

Poetics and the Realistic Novel:
Contextual Equivalence Systems in Michael Ondaatje's
In the Skin of a Lion

by

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B.A.H, Acadia University, 1992

Thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts (English)

Acadia University
Fall Convocation 1997



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0-612-23700-1

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Abstract

This thesis asserts that subtle and diffuse systems of contextual equivalences constitute the poetic dimension of realistic novels. It then proceeds to identify certain of the major systems perceived in Michael Ondaatje's In the Skin of a Lion and explores the diversity of their manifestations. The analysis focuses on three equivalence systems which are among the central organizing principles of the novel and that roughly coincide, respectively, with the three sections of the work; the first based on division and exclusion, the second on change, conversion, and metamorphosis, and the third on similarity and equivalency.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my mother and father, Linda and Al Sesk, for their support and encouragement during the writing of this thesis.

My thanks also go to Dr. David Baron for taking on this project during a difficult time, and for remaining optimistic about its ultimate completion.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Richard Collins during the printing of this thesis.

Introduction

When reading a novel, one is often conscious of a subtle underlying unity, a resonance among its various components that is aesthetically pleasing. This experience is common when dealing with other genres and indeed other artistic modes. A structuralist approach attempts to account for these feelings in a straightforward, non-impressionistic way, by identifying the consistent, linguistic principles that produce it in literature in general, and the specific organizing principles that sustain it in a given work.

In literature, the medium of artistic expression is language, the means of everyday communication. However, in the artistic mode language has a dualistic nature. While conveying a readily intelligible message, it simultaneously possesses a poetic dimension that reverberates ambiguously below the surface of the discourse, contributing to the richness of the reading experience.

This paper begins by summarizing and synthesizing the structuralist approach to literary criticism, a method of analysis which has its roots in linguistics. Roman Jakobson contends that the essence of the poetic dimension of literature is the creation of systems of equivalence (358). The manner in which these equivalences are generated varies in each genre according to whether, and to what degree that mode is predominantly metonymic or metaphoric (Jakobson qtd. in

Lodge 73). The conventions of the realistic novel mandate that it is heavily contextual or metonymic in nature. This means that with regard to plot, setting, and character there is a degree of continuity and cohesion, a basic contextual consistency. There must also be a fundamental plausibility about the novel (Culler, Poetics 189-92), a sense that the actions and characters described could well have taken place or existed.

The author of a realistic novel constructs systems of equivalences in a manner that preserves the metonymic nature of the work. The equivalence systems are subject to context and convention. Because a realistic novel is context driven, the author must generate equivalences between subject matter appropriate to the world being depicted (Lodge 107), and through methods of presentation which do not disturb the cohesion of the narrative (Lodge 98). As a novel progresses, certain abstract ideas (the thematic organizing principles of a given equivalence system) become somewhat conspicuous by their repetition throughout the form and content of the work. These themes are reinforced and equivalence systems generated, by the manner in which the narrative is organized and presented, and by the interrelation of such elements as character development, plot progression, and setting. The author uses repetition to emphasize the thematic importance of certain topics (Lodge 98). As well, equivalences are implied,

a thematic echo produced, between different areas of contextually appropriate subject matter (Lodge 98).

Within a novel, there are a number of equivalence systems in operation, and overlapping, simultaneously. Though present throughout the work, certain of these systems predominate at different points in the novel's evolution as certain themes become more important than others. What is being attempted here is a structuralist analysis of Michael Ondaatje's realistic novel, In The Skin Of A Lion. The task is to identify some of the major equivalence systems, discuss the ways in which equivalences are manifested, and trace the relative importance of each system as the novel progresses. The method of organization is threefold, featuring an analysis of the three equivalence systems which roughly predominate in each stage of the novel. In the earlier sections of Ondaatje's novel, a system of equivalences which emphasize the ideas of exclusion and division predominates. There is an initial tendency to highlight the separations, between characters or groups of characters, based on language, culture, class, and sensibility. There is another system, given greatest emphasis in the middle sections of the novel, that is built around the concepts of change, conversion, and metamorphosis. These ideas are manifested through the parallel phenomena of character conversion, the immigrants' assimilation, theatrical metamorphosis, and a shifting narrative structure. Towards the latter sections of the novel there is an emphasis on the

fundamental similarity of all characters regardless of differences in class and culture, an equivalence system actually based on similarity or equivalence. This system is promoted through a stress on universal emotions and experiences, by an emphasis on socialism, through the exchange of roles and the depiction of parallel circumstances and struggles, and by the similarity of the characters' personalities.

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework

Structuralism is an approach to the study of cultural phenomena that searches for organizing principles, that attempts to discover how things operate. Heavily indebted to the semiotic and linguistic ideas of Ferdinand de Saussure (Lodge 61), the fundamental ideology of structuralism is that social practices or artistic creations are "self-sufficient, self-ordering" (qtd. in Abrams 238) "systems of signs" (qtd. in Lodge 61). Saussure asserted that the rules which govern these various systems are discoverable (qtd in Culler, Saussure 103). He held that it is the structuralist critic's task to make explicit both the signs and the "underlying system of conventions" which regulates their operation in any cultural phenomenon (qtd. in Culler, Saussure 97). Structuralism has widespread applicability. It provides what Culler calls "a methodological model" for the analysis of phenomena in diverse disciplines (Poetics 4). Culler notes that "[a]ny domain of human activity--be it music, architecture, cooking, etiquette, advertising, fashion, literature--could be approached in semiological terms" (Saussure 103). Claude Levi-Strauss has applied structuralist principles to cultural anthropology, analyzing the beliefs and customs of tribal societies in semiotic terms (Abrams 238). Finally, structuralism generally adopts an objective, almost scientific approach (Scholes, Structuralism 10). It is

oriented more toward interpretation than evaluation; it seeks to understand how various systems work, to define their internal logic, rather than judging their merit (Barthes, "Criticism" 648-49).

Structuralism has its origins in linguistics (Culler, Poetics viii). Abrams defines linguistics as, "the systematic study of the elements of language and the principles governing their combination and organization" (214). Here again, Saussure's contributions are pivotal. Perceiving language to be a "system of signs" that transmit meaning (qtd. in Scholes, Structuralism 16), Saussure attempted to reconstitute the rules which govern the operations of linguistic systems (qtd. in Abrams 215). He found language to be "a hierarchy of levels;" in which "at each successive level, the operation of the same principles serves to organize the lower-level units into ever more complex combinations . . ." (qtd. in Abrams 242). These principles, which extend from the smallest units of sound to large segments of discourse, are selection and combination (qtd in Lodge 74).

Saussure identified a basic duality in the way language is organized, the paradigmatic or vertical axis and the syntagmatic or horizontal axis (qtd. in Abrams 217). It is helpful to use a simple sentence such as, "The dog ran away," to illustrate their differing operations. The governing principle of the paradigmatic axis of language is selection based on equivalence. (qtd in Lodge 74). In choosing the word

'dog,' the writer or speaker makes a choice between words "from the set (paradigm) with the same grammatical function (i.e. nouns) and belonging to the same semantic field . . ." (Lodge 74-75). The person could have used 'animal,' 'beagle,' or many other more or less equivalent terms. The selection process involves, as Scholes says, a "scanning of paradigmatic possibilities" (Structuralism 19). According to Saussure, the syntagmatic or horizontal axis of language is associated with the idea of combination (qtd in Lodge 75). Once the word choices have been made, the person must combine them into larger units in an order that makes sense, that will render his or her message intelligible. In this case the order is determined by the syntactic or grammatical conventions of the English language (Lodge 75). The respective conventions of different languages are the rules or governing principles that allow languages to convey meaning (Culler, Poetics 5).

Literature is an artistic mode or system constructed of language. Abrams defines "literature as a second-order system which uses language, the first-order system, as its medium . . ." (242). It is therefore structurally appropriate to analyze the nature of literature in linguistic terms (Fowler 3). Whether one is referring to a conversation or a work of narrative prose, the paradigmatic and syntagmatic dimensions of language exist, and the processes of selection and combination are occurring. (Jakobson 358). However, there are qualitative differences between literature and ordinary

language despite the fact that the former is composed of the latter. Literature tends to be "aesthetically pleasing" in a way that ordinary language usually is not (Lodge 1). Somehow, literature is organized differently than referential language to produce this artistic effect; the rules governing the selection and combination processes must be altered in some manner in literature. The structuralist challenge is to account for this difference, to make explicit the rules or "grammar" (Abrams 242), of a literary system of language or as Culler says, to formulate "a poetics which would study literature as linguistics studies language" (Poetics 96). For this we turn to the linguistic principles developed by Roman Jakobson.

Poetics is the branch of linguistics which attempts to answer the question: "What makes a verbal message a work of art?" (Jakobson 350). Jakobson contends that the differences between literature and language are a result of "a different hierarchical order" in the poetic and communicative functions of language (353). He argues that the "poetic function" is the "dominant, determining" aspect of literature, "whereas in all other verbal activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituent" (356). The primary purpose of ordinary referential language is to communicate a message; it is a medium (Abrams 235). In literature, while conveying a message, language also "calls attention to itself" as art (Lodge 1), suggesting other levels of meaning. The question remains as to

the specific nature of the poetic function, the linguistic rules by which it is produced. To define this, Jakobson utilizes Saussure's paradigmatic/syntagmatic model of language (358). This illustrates the fact that literature is both subject to the same organizational scheme as language while constructed according to different principles (358). In a famous axiom Jakobson states: "The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination. Equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence" (358). In discourse, equivalence is a criterion of the selection process, which is in turn the governing principle of the paradigmatic axis of language. In literature, the principle of equivalence is also extended along the syntagmatic axis, or in other words, throughout the entire work (Jakobson 358). Equivalences have many different manifestations in literature; they may be formal, such as rhyme and rhythm patterns, or contextual, such as theme and symbol. By implication, it is this distribution of equivalences throughout the form and content of a literary work that accounts for the feelings of resonance, underlying unity, and aesthetic satisfaction that a reader often experiences, and that separates literature from non-literature.

Jakobson's axiom is a general statement defining the nature of poetic language, which is a feature of literature in all its diversity (356). A foregrounded poetic dimension is

what separates literary from non-literary language systems. (Lodge 2-3). The heading of literature encompasses a wide variety of radically different modes. While the poetic function is the defining criterion of literature, there must be variations in the way it is manifested in different genres (Lodge ix). Next we will explore the nature of these variations in the generation of equivalences throughout the broad spectrum of literature.

Jakobson posits a poetic typology of literature based on two rhetorical devices, metaphor and metonymy (qtd. in Lodge ix-x). These two devices are "opposed, because generated according to opposite principles" (qtd. in Lodge 76). Jakobson states:

The development of a discourse may take place along two different semantic lines: one topic may lead to another either through their similarity or their contiguity. The metaphoric way would be the more appropriate term for the first case and the metonymic for the second. . . . (qtd. in Lodge 79)

Jakobson contends that a given literary mode is either predominantly metaphoric or metonymic in orientation, and that this accounts for the variations in the way equivalences are generated, or the poetic function manifested (qtd. in Lodge 73). Once again, Saussure's paradigmatic/syntagmatic duality of language is pivotal (Jakobson qtd. in Lodge 76).

The creation of metaphor involves equating things on the basis of similarity, or on perceiving an analogy between things from different contexts (Lodge 75). Jakobson thus associates it with the paradigmatic axis and the principle of selection based on a type of equivalence (qtd. in Lodge 76-77). Jakobson asserts that in genres which are developed in a predominantly metaphoric manner, the poetic function is present in an overt way, while the referential or communicative function is less emphasized (371). As Lodge says:

This emphasis on metaphorical or paradigmatic relationships in the discourse leads correspondingly to a weakening of metonymic or syntagmatic relationships--i.e. the relationships of contiguity in time and space, and of cause and effect (104).

Metaphorical modes seem less realistic and more literary; form supersedes content; the poetic is dominant over the contextual.

Poetry is an example of a genre which is predominantly metaphorical (Lodge 81). This mode often associates and equates freely ideas, objects, and feelings from different contexts for poetic effect. Poetry also usually possesses acoustical and formal patterns, equivalence systems such as rhyme, rhythm, and stanza, which are inherently metaphorical (Lodge 81). The conventions of this particular literary mode

tend to accentuate the poetic function at the expense of contextual cohesion (Lodge 89). As Jakobson says, "[i]n poetry . . . similarity is superinduced upon contiguity . . ." (370). What the author is saying is determined, to a large extent, by how he or she can fit it in to this "elaborate phonological patterning" (Lodge 89). As Lodge states: "the poet is constantly diverted from combining items in a natural, logical or temporal succession by the arbitrary demands of the metrical form he has elected to employ" (89).

The creation of metonymy involves the deletion of a thing or idea and its replacement by a part, quality, or property that is associated with, or contextually close to, the original (Scholes, Structuralism 20). Unlike metaphor, this substitution is based on contiguity, not similarity (Lodge 99). Jakobson thus associates it with the syntagmatic axis of language and its governing principle of combination based on the rules of grammar (qtd. in Lodge 76). In literary language, the rule governing metonymic substitution is that it be based on contiguity or context; systems of equivalence must be generated in a way which does not disrupt "the syntagmatic contiguity of the discourse" (Lodge 98). In modes which are predominantly metonymic, the poetic function is subtly and implicitly manifested. These genres seem more realistic and less overtly literary; content supersedes form; contextual consistency is dominant over poetic expression.

