

MICHAEL ONDAATJE'S *THE ENGLISH PATIENT*:
REMEMBRANCE OF CULTURES PAST

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After seeing the film of *The English Patient*, returning to the novel is difficult.¹ The film's influence is so strong, the visual effects are so splendid, the love story of the English patient and the English socialite so patent and pathetic, that the novel seems at first unexciting, mere graphemes on a page that one must make an effort to construe. No instant gratification as in a film. However in one area where film with its rapidity and compression has a weakness, Ondaatje's novel abounds – reference or allusion. In the slow medium of the novel one may linger on cultural allusions, contemplate their meaning, watch for their recurrence and any telling pattern they develop. Ondaatje's award winning novel is rich in complex meaning that the film barely taps; and this richness is conveyed to a great extent by his use of cultural allusion. (Ondaatje actually supplies a bibliography at the end of his novel, unabashedly declaring certain of his sources of allusions.)

References to Herodotus and Herodotus's *The Histories*, although mentioned in the film, are pervasive in the novel. So too are the references to Italian culture, from the Renaissance to the end of the Second World War. Exploring the Italian cultural allusions is also to explore Ondaatje's use of Christian reference. But before doing so, I will briefly outline what I take to be the significance of the Herodotus allusions. These economically augment our understanding of the English Patient's experience as he explores in the North African desert in the 1930's and then undergoes the war; and these also signal Ondaatje's attitude to history, historiography and his de-colonialised perspective. The novel's hero, Hungarian Count Ladislaus de Almásy, later known as the English Patient, keeps a copy of *The Histories* with him as he goes about his North African desert explorations and finally as he awaits death in Tuscany. Indeed his volume appears rather waterproof and fireproof as it follows Almásy through dire experiences of exploration, love and war. But it is a talismanic book to Almásy and of

considerable importance to Ondaatje. It is the novel's master reference, the text behind Ondaatje's text.

Just as Herodotus was born in Halicarnassus, a Greek city in Asia Minor on the edge of the Greek imperium, so was Ondaatje born near the edge of what was the British imperium, in Sri Lanka (then, of course, Ceylon). Herodotus wrote about a great war, the conflict between the Greeks and the Persians as Ondaatje writes of the Second World War. Herodotus wrote his history after much travelling; he listened to tales and experienced many different cultures – and not from the viewpoint of the Greek imperium, but from outside and from many different perspectives, from many different cultures. The English Patient approvingly quotes a passage of Herodotus on his own historiography: "This history of mine... has from the beginning sought out the supplementary to the main argument" (p. 119). As Oswyn Murray says: "Herodotus's openness to other cultures, indeed, caused him to be called a 'barbophile' – a lover of barbarians."² Ondaatje's novel explores diverse viewpoints derived from the several cultures his four major characters are shaped by. And he has his hero, Almasy, know a great deal about Europe in general and England in particular; indeed, know enough to pass as an Englishman. But he also knows and understands and deeply respects the desert tribes of North Africa, their very knowledgeable civilisation and the many kindnesses they perform for him. In fact Herodotus and the historical Almasy both explored in Libya. Ondaatje's Almasy does the same.

Almasy is a kind of historian too. As he has experienced, so has he learned; and as he has learned, he has inserted passages from other authors or of his own into his copy of *The Histories*. He, in a sense, continues *The Histories*. Certainly he continues Herodotus's cross cultural, non-imperial views, views which have persisted in Ondaatje's work from the beginning and which are made much of in current "post-colonial" scholarship. The English Patient tells his nurse Hana that in the desert he and the other explorers – German, English, Hungarian, African – became "nationless" (p. 138) and that this is right: "Erase nations! I was taught such things by the desert" (p. 139). "The desert could not be claimed or owned" (p. 138) Almasy

affirms and this also is right.

