An Analysis of Images in *The English Patient* by Ondaatje

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Abstract

*The English Patient* is one of the representative works of Canadian writer Mikell Ondaatje. The author tries to use archetypal criticism theory to analyze the main archetypal images in this novel, including fire, water, desert and so on. Blending multiple themes is one of the characteristics of Ondaatje's novels, and the English patient is no exception. In the novel, the author skillfully conveys his thoughts and emotions through the characterization of characters, the description of concrete things and the arrangement of plot structure. There is no absolute opposition in Ondaatje's writing. The Barbarians and the civilised, the British and the Indians, the present and the past, chaos and order, the desert and the villa, water and fire, Elmas and Catherine versus Lao Kip and Haner, they overlap and diverge. Almasy's desperate attempts to erase his nationality, Kip's desire to give up his cultural identity and follow the west, two couples struggling in different situations, and so on, these people's efforts in the face of reality has always seemed so pale. These images seem to be fragmentary, but they are related to each other. They bring together the theme of the novel and convey the author's deep understanding of the disasters that war brings to mankind, and the desire and belief of multi-cultural co-existence.

Keywords

The English Patient, Images, archetype

Introduction

After the 1960s, Canadian literature began to spread to the world, and many excellent writers with international reputation emerged. Mikell Ondaatje is one of them. Dubbed "One of the best writers in North" and "A literary genius," the Canadian is a prolific and award-winning writer. But it was the dreamy English patient that really propelled him into the ranks of world-renowned writers. Published in 1992, the novel won three literary awards that same year, including the Booker Prize, the top prize in English fiction. In this novel, Ondaatje subverts the traditional conventions of the novel and presents the reader with a common post-modern collage: an ever-changing style and narrator, it is interspersed with notes, poems, biographies, photographs, reports, etc. (Avila S, Haydon A, & Macayan J.P.M, 2021). The use of a large number of symbolic techniques in the novel plays an important role in highlighting the theme of the novel.

1. The symbolic meaning of “the English patient”

Canadian literature has always been included in different research systems, such as Commonwealth literature, North literature, New World Literature and so on. These nomenclature categories are concerned with the cultural
division of space, which is inextricably linked to political anxieties about identity and status, "Attribution confusion and root-seeking have become an important theme in Canadian literature", and the identity problem also perplexes Ondaatje and his protagonists. In the English patient, the identity of the patient has been a mystery, and the exploration of the identity has been pushing the plot of the novel forward. The English patient-the novel's seemingly bland title also has a rich implication: a wounded man who is taken by Bedouins to an Allied hospital, his papers missing and his identity unidentifiable. This was common during the war because there were thousands (Tarp Helen C, Sanderson Tammy, Fore M Elizabeth, & Nies Mary A, 2017).

Hundreds of soldiers don't know who they are or what nationality they are. As the story unfolds, Ondaatje slowly brings all the pieces of the past to the reader: the British patient is a desert explorer, a pilot, a cartographer, a German spy, until finally the mystery is solved: his true identity is that of the Hungarian aristocrat, El Masi. Elmasi was an explorer who could easily forget his identity and nationality in a borderless land. After nearly a decade in the desert, he had no interest in trade, power, money, or war outside the desert. He believed that what he and his colleagues were doing was purely scientific. What they didn't know was that Geoffrey Pearson was working for British Intelligence, a vast network of British intelligence that watched their every move in the desert. Geographical exploration opened the way for Western colonial invasion. War broke out, the desert became a war zone, the map became a weapon for both sides to fight, good friend meadows is "Dead because of the country" people. As Geoffrey Pearson was dying and Catherine was dying, Elmasi turned to the Allies for help, and Catherine died alone in the swimmer's cave because his name was assumed to be German. Almasy hates nationality! After exchanging information with the Germans for gas, Al-massey took Catherine up into the air. The plane caught fire, Catherine was reduced to ashes, and Al Massey was burned beyond recognition. He "Knows the weapons of the Allies and enemies; he knows the geography of the story" but "Doesn't know" who he is. Elmasi's identity eventually became a blank, and his desire to erase his nationality and identity was realized. Catherine was dead, his heart long gone, and the "English" patient, the "German" patient, or any other patient from any other country no longer mattered to him. To allow the allies to label him "British" was not only a mockery of the Allies, who had given him a different identity before and after the same organization, but also because of his ties to Britain in the past. At the end of the war, the card of England, the victor of the battle, was a talisman that allowed al-massey to find a quiet place to find salvation and comfort in the lingering scent (Mike Marais, 2015).

