sup>61</sup>

Thirdly, postmodernism stresses that the past can only be known in the present through cultural representations; through text and art. This emphasis is preceded by a postmodernist concern: “[t]he past really did exist. The question is: *how* can we know that past today – and *what* can we know of it [author's emphasis]?”<sup>62</sup> As such, postmodernism scrutinises the role of historical documents, as they appear to be the only window to the past. The past, in other words, can only be known “through their traces in the present;” these traces being texts and art.<sup>63</sup> As Owens describes, “we can only know ‘reality’ as it is produced and sustained by cultural representations.”<sup>64</sup> This, of course, is problematic. Cultural representations are constructs, results of imaginative reconstruction and dependent on the interpretation of historical documents. Being constructs, cultural representations cannot possibly be objective, or, as White points out, “[f]acts are not given but are constructed by the kind of questions we ask of events.”<sup>65</sup> History thus lies in the eye of the historian. Next to the impossibility of an objective representation of the past there is another issue. Most representations of the past are registered in language, a notoriously arbitrary device. Even when the signifier of the past is not of a textual nature, “our knowledge of it is semiotically transmitted,” meaning that information of the past is unavoidably destined to ultimately become textual.<sup>66</sup> Postmodernism hence argues that knowledge of the past is therefore problematised because it is captured in language. While language problematises historical truth, it, in turn, greatly empowers language. This is a logical consequence of all knowledge of the past being captured in language. Language, and written language in particular, determines how the past is represented and subsequently regarded. It decides who or what is permitted to be part of the historical record, and who is not. It therefore simultaneously determines what is remembered, and what is forgotten.

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<sup>61</sup> Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 66.

<sup>62</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 92.

<sup>63</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 97.

<sup>64</sup> Owens quoted in Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 121.

<sup>65</sup> White quoted in Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 123.

<sup>66</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 122.

Postmodernism, aware of the ruthlessness or exclusivity of language, attempts to ensure that marginalised events and people are not excluded from historical records and thereby forgotten. Lukács and Hutcheon point out that the protagonists of historical postmodernist fiction are “the ex-centrics, the marginalized, the peripheral figures of fictional history.”<sup>67</sup> Postmodernism allows for the remembrance of these peripheral groups by writing them a history, albeit an unofficial, fictional one. It is, as Hutcheon describes it, “the ‘inscription’ into history of those previously silenced ex-centrics,” who are “defined by differences in class, gender, race, ethnic group, and sexual preference.”<sup>68</sup> The focus on ex-centrics is a characteristic of the postmodern genre of historiographic metafiction in particular, as will be elaborated on later.

A fifth main characteristic is postmodernism’s view of writing as a discursive process, thereby having an interest in so-called readerly texts, and questioning the process of writing. Postmodernism sees history – like fiction, as a discourse, a narrativization of the past based on historical documents. Through this discourse, authors of either fiction or non-fiction “make sense of the past.”<sup>69</sup> The discursive process is thus significant, as it is in this way that the historian gathers, connects, ‘understands’, and, mostly importantly – writes history. Postmodernism takes a critical stance towards this process, because it is never a process devoid of traces of subjectivity, since “[y]ou can explain the past only by what is most powerful in the present [author’s italics removed].”<sup>70</sup> This, of course, is strongly related to postmodernism’s rejection of the possibility of a single and objective historical truth.

Lastly, postmodernist works are highly intertextual. Although she does not engage with this aspect at great length, Hutcheon does point out its main purposes. In the first place, it is a manifestation of the intention to “close the gap between past and present of the reader,” using (non-)fictional works of the past as a time-bridging intertext.<sup>71</sup> Secondly, it is the direct result of wanting to “rewrite the past in a new context,” consequently uniting the present and the past into a single discourse.<sup>72</sup> Intertextuality in historical postmodernist novels, in other words, is the result of postmodernism’s desire to connect the present and the past.

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<sup>67</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 114.

<sup>68</sup> Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 11.

<sup>69</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 96.

<sup>70</sup> Nietzsche quoted in Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 99.

<sup>71</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 118.

<sup>72</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 118.

Historiographic metafiction is, essentially, fiction that applies the postmodernist views on history to a historic work of fiction. Coined by Hutcheon in the late 1980s, it was introduced as follows:

The postmodern novel has not yet been given ... careful and particular attention, especially the one form of it that seems to be most typical of the paradoxes that characterize the postmodern. This is the form I would like to call 'historiographic metafiction' – fiction that is intensely, self-reflexively art, but is also grounded in historical, social, and political realities: Findley's *Famous Last Words* ... or Chris Scott's *Antichthon*.<sup>73</sup>

Apart from its self-reflexivity, historiographic metafiction has other main characteristics. Hutcheon's concept is distinctly postmodern. As a result, some of its main characteristics are results of, if not directly connected to, major aspects of postmodernism's view on history.

Firstly, consequence of postmodernism's rejection of the possibility of a single historical truth, historiographic metafiction reminds the reader of history being a construction. It reveals to readers that "while events did occur in the real empirical past, we name and constitute those events as historical facts by selection and narrative positioning."<sup>74</sup> A novel can expose this process by making the protagonist deal with the process of making history. A 'searcher' character looking to find out more about his family lineage may also serve as a tool for bringing the constructed nature of history to the fore. Readers of Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*, for example, "watch the narrators ... trying to make sense of the historical facts they have collected. As readers, we see both the collecting and the attempts to make narrative order."<sup>75</sup>

Historiographic metafiction can also explicitly alter "certain known historical details" in order to display to the reader the ease with which errors occur in the process of history making.<sup>76</sup> An even more explicit way in which a novel can show its distrust of historical facts is by making its

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*The Canadian Postmodern*, 14.

<sup>73</sup> Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 13.

<sup>74</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 97.

<sup>75</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 114.

