

“THIS IS ONLY A LOVE STORY:”

DEFINING LOVE AND ITS POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS IN MICHAEL ONDAATJE’S

IN THE SKIN OF A LION

by

Nicole Gerber

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

at

Dalhousie University

Halifax, Nova Scotia

August 2017

© Copyright by Nicole Gerber, 2017

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT...	iii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION...	1
CHAPTER 2. DEFINING LOVE...	4
CHAPTER 3. OTHER OTHERS...	10
CHAPTER 4. POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS...	17
CHAPTER 5. ASPIRATIONS: IN CONCLUSION...	34
BIBLIOGRAPHY...	36

Abstract

This thesis will examine how Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* formulates an ethic of love for social connection. Using Sara Ahmed's theories on "encounters" and "touch," as well as Alain Badiou's ideas on the event of love, this thesis will examine intimacy through the body as a means of defining love and community connection. Intimacy, as a gesture of love, also has political implications in Ondaatje's novel that work toward changing hierarchies of difference and establishing loving or intimate connections between strangers, or even enemies. Such change, as this thesis will demonstrate, is important to shifting fixed notions of economic and political structures.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Michael Ondaatje describes *In the Skin of a Lion* as a “love story,” yet it is a love story that moves beyond any simple romantic formula (160). I will argue throughout this thesis that Ondaatje’s novel formulates a broader love ethic that moves outward from the personal, physical body through intimacy to reach a network of interconnected bodies. Such a love ethic seeks to understand what love can do in the face of social disconnection and divisions and as such has implications for both the social and political realms of personal life. The novel defines “love” in many ways and characterizes it, like Martha Nussbaum, as “a family of sentiments, not a single emotion” (394). In *In the Skin of a Lion*, the body is necessary to every definition of love. The first section of my thesis will work to examine and define various aspects of love in the novel to consider what constitutes the parameters of Ondaatje’s love ethic. Encounter and contact create the meeting point of bodies coming together through skin and touch. Sarah Ahmed and Alain Badiou’s definitions of “encounter” and “event” will inform my understanding of these terms and their complex implications. Ultimately it is through touch that gestures of intimacy are enacted. Intimacy, I will argue, is fundamental to any kind of loving contact that compassionately necessitates and centralizes the experience of the other. My second section will work to understand “other others” as the important recognition of difference in the event of love which shifts one’s central experience to another’s perspective. This shift in turn opens up the ability to understand not just ‘the other,’ but “other others” within a sphere of community (Ahmed, *Encounters* 155). I will then argue that such difference included within a loving community has political implications for the inclusion of others – including strangers and enemies – within a larger love ethic.

Ursula Kluwick notes that “Ondaatje’s third novel, *In the Skin of a Lion* constitutes a definite move into a more political realm” (275). However, for some critics, this shift into the realm of the political has been controversial. Many of the arguments focus on the effectiveness of aesthetics for social action. For example, both Julie Beddoes and Frank Davey take issue with the novel’s aesthetics and sensuality, arguing that it “blots out politics” and “obscures” difference, respectively (Beddoes 208; Davey 152). While the larger scholarly debate about the relationship between art and politics is beyond the scope of this essay, it is important to note the effect it has had on the reception of this novel. The debates, and the resulting cynicism, about Ondaatje’s political engagement perhaps obscure the very thing his novels are trying to do: centralize the intimate and shift the political into the personal experience. Jacques Rancière’s insights on politics and art are perhaps helpful in thinking of this shift; he writes, “art does not become critical or political by ‘moving beyond itself’, or ‘departing from itself’, and intervening in the ‘real world’”; rather it is in art’s ability to *move* the personal body through emotions that “dissensus” or “rupture” takes place (148, 140).