The story begins near the end of the war. At the Villa San Girolamo, three people of different identities gather around the "English" patient, Haner, who looks up to his intellect as a pious student to a respected mentor. Like his teacher, Haner tried to write notes in books he read, Kip respected him and the two shared a common interest; Caravaggio suspected that he was the long-lost Elmasy, a spy who had betrayed the Allies, provided information to the Germans, and was irrefutably responsible for his crippled hands. The "English" patients seemed to have an extraordinary bond that held the people in the villa together, no matter what the purpose of their visit-hate or love-until they were able to live together in peace and joy, it didn't last, though. Writing in the 1990s, Ondaatje named the novel! "The English Patient" because the United Kingdom as the core of the Commonwealth, she once had an extraordinary cohesion. Although this cohesion in the novel at the time of writing is not as good as before, but her influence will continue to exist, in the former colonial areas play an important role. After independence, the members of the Empire, such as India and Canada, for historical reasons, in the composition of immigration, cultural background and development path, and so on, have a common brand of colonial rule. The feelings of the people of these countries for their former masters are as ineffable as those of Caravaggio and Lao Kip in the novel: When his suspicions are finally confirmed, Caravaggio decides to let bygones be bygones, luo Kip aimed his gun at a "British" patient he admired (Cara E. Palmer, 2015).

2. The symbolic meaning of the structure

The English patient revolves around the love stories of Elmassey and Catherine, Lao Kip and Haner. Haner, a Canadian nurse, is left alone with an English patient after the allied forces retreat from the villa in San Girolamo. Her fellow countryman and old friend, Caravaggio, had heard about it by chance and had followed them here, only to be surprised to find the man she had been searching for all these years. The arrival of Indian engineer Lao Kip opened the curtain on his love affair with Haner. In fitful memories, the love affair between Al Massey and Catherine came to light. Two main lines of love, Ondaatje in the plot on the use of the same way. Their surface structure is linear, driving the story forward, the deep structure is circular, used to deepen the theme.

Because of its special convergent function and open function, the circle has the ability of regenerating at will.
The first circle of Ondaatje, centered on the desert, radiates from the surrounding space-time plane, following the love of Elmasy and Catherine. The behavior of the members of the research team constitutes the points on the circle, and their relationship goes through a circular cycle. A multi-national team of scientists came to their “Land of faith” to explore. The newlyweds, Catherine, who accompanied her husband, fall in love with Elmasy. Almas and Catherine love each other, but they can’t be together. The affair seemed to come to an abrupt end when the couple decided to break up after a series of tortures. After the outbreak of war, the joint expedition was forced to disband, and El-masi in the station waiting to leave. I never thought Geoffrey Pearson would take Catherine's plane, fly into the station, and kill all three of them. Catherine, barely alive, expresses his love for Al Massey again, and their feelings are shaken. Geoffrey Pearson is dead, and there will be no more obstacles to their love. Elmasi went to ask for help with this love and was gone for three years. Three years later, Al Massey walked naked into the swimmer's Cave and made good on his promise to Catherine. When the plane caught fire, he became “A man on fire”. The relationship between Catherine and Elmasy has been through one ups and downs, and after another, it's been stormy. To the reader, Catherine remains a mystery. Her stories are told by British patients, whose narratives split the story as if to hide the logic of what happened. Why would Catherine, who loved her husband, risk her husband and her reputation to love a man fifteen years her senior? Is the British patient al Massey? Did he have anything to do with the deaths of Catherine and Geoffrey Pearson? Around the identity of British patients, Ondaatje set up a center, lay out layer by layer, it affects the heart of the villa, also affects the reader's heart (Wan-lun Lee, 2014).

With the villa as the center, people of different nationalities gathered together again. Haner, the British patient, Caravaggio and Lao Kip's present and past are intertwined and moving forward. Each person's own experience is a circular trajectory. With the same hope, Lao Kip and Haner went to war against their families' advice. Watching countless casualties die, Haner realized that the people who started the war didn't care. His lover and father died in the war, the child was aborted, and Haner's emotions dried up. When most were ready to return home, she chose to stay behind, alone with English patients in the villa, where food and water were scarce. During her time at the villa, the patient's care made up for her guilt about her father, and Lao Kip's love made her feel better. From the initial escape to packing up and writing to Claraz, she was ready to return home. Kip, an Indian, joined the British Army as an engineer out of respect for British culture and way of life. Kip cultivated himself in every aspect of English culture and way of life. He loved English tea, “Always humming Western songs he learned in the last three years of the war.”