<sup>76</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 114.



protagonist realise the flaws behind historiography and supposed historical truths. Hutcheon points out that *In the Skin of a Lion*, the protagonist realises that history is relentlessly selective, excluding “those who worked on the monuments of public history” – the ex-centrics, in other words.<sup>77</sup>

While postmodernism theorises that art and history are nearly identical, historiographic metafiction puts this theory into practice by confronting and mixing history with art. History, Hutcheon argues, is often seen as more authoritative than art, or fiction, for that matter.<sup>78</sup> As a result, “[h]istoriographic metafiction ... attempts to demarginalize the literary through confrontation with the historical.”<sup>79</sup> Such attempts are made by combining history with art either thematically or intertextually.<sup>80</sup> Another way by which this confrontation takes place is by allowing historical and fictional characters to interact. In *In the Skin of a Lion*, for example, fictional protagonist Patrick and historical figure Ambrose Small interact on equal terms, entwining fiction with non-fictional history.<sup>81</sup> By intermingling art and history, historiographic metafiction rejects any sense of hierarchy between the two, engaging with both concepts on new, equal, terms.

Works of historiographic metafiction, furthermore, tend to present fragmented narratives that feature several different perspectives, or “an overtly controlling narrator.”<sup>82</sup> Regardless of the perspective of the story, neither offers “a subject confident in his/her ability to know the past with any certainty.”<sup>83</sup> Historiographic metafiction thus always offers a perspective that questions the possibility of historic truth and exposes the constructedness of such supposed truths. Hutcheon illustrates that in *Antichton*, for example, a “new testimony [of a key historical event] is established, then cancelled out, then re-established, only to be put in doubt once again.”<sup>84</sup> Aspects like this relate to the postmodernist rejection of a factual historical truth. What historiographic metafiction offers by means of the unreliable, or at least uncertain perspectives it presents, is “a

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<sup>77</sup> Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 99.

<sup>78</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 108.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 108-9.

<sup>81</sup> Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 94.

<sup>82</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 117.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>84</sup> Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 65.

problematized inscribing of subjectivity into history,” which is related to its mixing of art (fiction) and history.<sup>85</sup> In addition to containing multiple fragmented perspectives, it is not uncommon for historiographic metafiction to “merge” (one of) the protagonist’s voice with that of the author, making it unclear whose thoughts, memories, speech is presented.<sup>86</sup>

As a postmodernist concept, historiographic metafiction is wary that language can be “historically damning”: to not be included in texts is to be excluded from history and memory.<sup>87</sup> As such, historiographic metafiction tends to voice the aforementioned ‘ex-centrics’. Since ex-centrics tend to be marginalised, and because of the focus of this research on marginalised groups, this naturally calls for postcolonialist theory. While postcolonialism originally revolved around the marginalised position of the native population of former colonies, its concepts are highly applicable when discussing other marginalised groups, such as immigrants or lower-class people as well. Indeed, as Hans Bertens points out:

The postcolonial perspective ... is a substantial intervention into those justifications of modernity – progress, homogeneity, cultural organicism, the deep nation, the long past – that rationalize the authoritarian, “normalizing” tendencies within cultures in the name of national interest.<sup>88</sup>

This description allows for an interpretation of postcolonialism as not only applicable in situations where ethnicity plays a prominent role.<sup>89</sup> This interpretation of postcolonialism may also be referred to as “neocolonial.”<sup>90</sup> All the same, the postcolonial perspective takes a postmodernist approach by rejecting “the authoritarian” and the way it simplifies history and culture.<sup>91</sup> This research will limit its use of postcolonial concepts to the notions of ‘the Other.’ Although the well-known notion of ‘the Other’ may nowadays generally be associated with

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<sup>85</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 117-8.

<sup>86</sup> Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 100.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>88</sup> Hans Bertens, “Postcolonial Criticism and Theory,” in *Literary Theory: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 174.

<sup>89</sup> Bertens, “Postcolonial Criticism and Theory,” 174.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

postcolonialism, its origins lie in poststructuralism, specifically in the work of Lacan.<sup>92</sup> The existence of the Other is facilitated by a “misrecognition.”<sup>93</sup> This process of misrecognition subsequently constitutes identity, as “we need the response and recognition of others and of the Other to arrive at what we experience as our identity.”<sup>94</sup> The Other “is not a concrete individual,” but rather a group of individuals “who resemble us in one way or another but who are also irrevocably different.”<sup>95</sup> Ethnic minorities, such as the colonised, were often regarded as the Other, resulting in the “damaging discourse” between coloniser and colonised.<sup>96</sup> In a neo-colonial context, certain social, ethnic, or economical groups are (subconsciously) placed under the predicate of the Other. This ‘Othering’ goes hand in hand with stigmatisation and generalising stereotypes, rendering these Others highly similar to what Hutcheon described as ex-centrics.

The following chapters will analyse Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient*, respectively, from the outlined theoretical perspectives.

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<sup>92</sup> Bertens, “Poststructuralism Continued,” in *Literary Theory: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 134.

<sup>93</sup> Bertens, “Poststructuralism Continued,” 135.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>96</sup> Bertens, “Postcolonial Criticism and Theory,” 176-7.

## CHAPTER 2: *IN THE SKIN OF A LION* (1987)

Celebrated as “[a] magical book” and nominated for the Governor General’s Award, Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion* is set in 1920s Toronto and presents the fragmented narratives of three ex-centrics.<sup>97</sup> Patrick Lewis, raised in the Canadian wilderness, moves to Toronto to work; first as a ‘searcher,’ later as a dynamiter for the The R.C. Harris Water Treatment Plant. He also finds work at a leather company, where he meets one of the other main characters, Nicholas Temelcoff. Nicholas, a Macedonian labour immigrant, also works for commissioner Harris and plays a vital role in the construction of the Bloor Street Viaduct – but no one knows his name. The third main character, Italian-Canadian thief David Caravaggio, meets Patrick in prison as they subsequently plan to blow up the water facility Patrick helped construct. The characters’ initially fragmented stories ultimately become connected as Patrick discovers the untold history of Toronto.