As Hana says of the English Patient's habit of inserting his learning into *The Histories*, using it as a kind of commonplace book, his ideas are "cradled" (p. 16) by Herodotus. Herodotus gives both an authoritative provenance and corroboration to the English Patient's understanding of history, the lessons he has learned of cross cultural understanding and openness.

There is much more to be said about Ondaatje's use of Herodotus – for instance, Herodotus is an early geographer; he is empirical and skeptical as an historian; and he tends to assume human not divine causation. Ondaatje even uses a specific and lengthy passage about Gyges, the King of Candaules and his wife, as an omen of Almasy's and Katharine Clifton's affair. Katharine quotes the episode directly from Almasy's copy of *The Histories* (pp. 232-234); it touches off the love affair, which leads to grief, even to unseen historical consequences, as the episode does in Herodotus's history. But the similarity between Herodotus's "de-centred" and tolerant historiography and the English Patient's distillation of his experiences, is sufficient at this point to show its relevance to the allusions to Italian culture and through Italian culture, past and present, to the Bible and Christianity.

The novel alternates Almasy's desert memories with his present state that of an unidentified, severely burnt man, known only as the English Patient, and cared for by a Canadian nurse, Hana, who has deserted the Allied evacuation at the end of the Second World War in order to care for him. With them eventually are two other men, who come to stay at the villa – Kirpal Singh, nicknamed Kip, a Sikh British army sapper from the Punjab (Kipling country) sent to Italy to clear mines; and David Caravaggio, an ex-thief from Toronto, who has known Hana as a child and who has worked in Intelligence in the war. The events focussing on Almasy as the English Patient take place mainly in or around a villa near Florence.

The very mention of Florence conjures up the great achievements of the Italian Renaissance. In one of his monologues or lessons, as it were, to his eager listener, Hana, the English Patient mentions two famous

Renaissance thinkers who came from Tuscany. Indeed the English Patient thinks he could be in the very room in the villa, formerly the Villa Bruscoli, where the humanist philosophers held their great conversations. In the present of 1945, the villa is named the Villa San Girolamo or Saint Jerome, having been a nunnery once and now a bombed ruin. (The historical Villa San Girolamo is still a convent.). One of the great Florentine humanists the English Patient alludes to is Andrea Poliziano, innovative poet, playwright, philologist and humanist thinker of Aristotelian allegiance. He lived in the Villa Bruscoli, a gift from Lorenzo de Medici. Educated under the patronage of Lorenzo and eventually friend of Marsilio Ficino, the famed Christian Platonist and leader of the Florentine Academy, Poliziano became a prime influence on Lorenzo as his fellow poet, guide and probable lover. He was also a significant influence on others outside the academy, such as Botticelli and Michaelangelo. Poliziano and Lorenzo, through their poetry in the Tuscan tongue, broke down barriers between the popular and the academy. However it is probably Poliziano's syncretic Christianised humanism, so characteristic of the Florentine Academy, that is most relevant to the English Patient's praise of him.³

The English Patient also refers to Count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. One could be forgiven for assuming Ondaatje's allusion to Pico would be favourable, as Pico attempted a bold synthesis of all religions. As Paul Oskar Kristeller says:

For [Pico], truth is not found only in the Christian religion and in Platonic philosophy. When he proposed his 900 theses, the theses themselves and the speech that was to precede the disputation express the idea that there are particular truths in all religions and in all philosophies... Thanks to Pico's influence, the Cabala was often added to Platonic, Pythagorean, Chaldaic, and Egyptian sources in a kind of universal syncretism... it has been shown that this syncretism had its share in preparing the way for later deism and for the modern idea of religious tolerance.⁴

