

**Care for the Other:
An Ethical Reading of Self and Other in Michael Ondaatje's
*The English Patient***

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Abstract

In postmodern and post-colonial contexts, Michael Ondaatje's novels are noted for blurring the ideological boundaries and fixed identities. The concept of "ex-centric subjectivity" provides an exceptional perspective to analyze the in-betweenness found in Ondaatje's central characters positioned outside the dichotomous structure of center/periphery, self/other. Rather than reconfirming the mergence of the identities of self and other, this paper aims to provide an alternative interpretation of "selfness and otherness" in Ondaatje's *The English Patient* in light of Emmanuel Levinas's ethics of "face-to-face encounter with the Other." In *The English Patient*, Hana's "face-to-face" encounter with Almasy reveals her the existence of otherness which is infinite and beyond the reach of her sensibility. In accord with Levinas's notion of ethics, the obligation to the Other is absolute from which the entire domain of subjectivity is thus defined. Regarded as a moral subject, Hana's ethical relationship with Almasy entails a sense of responsibility which is incumbent on her alone. Through the recognition of, the care for the Other and the establishment of an ethical I-Thou relationship, Hana gradually possesses herself of resistance to the traumatic past wreaked by the war and achieves some form of salvation for herself.

Keywords

Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, Emmanuel Levinas, face-to-face ethics,
moral subject, the Other