*In the Skin of a Lion* reveals its postmodernist view on history before even beginning its narrative. One of the novel’s opening quotations reads “[n]ever again will a single story be told as though it were the only one,” quoting John Berger.<sup>98</sup> Berger’s words dismiss the possibility of a single historical truth and voice a belief in multiple stories, multiple histories, instead. Rejecting the possibility of a single historical truth is characteristic of a postmodernist view on history. The fact that Berger’s postmodernist words are placed right at the start of the book add to their significance. The novel’s prologue also sheds a light on how the text works:

This is the story a young girl gathers in a car during the early hours of the morning. She listens and asks questions as the vehicle travels through the darkness ... The man who is driving could say, ‘In that field is a castle,’ and it would be possible for her to believe him. She listens to the man as he picks up and brings together various corners of the story, attempting to carry it all in his arms. And he is tired, sometimes as elliptical as his

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<sup>97</sup> Graham Swift’s praise on the cover of the 1987 Picador edition.

Canada Council for the Arts, “Governor General’s Literary Awards: Past Winners and Finalists,” GGbooks.ca, 2018. <http://ggbooks.ca/past-winners-and-finalists>.

<sup>98</sup> Ondaatje, *In the Skin of a Lion*, prologue.

concentration on the road, at times overexcited ... She says awake to keep him company.<sup>99</sup>

Despite its short length, the piece of paratext contains elements that are significant in the light of postmodernism, as well as historiographic metafiction. The fact that the driver is tired while reciting his narrative indicates a possible unreliability of the narrative that follows. It, in other words, instantly problematises the history that the novel relates to the reader. Its narrative is further called into question by aspects of the prologue that only become curious later. After reading, the reader knows the story is set in Canada, making it unrealistic for the driver to be able to truthfully claim that there is a castle in a field, as they are by no means prominent in the country's landscape. The passenger, however, would believe such claims by the driver.<sup>100</sup> Both driver and passenger are tired, increasing the margin for errors in the narrative. The story, moreover, is "gather[ed]."<sup>101</sup> The word choice is important, it hints at collecting, interpreting, and reorganising a certain story, rather than retelling it in its original form. This, essentially, is what Hutcheon referred to as the "narrative emplotments of past events;" a major aspect of a postmodernist view on historiography.<sup>102</sup> The text of the prologue is, in addition, problematised by the end of the novel. Whereas the prologue suggests Patrick is driving and Hana, the orphan Patrick takes under his wings, is listening, the last words in the novel make it clear that Hana will drive, as she "sat upright, adapting the rear-view mirror to her height. He climbed in, pretending to luxuriate in the passenger seat, making animal-like noises of satisfaction. – Lights, he said."<sup>103</sup> The contradiction suggests multiple perspectives may be at work in the recital of the history that the novel presents. This relates to historiographic metafiction, which often presents narratives featuring multiple, possibly unreliable, perspectives. "[B]ring[ing] together various corners of the story, attempting to carry it all," points at history being a construction, as well as the elusiveness of memory.<sup>104</sup> From a postmodernist perspective, bringing together a story is hardly different from historiography. The latter is, again, an act of narrative emplotments, as well as the result of

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., prologue.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., prologue.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., prologue.

<sup>102</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 92.

<sup>103</sup> Ondaatje, *In the Skin of a Lion*, 256.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., prologue.

gathering, connecting, and interpreting fragments. In this case, the fragments consist of Patrick's memory, appointing Hana to the role of historiographer. The actual story of *In the Skin of a Lion*, too, is characterised by a postmodernist view on history, and, in relation, possesses several traits of historiographic metafiction.

The opposition of official, recorded history on the one hand, and unknown, unofficial history, on the other, lies at the core of Ondaatje's work. The construction of the Bloor Street Viaduct, apart from taking a central role in the plot, is used as a major vehicle for pointing out the chasm between official and unofficial history. Contrary to the historical record, for example, the bridge was not opened by Torontonians: "[t]he previous midnight the workers had arrived and brushed away officials who guarded the bridge in preparation for the ceremonies the next day, moved with their own flickering lights – their candles for the bridge dead – like a wave of civilization."<sup>105</sup> The R.C. Harris Water Treatment Plant is treated in a similar fashion. Harris, one of the non-fictional characters in the novel, is credited for the construction of the "Maritime Theatre" in the historical records.<sup>106</sup> The labour immigrants that built the plant are ruthlessly excluded from history – "there was no record kept" is Harris' reply when Patrick asks if he is aware of how many people died realising his brainchild.<sup>107</sup> In scenes like this, Ondaatje exposes the problematic nature of official history, in line with postmodernist principles. One of the flaws of official history is the way they exclude the marginalised. This is illustrated by Patrick's discovery that "articles and illustrations he found in the Riverdale Library depicted every detail ... everything but information about on those who actually built the bridge ... Official histories and news stories were always soft as rhetoric, like that of a politician making a speech after a bridge is built, a man who does not even cut the grass on his own lawn."<sup>108</sup> Apart from revealing the problematic nature of official history, this sequence furthermore points at Ondaatje's critical attitude towards the exclusion of people from the periphery from recorded history.

The paradox – the central role of marginalised groups in unofficial history – is inherently connected with the way Ondaatje brings the issue of official versus unofficial history to the fore. Hutcheon points out accordingly that the novel uses ex-centrics as its "very postmodern"

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 29

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 218

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 248

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 151-2

centre.<sup>109</sup> Toronto's labour immigrants are the postcolonial Other in Ondaatje's story. Their identity is greatly reduced to either a fake name or even a number, as "the labour agent g[ave] them all English names. Charlie Johnson, Nick Parker. They remembered the strange foreign syllables like a number."<sup>110</sup> They are hopelessly voiceless, perpetually surrounded by silence. Nicholas arrived after "a great journey made in silence" and subsequently struggles to find a voice for himself.<sup>111</sup> In fact, all immigrants face this same problem. Unable to voice themselves, they copy the speech of anglophone actors, whose lines "would be followed by growing echoes as Macedonians, Finns, and Greeks repeated the phrases after a half-second pause, trying to get the pronunciation right."<sup>112</sup> Due to being seen as 'the Other,' the labourers cannot find a voice of their own. As a result, they are obliged to use another's, symbolised by the immigrant workers at the Cypress Street leather factory, where "the men stepped out in colours up to their necks, pulling wet hides out after them so it appeared they had removed the skin from their own bodies. They had leapt into different colours as if into different countries."<sup>113</sup> The labourers' desperate struggle for finding this voice is poignantly symbolised by the waterworks play, in which the human puppet clearly represents the diverse group of Toronto labour immigrants:

The face, in spite of the moustache, was dark and young. He wore a Finnish shirt and Serbian pants ... he was brought before the authorities, unable to speak their language. He stood there assaulted by insults ... The others began to pummel him but not a word emerged – just a damaged gaze in the context of those flailing arms. He fell to the floor pleading with gestures. The scene was endless. Patrick wanted to rip the painted face off. The caricature of a culture.<sup>114</sup>

What follows is the puppet's desperate attempt to voice itself: "[t]he figure knelt, one hand banging down on the wooden floor as if pleading for help – a terrible loudness entering the silent

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<sup>109</sup> Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 94.

<sup>110</sup> Ondaatje, *In the Skin of a Lion*, 138.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 50

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 136

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 122

performance.”<sup>115</sup> The banging is met with agreeing cheers from the immigrant audience.<sup>116</sup> Although a substantial part of the novel is told from a Canadian’s perspective, Patrick, too, is marginalised – an immigrant in his ‘own’ country. Raised in a “nameless” place in by a poor father, as Hazen is “obsessed with not wasting things,” Patrick the Canadian is “an immigrant to the city,” just like the European migrants.<sup>117</sup> As a result, he, too, “live[s] ... in silence,” “as silent as the Italians and Greeks towards the *bronco* foremen [author’s italics].”<sup>118</sup> By making the marginalised immigrants of early-20<sup>th</sup>-century Toronto the centre of his novel, Ondaatje gives them the voice they so desperately struggle for. It is important to remember that the voicing of ex-centrics such as the Toronto immigrants is a main characteristic of historiographic metafiction, and thereby postmodernist history.

Art is another major theme in *In the Skin of a Lion*, and the way Ondaatje relates it to history further adds to the historiographic metafictionality of the novel. Cato’s history, for example, is discovered by means of photographs.<sup>119</sup> Ondaatje’s metafictional remarks at the heart of the novel, however, truly reveal how the novel operates with regard to art and history, as well as its intent to stand up for the othered labourers. After Patrick leaves the library – having looked into Toronto’s historical records – Ondaatje writes, in metafictional fashion:

Hine’s photographs betray official history ... But Patrick would never see the great photographs of Hine, as he would never read the letters of Joseph Conrad. Official histories, news stories surround us daily, but the events of art reach us too late, travel languorously like messages in a bottle. *Only the best art can order the chaotic tumble of events. Only the best can realign chaos to suggest both the chaos and order it will become* [author’s emphasis] ... The first sentence of every novel should be: ‘Trust me, this will take time but there is order here, very faint, very human.’ Meander if you want to get to town.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 11, 14, 55.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 144, 110.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 152.



Ondaatje presents art as a powerful tool able to subvert official historiography, and thereby useful to draw attention to Others, like Hine did. By doing this, he reverts the conventional hierarchy between art and history: a highly postmodern practice. Art, however, is not found to be flawless either. Its “messages in a bottle” are received too late to be of use for its contemporaries – “[i]f only it were possible that in the instance something was written down – idea or emotion or musical phrase – it became known to others of the era.”<sup>121</sup> The importance attributed to art, its confrontation with history, as well as the metafictionality of Ondaatje’s comments all fit within the framework of historiographic metafiction.

Adding to the historiographic metafictionality of *In the Skin of a Lion* is the way it reminds the reader of the constructed nature of history. Patrick’s reflections following his library research are as much about Ondaatje’s approach to history as they are about Patrick:

He walked on beyond the sound of the street musicians, aware once again of the silence between his individual steps, knowing now he could add music by simply providing the thread of a hum. He saw the interactions, saw how each one of them was carried by the strength of something more than themselves ... The street-band had depicted perfect company ... His own life as no longer a single story but part of a mural, which was a falling together of accomplices. Patrick saw a wondrous night web – all of these fragments of a human order, something ungoverned by the family he was born into or the headlines of the day.<sup>122</sup>

Patrick’s view on his steps along the street-band may be seen as a metaphor for historiography. His steps provide a musical rhythm, but there is an awkward silence between them. These steps may be seen as historical documents or fragments. Weaving these seemingly disjointed fragments together by “the thread of a hum” appears to symbolise the process of narrative emplotment; filling the gaps left by historical evidence, hence crafting a history in the form of a narrative.<sup>123</sup> Naturally, this metaphor reveals the postmodern view that history is unreliable, as the process of narrative emplotment is prone to subjectivity. This proneness to subjectivity, from a

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 152, 140.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 151.

postmodernist perspective, is what makes history unfit to claim that it alone has a patent on revealing the ‘truth(s)’ of the past. *In the Skin of a Lion* also reveals the constructed nature of history through one of the techniques pointed out by Hutcheon. Patrick takes on a job as searcher for the missing, non-fictional, A.J. Small. Next to looking for the whereabouts of Small, the ‘searcher’ role is a common vehicle in historiographic metafiction, used to point out to the reader the construction, rather than recording, of history. Finally, the novel intermingles history and fiction to such an extent that it blurs the reader’s understanding of what was real and what was not. The non-fictionality of the newspaper articles regarding Small’s disappearance, for example, is ambiguous, as is the brief description of his life before his disappearance.<sup>124</sup> All the same, it does not change the reader’s understanding of A.J. Small – both would be as successful in portraying “the jackal” believably.<sup>125</sup> This, in effect, voices the postmodernist claim that history and fiction are closer to being identical than binary opposites. Another example is the man from Patrick’s youth, who “would float under the bridge [while standing on logs] without altering his posture, though there was only an inch to spare, nodding to loggers on the bank ... He would step off at the camp at Goose Island with his shoes perfectly dry.”<sup>126</sup> It appears to be a tale of legend, a “fairy tale” as much as that of the Toronto bridge workers.<sup>127</sup> It may be true, however, and it its claim to truth that proves that its foundations – be it fiction or history – are more relative/arbitrary than non-postmodernist views would suggest.