But Ondaatje's allusion is not favourable. He focuses on a later phase of Pico's life when he came under the influence of Savonarola, the fanatical Dominican monk who attempted to cleanse Florence of its "Medici-inspired" vices. Ondaatje, ever for tolerance, uses Pico as a foil to his favoured Poliziano. Interestingly Ondaatje chooses to ignore Poliziano's eventual wish to be buried in Savonarola's Church of San Marco, having

been received into the Dominican order.⁵ The English Patient says to Hana: "And then came Savonarola's cry out of the streets: '*Repentance! The deluge is coming!*' And everything was swept away – free will, the desire to be elegant, fame, the right to worship Plato as well as Christ. Now came the bonfires – the burning of wigs, books, animal hides, maps" (pp. 57-58).⁶ The English Patient laments the loss of learning and the loss of the cultural boundary crossing in the humanistic worshipping of both Christ and Plato. He reads to Hana from one of his own insertions in Herodotus's volume:

Hana listened as the Englishman turned the pages of his commonplace book and read the information glued in from other books – about great maps lost in the bonfires and the burning of Plato's statue, whose marble exfoliated in the heat, the cracks across wisdom like precise reports across the valley as Poliziano stood on the grass hills smelling the future. Pico down there somewhere as well, in his grey cell, watching everything with the third eye of salvation. (p. 58)

The English Patient scorns the implications of Pico's final stage, tutoring Hana in his sympathy with the humanistic movement of the Italian Renaissance. A temperate, boundary crossing humanism is one of the most important values the English Patient reveals to Hana. It sits well with his reverence of Herodotus; and it is at the heart of the novel's values.

To return to the allusion to Saint Jerome: the Villa San Girolamo where the foursome dwell is named after one of the Fathers of the Church, awe inspiring translator and interpreter of scripture, whose work formed the basis of the Vulgate. Although he had been the object of ascetic cults in the Middle Ages,⁷ by the time of the Renaissance humanists, he had become revered for his great learning in Greek, Latin and Hebrew and for the magnificence of his Latin translation.⁸ It may be that Ondaatje is tapping both associations. But whether he is hinting at Saint Jerome as a cross-cultural polymath that the Renaissance humanists could admire or as an ascetic inimical to Renaissance humanism, his reference to the Villa San Girolamo is to an ancient building, full of history, named after a Church Father, yet in 1945 with its chapel and its six-foot crucifix damaged, a war-stricken ruin, serving ironically as only an imperfect refuge for its four modern inhabitants.

There are many other allusions to Italian culture from the time of the Renaissance to the end of the Second World War. Kip, who shows the same cross-cultural tolerance as the English Patient, prompts many of these allusions. Kip is very open to the Christian sanctities he witnesses in Italy. He watches, for example, the Marine Festival of the Virgin Mary: he is not hostile or cynical or uncomprehending. Carefully he studies the episode and finally feels the Virgin's face could be that of "A sister" or "Someday a daughter" (p. 80). When Kip gets the privilege granted to a few sappers to see the Sistine Chapel with its famous ceiling by Michaelangelo (pp. 77-78), he looks up at the ceiling, as Ondaatje says, "as if he were searching for a brother in the crowd" (p. 77). At that moment he sees a face that is wise and curiously "unforgiving" (p. 77). The padre accompanying him tells him it is Isaiah's face. Ondaatje describes Isaiah as both "wise" and "unforgiving"; there is no contradiction in this, given the novel's criticism of war. The Book of Isaiah in the Old Testament is, of course, named after the prophet Isaiah. It tells of Sennacherib's unsuccessful attack on Jerusalem and his subsequent murder; and it contains a prophecy of the redemption of Israel. Isaiah and the Book of Isaiah serve as a guide to Isaiah's perilous times. But Isaiah is also a judge of his times. Kip searches as if for a brother and he finds one. Kip will be used by Ondaatje to judge his times.

Later, when Kip learns the atom bombs have been dropped on Japan, he recollects prophetic passages from Isaiah that the English Patient had once quoted to him: "The voice of the English Patient sang Isaiah into his ear as he had that afternoon when the boy [Kip] had spoken of the face on the chapel ceiling in Rome... 'Behold, the Lord will carry thee away with a mighty captivity, and He will surely cover thee. He will surely violently turn and toss thee like a ball into a large country'" (p. 295). Kip recalls another fragment from the Book of Isaiah: "For the heavens shall vanish away like smoke and the earth shall wax old like a garment. And they that dwell therein shall die in like manner" (p. 295). These passages are omens - of Kip's flight from Europe to India, "the large country", after the dropping of the bombs, when the heavens did seem "to vanish away like smoke"; and they are Ondaatje's warning to his era of the consequences of the new found

destructive power.