Ondaatje's narrative alternates between increasing and decreasing, between leaping from the past to the present, and from the present to the past. This non-traditional narrative structure makes the two main lines of love cross each other, scattered but orderly. No matter in the narrative techniques, plot clues, or in the characterization, the circular image appears repeatedly. Now and the past, open and closed, no matter how the space-time, scene changes, the characters are always experiencing a loose-poly-loose cycle. The parallel narrative structures of Almas and Catherine in the desert, Hana and Lao Kip in the villa, which appear to be unrelated, actually alternate and overlap in circles due to the involvement of the British patient. The tragic ending of Al Massey and Catherine Doomed Kip and Haner to a separation. The vast desert is an explorer's paradise, once the intervention of modern civilization, the past peace will not exist. The outbreak of war caused them to lose paradise, the villa after the war as a paradise, people from different countries in which to forget all the Troubles. The invasion of external forces made them lose paradise again. The beginning and the end of the novel is also a circle. It is not difficult to see, through the circular structure, Wundajie's characters struggle on the paper, and different identity, the gap between different nationalities doomed the inevitability of this tragedy.

3. The symbolic meaning of fire and water

Fire and water have always been considered mutually exclusive and incompatible. In the dispute about the origin of everything, some people think it is water, others think it is fire. The battle between fire and water is often likened to the battle between God and Satan: Water is a gift from heaven, and fire always leads to hell. In the English patient, Elmasi is blindfolded as the Bedouin wanders through the desert. Although at times he felt confused that what had happened was a dream, one thing he was sure of was the importance of water to the desert walker. Without water, all things wither, even life will be gone. After the crash, Al Massey carried Catherine to the swimmer's Cave. Although the cave that once had water has long since dried up, it is a sacred place of death because of its past. If Kip is still drifting between East and west, it is the water that has brought him a complete return to his native culture and faith. “The sapper's head came out of the water,” like Jesus, “And he came out of the water after being
baptized. Then the sky opened and he saw the Holy Spirit come down on him like a dove.” Lao Kip's identity with English and Western civilization had been washed away by the water.

Water symbolizes the subtle changes in the heroine's spiritual world. The story begins, “There was a muffled thunder in the air... and feeling the rain on her bare arms, she walked quickly through the gazebo into the house.” Haner's past made her feel, the choice was escape, and even a surprise visit from a childhood friend, Caravaggio, would leave her at a loss. After listening to the British patient's story, “In the desert, all you can do is praise water,” Haner wet her hair with fountain water. People in the desert cherish water as they cherish their own lives. In this way, Haner was praising the water and baptizing himself. The water made the hope of life grow in Haner's heart. But at this time of Han to the outside world still have some reservations, because the water she uses is only villa material at the end of the story, when a heavy rain falls from the sky, the author again mentions that Haner wet his hair with water, but the water is no longer fountain water, it comes from the outside, is a gift of rain In more than two months, Haner went from despair to hope. From the initial escape to packing up and getting ready to return home, Haner used this gift to baptize himself once again and achieve a phoenix-like nirvana.

In Ondaatje's works, water is the source of redemption and hope, while Fire is the power of evil and destruction. War broke out all over the continent, almost all countries were involved in the war, the war brought about is full of devastation. The characters come from all over the world and experience war: Haner's father is burned “So bloody that the buttons on his shirt stick to his skin and stick to his chest.” The plane is on fire, Catherine was reduced to ashes, and Al-massey emerged naked from the fire as “A man whose head was on fire”. As soon as Lao Kip closed his eyes, he could see the flames of the explosion, and he could see people jumping into rivers and cisterns to escape the flames and heat that would incinerate everything in seconds.

4. Conclusion

Ondaatje adopted the names of some characters in his 1987 work the lion's skin in the English patient, which was written five years apart. Yao Yuan said that in a multicultural society, “Dressed as a lion” “Envisions another way for Toronto to develop, to connect, to live in harmony and to be one.” Five years later, however, under the pen of Ondaatje, more is under the multi-culture some difficult to overcome, the helpless realistic question. The vast sea of sand, worth exploring, exploring the efforts of people, worthy of future generations to write. In the novel, the protagonists' exploration of personal and national identity is worth writing, but in real life, Ondaatje realizes that this exploration is a long way to go.

References