The plot of *In the Skin of a Lion*, finally, presents a fragmented narrative from multiple perspectives – another characteristic of historiographic metafiction. The story jumps between the perspectives of three major characters: Patrick, Nicholas, and Caravaggio. Occasionally, in addition, it briefly describes scenes from the eyes of secondary personages, such is the case with Harris’ on his walk over the bridge or his night in the waterworks plant.<sup>128</sup> The character of Patrick is most vividly engaged with history, not only because the prologue presented him as the narrator of the entire novel, but also by means of his historic library research. This is where he experienced the construction and exclusivity of history first hand. *In the Skin of a Lion*,

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 58-9.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 31, 244.

moreover, features a blur between metafictional comments of the author and the/a protagonist that Hutcheon pointed out as characteristic of historiographic metafiction.<sup>129</sup> The novel features several passages in which it is ambiguous whether the reader is presented with Patrick's or Ondaatje's reflections. In such sequences, "the narrative voices of writing artist-figure and the memory-ridden protagonist merge."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 100.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

CHAPTER 3: *THE ENGLISH PATIENT* (1992)

*The English Patient* is Ondaatje's most successful novel to date. Praised by Toni Morrison as "profound, beautiful and heart-quickenning," it won both the 1992 Man Booker Prize and the Governor General's Award and was adapted into an Oscar-winning motion picture.<sup>131</sup> Set in World War II, the plot revolves around four highly different characters living through the last phase of the war in a partially destroyed Tuscan villa. Almásy, the titular character, is a man "damaged beyond recognition," the consequence of a plane crash in the North-African desert.<sup>132</sup> The main narrative consists of Almásy recalling the events before the traumatising crash, presenting them in fragments to his nurse, Hana, later joined by the sceptical former thief and intelligence agent David Caravaggio. Both characters were first introduced in *In the Skin of a Lion*. In between fragments of the English patient's memory, the story focuses on life in and around the villa while the war nears its end. The initial three main characters are later joined by Kirpal Singh, nicknamed 'Kip,' an Indian bomb disposal expert who lost his only sense of community ever since Lord Suffolk, mentor and friend, was killed while defusing a new bomb.

Similar to *In the Skin of a Lion*, the paratext of *The English Patient* exposes the novel's postmodernist perspective. The book opens with an excerpt of a historical document: "the minutes of the Geographical Society meeting of November 194-, London."<sup>133</sup> This document, which could be either fictional or non-fictional, directly relates to a crucial event in the novel's plot – Almásy's crash into the desert. By presenting this ambiguous historical piece, the prologue blurs the line between 'factual' history and historical fiction right from the beginning. This is enhanced by the acknowledgements in the back of the book, where Ondaatje writes that, "[w]hile some of the characters who appear in th[e] book are based on historical figures, and while many

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<sup>131</sup> The Man Booker Prize, "The English Patient," TheManBookerPrize.com, 2018.

<http://themanbookerprize.com/books/english-patient-by-michael-ondaatje>.

Canada Council for the Arts, "Governor General's Literary Awards: Past Winners and Finalists," GGbooks.ca, 2018.

<http://ggbooks.ca/past-winners-and-finalists>.

Toni Morrison's praise in the 2017 Bloomsbury Modern Classics edition.

Cover of the 2017 Bloomsbury Modern Classics edition. *The English Patient*, dir. Anthony Minghella, Miramax Films, 1996.

<sup>132</sup> Cover of the 2017 Bloomsbury Modern Classics edition.

<sup>133</sup> Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, (London & New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1992), prologue.

of the areas described exist ... it is important to stress that this story is fictional, as are some of the events and journeys.”<sup>134</sup> These lines may appear to be a common obligatory disclaimer, but the book already contains one at its first page. Its inclusion is thus superfluous, suggesting that Ondaatje purposely added it as an attempt to further problematise the border between history and historical fiction, which is an important aspect of the novel. The actual function of the lines thus appears to be the further intermingling of fiction and history, adding to the novel’s sense of postmodernism. Ondaatje furthermore indicates in the book’s acknowledgements how a great number of (fictional) features of the novel were based on a myriad of historical documents.<sup>135</sup> From a postmodernist perspective, the process he describes is indicative of the use of narrative emplotments in historiography. It, moreover, corresponds with the postmodern tendency to expose the constructed and narrativized nature of history. Ondaatje also lists the great number of intertexts used. The wide spectrum – from Milton’s renowned *Paradise Lost* to the nursery rhyme ‘Buckingham Palace’ – conveys the postmodernism dismissal of cultural hierarchy, and moreover relates to the postmodernist characteristic of being highly intertextual.<sup>136</sup>

On a textual level, *The English Patient* is critically concerned with history as well. Instead of focusing quite explicitly on the poignant divide between official and unofficial history, *The English Patient* focuses on the concept of history, its creation, and its relation to art in a more indirect manner. These aspects, among others, make *The English Patient*, despite its comparatively more implicit nature, present itself as a postmodernist historical novel – as well as a work of historiographic metafiction. The novel’s focus on historical documents is a thread weaved through the narrative arc of Ondaatje’s work. Most significant is Herodotus’ *The Histories*; an ever-present historical intertext and ultimately a core element of the novel. The work is, essentially, “the only clue ... to unlocking his [the English Patient’s] past.”<sup>137</sup> Almásy’s copy is one “he has added to, cutting and gluing in pages from other books or writing his own

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<sup>134</sup> Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, Acknowledgements.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., Acknowledgements.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., Acknowledgements.

