NEGOTIATING IDENTITY AND HISTORY: MICHAEL ONDAATJE’S *IN THE SKIN OF A LION* AND THE ENGLISH PATIENT

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ABSTRACT

The present paper examines how Michael Ondaatje in his works explores the complex issues of identity and individual histories in the transnational/trans-cultural setting. The paper in particular focuses attention on his two works, *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987) and *The English Patient* (1992). The paper discusses how in both the works Ondaatje frames the stories around actual historical events, yet at the same time his aim is to uncover the unwritten, hidden, ignored histories of the marginal characters. The historical and the fictional get juxtaposed in his works even as Ondaatje attempts to create a narrative space where many stories/histories may enact/recreate/reinvent themselves. Ondaatje thus adds to the discourse as he challenges and revises the already narrated one to incorporate the other histories. While *In The Skin of a Lion* is about the immigrant laborers of the 1920s’ Toronto when foundation of industrialization was being laid in Canada, *The English Patient* is set during the World War II. The novels reveal the inner conflicts that the marginal characters experience as they journey through the external incidents of death, discrimination, domination and seclusion. Ondaatje becomes the voice of the ex-centric people attempting to come to terms with their cultural past, to negotiate identity through the complexities of the present and to secure a place for themselves in the cultural memory.

KEYWORDS: Historiographic Metafiction, Inter-Textuality, Ex-Centric, Identity, Trans-Cultural/Transnational, Postmodernism