Prose is a literary mode which is predominantly metonymic (Lodge 81). According to Jakobson prose is "forwarded essentially by contiguity" (qtd. in Lodge 81). A story must possess a sense of contextual orderliness. There has to be spatial, temporal, and causal consistency and cohesion (Lodge 82). The prose writer must incorporate the poetic function, must generate equivalences, without disturbing the basic metonymic orientation of the work. He or she is not free to utilize overt acoustical or formal patterns to reinforce equivalence systems, but must operate in a subtle fashion, drawing parallels through stylistic and semantic choices.

Despite the fact that metaphor and metonymy are generated according to opposing principles, it is not an either/or proposition with regard to the categorization of literary modes. In reality, and for practical purposes, every genre incorporates a blend of the two. It is, as Lodge asserts, "a theory of dominance of one quality over another, not of mutually exclusive qualities" (81). Poetry must have some metonymic traits; it has to have some sense of context and cohesion or it would be unintelligible in any sense (Lodge 111). Likewise, prose must have a metaphoric aspect; it has to have systems of equivalence or it would not be poetic and consequently not literature (Lodge 111). It is perhaps better to conceive of the metaphoric/metonymic typology of literature as a continuum along which the various genres can be placed (Jakobson 357). There are variations in the manifestation of

the poetic function even within sub-groups of the various genres. Epic poetry with its strong narrative element is more metonymic than lyrical poetry with its impressionistic, evocative nature (Jakobson 357). The manner in which equivalence systems are manifested varies in direct proportion to the relative metonymic or metaphorical orientation of the genre.

The focus of this study is the realistic novel, specifically Michael Ondaatje's In the Skin of a Lion. This mode is one of the most metonymically oriented of all genres. Contextual cohesion, a consistency and logicity in spatial, chronological, and causal relations are among its defining attributes (Lodge 82). The novelist, in Jakobson's view, develops the story by "following the path of contiguous relationships" (qtd in Lodge 80). He or she "metonymically digresses from the plot to the atmosphere and from the characters to the setting in space and time" (qtd in Lodge 80). The author is not free to diverge radically from the linear, logical, and contextual orientation of the narrative. This would strike a false note in a mode which, with its strong rational and referential elements, tends to "disguise itself as non-literature" (Lodge 93). At times Ondaatje bends but does not break these rules. Though moving his story around in time and space, and changing perspectives frequently, there is a time-line and plot progression which can be pieced together. A realistic novel must also possess the qualities of

plausibility and realism (Culler, Poetics 189-92). The realistic novel aims to "convey the illusion of . . . reality" (Fowler 71). It upholds what Culler calls "the mimetic contract" (Poetics 192). The reader must be made to believe that the imaginary world and actions portrayed could well exist or have happened.

Despite the metonymic orientation of the realistic novel, it is still unquestionably literature, and thus by definition possesses a poetic dimension. Jakobson asserts the universal application of his poetic axiom:

realistic literature, intimately tied with the metonymic principle, still defies interpretation, although the same linguistic methodology, which poetics uses when analyzing the metaphorical style of romantic poetry, is entirely applicable to the metonymical texture of realistic prose. (375)

The challenge is to identify the manner in which an author generates various systems of equivalence within the constraints of a contextually dominant mode. We are looking for the specific way in which the poetic function is manifested in this metonymic sub-system of literature.

The equivalence systems of a realistic novel are generated by the interrelation of different components of the work. As a novel progresses, certain abstract ideas or themes are foregrounded through their repetition in both the form and content of the work. Despite the constraints of realism, the

writer has a variety of tools to work with in forging a poetic dimension. The author chooses subject matter, develops characters, elaborates a plot, describes a setting, selects a narrative style and structure for the story, and uses symbolic devices. All of these elements, which one tends to consider separately (Lodge xii), are carefully crafted and orchestrated to produce subtle equivalences. The author may imply an equivalence between form and theme, mirroring an idea through the narrative structure and style. Roland Barthes provides one example:

in Robinson Crusoe labour is not only exhausting .
 . . but even defined in its difficulty by the
 elaborate accounting of the days and weeks
 necessary in order to accomplish (alone) the
 slightest transformation: . . . here the function
 of the discourse is to show labor in slow motion,
 to restore its time value. . . . ("Begin" 84)

There may a thematic connection between character and setting (Fowler 39), or between plot progression and character evolution. All of this is done in a manner which does not disturb the basic metonymic and realistic nature of the narrative. Sometimes thematic significance is implied simply by the repetition of certain subject matter or details (Lodge 107). Ondaatje himself has spoken of "repeating and building images and so making them more potent" ("Interview" 322).

The equivalence systems of a realistic novel are generated in a subtle and diffuse manner which is at all times subject to contextual control (Lodge 115). Everything is thematically relevant or as Barthes puts it: "however realistic, nothing is ever merely referential . . ." (qtd. in Lodge 62). There tends to be, as Lodge asserts, "a specifically literary motivation for the selection of detail" (94). Lodge claims that repeated details have a dualistic function: "[w]hat makes it capable of bearing a metaphorical meaning as well as taking its place in a natural sequence of contiguities is . . . the prominence it is given by repetition . . ." (107). Equivalence is often implied between different, prevalent subject matter, from the same context, between which one can perceive an analogy. These things may be scattered throughout the text or be relatively close together, but when recalled, juxtaposed, and equated, they produce a paradigmatic echo. As Lodge says: "the realistic author can, by selection . . . and repetition within a field of contiguities, construct a metonymic metaphor . . . without disturbing the illusion of reality" (107). The metaphorical connection is sensed, but "contiguity, or context, controls" what is being equated (Lodge 93). This is perhaps the most definitive characteristic of the equivalence systems of realistic novels, for by metaphorically connecting contextually related subject matter, the writer can produce a work that is both realistic and poetic.

The above outlines some of the ways in which equivalence systems are generated, and thus the poetic function manifested, in realistic novels. It will be remembered that structuralism regards any literary work as being a "coherent system of signs" (Barthes, "Criticism" 649). Though a novel may be what Culler calls "an extremely rich and complicated communicative system" (Saussure 109), it is still subject to the same type of analysis as any other cultural phenomenon. The critical analysis of a realistic novel "is essentially a process of identifying and interrelating recurrent features which are thematically significant . . ." (Lodge 22). It is also important to restate the relatively objective nature of structuralist criticism. One attempts more to make explicit the organizing principles, than to evaluate merit or meaning. As Barthes says: "the critic is not called upon to reconstitute the message of the work, but only its system" ("Criticism" 650).

In a novel there are typically a number of equivalence systems and sub-systems in operation simultaneously. Stankiewicz contends that "[w]ithin a single work the basic theme may alternate with rival themes, and their hierarchical relationship may be quite complex" (72). These various equivalence systems are present throughout the whole work, yet certain ones are more predominant at different stages of the novel. The task being attempted here is to identify some of the major equivalence systems found within Ondaatje's In the

Skin of a Lion, explore the diversity of their manifestations,
and trace their relative importance throughout the work.

Chapter Two: Division and Exclusion: An Overview

In analyzing a novel, the structuralist critic, through a close reading, seeks to reconstitute the system of signs, the equivalences, or organizing principles of the work. This involves thoroughly examining the subject matter, manner of presentation, and certain repeated or emphasized details until particular patterns, consistencies, or analogies emerge. One of the dominant tendencies, especially in the earlier stages of In The Skin Of A Lion, is the highlighting of what divides or excludes individual characters from each other or the community, or groups of characters from society. This equivalence system is created through the repetition of certain metonymically appropriate, though metaphorically related, subject matter. Four interrelated issues seem to exemplify the themes of division and exclusion: the immigrant experience, class polarization, character sensibility, and historical exclusion. The immigrant experience, the story of outsiders, is central to the novel and features divisions and exclusions based on race, language, and culture. There is also the phenomenon of class polarization, a division of characters or groups of character on the basis of wealth, power, and ownership. Many of the male characters share a sensibility dominated by isolationism and individualism, which serves as a barrier to social intercourse. Finally, there is the phenomenon of historical exclusion, a denial of the

accomplishments and significance of the marginalized by the powerful.

Certain aspects or details, which are metonymically relevant to these different issues, cut across them all to take on paradigmatic or thematic significance by their repetition in different contexts. The immigrants are cultural, linguistic, and racial outsiders in Canadian society, who are looked down upon by the dominant ethnic and linguistic groups. They are also economically marginalized members of the working classes, often in opposition or confrontation with the prosperous elites who are typically English-speaking Protestants. The immigrants are rendered inarticulate or silent by linguistic barriers and this serves to cut them off from society. Many of the male characters, though able to converse, tend to be solitary, withdrawn, and uncommunicative because of their personalities. Their situations parallel that of the immigrants, though for different reasons. Silence and marginalization becomes metaphorically associated with historical inarticulateness or exclusion. Ondaatje draws parallels between the realistic silence or inarticulate natures of immigrants or other disenfranchised characters, and their exclusion from the historical record. Social and economic marginalization are also equated with historical exclusion. All of these interrelated issues serve to extend and deepen one of the major organizing principles of the

earlier sections of the novel, an equivalence system based on exclusion and division.

The Immigrant Experience

Having been an immigrant himself, Michael Ondaatje is well aware of the traumas and dislocations inherent in the immigrant experience. His body of work exhibits a concern for, and empathy with, "the difficulties of communication inevitably experienced by a person who crosses cultural boundaries . . ." (Bennett and Brown 570). Iyer claims that Ondaatje "has established himself as one of the most inspired chroniclers, and exemplars, of the new cross-cultural mix taking shape all around us" (91). Much of In the Skin of a Lion is set in the multi-cultural urban milieu of Toronto during the interwar period. This setting features a continual influx of immigrants of various nationalities seeking jobs and a better life. As such, the portrayal of the immigrant experience is one of the most central, pervasive, and thematically suggestive aspects of the novel. The immigrants are presented as the ultimate outsiders; they are divided from their old world and excluded from their new one. They leave familiar places and cultures and are transplanted into the alien environment of Canada. It is a wrenching, disorienting experience, and the immigrant characters continue to feel a profound sense of otherness, of not belonging. This condition

is reinforced by a Canadian society which refuses to accept them. Perhaps the greatest barrier faced by the immigrants is that of language. Their inability to speak English cuts them off from the larger world, confirming their outsider status. Closely related to the language barrier, and in a sense a consequence of it, is the idea of inarticulateness, the inability to express oneself.

The immigrant experience of physical and cultural dislocation and disorientation, of encountering an alien world, is manifested and repeated in both overt and subtle ways throughout this novel. To an immigrant, everything is strange. The new physical environment, even the climate, is foreign, probably quite different from the land left behind. Immigrants experience an alien culture of whose subtleties and nuances they know nothing. In the opening segments of this novel, we see, through the eyes of the boy Patrick Lewis, foreign loggers going to work. To earn their living, these men walk "twenty miles into land they did not know" (16). Later, an older Patrick remembers his father musing on the displacement and disorientation of the loggers in their new land by saying of them: "[t]hey don't know where they are" (133). Alice's performance at the waterworks, a portrait of the immigrant experience in the city, reinforces this cultural disorientation. During this show, as the puppets emerge onto the stage, they move tentatively, unsure of their new environment, and this parallels the immigrant experience:

"[f]eet tested air before each exaggerated step was taken on this dangerous new country of the stage" (116). Some passages feature details and descriptions which seem of little importance, but which resonate with the physical dislocation and cultural disorientation of the immigrants. So it is that Clara Dickens's pet iguana, is referred to as "[a]n animal born of another planet" (83).

Above all else, the immigrant is conscious of otherness, of not belonging, and of standing apart. They are outsiders and are treated as such by the natives. Linguistic, ethnic, and cultural differences tend to isolate them from the mainstream and serve as an excuse for their exclusion by Canadian society. Patrick characterizes the loggers as a "strange community" (7). These men are seasonal, transient workers who live in temporary shacks and are not accepted into the social life of his village. In fact they have "little connection with the town" (8). The strangeness of their new environments make the immigrants hesitant and tentative in their attempts to fit in, yet neither are they offered a place. At times the prejudice they face is subtle and at other times it is overt and violent. The attack on Caravaggio in prison is racially motivated. As the convicts cut his throat, they punctuate the attack with remarks such as 'Fucking wop! Fucking dago!' (185). Despite their many contributions, the immigrants are viewed with suspicion, as unwanted and undesirable foreigners. At one point it is noted that, "[b]y

now over 10,000 foreign-born workers had been deported out of the country" (209).

Finding themselves excluded and unwanted in a strange place, the immigrants try, understandably, to surround themselves with the familiar, to recreate home environments that are within but divided from Canadian society. The different nationalities live in ghettos. Nicholas Temelcoff goes to Toronto because in the big city he could find "many from his village" and thus "would not be among strangers" (47). As Alice Gull escorts the injured Temelcoff to the Ohrida Lake Restaurant, an immigrant cafe, she feels that she is entering another world: "[s]he realizes the darkness represents a Macedonian night where customers sit outside at their tables. . . . So when customers step in at any time, what they are entering is an old courtyard of the Balkans" (37). This establishment is a refuge, an island of familiarity in a sea of strangeness. Here one can find "[t]he dark coats of men, the arguments of Europe" (36), and a serving counter on which "[t]he zinc was an edge of another country" (39). Similarly, at Kosta's house Patrick notices a picture on the wall which proves to be "a memory painting of Europe" that features a "sparse landscape" with "the village imposed on it" (133). The nature of this painting resembles the immigrant characters' psychic and physical reaction to Canada. Holding themselves apart, feeling excluded, and clinging to distant lands, they seem more exiles than immigrants.