The Book of Isaiah is also read typologically by Christians as containing prefigurations of Christ, especially in its vision of the suffering servant. Associations of Christ and service hover around Kip. Twice in the novel he is called a "warrior saint" (pp. 209, 217). Certainly, as a sapper risking his life to protect others, he is a warrior saint, a secular crypto-Christ figure, dedicated selflessly to others. Ondaatje makes the association with Christ more patent in an incident in Naples, where Kip has been assigned to make the city safe from mines and habitable again. He goes to the damaged Church of San Giovanni a Carbonara. Ondaatje has Kip misunderstand the iconography of the Annunciation that he sees there. But still he is sympathetic, appreciative. He falls asleep at the feet of the Archangel and the Virgin and feels comfort (pp. 279-280). With perhaps too allegorical an impulse and with his usual strong visual sense, Ondaatje suggests Kip at the feet of the two figures, the Archangel and the Virgin, forms a "tableau" (p. 280). He suggests that the angel's raised arm indicates "a stay of execution" (p. 281) for Kip; a "promise of some great future for this sleeper, child-like, foreign born" (p. 281). Kip is indeed a special promise in the modern world – a sapper risking his life to make others safe, a Christ-like warrior saint, a seeker of brotherhood across cultures and races. Even after his ideals are shattered by the bombing of Japan, he becomes a healer. He returns home to be a doctor and a loving father and husband. This is significant: the atomic age does not destroy Kip's goodness, whatever else it destroys, nor does it make it irrelevant.

There are other Biblical and Christian associations in relation to other characters besides Kip. Hana, for instance: Hannah in the First Book of Samuel is bitter about her childlessness; she prays fervently to God for a child, and finally God grants her a child, who will be the last and the greatest of the judges of Israel and the first after Moses of the great prophets. Hannah will sing a song of Thanksgiving for her son. The association of Hannah in the Bible with the modern Hana suggests a sad and ironic lack; the modern Hana has had a lover in the war; she has not given birth; she has chosen termination (p. 85). The war indirectly destroyed this first love. Ondaatje is

tender and does not judge Hana. She is left by the war's end with caring for the English Patient as a substitute she can focus her love upon. She is never to have a child; but she is always to be giving and caring.

During the war the gruesome scenes she witnesses as a nurse created a "coldness hidden in her" (p. 48). But with her turning away from the war to care only for the dying English Patient, her love and protectiveness flourish. She comes to feel peace with no bounds which Ondaatje describes as: "To rest was to receive all aspects of the world without judgement. A bath in the sea, a fuck with a soldier who never knew your name. Tenderness towards the unknown and anonymous which was a tenderness to the self" (p. 49). She does many little acts of caring – just as the Bedouin did for Almasy; and when she plants her garden among the ruins of the Villa San Girolamo she impels hope: "Someday there would be a bower of limes, rooms of green light" (p. 43). She reads to the English Patient; she lies beside him – perhaps here a hint of King David and the Shunammite; she administers morphine; she listens to his deep unburdening of himself. The song she sings is not a song of thanks to God for the birth of a son, but the Marseillaise. Yet when she sings it, Carravaggio thinks it is a "new testament" (p. 269). The modern Hana as a nurse is the centre of selfless loving and caring, in spite of her own suffering. She is akin to New Testament, Christ-like virtue at work in the secular modern world.

