

Occidental Hostility towards Oriental Countries: A Study of Michael Ondaatje's Novel the English Patient

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ABSTRACT

This research paper entitled Occidental Hostility towards Oriental Countries: A Study of Michael Ondaatje's novel The English Patient focuses on the implied hostility of westerners towards the people of oriental countries. The novel depicts the effects of World War II which made the world witness the horrific destruction during the wartime. Sahara desert symbolically serves as the representation of the characters' war experiences in this novel. The argument which was going on about the nationality and integration in Canada when the novel was being written has a significant influence in unfolding the antagonistic ideas of westerners towards the people those who do not belong to white race, though they are the inhabitants of western countries.

Key words: Occidental, Hostility, Oriental, Allied, Axis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Michael Ondaatje is one of the prolific writers in Canadian Literature. His novel The English Patient throws lights on the trauma and destruction during World War II. The novel pictures the present and past of the four dissimilar characters who live in a bombed out Italian villa, despite the danger of earth mines and unexploded bombs which have been buried and hidden by Germany. All the four major characters in the novel live in a nation which is not of their own. The English Patient, a Hungarian is taken care by Hana, a Canadian nurse. Caravaggio, a Canadian thief whose thumb has been cut by the German soldiers for having tried to steal a cameras. He has come to Italian villa after knowing about his friend's daughter, Hana who lives with a burned patient. Kirpal Singh who is known as Kip throughout the novel, works for the English army as bomb disposal specialist. Kip loved and trusted English people.

War novels originated from the epic poetry of classical or medieval period, especially Homer's The Illiad, virgil's The Aeneid, sagas like the old English Beowulf and Arthurian literature. All these epics are considered as preserving history are mythology of different societies. War novels of nineteenth century were featuring the Battle of waterloo, Napoleonic war and American civil war. War novels during and aftermath of World War I were depicting the horror and atrocities of war. These novels made a significant insight to explore moral questions. They initiated anti-war movement in literature. They dealt with the subject of war but, not in conventional sense. The effects of war was featured through psychological trauma and alienation in most of the novels after WW I. World War II paved way to a new form of war novels.

Ondaatje's novel *The English Patient* portrays the horror of War during the Italian campaign of WW II. Italian campaign consisted of Allied and Axis operations in and around Italy from 1943 to 1945. The plot of the novel is a combination of both the present and past of four dissimilar people inhabiting in a bombed out Italian villa. All these four Characters have volunteered themselves to take part in the horror of wartime despite witnessing the fatal risk in it. Ondaatje explores significant themes and his imagination acknowledges no borders. Though there are many themes that run through the novel such as, nationality and identity and destructiveness of war, the author carefully unravels the theme of occidental hostility towards the oriental countries at the end of the novel.

The novel describes the western hostility through the character of Kirpal Singh who is known for Kip all through the novel as self-imposed with British army to act as a sapper. He saved many English people by diffusing the bombs. He was not ready to believe the western antagonism when his brother asserted it. "The English! They expect you to fight for them but won't talk to you. Singh. And the ambiguities" (TEP 164). Kip had a great passion and love to serve the English army since he blindly trusted them.

Although he is a man from Asia who has in these last years of war assumed English fathers, following their codes like a dutiful son. "Ah, but my brother thinks me a fool for trusting the English." He turns to her, sunlight in his eyes. "One day, he says, I will open my eyes. Asia is still not free continent, and he is appalled at how we throw ourselves into English wars. It is battle of opinion we have always had. 'One day you will open your eyes', my brother keeps saying (TEP 187).

Kip came to know the wicked nature of English people after they destroyed two cities of Japan that shook the world. It broke the faith that Kip had on English people. They dominated the people in colonized countries by excessive rules that they imposed on them. He turned against the English after hearing the shocking news about the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by Americans. He revealed his wrath by threatening the English Patient at gun point.

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 perfects and somehow converted the rest of the world. You stood for precise behaviour. I know if I lifted a teacup with the wrong finger I'd be banished. If I tied the wrong kind of knot in a tie I was out. Was it just ships that gave you such power? Was it, as my brother said, because had the histories and printing presses? (TEP 243).

Kip exposed the cunning intention of English by finding fault with the Christian missionaries in India. He realized that the Indian soldiers were wasting their lives by serving the English people.

You and 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 (TEP 243).

2. CONCLUSION

The hostile nature of white race perpetrated violence against brown race at end of WW II that caused a huge destruction to Asia. Though Kip saved many English people, he started hating them after knowing the antagonism of the white race against the brown race. He says, "American, French, I don't care. When start bombing the brown races of the world, you're an Englishman" (245). His strong dislike towards the hostile nature of white race drove him out of Italy. Thus, the aggressive behaviour of the white race towards the brown race makes him to drive to a conclusion and ultimately he has decided to come to India to become a doctor. He wished to become a doctor before joining the English Army. As he is unable tolerate the violence and atrocities of English people against brown race, he does not want to communicate with the white people including Hana whom he loved.

ABBREVIATIONS

TEP - The English Patient
WW I - World War I
WW II - World War II

3. REFERENCES

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