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1667.

Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 118.

A.A. Milne, ‘Buckingham Palace,’ from *When We Were Very Young*, (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1924).

<sup>137</sup> Cover of the 2017 Bloomsbury Modern Classics edition.

observations – so they are cradled within the text of Herodotus.”<sup>138</sup> This description of a major document for the plot is striking from a postmodern perspective, if not more so from that of historiographic metafiction. What is described is, in essence, the collecting, editing (hence the additions, cuts, and notes), and ultimately creating of a history or historical narrative through imaginative reconstruction, finally resulting in the narrative offered to the reader. Caravaggio’s reflections on the intelligence work he did also present a postmodern view on how history is created. “[H]e has been trained to invent double agents or phantoms who would take on flesh. He has been in charge of a mythical agent named ‘Cheese,’ and he spent weeks clothing him with facts.”<sup>139</sup> Here, Caravaggio’s thoughts describe a reversed version of postmodernism’s view on historiography: whereas Caravaggio clothes imagination with facts, postmodernism assumes historians to do vice versa. The way Almásy edits his copy of Herodotus’ *The Histories*, “his guidebook, ancient and modern, of supposed lies,” is similar to Caravaggio’s practises: “[w]hen he discovered the truth to what had seemed a lie, he brought out his glue pot and pasted in a map or new clipping or used a blank space in the book to sketch men in skirts with faded unknown animals alongside them.”<sup>140</sup> As Almásy produces clippings and sketches, he simultaneously creates history, since postmodernist sees history as consisting of fragmented historical documents combined with narrative emplotments. Apart from exposing the construction of history, the novel, in postmodernist fashion, points at the unreliability of history. When Caravaggio “picks up the Herodotus,” he “reorder[s] the events” because he believes that the English patient’s version is “errant, ... an apocryphal story.”<sup>141</sup> This mirrors the subjective reordering of historical documents by historians in order to make them suitable for their particular narrative emplotment. In another section, “the jackal with one eye that looks back and one that regards the path you consider taking” symbolises how history is constructed from within a certain context and goal; hence the simultaneous interest in the past and future.<sup>142</sup> The jackal’s jaws contain “pieces of the past that are delivered to you,” and that will be gathered into a history through narrativization.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 17.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 275.

Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 97.

<sup>143</sup> Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 275.

Almásy, at a certain point, points out that elements of the past that do not suit the desired narrative of the historian are excluded from history “you do not find adultery in the minutes of the Geographical Society. Our [Madox’ and Almásy’s] room never appears in the detailed reports which chartered every knoll and every incident of history.”<sup>144</sup> The latter appears a reflection on the postmodern view that history may falsely appear a comprehensive and coherent whole. The English patient reflects, in addition, on the subjectivity of history when sharing his thoughts on love. “When we meet those we fall in love with, there is an aspect of our spirit that is historian, a bit of a pedant, who imagines or remembers a meeting when the other had passed by innocently.”<sup>145</sup> This excerpt addresses the inherent subjectivity of history which differs between, in this case two, different perspectives.

*The English Patient* is also concerned with art and deals with a wide spectrum of art forms. The novel differs from *In the Skin of a Lion*, however, in the sense that the way it deals with art is of a more implicit nature. While the way the novel focuses on art does indicate a postmodern view on history and its construction, it is not as clearly brought to the fore as in Ondaatje’s previous novel. 13<sup>th</sup>-century towns, for example, were referred to “in terms of the art in them” by the Kip’s bomb defusal group.<sup>146</sup> Art and history are also mixed when, for example, soldiers building a bridge are linked to frescoes that are also connected to bridges: “a twig from the Tree of Good and Evil inserted into the mouth of the dead Adam. Years later this queen [of Sheba] would realize that the bridge over the Siloam was made from the wood of this sacred tree.”<sup>147</sup> A similar situation occurs later, when Kip recounts “how he had slept behind [a statue] of a grieving angel,” feeling “at peace” during the war.<sup>148</sup> At these moments, art and (war) history appear to coexist in a vacuum of time. Ondaatje’s use of art, moreover, corresponds to his metafictional remark in *In the Skin of a Lion*, where he wrote that “*only the best art can order the chaotic tumble of events* [author’s emphasis].”<sup>149</sup> In *The English Patient*, Ondaatje’s principle holds, as he writes how “there was no order but for the great maps of art.”<sup>150</sup> Visual art is

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>149</sup> Ondaatje, *In the Skin of a Lion*, 152.

<sup>150</sup> Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 74.

mentioned at several occasions, such as when Almásy connects Kip to a Caravaggio painting.<sup>151</sup> In the light of the novel, in which Caravaggio is the name of one of the primary characters, this is a rather ambiguous sequence.

Instead of focusing on a social group, like *In the Skin of a Lion*, *The English Patient* deals with marginalised groups by means of two characters: Kip, “[t]he young Sikh,” and to less extent Almásy.<sup>152</sup> The novel continuously reminds the reader of Kip’s non-white background, hence constantly pointing out the ethnic contrast between him and the other characters. Virtually whenever the novel mentions Kip, he is described in terms of his different ethnicity: “[t]he Sikh,” with “his shirtless brown body,” possessing “all the varieties of his darkness;” “a black figure,” is continuously contrasted with the other, white, characters.<sup>153</sup> Next to language, descriptions of Kip’s past are also used to further emphasise his marginalised ethnicity. His real name was lost, due to an officer exclaiming “[w]hat’s this? Kipper grease?” when marking his paper.<sup>154</sup> “He had no idea what a kipper was, but the young Sikh had thereby been translated into a salty fish. Within a week his real name, Kirpal Singh, had been forgotten.”<sup>155</sup> It is telling that Kip’s renaming was caused by a white army superior, as this act signifies the relationship between the marginalised Other and the white centre. Kip is furthermore stigmatised by the army secretary when signing up for the sapper squad:

He looked back at the others, peered around the room and caught the gaze of the middle-aged secretary. She watched him sternly. An Indian boy. He smiled and walked towards the bookshelves. Again he touched nothing ... He turned and caught the woman’s eye on him again. He felt as guilty as if he had put the book in his pocket ... The English! They expect you to fight for them but won’t talk to you.<sup>156</sup>

This passage shows Kip as the subject of the postcolonial concept of othering. The almost metafictional comment at the end criticises this western practise. This critique is further

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 76, 77, 193.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 93-4.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 200.



emphasised by Kip “sens[ing] that he would admitted easily if it were not for his race.”<sup>157</sup> When Kip receives the news on the bombing on Hiroshima and Nagasaki the novel’s critique on the West reaches its high point.<sup>158</sup> Kip is distraught; the bombings to him are a sign that his brother, who “*sided with whoever was against the English*” [author’s emphasis], was right all along in hating the West.<sup>159</sup> Kip’s emotional reaction seems to stem from a sense of colonial trauma, as he – or Ondaatje; this passage significantly lacks quotation marks to indicate whether the words are Kip’s or Ondaatje’s – cynically argues: “American, French, I don’t care. Whenever you start bombing the brown races of the world, you’re an Englishman. You had King Leopold of Belgium and now you have fucking Harry Truman of the USA. You all learned it from the English.”<sup>160</sup> Caravaggio, the Italian-Canadian, acknowledges that “[t]hey [the allied forces] would never have dropped such a bomb on a white nation.”<sup>161</sup> The latter makes particularly clear that the novel is focused on the voicing of othered marginalised groups, in this case by a verbal attack on the white world. At a certain point, Almásy mutters “[w]ords, Caravaggio. They have a power,” something which is confirmed by and linked with Kip’s imperialist trauma. Right after hearing about the bombings, he addresses Britain:

I grew up with traditions from my country, but later, more often, from *your* [author’s emphasis] country. Your fragile white island ... that somehow converted the rest of the world ... I knew if I lifted a teacup with the wrong finger I’d be banished. If I tied the wrong kind of knot I a tie I was out. What gave you such power?<sup>162</sup>

The answer the novel provides is language – and with language, history: “you had the histories and printing presses.”<sup>163</sup> This answer corresponds with the postmodernist view that history is language, and thus inherently subjective and problematic. Whoever controls language, controls history. Like the Toronto labourers in Ondaatje’s previous novel, Kip is invisible to those that are

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 302-3.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 309.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 304.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 304.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 301.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 301.

part of the centre. He is “the anonymous member of another race, a part of the invisible world,” and thereby an ex-centric.<sup>164</sup> Kip’s ex-centricity radiates on those closest to him. Lord Suffolk, his teacher, was “considered eccentric.”<sup>165</sup> Hardy, the only one who “keeps [Kip] human” when he feels like an animal, displays eccentric behaviour by calling him ‘sir’ and treating him as such when no one else does.<sup>166</sup> Almásy may also be considered an ex-centric, despite his western appearance. Although “[e]verything about him was very English except for the fact that his skin was tarred black,” “damaged beyond recognition,” Almásy was born in Hungary.<sup>167</sup> He later describes himself as having become “nationless” after his crash in the desert.<sup>168</sup> All subsequent descriptions of the ‘nationless English patient’ make his ex-centricity more pronounced. Finding himself “[o]n the periphery of Cairo society”, his change in alignment from allied to axis forces is accompanied with a move from centre to periphery, to the extent of being othered as “[j]ust another international bastard.”<sup>169</sup> Because of his ‘nationlessness’ – aided and symbolised by his ethnically unrecognisable physique – Almásy, rather like Nicholas in *In the Skin of a Lion*, is a marginalised ex-centric in the ‘real world,’ but finds himself at the centre of Ondaatje’s fictional world. This postmodern focus on ex-centrics thus appears to be a continuity between his 1987 and 1992 works.

The highly fragmented structure of *The English Patient*, in combination with the use of multiple perspectives, is arguably its most pronounced characteristic of historiographic metafiction. Since the narrative of the novel consists of continuous jumps in time and perspective between Almásy’s memories and the current events at the villa, the novel’s set-up is fragmented by default. None of the presented perspectives prove particularly reliable, as each character’s past is filled with a personal trauma. When Caravaggio attempts to discover the darkest parts of Almásy’s past and gives him excessive amounts of morphine, the fragmented nature of *The English Patient* becomes particularly clear. Almásy’s body has to cope with increasing amounts of morphine, and his mind with reliving the trauma that defined his life. At a certain point, the

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 102.

Cover of the 2017 Bloomsbury Modern Classics edition.

<sup>168</sup> Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 147.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 267.

peak of the novel's fragmentation, each paragraph jumps to a different time and space, as the first line of each paragraph reads:

I carried Herodotus, and Madox – a saint in his own marriage – carried *Anna Karenina*, continually rereading the story of romance and deceit ... *Half Moscow and Petersburg were relations of friends of Oblonsky* [author's italics] ... I have come to love the tap of your fingernails on the syringe, Caravaggio ... Women want everything of a lover ... 'I think you have become inhuman,' she said to me.<sup>170</sup>

The novel's unannounced jumps between four different perspectives are often accompanied by sudden gaps or blanks between paragraphs that greatly differ in size.<sup>171</sup> A passage in book I appears to be as much about *The English Patient* itself as it is about Hana reading to the English patient:

So the books for the Englishman ... had gaps of plot like sections of a road washed out by storms, missing incidents as if locusts had consumed a section of tapestry, as if plaster loosened by the bombing had fallen away from a mural at night ... She was not concerned about the Englishman as far as gaps in the plot were concerned. She gave no summary of the missing chapters. She simply brought out the book and said 'page ninety-six' or 'page one hundred and eleven.' That was the only locator.<sup>172</sup>

Like the books read to Almásy, *The English Patient* is fragmented, incomplete, and misses seemingly random pieces. Nevertheless, the plot is presented as one entity, rather than a collection of fragments. In this respect, the novel is a postmodernist representation of history – a seemingly coherent whole, in truth made up out of a multitude of collected fragments, glued together by the process of narrativization.<sup>173</sup> Adding to the novel's ambiguity is the blurring of voices. The use of quotation marks is arbitrary, as they are used and omitted even on the same

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>171</sup> Page 110, for example, features a relatively small gap, while the gap on pp. 219-20 is considerably larger.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>173</sup> Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 66.

page.<sup>174</sup> This stylistic feature problematises the reader's understanding of whose voice is heard. This aspect is pointed out explicitly by the novel itself when Caravaggio wonders, while listening to Almásy's historical narrative: "[w]*ho is he speaking as now* [author's emphasis]?"<sup>175</sup> Ondaatje's use of italics and the fact that this particular line is accompanied by a blank space above and below indicate its relevance for the novel as a whole. The novel's use of multiple unreliable perspectives, its fragmented structure, and its ambiguity are clear characteristics of historiographic metafiction.

