

Postmodern study of in the skin of a lion



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The central idea of Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* is the presentation of the marginalised voice, which is in keeping with his motivation to craft texts of post-colonial fiction. He offers an alternative version of events to reveal the lived truth by a particular group of people. In this case, it is the Canadian migrant struggling for political, cultural and social sovereignty in the effort for solidarity and a faithfully recorded presence in history. However, this text can also be read as postmodern as it explores differing perspectives through the triumphs and tribulations of the main characters, who present different versions of reality, yet are connected through time and place. Through this meta-fictional work, Ondaatje is saying that reality, history and memory are inescapably subjective. This is the essential quality of the text. Ondaatje reveals the untold stories of the marginalized through the protagonist Patrick Lewis and the intersections of his life with other characters. To this purpose, a disjointed narrative technique free from strict chronological sequence is employed. Through poetic prose, we are made to feel Patrick's silenced voice, "easily harnessed" character and isolation from "a warmth which is the odour of men". Like the Fins who have only the heat of cows to feel a connection with humanity, Patrick feels "deliriously anonymous" in his own country and plays an ocarina "to give himself a voice". Later, as "an immigrant" to Toronto, Patrick is inspired by the migrant workers who head towards the waterworks "in silence" yet emerge "from darkness, mothlike...[with] noise and light" to create a puppet show. This show is not only a celebration of humanity and multiculturalism, but also the mechanism through which the Ondaatje gives the forgotten migrants a voice to tell their struggles, lost in blinding capitalist visions. Patrick, here, still sees himself here as "the third

person in the picture". However, through Alice, who endows him with "energy, a confidence", he is able to recognize that "Each person ha[s] their moment when...they t[ake] responsibility for the story." From Patrick's involvement with the migrant workers, he is presented with the first snapshot of political life with which he chooses to become involved. The shy, retiring boy is suddenly thrust into a world where individuals must claim their own rightful place. Thus, the writer shows that unofficial histories provide a source of identity for the excluded. Patrick's encounters with the personal and profound versions of history activate his sense of political interest. This interest is translated into action when Patrick eventually confronts Commissioner Harris at the symbolically purifying waterworks to tell his story and to reserve a place in history. Ondaatje uses the imagery created by "lights" at the conclusion of the text to illustrate how Patrick, like the recurring motif of the moths, has surfaced from the darkness and silence of the tunnels to live with solidarity and a faithfully recorded presence in history. The presentation of alternative histories of people within the text, which differ from official histories, facilitates a post-colonial reading of the narrative. To explore postmodernist concerns and highlight that "Never again will a single story be told as though it were the only one", Ondaatje integrates interrelated, juxtaposed stories of mostly fictional migrants and factual capitalists into Patrick's autobiography. He rejects the liberal humanist idea of a grand narrative and questions authority by not using a narrative voice. This allows every story to shape meaning and blurs the distinction between fact and fiction. For example, despite finding "language is much more difficult than what he does in space", Nicholas eventually realises "he has been sewn into history...[and] begin[s] to tell stories."

Additionally, the writer shows life is fluid and interconnected, without an easily discernible pattern. As Alice once whispered, " Let me now reemphasize the extreme looseness of the structure of all objects." Both the structure of the novel and the events within the novel are determined by this understanding of life. Herein lies a postmodern reading of this freely constructed text where diversity and plurality are promoted. Additionally, the writer's appropriation of the Epic of Gilgamesh is used to show that Patrick possesses similar traits to the hero Gilgamesh by representing the avenger for oppressed workers and silenced voices. This application of intertextuality, considered a technique of Postmodern writing, allows the correlation of images to Patrick's context with an economy of language. Simultaneously, minor characters are given the right to be " part of the fairy tale", to be part of reality, history and memory. Ondaatje glorifies the Canadian migrant's contribution to the growth of the nation with vivid visual imagery such as " his shadow shifts like a giant alongside him", although no record been kept, exemplifying their struggle for official acknowledgement. He also utilizes a pastiche of genres, cinematically presented through an adventure story in which Patrick experiences romance, fantasy and mystery. Ondaatje has adopted an interconnected, non-linear narrative structure, compelling the reader to piece " together various corners of the story". Thus we become " The Searcher" in each shifting focus of the narrative deciding whose significance to remember. This reinforces the view that In the Skin of a Lion shows the postmodernist erosion of a text presenting absolute truths and a universal reality. Through the inclusion of literary techniques, therefore, the story becomes reflections of Ondaatje's reality, and the reader trusts the journey through which they will meander. In the Skin of a Lion is a <https://assignbuster.com/postmodern-study-of-in-the-skin-of-a-lion/>

story told history which has the capacity to make connections with a broad audience. The observing child becomes the searching man, the principled worker, and then the avenger with the activated voice “ who will wonder through the wilderness in the skin of a lion”. However, its poignant conclusion where the misery of human sacrifice and the pride of visionary architecture are both presented show that the novel is essentially asking us whose voice do we hear-and whose story do we remember.