The greatest barrier faced by the immigrants of In The Skin Of A Lion is language. The inability to speak English restricts their ability to communicate, confines them to their native communities, and generally intensifies their sense of division and exclusion from Canadian society. As Patrick leaves the factory with the immigrant workers, this isolation is noted. There are "thirty or so of them knowing little more than each other's false names or true countries. . . . They were in pairs or trios, each in their own language as the dyers had been in their own colours" (135). Instances of linguistic difficulties are numerous. Temelcoff experiences the "terrible barriers" (43) of his new language. He decides to go to school because "[i]f he did not learn the language he would be lost" (47). In Alice's performance art, the immigrant hero is "brought before the authorities, unable to speak their language" (117). Perhaps the most poignant example of the frustration and isolation caused by the language barrier occurs when Patrick sees an immigrant at the train station:

He saw a man with three suitcases, well-dressed, shouting out in another language. The man's eyes burned through everyone who at first received his scream personally. . . . Two days later Patrick returned. . . . He saw the man again, still unable to move from his safe zone, in a different suit, as if one step away was the quicksand of the new world. (54)

In this novel, linguistic barriers often give rise to a related phenomenon, that of withdrawal into silence or inarticulateness. Unable to speak English, the immigrants are prevented from communicating with or expressing themselves adequately, or at all, to their Canadian neighbours. They typically retreat into silence, abandoning any effort to make themselves understood. This further isolates and excludes them from society. Examples of this realistic phenomenon are numerous, and its repetition seems to suggest its thematic importance. Some incidents are explicitly related to the immigrant experience while others are discrete details. Though from a variety of metonymically appropriate contexts, they suggest metaphorical equivalences and reinforce the idea of exclusion through inarticulateness. Temelcoff's trip to Canada is described as "a great journey made in silence" (43), evoking metaphoric connections between the dark quiet hold of the cargo ship he has travelled on, and the linguistic isolation he comes to experience. Shortly after Patrick has observed the foreign loggers, whom he has never spoken with and who seem never to speak themselves, he watches insects as they hit the screen door with "a muted thunk" (9). The immigrants often attend silent films in which they find "all events governed by fate and timing, not language and argument" (43). Though this activity is realistically portrayed and even historically accurate, it suggests parallels with the lives of the immigrants who often find themselves rendered

inarticulate. In one particular film Charlie Chaplin roller skates precariously on the ledge of a tall building, but no one in the immigrant audience "shouts to warn him. He cannot talk or listen. North America is still without language . . ." (43). After Temelcoff rescues Alice Gull, he tries to comfort her through quiet conversation, but she is still in shock and "could not speak though her eyes glared at him bright . . ." (32). When David Caravaggio meets Anne, she makes a point of telling him: "I have a brother who doesn't speak. He hasn't spoken for years" (202). These instances, unrelated as they appear and insignificant as they seem, converge to promote the idea of inarticulateness, an element of the division and exclusion system, throughout a range of contexts.

Silence and inarticulateness, intimately related to the immigrant experience, are also connected contextually and metaphorically with other forms of exclusion and marginalization. One of these is political oppression. Part of the reason the immigrants remain so uncommunicative and reticent is that the authorities have "imposed laws against public meetings by foreigners. So if they speak this way in public, in any language other than English, they will be jailed" (133). Their power of expression is denied just as their democratic rights are refused. Alice's performance at the waterworks, the depiction of an immigrant experience, a drama without dialogue, reflects the sense of impotency and frustration that results from linguistic and political

exclusion. The central character, an immigrant worker, is brought before the authorities to be admonished for his supposed transgressions. Lacking language, he cannot defend himself:

His face was frozen. The others began to pummel him but not a word emerged - just a damaged gaze in the context of those flailing arms. He fell to the floor pleading with gestures . . . They were all waiting for the large puppet to speak, but it could say nothing . . . It stamped a foot to try and bring out a language . . . The figure knelt, one hand banging down on the wooden floor as if pleading for help - a terrible loudness entering the silent performance. (117)

Hutcheon claims "that such mimed miracle-plays dramatize the silence of the proletarian classes, a silence imposed upon them by the dominant classes . . ." (qtd in Bok 19). Significantly, the audience to this performance, a collection of immigrant workers and their families, remains silent as they watch, undoubtedly empathizing.

Ondaatje reinforces the ideas of division and exclusion by crafting and implying parallels between the life and circumstances of the major character, Patrick Lewis, and the immigrants' experiences. Hutcheon contends that though Patrick is male, white, and English-speaking, in the city he is still an outsider, for he is from rural Ontario (94). Growing up in

the country, accustomed to seasonal rhythms and open spaces, the city is a foreign environment for Patrick. Orphaned and without family, he comes to the city alone to find work. Stumbling out of the train station, he seems to share the disorientation of all newcomers. He feels himself to be "an immigrant to the city" (53). Solitary and withdrawn, a loner by nature, Patrick does not make friends easily. Patrick's natural reticence results in a self-imposed exclusion from society that parallels the linguistic isolation of the immigrants. Further he works with and lives among the immigrants with whom linguistic barriers prevent communication. Even to buy food Patrick must "leap over the code of languages between" (113) himself and the Macedonian clerks. Thus he is doubly isolated and excluded, an outsider among outsiders, and feels himself to be an "alien" (113). Hutcheon notes that "[t]o his capitalist bosses he is just another worker; to his ethnic neighbours he is a stranger. . . ." (96). Patrick's personality and circumstances combine to render him inarticulate like the immigrants. During the back-breaking work in the tunnels "no one speaks" and "Patrick is as silent as the Italians and Greeks towards the bronco foreman" (106). Later, Patrick searches for Ambrose Small in order to see his former lover, Clara Dickens, but feels himself "inarticulate against the power of his unseen enemy" (79). The exclusions experienced both by Patrick and the immigrants points toward an emphasis of this theme in general.

Exclusions and divisions based on language, ethnicity, and culture are just some of the many manifestations of this theme. There are other forms, some explicitly and contextually interconnected with the immigrant experience, and others metaphorically related. The repetition of these various exclusions and divisions signal their thematic importance.

Class Polarization

The historical context of In the Skin of a Lion encompasses both the Roaring Twenties with its stock market speculations and ostentatious displays of wealth as well as the Great Depression with its unemployment and poverty. Ondaatje's portrayal of this period, marked as it was by class polarization, is historically accurate. Consequently, any discussion of an equivalence system based on divisions and exclusions must include an analysis of class. In this novel there is a wide gulf between the rich, with their wealth and power, and the poor, who are subject to it. The rich are typically depicted as members of the dominant ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups while the poor are usually immigrants who belong to none of these categories. The poor own nothing and work for little. They are graphically portrayed engaging in brutal, dehumanizing labour. The rich, with the exception of Harris, are typically depicted as idle and aimless, doing or making nothing, interested only in

maintaining the status quo. Both groups are conscious of the barriers between them and engaged in an adversarial relationship that features a variety of oppressive and retaliatory measures. There is a capitalist/socialist struggle, with the poor fighting for social justice and the rich easily resisting any diminution of their power.

The poor are separated from the rich by more than money. As in Ondaatje's autobiographical work Running in the Family, the class system corresponds to ethnic, linguistic, and religious distinctions (41). The working poor who inhabit In The Skin Of A Lion are often first and second generation European immigrants who face barriers of language and culture as well as poverty. The rich and powerful are stereotypical members of the Canadian Establishment, English speaking and Protestant. The members of this class "have evolved smug and without race" (185). Thus elitism and racism are interrelated.

Ambrose is an exception to this: an immigrant businessman who rises by ability rather than because of connections or heredity. Yet he is not accepted by the dominant social class; his social mobility is restricted by his background. He takes out his frustration through predatory business practices that involve "attacking all those wealthy families" (71). In a letter to Clara, Patrick sees him as "[a]n immigrant rat. He had to win or he lost everything" (84).

The classes are further separated by where they live. The wealthy are depicted living a life of ease and luxury,

dwelling in fine mansions in the better parts of town. They attend parties at the "Yacht Club on Toronto Island" (221) during the winter, and in the summer go off to luxury hotels in the country. As Alice remarks, the rich have "their select clubs, their summer mansions" (125), from which, needless to say, the poor are excluded.

This stands in stark contrast to the meagre accommodations of the poor. We read of loggers living in cold, crowded, smoky shacks where "[f]ires die out at night and men wake with hair frozen to damp icicles on the wall" (154). Temelcoff travels to Canada as a steerage passenger, living among the animals, and watching his companions die of fevers in the hold of the ship. The workers and their families in Toronto live in spartan one-room apartments.

Another division between the classes involves manual labour. Speaking of life in general, Alice Gull says, "[i]t is important to be close to the surface of the earth" (141). This is literally so for the immigrant workers. Hard, dirty, and dangerous work is the primary activity of the lower classes. The book is filled with dozens of descriptions of different types of blue-collar work: logging, tunnelling, dyeing, steel-working, tanning, tarring, and slaughtering animals. The work in a slaughter house is described in the following way:

Here the men stood, ankle-deep in salt, filling casings, squeezing out shit and waste from animal intestines. In the further halls were the killing-

floors where you moved among the bellowing cattle stunning them towards death with sledge hammers, the dead eyes still flickering while their skins were removed. (131)

The men labouring in the tunnel find themselves "pissing where they work, eating where someone else left shit" (106). The loggers work from dawn to dusk in freezing cold and snowstorms while "[t]he sweat moves between their hard bodies and the cold clothes" (8). As he digs in the tunnel, [e]xhaustion overpowers Patrick" (105). Only the poor face the dangers of sudden death or chronic work-related disease. Patrick's father Hazen is buried in a mining accident, Daniel Stoyanoff loses an arm in a slaughterhouse, the loggers die from pneumonia, and many workers plummet to their death from the uncompleted bridge. In the dyeing factories and slaughterhouses, the chemicals, cold, and lack of ventilation "left the men invisibly with tuberculosis and arthritis and rheumatism" (131).

All of this is a range of experience which is alien to the rich. They are spared the painful, exhausting struggle to earn a living. As Alice says, the rich "keep you in the tunnels and stockyards" but "do not toil or spin" themselves (132). Referring to the permanent and disgusting stench which results from the dyeing process in the tanneries, Alice says: "[d]o you know the smell? You can bet the rich don't know it" (124). Their dominant characteristic seems to be idleness.

They hold power and attend parties where they listen to the "Anglo-Canadian Band" (166). The rich do not contribute to society, do not make or produce anything of benefit, but are parasitic. As Rowland Harris, the city commissioner says, "those with real power had nothing to show for themselves" (242). Patrick characterizes the rich as: "those half-formed people who were born with money and who did nothing except keep it like a thermometer up their ass. The mean rich. The soft rich" (84).

Wealth and ownership is the defining difference, the greatest division, between the classes. During a time when "hordes of the . . . unemployed" (59) searched for work, Small holds "appalling parties" (57) and Harris wears an "expensive tweed coat that cost more than the combined weeks' salaries of five bridge workers" (43). Small is said to be so powerful that "he owned people" (57). Yet when Patrick comes to the city to find work, "[h]e owned nothing, had scarcely any money" (53). The loggers that young Patrick sees walking to work in the middle of winter, put their hands on the warm flanks of passing cows to heat them but, "[t]hey must do this gently, without any sense of attack or right. They do not own this land as the owner of the cows does" (7). The poverty, low status, and disenfranchisement of the immigrant workers is repeatedly reinforced by language which implies they do not even have dominion over their own bodies. Greenstein points this out, and notes that: "[j]ust as the loggers do not own

the land they traverse, so these tarrers of the Dominion Bridge Company 'don't own the legs or the arms jostling against their bodies' (25) . . ." (121).

These extremes of experience between the rich and poor results in a polarized society in which the conflicts and tensions are acted out through the capitalist/socialist struggle, with the various characters taking sides. There seems to be no real middle class, and certainly no mobility, and little communication or intercourse between the rich and poor. Instead the divisions and exclusions are severe, and result in a prevalent feeling of us against them. Alice tells Patrick that "there are a hundred fences and lawns between the rich and you" (132). The desperate economic times make "the rich and powerful close ranks" (220). The capitalist/socialist struggle, which with the Spanish Civil War and the rise of fascism, was the raging political conflict of the day, exemplifies these divisions. We are told that "Small's blatant capitalism had clarified the gulf between the rich and the starving" (59). Clara thinks of Patrick as "a romantic Bolshevik" (90), while Small practises "bare-knuckle capitalism" (57). There are a number of oppressions and retaliations associated with the class struggle. The government, along with characters such as Police Chief Draper and Rowland Harris, initiates a "crackdown on unions" (220). During this time in Canada, "'Red Squads' intercepted mail" and "tear gassed political meetings" (209). Alice is a

socialist revolutionary who detests the power of the rich. She contends that "[y]ou must name the enemy and destroy their power "(124). She is killed in the course of her revolutionary activities, but the struggle continues in other ways. Caravaggio steals only from the rich and Patrick sabotages a hotel resort and later attempts to destroy the water filtration plant. Cato tries to unionize the loggers, is killed by the bosses for his efforts, and their power and influence is such that they are acquitted of any wrong doing. The poor have little hope of making inroads against the entrenched power of the rich.

By emphasizing the class struggle and its inherent interconnection with language and ethnicity, Ondaatje reinforces the equivalence system based on the ideas of division and exclusion. These two areas of subject matter are naturally related and portrayed in a historically accurate manner. The emphasis given them, especially in the earlier stages of the novel, results in a realistically achieved thematic resonance, a sense that division and exclusion are important ideas or organizing principles of this work.