While it is easy to be cynical about Ondaatje’s politics and ignore his larger goal, it is just as easy to be cynical about love itself and the relational gestures that make love possible. Love becomes trite, clichéd, and banal in a hyper-cynical and hyper-critical context. bell hooks in her book, *All About Love: New Visions*, suggests there is a “mounting lovelessness in our culture,” in which love is met with a “callous cynicism” that “declare[s] the meaninglessness of love [and] its irrelevance” (xxviii, xvii). Perhaps this cynicism causes us to lose something in a scholarly analysis of a text like *In the Skin of a Lion*. Indeed, hooks adds, “it is especially hard to speak of love” as scholars when we

are “taught to believe that the mind...is the seat of learning” (xxvii). It is certainly a risk to attempt a scholarly and theoretical approach to love and intimacy, and then apply it to the formulation of political connections. Scholars attempt to define words, like love, through a series of referents, connotations, and textual examples, while poets, like Ondaatje, leap into words and discover their meanings from the inside. My goal in writing this thesis is to work through both perspectives in order to formulate a definition of love relevant to Ondaatje’s novel and then understand how love informs the novel’s politics. Poetic aesthetics serves the goal of forming or re-inventing meaning, not, as Beddoes argues, blotting it out. I want to think through experience itself – “the event” of love as Alain Badiou terms it – and how that event is formulated and then embodied in personal experience (28). Love can in turn have political implications, but only through its personal resonances, as I will argue later in this thesis.

CHAPTER 2. DEFINING LOVE

In *In the Skin of a Lion*, bodies are constantly meeting; abruptly coming together and leaving a mark: Nicholas catches Alice mid fall off the bridge, dislocating his arm; Giannetta kicks Caravaggio in the face when he surprises her on their first encounter; Anne's canoe knocks into Caravaggio's canoe; and Patrick clings onto Alice in his apartment. Characters crash into each other and grab onto one another: what do such encounters involve and create? Badiou's theories on encounter from his short book, *In Praise of Love*, provide an insight into this question; he writes, "love always starts with an encounter... an event" (28). In speaking about "encounter," Sarah Ahmed writes, "the term encounter suggests a meeting, but a meeting which involves surprise and conflict" (*Encounters* 6). Ahmed adds, "encounters involve the production of meaning as a form of sociality. That is, meanings are produced precisely in the intimacy of the "'more than one'...by 'coming together' at a particular time and place" (15). For Badiou and Ahmed, the event of the encounter, in its surprise and randomness, is what opens the possibility of love and intimacy through the recognition of the other. Ahmed asks, "how does identity itself become instituted through encounters with others that surprise, that shift the boundaries of the familiar, of what we assume that we know?" (7). The answer, according to Badiou, is that the encounter means a complete transformation of one's perspective: "Starting out from something that is simply an encounter, a trifle, you learn that you can experience the world on the basis of difference and not only in terms of identity" (16). Furthermore, when the encounter turns into an opening of love, it can have "universal implications": "Love isn't simply about two people meeting and their inward-looking relationship: it is a construction, a life that is being made, no longer from the

perspective of One but from the perspective of Two” (17, 29). The universal application of loving encounters is the effect of “experience[ing] the world on the basis of difference and not only in terms of identity” (16). It is this universality of love that has the most relevance for Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion*. However, before jumping to a universal concept of love, it is important to think about how encounter moves to an event of love.

If the encounter reconfigures a formulation of identity and difference – “the world...experienced, developed and lived from the point of view of difference and not identity” – then it is in the physical body that the transformation occurs (Badiou 22). As one of the goals of this essay is to explore definitions of love through the novel and corresponding scholarly theories, then here I must also think through a definition of intimacy. Lauren Berlant writes, “rethinking intimacy calls out not only for redescription but for transformative analyses” (286). Transforming intimacy means moving beyond solely sexual and romantic intimacies, or those intimacies which are defined through “hegemonic fantasies” or “traditional sites of pleasure” alone, but include any gesture that constitutes an act of care and love (Berlant 286, 287). Intimacy, in this sense, functions as an act of love. Martha Nussbaum defines love as “a concern for the beloved as an end rather than a mere instrument; respect for the human dignity of the beloved... all repudiate the obsessive search for personal status and honor in favor of reciprocity and vulnerability” (382). In this context, reciprocity and vulnerability are ideas important to the process of intimacy.