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<sup>174</sup> Page 271, for example.

<sup>175</sup> Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 259.

## CONCLUSION

Having analysed both novels from a postmodernist perspective, as well as Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction, it is now possible to draw conclusions on the function of Ondaatje's approach to history with regard to marginalised groups.

*In the Skin of a Lion* was clearly written from a postmodernist view on history. It, moreover, was a clear work of historiographic metafiction because of how it revealed the constructed nature of history, and the way it focused on the arbitrary opposition between official and unofficial history. Art, another prominent feature of postmodernist novels, also played a major role in *In the Skin of a Lion*. The only way to "order the chaotic tumble of events [original italics removed]," Ondaatje presented art as a powerful medium for subverting the practices of official historiography.<sup>176</sup> The novel, moreover, revolved around on ex-centrics: the marginalised immigrant labourers of Toronto, othered by Canadian society and unable to represent themselves in their environment. Ondaatje used his postmodernist approach to history to voice these marginalised groups by making them the centre of his novel. From a postmodernist perspective, this central role in historical fiction is just as valuable as a place in the official historical record. Ondaatje appears to have succeeded in doing the "poetic justice" noted by Bak, as his postmodernist approach to history functions harmoniously with the voicing of marginalised groups.<sup>177</sup>

*The English Patient*, too, was the clear result of a postmodernist approach to history and a work of historiographic metafiction. Ondaatje's 1992 novel differed from its precedent in that it presented its postmodernist characteristics and its concern with history in a, on the whole, more implicit manner. As such, Procter's claim of *The English Patient* being a less direct version of *In the Skin of a Lion* appears to have been a correct observation.<sup>178</sup> Particularly the way art featured vis-à-vis history was made far less explicit, yet noticeable enough to reveal its postmodernist perspective. On the other hand, Ondaatje's Booker Prize-winning novel clearly voiced marginalised groups by appearing to side with Kip by means of, sometimes cynical, critique on white society – especially after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the events of which

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<sup>176</sup> Ondaatje, *In the Skin of a Lion*, 152.

<sup>177</sup> Bak, "Site of Passage," 291.

<sup>178</sup> Procter, "Michael Ondaatje."

caused an irreparable divide between Kip and the other characters. Because of the less pronounced historiographic metafictionality, the voicing of marginalised groups appears less of a direct natural consequence of Ondaatje's postmodernist approach.

All in all, the two novels display a distinctively postmodern outlook on history, and both qualify as works of historiographic metafiction. In *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient*, Ondaatje voices marginalised groups by placing them at the centre of his historical fiction. *In the Skin of a Lion* focused on the labour immigrants of Toronto, victims of the exclusivity of history. *The English Patient* presented its concern with marginalised ex-centrics by means of two individuals: Kip, the Indian sapper, and the self-proclaimed nationless patient Almásy. Because postmodernism is characterised by an interest in ex-centrics, their place in Ondaatje's novels is to be expected when taking his postmodernist perspective into account. However, Ondaatje was by no means obliged to subsequently voice marginalised ex-centrics in his novels because of this postmodernist approach. The voicing of marginalised groups is thus a result of Ondaatje's own intentions as an author, rather than a logical result of his postmodernist outlook. Postmodernism's characteristic focus on ex-centrics lends itself particularly well to voicing marginalised groups, and Ondaatje, effectively, takes advantage of this in his works *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient*. These two novels harmoniously bring his intention to voice marginalised groups together with his postmodernist approach to history. In other words, Ondaatje's postmodernist approach to history appears to function as the ideal mode of writing to voice the marginalised. Reaching his audience decades after official history, *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient* are Ondaatje's "messages in a bottle," as his works give marginalised groups their place in "[t]he chaos and tumble of events" – history.<sup>179</sup>

This research provides answers to a hitherto unresearched aspect of Ondaatje's renowned oeuvre. In doing this, it illuminates the understanding of a distinctly Canadian mode of writing – "the Canadian postmodern."<sup>180</sup> Further research could delve deeper into Ondaatje's oeuvre and explore the role of historiographic metafiction in his later works. Especially his newest novel, *Warlight*, just over a month old at time of writing, may be particularly interesting to consider.<sup>181</sup> A historical novel about "a man piecing together his troubled adolescence," Ondaatje's newest

<sup>179</sup> Ondaatje, *In the Skin of a Lion*, 152.

<sup>180</sup> Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, xi.

<sup>181</sup> Michael Ondaatje, *Warlight*, (New York: Knopf, 2018).

work of prose also appears to be a work of historiographic metafiction.<sup>182</sup> As such, further research could, for example, compare the manifestation of Ondaatje's postmodernist approach to history in his earlier works to *Warlight* – his most recent novel. Moreover, scholars could look into other authors of historiographic metafiction and, for example, investigate how its function with regard to marginalised groups relates to the way Ondaatje used it in *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient*.

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<sup>182</sup> Alex Preston, "Warlight by Michael Ondaatje Review – Magic from a Past Master," review of *Warlight*, by Michael Ondaatje, *The Guardian*, June 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jun/05/warlight-michael-ondaatje-review>.

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