Character Sensibility: Isolationism and Individualism

Thus far, divisions and exclusions based on cultural, linguistic, and economic factors have been discussed. Another way of creating equivalence systems in a novel is through the

depiction of character. Ondaatje has always been fascinated with outsiders: his works display a strong interest in those who operate on the fringes of society. The individuals portrayed, in a fictionalized way, in both Coming Through Slaughter and The Collected Works of Billy The Kid: Left Handed Poems are two examples. This fictional investigation of outsiders continues in In the Skin of a Lion. In this novel, Ondaatje echoes social and cultural divisions and exclusions by creating a cast of characters that are cut off from society and intimacy by their own personalities. Despite their diverse backgrounds, the major male characters: Patrick, Hazen, Temelcoff, Small, and Caravaggio all share a sensibility based on isolationism and individualism. Each tends to be solitary, withdrawn, and uncommunicative. They focus obsessively on dangerous, precise occupations which require a disciplined, detached state of mind, and while comfortable within the precarious but predictable routines of their trades, the men remain hesitant and wary in the social world, where friendship, intimacy, or any sort of communal involvement is, ironically, perceived as a dangerous, unpredictable lack of self-possession. The repetition of these traits in each of the men extends and deepens, in a contextually appropriate manner, the equivalence system based on division and exclusion.

The external circumstances of these male characters and the manner in which they are depicted tends to reinforce their isolation. Ondaatje chooses to introduce each one separately

and their initial stories are tales of lives lived in seclusion. Patrick spends his boyhood in the woods of rural Ontario where he has little opportunity for social interaction. He works in the forest or on the log drives with his father and his knowledge of the wider world he derives mostly from books. Conscious of his isolation, young Patrick feels the need to find "something to leap with over the wall of this place" (10). When Nicholas leaves the Balkans for Toronto, he finds himself cut off from family and friends as well as linguistically excluded in Canada. Ambrose's decision to disappear from society and go into hiding is a self-imposed type of isolation. The incarceration of Patrick and Caravaggio is a form of exclusion imposed upon them by society.

Aside from these external types of isolation, the men share a solitary and withdrawn nature. Holding in common a view of themselves as outsiders, they maintain a neutral, non-involved outlook, retreating from potential friends and refusing to become a part of the communities and causes which swirl around them. Even in prison we are told that when Patrick "imagined freedom it was as a solitary" (212). Small has "no compatriots" (57). Temelcoff is "awkward in groups" (48), and regarded by his fellow workers as a "recluse" (47). He "never catches anyone's eye," preferring to fade into the background (42). Hazen Lewis is characterized as being "withdrawn from the world around him, uninterested in the habits of civilization outside his own focus" (15). Patrick

inherits this tendency from his father. As a boy "he absorbed everything from a distance" (19). In his youth, Patrick comes upon Finnish loggers in the woods skating on a pond by torchlight. Though fascinated and longing to join their game, he finds that something within his own nature prevents him. At this stage in his life, "he did not trust either himself or these strangers of another language enough to be able to step forward and join them" (22). Similarly, as a young man, Patrick will find himself unwilling to join Alice's revolutionary, socialist movement. Becoming entangled in something communal is contrary to his neutral, individualistic nature. In Toronto, Patrick lives and works alongside the immigrants yet remains friendless and lives alone. Linguistic barriers play a part in this isolation, but the primary cause is his natural reticence. Alice says to him, "You believe in solitude, Patrick, in retreat" (123). Patrick is aware of this defect in his personality which produces "a space between him and community" (157). It is a tendency he struggles with throughout the novel.

The relationships the men do form, both friendly and romantic, at least initially, feature a profound lack of intimacy. They share an aversion to opening up or confiding their feelings, even in their love affairs. The father-son relationship of Patrick and Hazen is distant despite the fact that they live and work together. Temelcoff works and eats daily alongside dozens of men on the bridge, but "[n]one of

his cohorts really knew him" (49). During her time with Ambrose, Clara seeks to achieve intimacy and understanding with him. However, Ambrose's isolationist tendencies and distrustful personality make this effort futile and Clara finds that "she would know him only as he wanted to be known by her. There was no other road towards him" (213). As Small lies dying, Clara realizes that "she would not be satisfied, would not know him" (215).

When social interactions and intimate situations are dealt with, there is an abundance of barrier imagery as if to reinforce the men's exclusionary tendencies. When Anne encounters Caravaggio, she engages him in conversation. Caravaggio feels threatened and Anne senses that "a wall had just been placed between them" (188). In his relationships with both Clara and Alice, Patrick tends to keep his emotional distance. Clara thinks that "[t]here was a wall in him that no one reached. . . . though she assumed it had deformed him" (71). Even in bed with Clara, Patrick "liked to sleep separate, in his own world . . ." (65). Despite the loving relationship he eventually shares with Alice, Patrick continues to feel that "his relationship with Alice had a horizon" (137). When Alice is killed Patrick laments that "now there is a moat around her he will never cross again" (164). Ambrose's isolationism is the most extreme and unchanging. He keeps "high walls between" himself and his various lovers and business associates (213).

In keeping with their basic isolationism, another shared personality trait of the men is self-sufficiency. They prefer to retreat from intimacy and social interaction and focus on the routines and rituals of their professions. Turning away from the world and his son, Hazen becomes obsessed with the intricacies of dynamiting. He is "a man who with his few props had become self-sufficient . . ." (18). Small, Caravaggio, and Temelcoff approach business, thievery, and steel-working, respectively, in a similar manner. Their trades are all-consuming obsessions. They derive satisfaction from the mastery of their jobs, rather than through relationships.

The destructive side of this self-sufficiency is a reductionism, which carried to the extreme, is soul-destroying. Cutting themselves off from others, interested only in their trades, the men become lonely and empty. Their isolation becomes self-perpetuating, their personalities stagnate, and their mental well-beings deteriorate. A prime example of this is Ambrose. Even in hiding from the world, Small continues to withdraw further into himself. As he lies dying his self-absorption and distance from Clara increase. She watches as "[h]e sat on the floor of the emptied room in Marmora nothing else around him but Clara and the walls and the wood floor and the curtainless windows so he could sleep at night neatly within the coffin of moonlight" (213). Ondaatje's sentence structure and diction, highlighting darkness, bareness, and monotony, indicate Small's extreme

reductionism. Rather than just dying, he is said to have "imploded" (215).

Patrick shares this tendency. When Clara leaves him, he becomes self-absorbed, obsessed with his daily routines. Living alone, he talks to no one for months, his only distraction the hours of digging in the tunnel. When a casual encounter with the Macedonian shopkeepers of his street leads to a dinner invitation, Patrick begins to realize the terrible price he has paid for his self-sufficiency. They ask him about his life and he feels "ashamed they could discover so little about him. He had reduced himself almost to nothing" (113).

The male characters work alone, both because the dangerous nature of their trades necessitate it, and because it suits their temperaments to do so. In the woods, Hazen is "solitary" as he cuts timber (15). Later, Hazen and Patrick both secure positions as dynamiters and this further removes them from interaction with other labourers because of the dangers involved. When laying charges in the tunnel, Patrick, "separates himself from the others" (106). Temelcoff is an acrobatic steelworker on bridges, "a daredevil" (35). Constantly risking his life, his work is "solitary" (34) because "[n]o one dreams of doing half the things he does" (35). As a thief, Caravaggio is eternally wary of discovery and finds that he cannot trust a partner or "work with someone else" (203). Small's business ventures are more financially than physically risky, yet he too trusts no one and works

alone. Despite his staff, "the time he loved most" is sitting alone in his offices before their arrival, plotting his strategy (58). This widespread inability or unwillingness to work with others is indicative of the men's sense of exclusion.

The types of occupations that the male characters of In the Skin of a Lion pursue promote a clinical mindset. Their jobs call for a cool, rational, and disciplined state of mind. Whether one examines references to the dynamiting of Hazen or Patrick, the financial plotting of Small, the carefully choreographed burglary schemes of Caravaggio, or the acrobatic manoeuvres of Temelcoff swinging under the bridge, this same unemotional mindset is present. This type of character is common in much of Ondaatje's work. The English Patient, for example, features characters that are involved in such risky professions as spying and bomb defusing. The male characters of In the Skin of a Lion walk a razor's edge between a successful day's work and catastrophe. A momentary lapse of concentration can bring financial ruin, imprisonment, or death. Consequently, each character cultivates the values of self-control, order, and predictability both as essentials of their trades and as personality traits in dealing with life in general. The men feel a need to be aware and in control of themselves and their environments.

Despite the hazards inherent in their respective trades, there is also a fundamental predictability about them. Each

character has carefully measured the risks, exercising exceptional skill and discipline in mastering them. Patrick and Hazen know the precise rate at which a dynamite fuse burns and "how much a piece of dynamite the size of bullfrog could destroy" (19). As a thief, Caravaggio has a "medicinal clarity in his survey" of robbery scenes (191). He trains by dismantling and removing furniture in the darkness of his room at night, without waking his wife. Small, the financial genius is seen: "choreographing his schemes, theorizing on bids and interest rates and the breaking point of his adversaries" (58). Just as Small has mapped the financial world, Temelcoff has charted the physical world below and above the bridge:

He does not really need to see things, he has charted all that space, knows the pier footings, the width of the cross-walks in terms of seconds of movement. . . . He knows the precise height he is over the river, how long his ropes are, how many seconds he can free-fall to the pulley. It does not matter if it is day or night, he could be blindfolded. (35).

Their trades promote in the men a sense of detachment, as well as a need for control, order, and predictability. They carry these traits into their personal relationships where they often prove crippling. Friendships and love interests are by their nature unpredictable, disorderly affairs. Feeling themselves unable to control or predict these human phenomena,

the men feel threatened and tend to avoid them. They seem to resemble autistic savants, having extraordinary technical abilities but unable to function socially or relate emotionally. Carrying a consciousness of the world as a dangerous place, relationships seem to these men even more hazardous, ironically, because of their unpredictable nature. The same traits which make them exceptional in their fields retard their development as social beings.

One incident, in particular, illustrates this point. Patrick does a trick in which he blindfolds himself and moves rapidly around a room without colliding with any obstacles, thus demonstrating his extraordinary hypersensitivity to the physical environment. Performing it for Clara, he positions her on a bed, tells her not to move, and begins. She nonetheless moves, they collide, and she is injured. Patrick says "[s]o much for the human element" (81), a comment which seems to reflect the attitudes of the all the men about social interaction in general.

Sexual intimacy is especially threatening to the male characters, who perceive it as a dangerous loss of self-control. It unleashes emotions in them which cannot be mastered or managed as easily as the risks of their trades. They cannot sit back and plan what to do but are drawn into a situation they cannot control. The sex act is the ultimate loss of self-control. It threatens their sense of detachment. Sexual encounters are portrayed as anarchic events, and are

often associated with bloodshed and danger. The love scene between Caravaggio and Giannetta, is both chaotic and bloody:

He carries her, still in her . . . crockery behind her crashing from shelf to shelf. . . . With each step her bare foot on a pearl or a fragment or plate. . . . Planting her foot on his shoulder she leaves blood when she moves it. . . . he sees glass and crockery and thin china plates tumbling down from shelf to shelf losing their order. . . . She pins the earring her fingers had strayed upon into his arm muscle, beginning a tattoo of blood.

(204-5)

Similarly, Patrick is uncomfortable with his romantic obsessions. His sexual encounters are laced with emotional and physical pain. When first attracted to Clara, he feels she has "mortally wounded him" (61). Later, she leaves him for Ambrose, and his dreams of regaining her often involve injuries to himself. When Patrick does locate Clara, Ambrose assaults him, nearly killing him. Their subsequent sexual encounter proceeds despite Patrick's numerous injuries:

They touched, both moving careful of his wounds, all over each other as if meeting in a dream. . . . with the light Patrick had awakened to find the sheets thick with blood which had escaped from his dressings . . . discovering even the print of her hand perfect on the wallpaper, the print of blood

on the English flowers of his bedroom where she had leaned to balance herself in their lovemaking as she crouched over him. (99-100)

The men tend to be uncommunicative. In accordance with their withdrawn natures, they prefer to remain silent, or speak sparingly. Descriptions of Hazen include words such as "sullen" (18) and "taciturn" (19). We learn that "[i]n all his life the longest speech" Hazen has ever made occurs when he undergoes a brief job interview for a dynamiting company (16). Indeed the relationship between Hazen and the young Patrick is largely non-verbal and devoid of expressiveness. Even when Hazen and Patrick share a bed in order to keep warm, "they do not acknowledge each other apart from sharing the warmth under the blanket" (14). The lack of communication between the two is so profound that we see young Patrick using an ocarina "to give himself a voice" (10). Patrick adopts Hazen's uncommunicative nature as he matures. He wishes neither to speak nor be spoken to by others. During his early days in the city, Patrick, "lived - in his job and during these evening walks - in a silence . . ." (138). While in prison he is known for "refusing communication" (212). Patrick's "longest speech for months" turns out to be three sentences he speaks to Alice Gull after months of self-imposed silence (87).

Earlier, the divisions of the class system as well as the related linguistic and cultural exclusion of the immigrants, were discussed. The immigrants are cultural outsiders, often

rendered inarticulate by language barriers. The situations of the male characters described above parallel those of the immigrants for different reasons, though the results are no less compelling or damaging. They are outsiders by virtue of their personalities and sensibilities. The men lack friends and intimacy whereas the immigrants lack acceptance and equality. Both groups share a basic wariness and reticence toward society, a sense of alienation. It is true that some of the men belong to both groups. Temelcoff and Small are immigrants while Caravaggio is probably a first generation Canadian. However, these characters tend to share the solitary and uncommunicative ways of Hazen and Patrick even after they have conquered the language barrier. Their uncommunicative natures are metaphorically linked to the inarticulate immigrants, though in a contextually fitting way. Both groups are excluded from the mainstream and both situations provide thematic or paradigmatic echoes that resonate within the equivalence system of division and exclusion.