In *In the Skin of a Lion*, Nicholas and Alice’s intimate encounter constitutes a particularly embodied intimacy that enables and defines the event of love. In catching Alice when she falls off the bridge, Nicholas meets her for the first time. In this “stranger

encounter” Nicholas dislocates his shoulder in order to save Alice’s life: “The right arm... all agony now – but his hand’s time had been immaculate, the grace of the habit, and he found himself a moment later holding the figure against him dearly” (32). The language used to describe this meeting is intimate and loving, both in Nicholas’ gracefulness, suggesting an intimacy with himself, and in the holding of Alice “dearly,” suggesting an already established love or care toward her as a stranger, yet fellow human. What constitutes such intimacy is the precision and care that Nicholas applies to his gestures. At his work “swinging up in the rafters of the trestle,” Nicholas “knows the precise height he is over the river, how long his ropes are, how many seconds he can free-fall to the pulley” (35). In short, Nicholas cares for and protects himself in his work and his actions represent an intimacy with his own body and the space it occupies. When Alice is put at risk, Nicholas extends that intimacy in the precision of his gestures. In their resulting interaction, Alice never speaks, yet she cares for his arm, wrapping it in her discarded nun’s habit, and holding him “like a lover” as they walk (33). Nicholas too feels a sense of care for her: “He just wanted her there near him, right all around them, where he could look after her, bring her out of the shock with some grace” (37). When Alice leaves she closes the encounter with an intimate gesture by kissing him “softly as [a] moth” (39). The violent and sudden accident of two bodies coming together in space enables an intimacy to be formed between two strangers, or as Ahmed writes, “embodiment is what opens out the intimacy of ‘myself’ with others” (*Encounters* 47). The intimacies they share transform them: they leave a physical mark in the healing of Nicholas’ dislocated shoulder, and give Alice the opportunity to leave her former life and completely re-invent her identity.

In the Skin of a Lion is immersed in references to skin and the marks left on the skin's surface. In her essay "Expeausition: Ondaatje's Skin-Effects," Sarah Jackson writes, "from the very title of *In the Skin of a Lion*, taken from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the reader is confronted with the transitory and mobile quality of the body's surface: skin" (32). Skin is the surface that enables the movement of intimate and connecting gestures between bodies. Jean-Luc Nancy writes,

It is the skin...here and there open...continually passing from one to the other, always coming back to itself without either a locus or a place where it can establish a self, and so always coming back to the world, to other bodies to which it is exposed, in the same gesture that exposes them to itself. (205)

The skin's surface works to delineate the boundaries of one's body, yet it also opens outward to the bodies of others. In speaking of her daughter, Hana, Alice says, "I feel she's loaned to me. We're veiled in flesh. That's all" (*Skin* 125). Here, the flesh acts as the boundary of the self or 'soul,' yet the "flesh" is also the locus of touch that prefigures the possibility of connection. Nancy writes, "the gesture at the limit is touch... touching is being at the limit – and this is indeed being itself" (206). If touch is the limit of one's self, then it opens up the possibility of moving beyond those limits to another's body. In resisting Patrick's advances, Clara won't "let him kiss her or hold her standing up – [she] didn't want all their bodies touching, that possibility" (*Skin* 63). The "possibility" here is the movement from the "locus" of self to the connection with another. If skin is a continuous loop that holds the self, then touch is what enables the disruption of that loop to include others.

Clara continuously seeks to place boundaries between herself and Patrick; she tells Patrick, “one of these days, soon, I’ll go,” and even as Patrick holds her, he realizes “he still didn’t know who she was” (67, 72). Yet, despite these moments of delineation and difference, the skin, as the surface of the body, also establishes a permeable surface of dissolving boundaries. Sarah Ahmed writes, “as a border or a frame, the skin performs that peculiar destabilizing logic, calling into question the exclusion of the other from the subject and risking the subject’s becoming (or falling into) the other” (*Encounters* 45). This “destabilization” of “exclusion” is certainly important to Clara and Patrick’s relationship, particularly in their sexual encounters. In one instance of sexual play, Patrick’s semen acts as a metaphor for the dissolution of the body’s surfaces:

I’m going to come. Come in my mouth. Moving forward...he ejaculated, disappearing into her. She crooked her finger, motioning, and he bent down and put his mouth on hers. He took it, the white character, and they passed it back and forth between them till it no longer existed, till they didn’t know who had him like a lost planet somewhere in the body. (68-69)

Sex, as one type of intimate encounter, most obviously highlights the permeation and inclusivity of the body. Yet, Badiou argues that “sex separates”: “in sex, you are really in a relationship with yourself via the mediation of the other” (18-19). Karen Overbye would agree with Badiou in this particular scene of Patrick and Clara’s sexual exploration, remarking that Patrick “experiences his own body through the other” (6). Yet, in this scene Clara also experiences Patrick’s body and self within her own, as shown in the line, “they didn’t know who had him.” Thus, this sexual interaction suggests, if not the opposite of Badiou and Overbye’s arguments, at least the possibility

that the act of sexual pleasure depends on “corporeal generosity” and an opening up of the body to include another’s experience (Ahmed, *Encounters* 49). Thus, this scene demonstrates that sex in fact bridges the experiences of two individual bodies.

In one scene in which Patrick and Alice have sex, the movement of bodies and touch oscillates from a site of differentiation to togetherness to differentiation again:

His hands on her shoulders, his arms straight, so their upper torsos were separate, their faces apart. The brain and eyes interpreting pleasure in the other, these textures that brushed and gripped...He knew now he was the sum of all he had been in his life since he was that boy in the snowy woods, her hands collapsing to hold him against her harder. (151-152)

Here, the act of intimacy moves from defining self to understanding other: marking clear differences and then formulating closeness. Sara Ahmed’s notion of “impression” (borrowed from David Hume) is useful to defining difference and the experience of togetherness simultaneously: “We need to remember the ‘press’ in impression. It allows us to associate the experience of having an emotion with the very affect of one surface upon another, an affect that leaves its mark or trace” (*Emotions* 6). In the event of love one’s respective difference and perspective remains intact, just as Patrick recognizes his own history and selfhood, yet through intimacy an impression is left and the lovers are changed – as Patrick feels Alice “has delivered him out of nothing” (*Skin* 152). Perhaps this mode of understanding difference through intimacy has the most political potential; as Badiou writes, “[love] takes us into key areas of the experience of what is difference and, essentially, leads to the idea that you can experience the world from the perspective of difference...it is an individual experience of potential universality” (17).

CHAPTER 3. OTHER OTHERS

In the Skin of a Lion is a novel particularly attuned to socio-political issues. As Jodi Lundgren notes, “although Ondaatje deliberately chose to distance the story by writing about European immigrants in an earlier era,” we can “read *In the Skin of a Lion* as an implicit critique of the ongoing racial stratification in contemporary Canadian society” (17). One way in which *In the Skin of a Lion* discusses difference is through issues of class, specifically in the divide between rich and poor. Difference, then, is important to the novel’s project. Difference, as a social signifier of ‘otherness,’ is strongly connected to a political, democratic framework that relies on freedom and equality, but is most often put to the test through the division of difference, such as gender, race, class. Yet, it is particularly the moments of intimacy and touch (the limits of the skin opening up from one to another) that enable difference to be recognized and connection established. This is particularly evident in the scene in the Garden of the Blind when Patrick meets Elizabeth.

Patrick enters the Garden of the Blind after he bombs and sets ablaze the Muskoka Hotel in protest against the large economic disparity between the wealthy and working class. He admits to Elizabeth that he is “wanted by the police...for willful destruction of property” (170). Elizabeth is uninterested in this information, but offers “a balm” and places her hands on his face (170). In the context of this scene and Caravaggio’s meeting of Anne at the cottage which I will discuss in detail later, Julie Beddoes notes that “it is interesting that two rich women function as healers” in the novel (210). However, Beddoes does not expand on this note, or make any further interpretation of it. Elizabeth is presumed to be a wealthy woman because she lives in the resort area of