There are hints on the very first page of the novel of the English Patient as a Christ figure. Hana sees him as having the "Hipbones of Christ" and as a "despairing saint" (p. 3). At one stage Ondaatje depicts him as having a halo: "He lay there in his dark skin, the only paleness the hearing aid in his ear and the seeming blaze of light from his pillow" (p. 100). The English Patient also does some moral reflection. Having recalled his tempestuous adulterous affair with Katharine Clifton, as he talks to Hana, he comes to question it. By this time he has literally passed through a baptism of fire and looks back upon his life and Katharine's meaning in it. Katharine herself had warned Almasy: "From this point on in our lives... we will either find or lose our souls" (p. 158). She is really a scourge to Almasy. Their love is not blissful. It is a painful passion (with some clumsy

reminiscences on Ondaatje's part of Heathcliff and Catherine [pp. 152-154]). Almasy wonders if he after all had been Katharine's "demon lover" (p. 260). Certainly his love for Katharine is different from the poignant tenderness he feels for Hana, his nurse and pupil (p. 115). Almasy as the English Patient comes to know love beyond passion.

And his affair is very different from Kip's and Hana's. Their love is full of kindnesses, not possession; nor does it bring grief to others. For instance, Kip gives Hana a birthday party. It is a mock splendid occasion imaginatively lit by a circle of snail shells filled with pink paraffin, with food and wine got by Kip specially for the occasion (p. 268). It becomes an occasion of tender reminiscence and dedication. Hana is moved to sing the "Marseillaise" – the "one voice was the single unspoiled thing. A song of snail light. Caravaggio realised she was singing with and echoing the heart of the sapper" (p. 269). There are innumerable acts of thoughtfulness between the lovers – and even sometimes celibacy (p. 225). Although the novel does not disapprove of the passion and sensuality of Katharine and Almasy, their affair is more one of profound dissatisfaction, mutual torment. Kip's and Hana's affair is a foil to Almasy and Katharine's. It is selfless and caring, in keeping with all sorts of other tender actions and transactions, celebrated in the novel.

Caravaggio⁹ is not strongly or directly associated with Biblical reference. Although his first name is David, it is Kip who is seen as a David by the English Patient who says that Kip is David to his Goliath (p. 116), youth judging age. However Caravaggio is named after the great Italian Renaissance painter, whose chiaroscuro influenced Rembrandt and Ribera. Wild and turbulent, Caravaggio nevertheless painted some of the greatest religious works of his time, including a Saint Jerome. Like the Renaissance Caravaggio, the modern Caravaggio, who is a thief turned intelligence agent, puts his talent to higher use. And although there are no patent Biblical or Christian associations for David Caravaggio, he is one with the others at the villa. He becomes a "friendlier human" (p. 266). He hopes Kip and Hana will marry (p. 268); but he can forgive Kip for abandoning Hana in his grief over the bombing of Japan (p. 289). He has a selfless affection for Hana and Kip; he

takes care of them and the English Patient by his "finds" in the village. One of Ondaatje's rare comic scenes is the scene with the gramophone Caravaggio has "found" (p. 107). The scene celebrates the forgivably eudaemonistic urges of these four left-overs of the war, as Caravaggio teaches Hana to dance and the English Patient, enjoying their joy, asks for wine, which Kip kindly supplies. And above all, although Caravaggio has had a brutalising war experience and although he learns that the English Patient is Almsy, who he knows helped the Germans in North Africa, he comes to do what Hana counsels: he foregoes retribution. He comes to feel that it does not even matter which side Almsy was on (p. 265).

Altogether this foursome enact an affectionate selflessness; they are a little United Nations bound together in *caritas* across race and culture. Kip sees the four of them as in a tableau (another allegorical nudge from Ondaatje). He reminisces about his experiences in Piedmont during a storm and sees this as relevant to the present state of the foursome in the villa, as he ponders them in a thunderstorm:

Lightning falls upon the steeples of the small alpine chapels whose tableaux re-enact the Stations of the Cross or the Mysteries of the Rosary... The Villa San Girolamo, located where it is, also receives such moments of light – the dark halls, the room the Englishman lies in, the kitchen where Hana is laying a fire, the shelled chapel – all lit suddenly, without shadow... The naive Catholic images from those hillside shrines are with him in the half darkness, as he counts the seconds between lightning and thunder. Perhaps this villa is a similar tableau, the four of them... momentarily lit up, flung ironically against this war (p. 278).