Historical Exclusion

Ondaatje's work often displays a consciousness of history and an interest in how history is written. Many of his books, including The English Patient and The Collected Works of Billy The Kid: Left Handed Poems, use actual historical figures, occurrences, or facts as raw material which is imaginatively

moulded into fictions. The characters of Ambrose Small (Hutcheon 93) and Nicholas Temelcoff (Ondaatje, "Listening" 932) of In the Skin of a Lion are based on historical figures. This artistic embellishment of history (Garvie 931) both provokes questions about, and provides an artistic commentary on, the subjective nature of the historical process. Hutcheon calls this mix of fact and fiction "historiographic metafiction" (82). In the Skin of a Lion uses extensive factual information and often features characters engaged in historical research on both public and private matters. Questions emerge throughout about the nature of history, such as who is included, who is excluded, and who decides. Ondaatje has expressed his opposition to the control of history by any one group (qtd in Kelly S11). In a different context, Ondaatje has said: "[d]on't forget, the history of war is written by its victors" (qtd. in Ross S16). It is implied, throughout this novel, that the historical record is governed more by power than truth. Just as the elite dominate the economic, political, and social worlds, they control the writing of history, and tend to exaggerate their own deeds while minimizing, or excluding completely, the contributions of those, such as the immigrants, who are marginalized in so many other ways. Acheson notes that in this novel "only the stories of the rich are written down and become history" (109). Economically and politically oppressed in life, the stories of the common people are suppressed in death. They live in

poverty and die in obscurity. Thus Ondaatje produces a realistic thematic resonance between their historical exclusion and the many other forms of exclusion that they experience, including the self-imposed isolation of many of the male characters. The marginalized are often associated with the metonymically appropriate, though metaphorically suggestive, qualities of darkness, silence, and anonymity.

The historical exclusion of the working people takes various forms. One aspect is a non-recording, forgetting, or outright ignorance of their identities and contributions. These are omissions from the historical record. This practice is suggested both in the broad strokes of the plot's progression and during inconspicuous descriptions of characters and activities. When Cato infiltrates the logging camp to organize a union, "[n]one of the bosses knows who he is . . ." (155). Temelcoff's work on the bridge is pivotal, yet not well-remembered in the records, for "[e]ven in archive photographs it is difficult to find him" (34). When Patrick confronts Harris about the number of deaths due to accidents during the constructions of the bridge, Harris can only respond: "[t]here was no record kept" (236).

Another tendency is toward the minimization of the role of the workers and their accomplishments. In the course of his research on the bridge, Patrick finds "everything but information on those who actually built the bridge" (145). Tragic accidents which killed many workers are "fleetingly

mentioned" (144). Throughout the novel, groups of workers are often juxtaposed textually with moths and other insects. This suggests their insignificance and expendability. Harris reinforces this view of the workers when he refers to them as "the dwarfs of enterprise who never get accepted or acknowledged" (238).

Finally, businessmen and politicians expropriate the accomplishments of the workers. It is they, "the bland fools -the politicians and press and mayors and their advisers" who "become the spokesmen for the age" (238). Just as they control society, they control the recording of the past. They have the power to manipulate facts and obscure the truth in almost Orwellian fashion. The histories they produce are vehicles for self-promotion, selective in nature, and more focused on enhancing their reputations than on giving an accurate recounting of the past. They choose to accentuate or exaggerate their contributions to society while minimizing or leaving unrecorded the lives and accomplishments of the poor and marginalized. Despite their labour, the poor immigrants who inhabit this novel are accorded no recognition for the great projects that their blood and sweat bring to fruition. Instead, the names of those who work and die go unrecorded or are forgotten while the great politicians and businessmen are immortalized in history. Hutcheon notes that In the Skin of a Lion includes sections that chronicle, in great detail, the companies and contractors involved in the bridge's

construction, as if to imitate an official history that excludes the workers (96). It is Harris rather than Temelcoff who will be remembered as having built the bridge. Patrick notes to himself the fundamental falseness and injustice involved in men who have never done manual labour claiming credit for the mega-projects of the age: "[o]fficial histories and news stories were always soft as rhetoric, like that of a politician making a speech after a bridge is built, a man who does not even cut the grass on his own lawn" (145). Nevertheless, Ondaatje suggests that this is the way official history is recorded.

A parallel exists between the marginalization and disenfranchisement of the immigrant workers in society and their exclusion from the historical record. The same class dynamics are in operation. The immigrants are politically oppressed; they may not be allowed to vote and are subject to deportation. Their meagre wages and dreadful working conditions are a form of economic exploitation. Historical neglect is just another form of oppression. One highly suggestive episode makes the point about exclusion. The immigrants hold festivals in the uncompleted waterworks. Patrick attends one such "illegal gathering" in which everyone is "trespassing" (115). Just as they are barred from using the facility, so are they excluded from credit for building it. Harris is surprised to learn that such meetings ever took place.

Two adjacent segments of the narrative make explicit the differences and divisions in the realities and histories of the workers and the elite. The first is from Patrick's perspective (105-08), and shows him working in the tunnel, part of the uncompleted waterworks. His world is essentially physical; his reality is heat, darkness, wetness, exhausting physical labour, and the fear of burial alive. The second perspective is that of Harris (108-11), and is predominantly mental. It is a world of blueprints, contractors, bureaucracy, and politics. Harris is ignorant of the conditions underground for "he had not entered the tunnels himself" (110). There is no real liaison between the two worlds. Again, it is Harris's experiences that will form the official record. It is metaphorically significant that the workers are labouring underground. A contextual equivalence is evoked between their subterranean work and the burial of them in the historical record (Greenstein 126).

It is mentioned in passing that there are documenters of the workers' lives, recorders of reality who "betray official history" (145). Among these are Lewis Hine's photographs of child labour and Joseph Conrad's letters about socialist activists. However, it is pointed out that "Patrick would never see the great photographs of Hine as he would never read the letters of Joseph Conrad" (145). Because such authentic documents go unseen or unread, their power to convey the truth is nullified (Greenstein 128).

There is a private ignorance of personal histories, and a turning away from the past, that parallels public historical exclusion. As a boy, Patrick does not know the identities or origins of the loggers he sees each day. Patrick notes to himself that "[h]e is the one born in this country who knows nothing of the place" (156-57). As a man, he remains ignorant for much of the novel of the complex interrelated pasts of Alice, Cato, and Temelcoff. Alice herself has abandoned a former identity and occupation and exists "outside of history" (Hutcheon 95). Patrick notices that "[s]he reveals no past," and "remains sourceless" (74).

Naming has extraordinary importance in this novel. To name something is to confer significance and value on it. The process of naming also has "authenticating power" in the historical sense (Hutcheon 94). The converse is also true. So it is that the immigrants and other marginalized groups in this story, by remaining anonymous, are rendered humanly and historically insignificant. Caravaggio realizes that this applies to him: [h]e was anonymous. . . . The houses in Toronto he had helped build or paint or break into were unmarked. He would never leave his name where his skill had been" (199). The boy named Alfred, who helps Caravaggio after he escapes from prison, urges him only to "[r]emember my name" (182). Small use false names, which slip "memorized into his brain, unrecorded anywhere else" (58). During his clandestine union activities, Cato writes "unsigned letters about camp

conditions" (155). After he is killed, the union breakers "find no messages or identification on him" (155-56).

Naming and anonymity also play a role in the life of Patrick Lewis. He too is one of history's unacknowledged and unrecorded. Hutcheon points out that Patrick is initially unnamed in the text (93-94), but instead referred to only as "the boy" (7-8). She identifies this as an early sign that within this novel, anonymity is related to historical insignificance (93-95). Patrick's anonymity is connected in part to his geographical isolation (Hutcheon 94), for the countryside in which he grows up is obscure to the wider world: "[h]e was born into a region which did not appear on a map until 1910, though his family had worked there for twenty years and the land had been homesteaded since 1816" (10). Patrick searches for his birthplace in his school atlas but finds only a "pale green and nameless" place near an "unnamed lake" (11). These references imply that society does not deem the lives and work of Patrick and his family significant enough to be included in the records.

During his time in the city, Patrick finds a different type of anonymity, based on both linguistic isolation and the feeling of being a small fish in a large pond. He enters the city without family or friends. Being from the country, he is shocked by the multitudes of people brushing unknowingly by him. He experiences feelings of anonymity and insignificance: "[h]e spoke out his name and it struggled up in a hollow echo

and was lost in the high air of Union Station. No one turned. They were in the belly of a whale" (54). In the city, Patrick lives among the immigrants, but is cut off from them by language. This isolation increases his sense of insignificance and reinforces his naturally reductionist, withdrawn, and anti-social tendencies. He comes to cherish his anonymity (Hutcheon 96). Alice notices that Patrick prefers to fade into the background and that with company, he behaves "as anonymously as possible" (112).

Throughout the novel, the quality of darkness is metaphorically linked with the idea of historical exclusion. Darkness has traditionally had connotations of mystery and ignorance. It is an appropriate device here because from a conventional historical perspective, the lives of the majority of characters and the masses of immigrants, are shrouded in darkness. In the introductory episode, Patrick and Hana Gull drive all night to Marmora in order to pick up Clara:

She listens and asks questions as the vehicle travels through darkness. Outside the countryside is unbetrayed. The man who is driving could say, 'In that field is a castle,' and it would be possible for her to believe him. (1)

Just as the darkness prevents Hana from seeing or knowing what is really outside, the actual experiences and contributions of the workers and other socially marginalized characters are historically neglected or distorted. A disproportionate amount

of the work and activity take place at night or in darkness as if to reinforce the association. In the course of a robbery gone wrong, Caravaggio seeks refuge in the "permanent darkness" of a mushroom factory (190). The tarrers "stare into passing darkness" as they go to work each morning (25). The loggers work in the darkness of early morning, Patrick in the dimness of the tunnels, and Temelcoff on the night shift at the bridge. During the secret meetings held at the waterworks, the immigrants are careful that "no light would be betrayed to the outside world" (158).

Patrick Lewis seems almost aware of the connection between darkness and historical exclusion. His free indirect discourse indicates that he senses the association's applicability in his own life. While reading a book, he wonders what is going on outside the storyline: "[o]utside the plot there was a great darkness . . ." (143). Patrick feels that his story too will be untold. After he sabotages the hotel, he swims away, linking the contextual darkness of night with his own obscurity: "[n]ow he will be a member of the night. He sees his visage never emerging out of shadows. Unhistorical" (172). Patrick also begins to make the association between darkness and his ignorance of the stories of those closest to him. Unaware for so long of the pasts of Cato, Alice, and Temelcoff, Patrick sees himself as "a searcher gazing into darkness" and "a blind man" (157).

Silence is also associated with historical exclusion. This is a particularly effective contextual equivalence because it resonates both with the linguistic isolation of the immigrants and the uncommunicative natures of many of the men. The immigrants and other workers are often depicted as silent. The loggers are a "silent gauntlet of men" (7). The tarrers are "crowded and silent" (25). During the performances at the waterworks, the immigrant families "come in silence" to watch a non-verbal play (115). After Patrick tells Harris the unrecorded story of the life and death of Alice, there is "[a] permanent silence" in the room as both become sad and reflective (241). The association of silence with the historical exclusion of the immigrant experience is particularly fitting because it reflects their actual life experiences. Unable to speak English, they often find themselves inarticulate. The historical silence regarding their lives renders them historically inarticulate. Nicholas, "assumes no one hears him" as he sings under the bridge (43). It is through subtle and contextually appropriate associations such as these that Ondaatje reinforces the themes of exclusion and division without disturbing the realistic nature of his work.

Chapter Three: Change, Conversion, and Metamorphosis

A second major equivalence system of In the Skin of a Lion involves the related ideas of change, conversion, and metamorphosis, and is most dominant in the intermediate stages of the novel. These ideas are manifested in the narrative structure, the evolution of character, and through metaphorical links between certain recurring issues or subject matter. A profound change, a conversion in outlook and mindset, occurs in several of the major male characters. Initially they are individualists and isolationists, yet as the story progresses their thoughts and actions are marked by a growing sense of community and interdependence. This metamorphosis of character is paralleled by the cultural metamorphosis of the immigrants. The immigrant experience is an important component of the novel and the assimilation process involves profound cultural and linguistic changes. Both the men and immigrants find themselves becoming integrated into society, and begin to sense their role in history. Another recurring manifestation of metamorphosis in this novel involves the theatre and acting. This is a world of artistic metamorphosis: the actresses use mimicry, make-up, and the audience's imagination to change appearances and become someone else. The metaphoric equivalences between personality conversion, assimilation, and theatrical metamorphosis are frequently reinforced by a host of

paradigmatic occurrences and symbols. Whereas the actresses switch identities, many of the characters often assume false names and use disguises, There are also references to a variety of animals and insects for which metamorphosis and camouflage are part of existence. Underlying all this is a narrative structure which has change and movement as its dominant characteristic. The story features rapid and frequent shifts in time, place, and perspective. The numerous alternations of season, and between light and darkness, create a sense of background flux. Thus the manner of presentation mirrors an important thematic idea. Taken together, these various manifestations of change and metamorphosis, by their frequency and diversity, serve to magnify the resonances within the equivalence system.

Structural Changes and Background Flux

Change and movement are central, thematically suggestive, aspects of the novel's narrative structure. The story shifts radically and suddenly with respect to time and place. The chronological progression of the story is often disjointed rather than linear, for Ondaatje has inserted episodes from both past and future into the narrative sequence. This frequent temporal shifting distorts conventional time. Events are not occurring in the order in which they are read. In addition, the story unfolds in a variety of diverse,

constantly changing locations. Geographically these include Toronto, the Ontario countryside, Sudbury, and the Balkans. Spatially the action moves from log drives on raging rivers, to steel-working on bridges far above a river valley, and to digging in tunnels deep underground. There is a continual alternation of urban and rural settings. From such places as Patrick's boyhood home in the woods of eastern Ontario, or Alice's cottage in the countryside, or Temelcoff's pastoral home in the Balkans, the scene always shifts back to the metropolis of Toronto. The characters seem always to be moving or travelling.