Muskoka. Lines of difference between Patrick and Elizabeth could be drawn across several stratifications – gender, wealth, ability – yet Beddoes only seems to note their class differences, implying that Elizabeth is acting from a position of relative privilege, and therefore performing a duty of care to someone in a lower position. Elizabeth *does* act as a healer to Patrick in this scene, but not in an act of charity with its implications of superiority, but as an act of love, manifested in the intimacy of touch. Their meeting begins in a gesture of touch – her “hand touches his back” – and continues throughout their encounter: “she puts her hands up bluntly to his face and searches him” (169-70). In this act, touch becomes a point of commonality through their respective differences: “a woman with her soft palms covering a tall man’s face, blinding him” (170). By blinding Patrick with her touch, Elizabeth allows him to momentarily “see” from her perspective. Patrick quite literally must shift his senses to mirror Elizabeth’s. Elizabeth offers him her sense of smell and “introduces him to the intimacies of dill and caraway” (169).

While Elizabeth’s influence on Patrick is subtle it suggests a reminder of both stillness and the natural world. In her thesis, Laura Gallant argues that what Elizabeth gives Patrick is an “an attentiveness to life” (39). “Life,” here can be considered synonymous with what is human – or the type of humanness to which I am arguing the novel refers – which is appropriately and concisely defined by Martha Nussbaum: “Real people are bodily and needy; they have a variety of human frailties and excellences; they are, quite simply, human beings, neither machines nor angels” (383). For Gallant, this moment between Elizabeth and Patrick is “life-affirming,” which leads to a type of civility: “to be civil is to see the value of forming bonds with the living” (39-40). This is important to how Elizabeth functions as a healer: by re-connecting Patrick to

fundamental, life-affirming intimacy between people, which, in his grief after losing Alice, Patrick has abandoned. This moment involves what Badiou terms “the paradox of identical difference,” in that the love event gives each of them the ability to view “the world through the prism of [their] difference,” thus creating a new perspective of the world that does not “simply represent what fills [one’s] own individual gaze” (25-26). Furthermore, in their “seeing” difference, there is also an understanding of their individual perspectives: “[Patrick] feels she receives all of his qualities, in this still garden” (171). It would be easy to fall into the language of commodity culture here and suggest that this constitutes an ‘exchange’ of perspectives, yet it is important to note that Ondaatje does not use such language. Instead the word “receive” is used to suggest an acceptance and understanding of “qualities” between Patrick and Elizabeth beyond their commodity value. Patrick wants nothing from Elizabeth and Elizabeth wants nothing from Patrick, yet their encounter allows a flow of ‘selves’ between them.

In attempting to understand this flow of “corporeal generosity” without simply dissolving the boundaries (and differences) that would move “‘my body’ to ‘our body,’” Sara Ahmed suggests what she terms “economies of touch,” which are defined through the sociality and socialization of bodies (*Encounters* 48-49). One of the ways in which she defines “economies of touch” as “the memory of...different touches” is helpful in thinking about how touch between two people can move outward into a sphere of community. Ahmed writes, “the forms of the skin are a living history of this other’s encounter with other others” (155). Indeed, this concept of the touch of “other others” is almost exactly repeated in one of Ondaatje’s poems from *Secular Love*: “Kissing the stomach/ kissing your scarred/ skin boat. History/ is what you’ve travelled on/ and take

with you/ We've each had our stomachs kissed by strangers/ to the other/ and as for me/ I bless everyone/ who kissed you here" (*Poems* 151). Shou-Nan Hsu's argument about *Secular Love*, which also borrows from Badiou's conception of love, suggests "the protagonist" of the poem "extends his love from loving this woman towards the worlds she has been through. Thus his care must also cover strangers" (121). In this way, Hsu argues, "Ondaatje comes to propose a life-centered ethics that emphasizes the interconnectedness of lives as well as mutual care and respect among them" (112). Touch, then, as the extension of the "skin boat" in which we move and through which we experience others, encompasses a gesture of care that extends even beyond "the perspective of Two" outward to a sphere of community (Badiou 29).