Just as Hana's garden blooms in the ruins, the human capacity for *caritas* survives the war. As Hana, quoting Almsy, says to Kip: "Love is so small it can tear itself through the eye of a needle" (p. 288).

But the atomic age arrives. It shatters the frail human propensities of the Villa San Girolamo. It is apocalyptic. Kip, warrior saint, kindly, loving, sympathetic, goes berserk, is momentarily decivilised. He loses his racial and cultural tolerance. He wants to shoot the English Patient for being English. He sees the bomb as the "tremor of Western wisdom" (p. 284); and thinks it would not have been dropped on a "white" nation. He abandons Hana and Europe. The English Patient dies. Hana is left to put her future together. She

finally leaves Europe to stay with her stepmother in Canada. Caravaggio is also to return to Canada. The reader's – and Carravaggio's – desires for Kip's and Hana's romance to come to fruition and the tender sense of *bien etre* fostered by their little community are shattered.

What mitigates the intensely sad break-up of this "tableau" of intertwining doers of good, loving deeds? Ondaatje himself comes to the rescue. He steps into his novel as a character. Although he has delivered the story multi-vocally, from the different characters' perspectives and in their voices, he writes himself into the novel as the novelist, speaking in his own right. He does a final act of the tolerant loving care that the novel celebrates. He sympathetically treats Kip, although he abandoned Hana. He tells us of Kip's becoming a doctor and of his persisting sad reflections on Hana. He shows him within his family still caring as he swoops to catch a fork that his daughter has dropped, reminiscent of his once catching a falling fuse box and saving Caravaggio (p. 208). And he tells of Hana's future, tenderly, kindly, doing her justice:

And Hana moves possibly in the company that is not her choice. She, even at this age, thirty-four, has not found her own company, the ones she wanted. She is a woman of honour and smartness whose wild love leaves out luck, always taking risks, and there is something in her brow now that she can recognise in a mirror. Ideal and idealistic in that shiny dark hair! People fall in love with her. She still remembers the line of poems the Englishman read out loud to her from his commonplace book. She is a woman I don't know well enough to hold in my wing, if writers have wings, to harbour for the rest of my life (p. 301)

The notion of harbouring, of a harbouring love, is again celebrated in this final passage on Hana. For Ondaatje the humanistic cross cultural tolerance of Herodotus is consistent with the humanistic tolerance of the Florentine philosophers, and all this is consistent with the associations of Christ and *caritas* that hover about certain characters and their actions. War and the bomb can smash this for a time. But it revives in the interstices of history, a human propensity with a time honoured provenance, which even the atomic age novelist can record and celebrate as Ondaatje does. The last act or rather the first act of *caritas* in *The English Patient* is the writing of *The English Patient*.

Ondaatje's rich use of allusion from Herodotus to the Renaissance to 1945 Italy is not all the allusions; he cites *The Odyssey*,¹⁰ *Anna Karenina*, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and popular romantic ballads, to mention but a few. Although I have not even exhausted the Biblical references, the allusions I have dwelt on go to the heart of the novel's values. Ondaatje does "fling" ironically the "tableau" of these four characters intertwined by care and kindness against the divisiveness of war and the divisiveness of nationality that engenders war. *The English Patient* is considered a post modern novel with its discontinuities, multi-vocality and so called reflexive narration; but although Ondaatje does avail himself of these contemporary strategies, his novel celebrates what is for him a time-honoured human quality, *caritas*.