There are also frequent changes in point of view, a shifting of perspective (Greenstein 125). Patrick's life and perspective are central, but there are also substantial sections in which many of the other characters, notably Temelcoff and Caravaggio, become the focus of the narrative. In such episodes, these characters' perspectives and perceptions become central. With the constant switching of settings and perspectives, the concept of change can be said to permeate the structural, framing aspects of the novel.

Seasonal and environmental changes, as well as the metamorphic processes inherent in them, are a constant part of the story's background. Greenstein implies that they foreshadow the modification of character (120). Seasonal changes occur with astonishing rapidity due to the distorted temporal nature of the narrative. In a given episode it may be

summer while in adjacent segments it is winter. There is an abundance of metamorphosis associated with seasonal shifts. These include the melting of ice, the freezing of water, and many other cyclical processes commonly associated with the death and rebirth of nature. Similarly, there are frequent and rapid alternations between day and night and light and darkness.

The idea of construction, so pervasive in this novel, features the transformation of raw materials and landscape into human creations like the bridge and waterworks, a metamorphosis of nature. Harris, quoting Baudelaire, likes to say that "[t]he form of a city changes faster than the heart of a mortal" (109). Dirty water enters the filtration plant and emerges clean. The idea of metamorphosis is sometimes introduced in other contexts. Temelcoff, who works as a baker, "is a man who is comfortable among ovens, the smell of things rising, the metamorphosis of food" (149). These forms of metamorphosis contribute to a subtle sense of background flux.

Of course a certain amount of change is an inevitable part of any story. The preceding types are more or less subtle. They do not seriously undermine the metonymic orientation of the narrative, though the temporal and spatial shifts may call for a somewhat more attentive approach by the reader. However, the widespread repetition of such various forms of change, both structural and contextual, foregrounds the paradigm of change as thematically significant. They

provide a background which resonates with the theatrical metamorphoses of the actresses, the assimilation process which the immigrants undergo, and the dramatic conversion in outlook experienced by Patrick, Caravaggio, and Temelcoff. Analogies can be drawn, and equivalences perceived, between these diverse subject matters. Ondaatje seems to be implying that the structural changes of In the Skin of a Lion are part of the artistic endeavour when he says "[O]nly the best art can order the chaotic tumble of events. Only the best can realign chaos to suggest both the chaos and order it will become" (147).

Theatrical Metamorphosis

Theatrical productions and acting in general play a prominent, thematically suggestive, role in this novel. Ondaatje himself notes that "[w]hen you write fiction. . . . You put on a mask that allows you to be someone else" (qtd. in Ross S16). There are numerous passages throughout In the Skin of a Lion dealing with various types of drama, silent and talking movies, and puppet shows. The two major female characters are both actresses: Clara Dickens on radio, and Alice Gull, on the stage.

The central activity in the professions of these two women is the taking on of alternate identities, a metamorphosis of self. Both are skilled mimics. They have a

chameleon-like ability to, "slip into tongues" and "impersonate people" (74). Accents, make-up, and costumes create the illusion of someone else. In Alice's cottage, Patrick watches as the two actresses "imitate the way men smoke" and mimic how "women laugh - from the raucous to the sullen to the mercenary" (74-75). Patrick becomes fascinated by the transformations in appearances and character that are part of the theatre. Going backstage after one play, watching various actors removing their costumes and make-up, he notes to himself that, "[w]hat had been theatrical seemed locked within metamorphosis" (120). He enjoys being "fooled by the person he felt could not fool him, who stopped three yards past the side curtain and became somebody else" (153). During his obsession with Clara, Patrick finds that he does not really understand her, but instead "keeps finding and losing another part of her, as if opening a drawer to discover another mask" (79).

Alice switches identities both in life and art. Her "changeability" is her dominant trait (210). As an actress she assumes a variety of personas, "a series of masks or painted faces" (128). These abilities are a source of marvel for Patrick:

he can never conceive how she leaps from her true self to her other true self. . . . in the midst of lovemaking even, he watches her face waiting for her to be translated into this war bride or that

queen or shopgirl, half expecting metamorphosis as they kiss. (153)

Of course, in real life too, Alice has undergone a change in identity. After the accident on the bridge, given up for dead, she abandons her old identity and life as a nun. As Hutcheon states: "[t]he nun leaves her habit and habits behind her and vanishes into the world to redefine her identity as a woman from scratch . . ." (95). Starting fresh, with a fictional name, Alice makes it her vocation to become the artistic embodiment of the immigrant experience, a metaphoric vehicle for expressing their experiences. This she does through her performance art. She has the ability, in life and art, to transcend any sort of barrier whether cultural or linguistic and to be comfortable within any setting or society. Her malleable, adaptable nature can be seen in her linguistic versatility. Just as she can assume any persona, she has the ability to quickly become fluent in different languages. Patrick listens to Alice "slipping out of English and into Finnish or Macedonian" with ease as she converses with immigrant friends (137).

Aside from the theatrical world, the altering of appearances and the assumption of false identities are widespread occurrences in this novel. Cato's name is not real, but rather a "war name" that he has adopted during his political activities (140). In the course of his business dealings, Ambrose finds it advantageous to use a variety of

"pseudonyms" (58). His secretive nature leads him to make purchases "under different names all over Ontario" (58). Caravaggio, too, is skilled at impersonation. Following a failed robbery, he hides in a mushroom factory from which he escapes by shaving off his moustache and disguising himself as a woman. Caravaggio specialises in assuming the identities of wealthy men in order to blend in with the rich, his usual targets for theft. After his escape from prison Caravaggio makes his way to a lake resort where he breaks into a cottage. He proceeds to pose as a rich vacationer so as not to arouse suspicion amongst his wealthy neighbours. Another time, Caravaggio, along with Patrick and Giannetta, attend a masquerade party, in itself a metamorphic event, among Toronto's elite at the Toronto Yacht Club. Here Caravaggio mingles, presenting himself as "Randolph Frog," and taking down names and addresses for future robberies (222).

This type of social blending is echoed by more physical and symbolic forms of camouflage. Caravaggio is painted blue to make himself invisible against the sky and blue roof he is painting in prison in order to escape. While fleeing he encounters a young boy, Al, who noticing the blue paint on his skin, asks him, "[a]re you from the movie company?" (181). This evokes a paradigmatic link with the metamorphoses of the theatrical world. Patrick takes an identical approach during his attempted sabotage of the waterworks. He has Giannetta rub dark grease over his body, the effect being to make him

"invisible" against the night (228). Also included in the narrative are numerous references to different types of animals that have the ability to blend into their environments and become invisible. Ondaatje refers to a "chameleon" (128), and to Clara's "iguana" (83).

The prevalence of these various forms of switching identities and appearances tends to reinforce the importance of the ideas of metamorphosis throughout the text. Though they are incorporated into the novel in a realistic manner, the reader can perceive metaphorical associations between them, and the metamorphoses of the assimilation process or the conversion in character experienced by the men. Through the interaction of these three issues, together with the background flux and change that is the defining element of the narrative structure, Ondaatje extends and deepens the equivalence system without disturbing the realistic nature of his novel.

The Assimilation Process

The immigrant experience is a major component of this novel. Throughout the story the immigrants attempt to adjust and assimilate to their new country. This process of cultural metamorphosis involves many profound changes. It requires them to leave behind familiar environments and cultures and to embrace the customs of a foreign country whose landscape,

climate, and culture are alien. The immigrants' greatest obstacle in their attempts to metamorphose into Canadians is language. To become fully integrated into their new worlds they must change languages and become fluent in English. Throughout the novel, Ondaatje underscores this wholesale cultural metamorphosis by placing the immigrants in settings and circumstances that, which though realistic, reinforce in a metaphorical way, the dramatic changes they undergo. He utilizes the paradigms of naming and language as well as juxtaposing the assimilating immigrants with metamorphosing insects. Resonances are produced between the assimilation experience, theatrical metamorphosis, and the conversion in outlook of the male characters.

Hutcheon asserts that "for immigrants language and identity are connected" (95). Thus, switching one's language is a major change that is both difficult and disorienting. As they attempt to overcome linguistic barriers, the immigrants are caught somewhere between their old and new languages, a sort of linguistic schizophrenia that parallels their cultural and geographical dislocation. Temelcoff enjoys singing along with songs on the radio. At one point Alice listens to him do this and observes that "his voice split now into two languages" (37). Translation is linguistic metamorphosis; the words used to express thoughts or describe surroundings are foreign. Temelcoff experiences "translation dreams" (46), in which his change in language is mirrored by metamorphoses in

the things he encounters: "[i]n the dreams trees changed not just their names but their looks and character. Men started answering in falsettos. Dogs spoke out fast to him as they passed on the street" (46-47).

The cultural and linguistic changes that the immigrants undergo requires an altering of much that is basic to their identities, a transformation of self. They seem almost to be exchanging an old for a new identity. This metamorphosis of identity is suggested in a variety of ways. One of these is through their method of learning English. Many of the "immigrants learned their English from recorded songs or, until the talkies came, through mimicking actors on stage. It was a common habit to select one actor and follow him throughout his career . . ." (47). The newcomers leave behind their accents, assuming instead the pronunciation, speaking styles, and mannerisms of these entertainers: "[s]ojourners walked out of their accent into regional American voices" (47). Temelcoff's speaking style and pronunciation is modelled after Fats Waller. These various imitations constitute a metaphorical change in identity that is both contextually consistent with the assimilation process, and that produces paradigmatic links with the metamorphoses of the theatre.

Many foreigners have names which are unfamiliar and difficult to pronounce. It is therefore a common practise for them to also use anglicized nicknames for the benefit of their new compatriots. At one factory, in this novel, the immigrants

are arbitrarily assigned new names by the bosses for administrative purposes. Patrick listens to "the labour agent giving them all English names, Charlie Johnson, Nick Parker. They remember the strange foreign syllables like a number" (132). This renaming or superficial exchange of identities, seems related to the metamorphoses inherent in the assimilation process.

Throughout In the Skin of a Lion, the transformations and traumas of the assimilation process are often echoed by settings and occurrences which, though metonymic, have paradigmatic and thematic significance. One symbolically charged, and visually striking, location is the tannery where many of the immigrants work. Here the men remove and dye the skins of animals. The process is described in the following terms:

Circular pools had been cut into the stone - into which the men leapt waist-deep within the reds and ochres and greens, leapt in embracing the skins of recently slaughtered animals. In the round wells four-foot in diameter they heaved and stomped, ensuring the dye went solidly into the pores of the skin that had been part of a live animal the previous day. And the men stepped out in colours up to their necks, pulling wet hides out after them so it appeared they had removed the skin from their

own bodies. They leapt into different colours as if into different countries. (130)

The skinning of animals as well as the dyeing process can be metaphorically related to the immigrants's cultural transformation. They face a stripping away of all that is original and its replacement by something foreign. In their various colours, the men feel "like an actress unable to return to the real world from a role" (132). The cultural grafting that the various immigrants experience is as superficial as the dye which covers the men's bodies at day's end. In the showers after work the men fear that:

they would be forever contained in that livid colour, only their brains free of it. And then the blue suddenly dropped off, the colour disrobed itself from the body, fell in piece to their ankles, and they stepped out, in the erotica of being made free. (132)

As well, the dyeing process, not unlike assimilation, is difficult and traumatic. The chemicals leave the men with acidic burns and a permanent, repulsive odour.

Another method of reinforcing the ideas of cultural and linguistic metamorphosis is through the repeated inclusion of a variety of metamorphosing creatures. These animals and insects - caterpillars, frogs, and especially moths - undergo a profound morphological change in the course of their life cycles. Often these metamorphosing creatures are juxtaposed

with or explicitly compared to assimilating immigrants. It is a "blue moth" which leads the young Patrick through the night to the Finnish loggers skating in the woods (20). Shortly after watching the foreign loggers, separated from Patrick by language, he sees damsel flies, and notes to himself that they "need something to translate their breath" (10). The immigrants attending the drama festival at the waterworks are described as "mothlike" (115). The moth, one of the most common motifs in the novel, is also associated with several characters, notably Patrick and Temelcoff, who experience a fundamental change in outlook as the story unfolds. Their respective conversions can be equated with the metamorphoses of the theatre and the immigrants.

Conversion: Social and Historical Inclusion

As the novel progresses, there is a conversion in the outlook and circumstances of Patrick, Caravaggio, and Temelcoff which is as fundamental and dramatic as the metamorphoses of the theatrical world or the assimilation process. This metamorphosis of character produces contextual equivalences with these other areas of subject matter, and is one of the central dynamics of the story. Initially, the men are solitary outsiders. Wary of intimacy, and cut off from community, their personalities are dominated by isolationism and individualism. Their love affairs and friendships with the

women bring about a moderation of these extreme anti-social attitudes. Through such interactions, the men are drawn out of their shells and begin a reconciliation with humanity. Eventually they are transformed into family men; they befriend each other, make connections in the community, and begin to have a stake in society. Patrick and the immigrants overcome the barriers of language and culture between them to form friendships. The men's conversion parallels the immigrants' assimilation. While the men are overcoming their self-imposed exclusion from the world, the immigrants are surmounting linguistic barriers and outsider mentalities to take their place in society. There is a growing sense of inclusivity, interdependence, and interrelatedness as the stories and lives of these men and women are interwoven. This is reinforced by the inter-textual nature of Ondaatje's narrative. Finally there is movement away from historical exclusion towards a revision of history that is more inclusive. Ondaatje utilizes the paradigms of naming/anonymity, light/darkness, and articulateness/inarticulateness, to promote historical inclusion.

