

"in the skin of a lion"
and "the wanderer"
essay sample



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“ In the Skin of a Lion” and “ The Wanderer” Essay Sample

Michael Ondaatje and Alain Fournier have both used a very similar style but a radically different structure in creating their novels “ In the Skin of a Lion” and “ The Wanderer” respectively. Alain Fournier has made “ The Wanderer” a simple, articulate piece, capturing an age of simplicity in France at the turn of the century and prior to The Great War. Like Alain Fournier, Ondaatje also sets his novel in the early part of century, in the immigrant filled city of Toronto, Canada.

Both the novels are a retelling of stories by the main character. The “ Wanderer” is seen through the eyes of Francois Seurel who retells the life and the tragic love story of Antoine Meaulnes. Similarly, “ In the Skin of a Lion” is narrated by Patrick Lewis, a character like Seurel, whose personality has been created as a consequence of the stories and lives of the other characters in the book. Fournier made his book rather simple, but not naive. Both the novels have a gentle and poetic quality. Unlike Fournier however, Ondaatje has created a much more compound and ambiguous structure for his book.

Therefore, taking in consideration the style, characters, language and setting, Ondaatje’s “ In the Skin of a Lion” and Fournier’s “ The Wanderer” formulate fascinating comparisons. Ondaatje has used a very distinctive style in writing his novel “ In the Skin of a Lion”. He structured his novel in such a way dividing the whole novel into three parts with each part comprising of chapters. In the first part of the novel, Ondaatje has introduced

the reader to the farming world of Patrick's childhood and the sensuous world of Clara who introduces Patrick to love.

While the second part of the novel shows a vivid exploration of love surrounding Patrick, Clara and Alice, the third part deals with Patrick's struggle for power and his search for identity. Likewise, Fournier also organized "The Wanderer" extremely comparable to "In the Skin of a Lion" by splitting it into three parts with an epilogue at the end of the novel as well. Fournier, in the first part puts forward the school life of the adolescent Antoine Meaulnes and his adventure where he meets Yvonne de Galais and falls in love with her but due to circumstances, he was forced to leave.

And in the second part he discusses about the Meaulnes' search and exertion for Yvonne and in the third their engagement and the abrupt tragedy that happens. Although both the novels have a very similar style, Ondaatje had used a very complex and cryptic structure for his novel. "In the Skin of a Lion" begins by quoting, "Never again will a single story be told as though it were the only one." Undeniably Ondaatje "In the Skin of a Lion" challenges the classic structures of novels as he shifts tenses and time, like a literary entertainer.

While on the other hand, the "The Wanderer" is quite lucid. In the Skin of a Lion" doesn't tell a simple narrative but unites a mixture of little stories together into a comprehensive, rational design. Ondaatje, in his novel has ingeniously used the lyric prose and introduced the chief characters.

Ondaatje primarily started scripting the novel about a Canadian millionaire Ambrose Small, who vanished along with a million dollars in 1919. But,

Ondaatje turned Ambrose to be a less likable character and focused his book on hard working immigrants of Toronto. In doing so, Ondaatje shifted his focus of novel from the powerful to the humble and unfortunate.

Ambrose Small weakened into the background of the narration, and Patrick Lewis came forward as the main protagonist. Patrick Lewis is the main character and is the narrator of this novel. He wanders from place to place in search for his identity and is involved in various, diverse and complex stories. In the same way, Fournier's novel is recited by the character known as Francois Seurel who is more sensible than the main protagonist of the novel, Antoine Meaulnes. Meaulnes is the leading role player in this novel who meanders in search for his love, Yvonne.

The noticeable resemblance in both the main characters of the two novels is that each of them is seeking to accomplish a goal for which they undergo enormous hardships. Patrick comes across Clara but fails to get her at the beginning of the novel and likewise Meaulnes is separated from Yvonne in "The Wanderer". In addition to the protagonists, the female characters of the novels are in many ways the most influential individuals. In Alain Fournier's "The Wanderer", Meaulnes's love was more an image of female perfection than an actual being.

Ondaatje uses the women, predominantly Patrick's lovers, Alice and Clara in an utterly contradictory style. Alice and Clara help to create Patrick, they draw him into a world where he can set up his own story and become component of a superior community. Alice provides Patrick with a strategy into becoming the agent against the struggle for the centre of power. She

say's, " You name the enemy and destroy the power. Start with their luxuries-their select clubs, and their summer mansions" (In the Skin of a Lion, 124 -125).

Patrick is drawn into the world of these women, out of his own isolation, and once within that world, he begins to realise a greater potential for existing. " The Wanderer" and " In the Skin of a Lion" are also apparent by many noticeable differences. Both books have temperate, rhythmical and compassionate characters that totally engage the readers. " The Wanderer", though is written from a place of superior gullibility than " In the Skin of a Lion". It is rural and pastoral, and in several ways impractical to place the setting as twentieth century Europe.

All the conflicts in the novel are emotional and intrinsic. The irony of the fundamental theme of the novel is " the loss of innocence" which is obvious when read with history's observation. Fournier, although never revealing it in his novel, sensed the industrial revolution and the expansion towards war in Europe. " In the Skin of a Lion", while dealing with roughly the same time period, is a denial of the reputable history and a tribute for those histories that have been forgotten. Ondaatje, though rhythmical, combines the story with realism.

In the Skin of a Lion", to a degree, resembling " The Wanderer", is a novel with a love story and a tale about the loss of innocence. But more than " The Wanderer", it enquires concepts of the how we describe our self. It is can also be classified as a political novel, with strong post-colonialism roots, giving a voice to those whom history has downgraded. " In the Skin of a

Lion" is also an exceedingly wonderful poem. Ondaatje's unique imagistic talent, his neatness and his insubstantial use of the most dominant words, gives the novel a liquid flow, like the finest of poetry.

Eventually, it can be inferred that both these novels have an equal magnitude of exquisite realism to them with a bit of attraction that makes them appealing to the reader. Both the novels have analogous characters, who find themselves in the same circumstances. The two comparative novels also have the style in common, the only difference being in their structure, which is coherent in the case of "The Wanderer" and complex in "In the Skin of a Lion". In addition, they also have the pleasant poetic language which flows resembling to a fluid and engaging the reader into them.

For Ondaatje's part, he re-evaluates history, the power struggle, the search for love and finally the language as a source of authority using his main character Patrick Lewis. Similarly, Fournier drew extensively from his personal and youth in French countryside to make his affectionate fable of two young friends, Seurel and Meaulnes at the turn of twentieth century. The main theme is the search for "loss of innocence" and "beauty" along with the hunt for love. Thus, these two novels discussed above are linked together structurally, thematically, character and language wise, with their setting at the turn of the twentieth century.