The stunning success of the film continues to overshadow the novel; but the film's rapidity forbids the dwelling upon crucial cultural allusion. The pondering of such potential, and perhaps even the retrospective perceiving of a pattern in the allusions, are a digression that the novel as a slower medium can risk without harm to its pace. At one stage in the novel Hana is reading from Kipling's *Kim* and the English Patient counsels her:

Read him slowly, dear girl, you must read him slowly. Watch carefully where the commas fall so you can discover the natural pauses. He is a writer who used pen and ink. He looked up from the page a lot, I believe, stared through his window and listened to birds, as most writers who are alone do. Some do not know the names of birds, though he did. Your eye is too quick and North American. Think about the speed of his pen. What an appalling, barnacled old first paragraph it is otherwise (p. 94).

This is an unsentimental tribute to Kipling, a writer of considerable influence on Ondaatje. Ondaatje's advice is right for Kipling. It is advice right for Ondaatje, another writer who uses pen and ink:¹¹ read him slowly. Not just for the sensuous thought and feeling Ondaatje is so justly famous for. Let the allusions sit a while, interrelate, orchestrating the deep significance that hovers over the four major characters and their deeds that we come to recognise as virtues, secular and just maybe sacred. Ondaatje may be hailed as a postmodern writer, but he knows what he values.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient* (London: Picador, 1993). Hereafter referred to in the text by page number only.
- ² Oswyn Murray, "Greek Historians," in Herodotus, *The Histories*, eds. Walter Blanco and Jennifer Tolbert Roberts. Trans. Walter Blanco (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992) p. 309. For comment on Ondaatje's attitudes to historiography, see Maria Jesus Llerena-Ascanio, "Michael Ondaatje's Use of History," *The Guises of Canadian Diversity. New European Perspectives*, eds. S. Jaumain and M. Maufort (The Hague: CIP-Gegevens Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 1995) pp. 19-26.
- ³ Of Florentine humanism, Paul Oskar Kristeller says: "There was at the time a profound intellectual gap between dogmatic theology which had its basis in faith, and Aristotelian scholasticism which was then largely limited to logic and physics. This gap could not be bridged by a purely literary or scholarly humanism but rather by a metaphorical Platonism based on reason and on the most respected ancient authorities besides Aristotle. This [Florentine] Platonism did not oppose the Christian religion or the Aristotelian science of the time, and it did not attempt to replace them. It rather attempted to supplement them... To this we may add the appeal of a doctrine that advocated harmony and tolerance in a period torn by the theological conflicts preceding and following the Reformation" (*Renaissance Thought and the Arts. Collected Essays* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980] pp. 90-91).
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99.
- ⁵ See "The Ghost in the Villa," an essay of Poliziano and his villa by Alan Moorehead, *The Villa Diana* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1951) pp. 107-150, a source Ondaatje cites in his list of acknowledgments.
- ⁶ This passage is a redaction of a passage in *The Villa Diana*, p. 145.
- ⁷ See "The Cult" in *Saint Jerome in the Renaissance* by Eugene F. Rice, Jr (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983) pp. 49-83.
- ⁸ See "Dives Litterarum princeps," *ibid.*, pp. 84-115.
- ⁹ See Raphael Ingelbien, "A Novelist's Caravaggism: Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*," *The Guises of Canadian Diversity. New European Perspectives*, eds. S. Jaumain and M. Maufort (The Hague: CIP-Gegevens Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 1995) pp. 27-38.
- ¹⁰ In "'And this is the world of nomads in any case': The *Odyssey* as Intertext in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 33, (1)1999, 23 - 31, Annick Hillger explores the novel through Ulysses as nomad and the "Treatise of Nomadology" of Deleuze and Guattari. Ondaatje's allusions often provoke such a framework, but I do not see so systematic or over determined a use of reference in Ondaatje's work. His use of reference is both less allegorical and less exhaustive of each reference than Joyce's and Pynchon's.
- ¹¹ Ed Jewinski, *Michael Ondaatje. Express Yourself Beaut fully. A Biography* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1994) p. 133.