The initial non-involved, self-sufficient mind-sets of the male characters has already been documented. However, the attitudes of the surviving men, Patrick, Caravaggio, and Temelcoff, are profoundly altered by their encounters with women. These meetings and the resulting relationships precipitate a movement out of isolationism by these men. It is

through these interactions that the male characters take their first tentative steps toward community.

Clara and Alice rescue Patrick from his self-absorption, reductionism, and loneliness. They make him aware of the significance of others as well as the desirability of intimacy and social interaction. While thinking of his time in the country with Clara and Alice, Patrick "feels more community" than at any other time in his life (79). During his romantic involvement with Clara, Patrick feels as if "he had come back to the world" (70). His love for Clara "opened him up" (66). When she leaves him Patrick retreats into himself, going back to his reductionist ways. It is Alice who halts this retreat. She enters his life "to save him, to veer him to some reality" (88). Patrick's subsequent relationship with Alice is the most fulfilling experience of his life. Comparing his former and present circumstances, Patrick comes to believe that Alice "has delivered him out of nothing" (152).

The extremely reclusive, introverted, and anti-social natures of Temelcoff and Caravaggio are also modified by their encounters with women. Temelcoff's rescue of Alice on the bridge, and the few moments they spend together afterwards, marks a turning point in his life. His fascination with her, his quest to discover who she is, constitutes his first interest in meaningful social interaction since his arrival in Canada. Through her, he becomes aware of alternate perspectives: "[h]e sees the landscape as something altered,

no longer so familiar that it is invisible to him. Nicholas Temelcoff walks now seeing Parliament Street from the point of view of the woman" (48). Likewise, Caravaggio's encounter with the rich woman Anne helps transform his withdrawn nature. Anne treats him with kindness and generosity, making him want to reach out to others. Caravaggio realizes he must choose between "descent or companionship" (188). Acheson also sees this meeting as signifying a crossing of class barriers (108).

Following these breakthroughs, Patrick, Caravaggio, and Temelcoff feel more capable of forming friendships. They forge ties between themselves and with others. It is through Alice that Patrick comes to know and befriend Nicholas Temelcoff. Following Alice's death, and prior to his imprisonment, Patrick entrusts Hana to Temelcoff's care. After his release, Temelcoff hugs Patrick to welcome him back, and Patrick sees this embrace as "[t]he grip of the world" (210). In prison, Patrick "turned from himself" to warn Caravaggio of an impending racial attack, forgetting for a moment his non-involved stance (212). This salvation marks the beginning of a relationship between the two. When Patrick comes back to Toronto, a grateful Caravaggio and his wife Giannetta "became his friends," helping him to adjust after his incarceration (224).

Patrick even makes connections with the immigrants, crossing linguistic and cultural barriers to forge ties with "these strangers who in the past had seemed to him like dark

blinds on his street . . ." (113). Through Alice, Patrick comes to know many of the immigrants. Trying to find clover for his pet iguana at a Macedonian market, he succeeds in learning the Macedonian word for the animal, and this translation is "a breakthrough" (112). The grocers, intrigued that he has such a creature, gather around to learn more about him. They invite him to lunch where suddenly "surrounded by friendship, concern," Patrick finds himself crying (113). Having "been alone too long," Patrick is touched by such basic human interactions (88). From this point forward he starts to look upon the immigrants more as potential friends than strangers. He begins to enjoy a sense of community.

The men's transformation into family men is the most compelling and convincing proof of their reconciliation with humanity. Though initially loners, by story's end Patrick, Caravaggio, and Temelcoff have each taken this step. Nothing indicates a willingness to embrace the world more than starting a family. Reference is made to the fact that Temelcoff has a wife and children. Caravaggio marries Giannetta, who proves to be a stabilizing force in a life full of reckless adventures. Patrick comes to relish family life with Alice and her daughter Hana. When Alice is killed, he adopts Hana. While standing on the fire escape of Alice's apartment, watching a sunset with a number of immigrant families, Patrick is "suddenly aware that he had a role" (126). He has evolved into a social being.

This conversion in outlook is expressed in political terms. Alice says to Patrick several times, "How can I convert you?" (135). She is speaking of the class struggle and the socialist cause. Patrick does not "believe the language of politics," tending initially to be anarchistic in his views, and rejects these overtures (123). However, in a broader sense he eventually comes to embrace Alice's principles. Greenstein notes that the loggers in the opening segment "'move from right to left'" (7)(118). He asserts that this movement coincides with "Ondaatje's political direction in this novel" for "Patrick must soon move outside his fenestrated cocoon to join the larger community . . ." (118). Patrick's integration into the community and involvement with others constitutes a move from individualism to collectivism. Though Patrick participates in acts of sabotage, his revolution is more personal, involving a complete change in the way he sees himself and his place in the world.

The metamorphoses in the men's characters is implied in a variety of subtle and symbolic ways. Early on, after completing a "spirit painting" (75) of him, Clara tells Patrick that his "soul is pliable" (78). This seems to suggest the possibility of a fundamental altering of his outlook, foreshadowing a change that does occur. Like the assimilating immigrants, the men are frequently juxtaposed to moths, the most common symbol of metamorphosis in the novel. During his prison break, Caravaggio is covered in paint which stiffens as

it dries. He finds it difficult "to move in his cocoon . . ." (180). In his daydreams, Patrick imagines the waitress who serves him breakfast every day to be "a goddess" who has the power "to transform the one she touched" (112). Patrick is conscious of, and others notice, his changing nature. Encountering him after their breakup, Clara notes that he is "less neutral now" (98). Patrick feels "new even to himself" (54).

There is a gradual interweaving of the lives of almost all the characters as the narrative progresses. This technique reinforces the ideas of inclusivity, interdependence, and interconnectedness. Bennet and Brown note that Ondaatje weaves a "gothic web of interrelations" in many of his fictions (570). This is true of The English Patient, in which the stories of a collection of culturally diverse characters become interconnected. Initially, In the Skin of a Lion is a tale of lives lived in isolation. However, each of the characters is eventually connected to all the rest, either directly or indirectly, by bonds of friendship or love. This inclusion parallels both the immigrants' integration into society and the men's familial and community connections. Patrick senses this, comparing, in his own mind, the interactions and interrelatedness of all their lives with the solos and chorus of a band:

The street-band had depicted perfect company, with an ending full of embraces after the solos had made

everyone stronger, more delineated. His own life was no longer a single story but part of a mural, which was a falling together of accomplices.

(144-45)

The growing interrelation of the characters is echoed by what Acheson calls the "richly intertextual" nature of the Ondaatje's novel (107). In the Skin of a Lion includes many allusions to, and quotations from, works and writings both classical and modern. Among the authors dealt with explicitly are Conrad, T.S. Eliot, and Baudelaire. The works of many more are alluded to subtly. Just as his characters come, in time, to depend on each other, Ondaatje borrows from the literary heritage to enrich his fiction and mirror the theme of interdependence.

The men overcome their internal personality barriers of isolationism and self-centredness to form familial, friendly, and community relationships. In a parallel way, the immigrants take their place in society by conquering language barriers as well as overcoming their sense of themselves as outsiders. The Macedonian immigrant, Temelcoff, is a representative of both types of exclusion; he experiences the linguistic and cultural isolation characteristic of the immigrant experience as well as sharing the naturally introverted personality and sensibility of Patrick and Caravaggio. However, he succeeds in overcoming these social and personal obstacles. Temelcoff takes English lessons and makes himself fluent. He makes

friends, gets married, has children, and prospers financially: "He is a citizen here, in the present, successful with his own bakery" (149). Temelcoff, along with many of the other immigrants, ends up feeling himself a part his new country.

The subject of historical exclusion has already been examined. It features a forgetting of the identities and contributions of marginalized people, and the expropriation of their accomplishments by the powerful, who create official history. The excluded people are associated with the symbolic ideas of anonymity, inarticulateness, and darkness. However, as the novel progresses there is movement towards a "historical revisionism" (Greenstein 121), that is more inclusive in nature and that parallels the social inclusion which the characters experience. During this revision, the stories of those who are typically regarded as historically insignificant, are told. In the symbolic language of the text, they are named, made articulate, and emerge out of the darkness which has shrouded them. On a personal level, many of the characters become aware of past events of which they had been previously ignorant. They come to appreciate their role in and contribution to history.

There are both public and private dimensions to this inclusive revision of history. Ondaatje has expressed an interest in writing "about the unofficial thing that was happening" in history (qtd in Bok 18). Greenstein contends that In the Skin of a Lion "challenges traditional historical

accounts" (122). The entire novel can be seen as a fictional documentation of the stories of marginalized characters; it chronicles the lives and experiences of minor actresses, poor immigrants, and manual labourers in great detail. They become historically articulate in this way. The inclusion of such unofficial history undercuts, modifies, and completes the record. One of the introductory quotes to In the Skin of a Lion is by John Berger: "Never again will a single story be told as though it were the only one" (iii). Greenstein contends that these words should remind one of "multiple perspectives" (117), and by implication the existence of alternate, unofficial histories.

Hutcheon asserts that a novelist has the "creative power . . . to name the unnamed of history" (104). Patrick's attempted sabotage of the waterworks is motivated, in part, by his outrage that the poor, like himself, who worked, and in some cases died on the project, have been forgotten. After confronting Harris there, his first act is to identify himself. He says: "I worked for you, Mr. Harris. I helped build the tunnel I just swam through. . . . I'm Patrick Lewis" (235). Patrick, acting as a representative of the nameless, forgotten labourers, forces Harris to acknowledge their contributions and mistreatment. He also makes Harris aware of the life and death of Alice Gull, the actress whose performance art was a reflection of the immigrant experience.

Her story is obscure to Harris, but the memory of her death is "indelible" to Patrick (241).

On a personal level, Patrick comes to know things about those closest to him of which he had been ignorant. Patrick spends time researching the struggle of workers to organize unions. He discovers that the foreign loggers he had watched as a child were Finnish. Patrick learns also of the secret former identity of Alice, her miraculous rescue by Temelcoff on the bridge, and the story of her lover Cato who was murdered for his union activities. Whereas darkness is usually associated with untold stories in this novel, Greenstein points out that Patrick's closing words are "'Lights'" (244) (118). This quote occurs in the ending episode of the novel which is temporally adjacent to the beginning section. Patrick is telling Hana to turn on the headlights so she can see better as they drive to Marmora. Despite its contextual appropriateness, Greenstein attributes metaphorical significance to this single word: "[i]n response to his opening question, 'Do you see?' Patrick concludes the novel with 'Lights' to focus on an unbetrayed countryside and an equally betrayed history" (118).

The characters themselves come to appreciate their role in and contribution to history and society. Temelcoff tends not to think about his early days in Canada or his work on the bridge, but Patrick's questions about Alice prompt a change in his thinking: "Patrick's gift, that arrow into the past, shows

him the wealth in himself, how he has been sewn into history. Now he will begin to tell stories" (149). Temelcoff realizes that he has helped create the city and country he now lives in. Similarly, Patrick becomes aware of the crucial role he and his fellow labourers have played in building the infrastructure of the city. He is "transformed from mere observer into active participant" (Greenstein 127). In the waterworks Harris says to him, "[y]ou must realize you are like these places, Patrick. You're as much of the fabric as the aldermen and the millionaires" (238). Patrick's realization of this may account for his decision not to carry out his plans to blow up the waterworks, for they are a monument to the workers.

Ondaatje has produced contextual equivalences between the conversion of the male characters' sensibilities, the metamorphoses of the assimilating immigrants, and the transformations of the theatre. Further, he has drawn parallels between the familial and friendly relationships of the men, the social integration of the immigrants, and the historical inclusion of marginalized people in general. All of this is achieved without disturbing the realistic nature of the narrative.

Chapter Four: Similarity and Equivalency

There is a tendency, in the earlier stages of this novel, to emphasize the differences and divisions amongst the characters and groups of characters. Exclusions based on wealth, power, ethnicity, language, and sensibility are highlighted. However, in the latter stages of the novel, there is an increasing stress placed on the essential similarity of these characters, and indeed people in general, regardless of such differences. This movement is manifested in a variety of ways. The men, despite diverse backgrounds, possess strikingly similar personalities. This equivalency in their natures is reinforced by a host of interchangeable textual references to them as well as by an absence of any distinguishing physical descriptions. Similar linking techniques are applied to the various female characters. The two actresses, Clara and Alice, so skilled at assuming different identities in the theatrical world, exchange roles as the love interest in Patrick's life. There are numerous examples of both figurative and literal changes of identity, and the characters tend to switch roles in each others' lives. This in itself implies equivalency. The men and immigrants are involved in parallel struggles to overcome barriers of sensibility or culture. The strong socialist current that runs through the book promotes the ideas of equality and levelling. Finally, there is an increasing emphasis on what is universal in the human

condition, the emotions and experiences which are common to all.

The similarity in the men's outlooks and the parallel circumstances they find themselves in, suggest equivalences between them. Notwithstanding their diverse backgrounds and conditions in life, each of the men - Hazen, Patrick, Caravaggio, Temelcoff, Small, and Harris - are linked by a common sensibility or nature. They tend initially to be solitary, withdrawn, uncommunicative, wary of intimacy, and interested obsessively in the perfection and intricacies of their respective trades. In Clara's words, they are "shaved down and focused" (70). Despite the varying of perspectives between these male characters throughout the novel, there is a sense that the story is being seen through the same eyes. Their reactions to the world are so similar that they seem to be incarnations of a type. Both the immigrants and the men share the experience of being outsiders, and both groups manage to overcome barriers of sensibility and/or language to take their places in society.