There are many pairings of "two" throughout *In the Skin of a Lion*: Patrick's two lovers, Clara's two lovers, Alice's two lovers, two healers, and "two representatives of the capitalist class" in Ambrose and Harris (Beddoes 206). Beddoes argues that "these repetitions, and the interlocking triangles of the relationships, suggest that people and lovers are, ultimately, interchangeable" (207). From a capitalist perspective which reduces one's value to one's level of production, Beddoes' argument is an accurate depiction of the events in the novel – Clara and Alice are both actresses, Patrick and Ambrose are both white settlers – yet this point of view is extremely reductive of the characters' intimate relationships and their acts of loving. This love ethic can be articulated through a polyamorous framework, for although Clara, Patrick, and Alice are not in an explicitly polyamorous relationship, their modes of loving involve the polyamorous ethics of love that is "non-exclusive and potentially unlimited" and based on "integrity and equality" (Klesse 205, 201).

In her relationship with Patrick, Alice shares her intimacy with Clara with him: “Alice’s tenderest speech to him...concerned her missing of Clara. ‘I love Clara,’ she said to him, the lover of Clara. ‘I miss her. She made me sane for all those years. That was important for what I am now’” (147). Indeed, Patrick meets Alice through Clara, who already have a close relationship with each other. Through the intimacy between Clara and Alice, and in turn through Patrick’s relationship with Clara, Patrick is able to then “see” Alice:

[Alice] climbs back into bed with Clara, puts her arm around her to accept the warmth she has lost by rising...[Patrick’s] mind remains against them, like an impress of his hand on their sleeping flesh...Hungry for Clara, he thinks about Alice as if he has not focused on her before, as if Alice being touched by Clara has grown magically, fully formed. (78)

Through the intimacy of touch here, Patrick, Alice, and Clara are defined in relationship to each other. The “impression” of the various gestures of touch creates an affective change in each, opening up one to another and formulating a love event. However, instead of naming it “polyamory” per se, the novel defines these relationships through “community”: “[Patrick] feels more community remembering [them] than anything in his life. Patrick and the two women” (79). Therefore, the interconnectedness of these “doubles” – the two women – suggests not an interchangeability of archetypical characters, but a polyphony of several voices.

Polyphony is also suggested in one of the epigraphs to the novel – “never again will a single story be told as though it were the only one”¹ – and repeated in the novel’s motif of skins: “each person had their moment when they assumed the skins of wild

¹ Attributed to John Berger

animals, when they took responsibility for the story” (157). Ondaatje uses the metaphor of story-telling to talk back to “official history” and allow the voices of many to be heard, and in so doing he opens up the perspective of one or even two to that of many. Frank Davey argues,

‘Who is speaking’ is an extremely important question in a novel that claims to call into question the large number of people – women, workers, immigrants – who are silenced by the ‘official histories’ of Canadian culture. The novel explicitly argues that it is Patrick who takes up ‘the skin of a lion’ and assumes responsibility for the narration of the lives of those whom official history leaves silent. (144-45)

While Patrick is certainly used most frequently as the perspective from which the novel is told, I disagree that the novel *explicitly* argues that Patrick is solely responsible for the voices of those that have been silenced. Instead, I would argue, Patrick facilitates the shift from “One” to others and is involved in the act of taking responsibility for others through care and community, not appropriation. Indeed, Davey gets tangled in an argument trying to find the authoritative speaking voice in the novel, confusing Ondaatje as the author with the framing device of Patrick and Hana as the vehicle of the narrative. Davey overlooks the many instances of multiplicity in the novel.

In his childhood, Patrick experiences much silence and isolation, but through encounters with others, Patrick importantly becomes aware of his small involvement in a larger sphere of community connections:

He saw himself gazing at so many stories...He saw the interactions, saw how each one of them was carried by the strength of something more than themselves.

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. (144-45).

