

# English patient

Literature, American Literature



Michael Ondaatje, author of *The English Patient*, and author Ernest Hemingway, who wrote *A Farewell to Arms* take the readers on a whole new journey set in the tragic time of war filled with stories of love and pain and loyalty which all of these feelings play an important role in the characters' lives. *The English Patient* is the story of four mentally and physically injured characters living in an Italian monastery as World War II was coming to an end at the time. One by one, Ondaatje reveals the stories of their past and how they came to be. *A Farewell to Arms* is a heartbreaking love story between a driver and a nurse who fall in love and how they deal with being separated during war. Ondaatje and Hemingway use their different styles of writing to capture their readers and to take them back to life of the World War I and World War II. Both use different types of themes, symbols, and views on how their novels to reflect on their own personal lives. *The English Patient* is truly an inspiring piece in literature. Some of the themes in this novel are the pain, trouble, and suffering that war causes. War has an impact on human beings emotionally, even if one is able to escape of being involved in war without being physically wounded. All the major characters go through some sort of pain as a result of the war. *The English patient*, Almasy, who is actually Hungarian, has perhaps suffered the most of all four. After his plane crashes, Almasy is later rescued and is mistaken for an English soldier. However, his life turns into more of a mess when his body is burnt from head to toe and has to constantly depend on morphine to relieve pain. If that wasn't enough, he fails to save the life of his lover, Katherine Clifton. Hana, the British nurse caring for Almasy, is just a woman with a regular life, but unfortunately, she suffers from the emotional impact war has left on her.

From her past experiences, the nurse feels that everyone she loves leaves her at the end. Being a nurse, Hana is required to care for the wounded and naturally she forms a close bond with her patients, but she ends up witnessing them dying which brings her more pain. When Hana finally finds love with the Kirpal Singh, an Indian bomb specialist, she feels very happy and energetic. However, as the war moves on, Kip ends up leaving her alone with Almasy and Caravaggio, a thief. This feeling of abandonment is just one many pains Hana faces. Another important theme in this novel is identity. Almasy, who lived and traveled mostly in the desert, creates an alternate identity for himself. The desert is an identity because it is constantly changing, and identity can be seen the same way. People have learned that the desert is where empires rose and fell, but as time moves on, they are all forgotten, and all their traces are covered by sand. " We were German, English, Hungarian, African - all of us insignificant to them. Gradually we became nationless. I came to hate nations" (138). The desert taught Almasy to hate nations and made him see that people should not be identified by their nation or where they are from. He views the desert as a place where people could live, a place without borders or rules, free without any limitations. Through all the journeys he has taken, he finds himself realizing that one's beliefs is what makes up a person, not a name or a country. In this novel, the desert is shown to be as a place where there is no prejudice, and one's nationality is not important. In *A Farewell to Arms*, the primary theme is war. Some of the characters remain neutral about the war, but others remain bitter about the troubles it brings in life. Lieutenant Frederic Henry, an Italian ambulance driver, enters the war looking for adventure, but ends

up finding no honor. He finds himself tired of the fighting and conflict and realizes he has to escape the war. Towards the end of the novel, the Italian forces become weak and lose many battles resulting in the sinking of morale and confidence the troops need. Rinaldi, one of Henry's friends, even finds himself exhausted from overworking: " This war is killing me." This man, who once was completely happy in his life, has now lost his will to live, proving that war brings pain to everyone. In one incident, Henry is forced to shoot an engineer for not helping free the truck from the mud, which the shooting surprises the readers because he usually follows the rules of being an officer. Henry believes that killing is unethical, but he justifies his actions by saying that the war caused him to shoot. Just like the engineer's death, Hemingway explains that war between nations is unstoppable. The English Patient and A Farewell to Arms contain many themes, but the theme that dominates in both novels is love hurts. Ondaatje shows readers that if love truly comes from the soul, it can transcend place and time. Almsy still holds Katherine dear to his heart even though he knows he can never be with her or hold her. Kip, who falls in love with Hana, moves to India and gets marries another woman, but he is still unable to stop thinking about Hana and the future they could have had. The love these characters experienced is the kind of love that lasts forever showing that time and place have no connection to love. Hemingway shows love can be used as a tool for the comfort of each other's pain. At the beginning of A Farewell to Arms, Catherine tells Henry that her fiancé recently died, but she starts flirting with him anyways the second she meets him and shows no grief. She wants to move on with her life as quickly as possible and find someone to comfort her.

Henry gives into his feelings as well because his life is in ruins from the war, and he wants to escape from the violence. At first, Henry refuses to fall in love with her, but his affection for her grows day by day and starts depending on her love for strength. From then on, Henry and Catherine's relationship goes from a game to real love. To prove he loves her, he goes to great lengths to get himself out of the war, so Catherine won't be alone. Both feel so confident in their love that they begin planning their future to make up the lost time when they were apart. They talk about where they want to live, how many kids they will have, and their house. At the end of the novel, Catherine gives birth to a son, and unfortunately she dies in childbirth, breaking Henry's heart. Hemingway brings these two together to show that no matter how strong love is, love can bring tragedy and pain in one's life. Symbols are very important because they visibly represent ideas. Books are used constantly as symbols throughout *The English Patient*. At the beginning, the stairs that lead to Almasy's room are damaged, so Hana uses books to create new stairs. This symbolizes how books can be used to reach out to others. Hana loves reading books and uses them to find a way to escape as she engages herself in the story. Maps are used in the book symbolically because they identify places and give them a name, announcing ownership of the land. The villa where all four people live also symbolizes as a place of healing and shelter for protection. Before a bomb damaged it, the villa had been a hospital for soldiers to get well physically and to boost their morale. Almasy, Caravaggio, Kip, and Hana all come from different countries and pasts and have been affected by the war. The villa is the place where they don't feel their nationality is being used against them.

It is a place where there are no boundaries to follow. A Farewell to Arms also contains many symbols, but most of them have to do with nature. The most important symbol in this novel is rain. Every time it rains outside, something bad happens. It is raining when Henry and Catherine get together, when Catherine reveals she's pregnant, when Henry had to go back to the front, and when Catherine dies. Even Catherine admits that she is afraid of "the rain" and says it can be capable destroying love or bringing bad luck. Snow and ice also represent a relief from the war or death. When it is snowing, the war stops for a while until winter is over, Catherine and Henry go to Switzerland to escape from the war, which is covered in snow, and snow is used to stop Henry's wound when he was hurt. Although snow does not hold things off permanently, it is a good sign of hope for the people. Ondaatje's work in *The English Patient* is so beautiful and absolute that every sentence in his book has a sense of power in its meaning. His novel gives us mysterious and memorable tales of his characters' lives. Instead of presenting the story in present tense, he informs the reader that the novel is nothing but a narrative. His narrative structure involves in moving through present, past and future events during the whole novel. He makes people feel as if the story is actually happening as they read along. The beauty of Ondaatje's writing and his imagination is what attracts people to read his novels. Ernest Hemingway is known for his distinctive writing style and his straightforward prose in which he uses simple words and few adjectives. Every word, sentence, and phrase seems to be direct, but can have multiple meanings. His writing style gives readers a chance to reflect on their own thoughts and opinions. His writing structure and his description of places

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