Ondaatje also equates the male characters by describing them in interchangeable terms. Small is "a spinner" (57) in the financial world while Temelcoff "is a spinner" because of his acrobatics while working on the bridge (34). Temelcoff is so sure-footed as he operates on the scaffolding that "he could be blindfolded" (35). Similarly, Hazen can "assemble river dynamite with his eyes closed" (18) and Patrick is able

to "blindfold himself and move around a room" without hitting anything (79). Caravaggio makes his living as a thief and Small is characterized as "a thief" because of his unscrupulous business dealings (58). At the masquerade party, Patrick comes "dressed as a thief" (224) and another time is as "quiet as a thief" as he sneaks out of Alice's apartment (127). Ondaatje further enhances this sense of equivalency by not giving detailed or distinguishing physical descriptions of any of these men. This implies interchangeability, in some sense, and thus suggests equivalency.

Besides these general similarities in character and circumstances, the men are equated by symbolic devices which are both contextual and naturalistic. The most widespread of these is the mirror. In this text mirrors are used metaphorically to imply a basic similarity between different people. When Ambrose and Patrick finally come face to face, there is "[a] mutual excitement, as if each were looking into a mirror" (93). This is fitting in that both men possess similar personalities and have at different times played the role of Clara's lover. The mirror is used to suggest a basic similarity between Patrick and the immigrants he works alongside, suggesting equivalency despite differences of language and culture. Patrick thinks that, "[t]he people on the street, the Macedonians and Bulgarians were his only mirror. He worked in the tunnels with them" (112).

Clara and Alice are also equated. As actresses, they play a variety of roles, and adopt different personas. Clara and Alice also alternate in the role of Patrick's lover. At first Patrick is obsessed with Clara. When she leaves him she says: "[d]on't worry Patrick. Things fill in. People are replaced" (72). Alice replaces Clara in Patrick's life and when she dies it is implied, both at the end of this novel, and the beginning of The English Patient, that Patrick goes back to Clara. Patrick even begins to equate the two women in his own mind. At one point, feeling "[h]ungry for Clara, he thinks about Alice . . ." (78). Patrick comes to associate the women's exchanging of roles in his life with their dramatic metamorphoses, believing it "was all a game of theatre the two of them had performed against him" (89). Thinking of their entrances and exits in his life Patrick marvels at "the way Clara dissolved and suddenly disappeared from him, or the way Alice came to him, it seemed in a series of masks or painted faces . . ." (128).

In fact, all of the female characters are subtly equated through a variety of linking techniques and inconspicuous textual references. Following Caravaggio's escape from prison, he breaks into a cabin, from which he phones his wife Giannetta. The owner, Anne, catches him, and during their subsequent conversation, Caravaggio feels "relaxed with her - is if this was a continuation of his conversation with Giannetta" (201). The equating may be sensed in something as

natural as a daughter's resemblance to her mother. While Patrick, "watched Hana, her face drifted into Alice's and back again as if two glass negatives merged, then moved apart" (137). When each new female character, even the minor ones, are introduced, reference is made to their earrings. These references serve to subtly link the different women. Patrick remembers Alice losing one of her earrings and adds his own remarks: "[c]an't find my earring, does it matter? As if another women would find it" (153).

The alternation of Clara and Alice in Patrick's life coincides with a host of literal and figurative switching of identities and exchanging of roles throughout the novel. Since the characters move so easily in and out of each others' lives, interchangeability and thus equivalency are implied. There are also parallel actions. Greenstein makes reference to an episode in which Patrick and Hazen save a cow that has fallen into a river, noting that "this levelling act of salvation will be repeated in different forms throughout the novel . . ." (120). Temelcoff saves Alice when she falls off the bridge, Alice saves Patrick from his reductionism, and Patrick saves Caravaggio when he has his throat cut in prison. Temelcoff comes to regard Alice as his "twin" after their unlikely and pivotal meeting (49).

Cryptic episodes also play a part in the promotion of equivalency. The passage regarding Small's disappearance and "the Bertillon identification system" is particularly

suggestive (55). This system identifies people by measuring the exact lengths of various body parts. Because the police have Small's "Bertillon record. . . . During the fever of the case over 5,000 people claimed to be Ambrose Small" (55). Even women, and men whose appearances are very different from Small, present themselves as Ambrose in the hopes of acquiring his fortune. This episode seems strange and tangential unless one sees in it a suggestion of equivalency. Clara tells a analogous story of "four redbone hounds, with no names" that she and her father shave and paint with names and numbers to deter theft (73). They paint "DICKENS 1, DICKENS 2, DICKENS 3. . . DICKENS 4" on these dogs (73). Again, this incident seems inconsequential unless one takes it as a suggestion of a broader equivalence among the characters. Later, while shaving Patrick, Clara writes "DICKENS 5 on his forehead" (98).

The political subject matter tends to promote a sense of levelling, which is metaphorically related to other types of equivalency. Alice's socialism, with its stress on the erasing of class distinctions and the promotion of equality amongst all people is one source. Bok contends that the novel features "a political argument for communal solidarity . . ." (13). Greenstein draws parallels between political levelling and the environmental levelling of both dynamiting and logging, which are recurring topics in the novel (120).

As the characters emerge from their various forms of isolationism and become integrated into society, there is a

gradual switch in emphasis from the forces and differences that divide people to the universal experiences and emotions shared by humanity. The title of Ondaatje's novel is taken from The Epic of Gilgamesh, an ancient Sumerian epic. This story deals with themes which are universal: friendships that cut across differences, empathy, and above all the realization of mortality.

The characters themselves begin to find common ground. Alice's performance art reflects the common experience of being an outsider. While the immigrants see it is an embodiment of their condition, it is equally applicable to Patrick, who with his self-imposed separation from the world, is another sort of outsider. Patrick begins to realize that "though not an immigrant . . . he too is an outsider and powerless . . ." (Hutcheon 97). He "comes to find a place among the other outsiders" (Hutcheon 94).

There is an increasing stress on fellowship and universal emotions which transcend barriers of language and culture. Patrick cannot converse with the foreign workers he labours alongside, yet achieves a sort of unspoken fellowship with them through their shared experiences and feelings. One source of common ground is physical labour. The men working in the tunnels remove their shirts to get relief from the heat, nailing them into the earth walls: "Patrick can recognize other tunnellers on the way home by the ragged hole in the back of their shirts. It is a code among them" (107). Patrick

also finds sources of communication which transcend language barriers. At week's end Patrick goes with the other men to a steam room where a radio plays opera music. Patrick "lay there, not wanting translation, letting the emotion of the music fall onto him" (136). Similarly, humour is a bridge across the barrier of language. Patrick attends a Chaplin film which is crowded with immigrants and their families:

he found himself laughing out loud, joining the others in their laughter. And he caught someone's eye, the body bending forward to look at him, who had the same realization - that this mutual laughter was conversation (138).

Ondaatje uses similarity of character, interchangeable textual references, and parallel circumstances to promote the equivalence system based on the ideas of equality, similarity, and equivalence. He also utilizes recurring subject matter, such as socialism, that is contextually appropriate, yet metaphorically significant, to reinforce this theme. Once again, this is achieved in a realistic manner through the repetition of contextual equivalences.

Conclusion

The goal of this thesis was to come to a fuller understanding of the poetic nature of a complex novel, In the Skin of a Lion, through a close examination of its organizing principles. It was asserted that the essence of the poetic dimension of realistic novels involves the creation of subtle and diffuse systems of equivalence which are at all times subject to contextual control (Lodge 115). This practice preserves the qualities of realism and plausibility which are integral components of the genre. This study finds equivalence in the repetition of different subject matter that is both contextually appropriate and metaphorically related, and it perceives parallels between the evolution of character and the progression of plot. It is these subtly manifested equivalence systems that give In the Skin of a Lion its sense of underlying unity and poetic resonance, and that make it work as art.

A basic assumption was that despite its seemingly chaotic structure, this novel was crafted in such a way as to be poetically unified. A passage from In the Skin of a Lion seems to echo this premise particularly well: "[t]he first sentence of every novel should be: 'Trust me, this will take time but there is order here, very faint, very human.' Meander if you want to get to town" (146). Accepting this as a starting

point, the critic should then try and understand how a novel works and identify the nature of this underlying order. The thesis was essentially a search for the organizing principles or major equivalence systems that produce this unity and resonance. It attempted to make explicit the novel's basic structures and analyzed three major equivalence systems that are central: the first based on division and exclusion, the second on change, conversion, and metamorphosis, and the third on equivalency and similarity.

Despite the relatively objective nature of the structuralist approach, all criticism is, in large part, subjective. This analysis does not make any pretensions about being definitive. It is simply one critic's attempt to impose a sort of order based on certain consistent perceptions about the way in which In the Skin of a Lion is organized, in the hope of understanding the richness and complexity of the novel. Different critics may assert other equivalence systems which are equally valid or more comprehensive. Having conceded this, it seems likely that any critic would touch, though perhaps from a different angle, on some of the same organizing principles.

The analysis deliberately focused on what is intrinsic to the story at the expense of what is extrinsic. Emphasis was placed on equivalences between realistic phenomena, characterizations, and settings, that a reader can sense without benefit of a literary background. The very real

mythological and inter-textual dimensions and resonances of the novel were largely ignored, though they are unquestionably present, both explicitly and implicitly. As one example, some readers may perceive parallels between Patrick's underwater expedition in the tunnel of the waterworks and the implicit allusions to both Gilgamesh's descent to the underworld, and Leggatt's long swim in Joseph Conrad's The Secret Sharer. This aspect of the novel has not been surveyed because it requires background knowledge that the reader may not have.

A structural analysis attempts to explain how and why a novel works more so than what its meaning is. Nevertheless, one would hope that any critical approach would result in a greater understanding of the work. The search for equivalence systems is not just an end in itself but a means to the end of interpretation, a vehicle for penetrating the density of the novel and making informed observations about its meaning.

Interpretation, or the search for meaning in novels, is an endeavour fraught with difficulties because literature is, by its nature, ambiguous. Barthes contends that "a work of literature is a very special semantic system, the aim of which is to put 'meaning' into the world, but not 'a meaning'" and that it generally "consists at one and the same time of the insistent offering of a meaning and the persistent elusiveness of that meaning . . ." ("Criticism" 650). Meanings and messages in novels are inexact and fluid. When one attempts to assert a particular one, the evaluation seems over-simplistic

and inadequate. Adding to the problem of interpretation is the inevitable subjectivity brought to the exercise by any individual critic. Different people will have varying impressions, and perceive diverse meanings and messages in the same literary work. This characteristic of literature is not a drawback, but rather a source of its enduring value to society. Barthes believes that this inherent ambiguity:

explains how it is that a work of literature has such power to ask questions of the world . . . without, however, supplying any answers (no great work is 'dogmatic'): it also explains how a work can go on being reinterpreted indefinitely. . . .
(Criticism 650)

The particular value of the structuralist approach to literary analysis is that it attempts, in a rather objective manner, and through an extraordinarily close reading, to identify the existence and validity of certain basic structures and organizing principles of a novel, about which there can be some degree of consensus. The three major equivalence systems perceived by this critic throughout In the Skin of a Lion are one set of organizing principles, though undoubtedly there are others. The identification of these systems is an original contribution to the study of this novel. Recognizing them gives one explanation of how this work was crafted. Hopefully, these systems also provide some common ground with other critical examinations of the novel.

Further, in discovering and formulating the existence and nature of these organizing principles or equivalence systems, one can not help but make interpretative conclusions about the novel's meanings and messages. The structural method of analysis itself contributes to an enhanced understanding of the novel as a whole and leads naturally to interpretation.

I find that the most convincing meanings and messages of In the Skin of a Lion are suggested by the gradual change in the emphasis placed on the different equivalence systems or themes. Initially, the ideas of exclusion and division predominate as the characters or groups of characters are separated from each other by either ethnicity, language, class, or their own isolationist tendencies. However, as the story continues there are profound metamorphoses in the characters. These conversions in outlook, underscored as they are by a host of symbolic and structural features, signal a transcending of different types of barriers and a general sense of reconciliation, interdependence, and community. Finally, toward the latter stages of the novel, an increasing stress is placed on the essential similarity of people and what is universal in the human experience. If there are general meanings and messages to be taken from In the Skin of a Lion, they seem to be twofold. Firstly, Ondaatje implies that differences between people, whether a result of personality, culture, or circumstances, are insignificant as compared to the needs, experiences, and emotions held in

common. Secondly, it is asserted that humans have the ability to evolve and grow, to alter their outlooks and to think for the better.

Finally, though structuralism is more concerned with understanding than judging, there must be some criteria for distinguishing between the relative merits of different works. Barthes suggests a method for doing this when he equates the operations of literature and language: "[i]n itself, a language cannot be true or false; it is either valid or non-valid. It is valid when it consists of a coherent system of signs" ("Criticism" 649). Literature too must be organized coherently, but in a poetic sense. In my opinion, In the Skin of a Lion does consist of a coherent system of signs, ambiguous and difficult though they are to unravel. One might add that part of this coherence, in realistic novels, involves organizing the poetic dimension within contextual boundaries. I believe that Ondaatje does this effectively; he manages to tell a compelling, intricate story featuring characters that the reader cares about, while simultaneously creating a host of paradigmatic echoes, a series of thematic resonances and reverberations that are generated in a realistic way. It is a very challenging, but ultimately rewarding novel.

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