The street-band's music functions as a metaphor for the capability of community – to support and make stronger individual voices through the togetherness and unity of many voices, demonstrated in the embraces at the end of the solos. Through this demonstration, Patrick sees how his own life is not singular, but interconnected within the many relationships he has to those around him, including how his intimate and romantic relationships, particularly with Alice and Clara, connect him to those his lovers have loved. This is particularly evident through Patrick's relationship with Alice's daughter Hana. Patrick says to Alice, "I want to look after Hana...more formally" (158). Patrick's responsibility for Hana is compelled by his closeness with her family, with his intimacy with their past which they allow him to know, and with his newly formed sense of community. Ondaatje writes, "[Patrick] wanted to pick Hana up and embrace her on the street but felt shy, though in games or in a crowded streetcar her arm lay across him as if needing his warmth and closeness. As he did hers" (137). Patrick's own childhood may have been lonely and self-sufficient, but by taking on the role of caregiver to Hana he extends love outside of himself and prevents Hana from experiencing the "gap of love" that he experienced in his youth (157). The body, in its embrace and intimate connections with others, formulates the realm of community. This community is precisely what acts in opposition to the forms of capitalist and neo-liberal individualism present in the novel.

CHAPTER 4. POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

As a novel that engages in a historical re-writing by giving names and voices back to those that have been erased from the historical archives, Ondaatje's political ideas rely on the (imaginary) bodies of those that have been lost. Overbye notes that historically "there has not even been a 'body count' of those who died in the Viaduct and Waterworks projects described in the novel, let alone an acknowledgment of the workers"; as such, "Ondaatje focuses attention on the bodies of men that are not perceived as being historically important... the workers who provide the means of production for the rich" (1). Analogously, Dionne Brand, another Canadian poet and novelist concerned with the relationship between aesthetics and politics, does engage in a type of historical body count (related to the Iraq war) in her long poem *Inventory*. This poem also uses similar methods of "haptic aesthetics" as defined by Milena Marinkova: "this aesthetic ...reli[es] on the bodily, the sensual, the material...such an aesthetic forges an intimately embodied and ethically responsible relationship among audience, author, and text" (4). Brand's reliance on intimacy throughout the poem connects her overtly political message to a particularly personal, bodily experience. These are particularly evident in the lines: "one took care of an itch over his right eye, / not a final act but a simple one, / reflexive" (74). Such delicate examples of the body within an inventory of death provide precarious and gentle reminders that the body still exists. The body continues its presence, its aliveness, and its needs – as Brand writes "the body must" (93). Diana Brydon's argument about *Inventory* is relevant to thinking about Ondaatje's novel. She writes,

[Brand] develops an affective citizenship that is attentive to embodied political subjects...feeling emanates from the intimacy of the human body outward into the range of spatial scales ... from the home, through the community, to the region, the nation, the broader transnational region and the world. (997)

According to Brydon's argument, the body is necessary to thinking about how politics functions on the level of the personal and the ways in which intimacy in turn effects social connections that lead to possible social change.

The personal body in this context is distinct from the body politic. While the body politic imagines the entirety of the political sphere as singular body, it does not allow for the possibility of seeing difference *and* sameness, but homogenizes the personal body into the political. The personal body *may* be political, but the political "body" is not personal or intimate, which is why it is dangerous to conflate the two. That being said, the personal body *is* important to affective citizenship and social and political engagement. Brydon's aim in her argument, as well as mine here, is for the personal body to maintain its difference, without being homogenized into the larger social "body," so that intimacy can be affective/effective as a movement outward from the singular body to a relationship with others. Ahmed defines this as "embodiment":

embodiment as lived experience...moves beyond the privatized realm of 'my body.' Such an understanding of embodiment can be theorized in terms of inter-embodiment, whereby the lived experience of embodiment is always already the social experience of dwelling with other bodies. (47)

The lived experience as a body means we are constantly affected by other bodies, yet within a politically neo-liberal, capitalist structure, the body is self-interested and

concerned only with its own survival and productivity. This is particularly evident in *In the Skin of a Lion*'s engagement with capitalism and the inequalities between the rich and the poor.

In the novel, Commissioner Harris represents a capitalist mindset that suggests individualistic gains through the value of hard work; he says to Patrick, "I was practically *born* in City Hall. My mother was a caretaker. I worked up," and later Harris is described as having to "sell himself every time" (235, 242). Like the ideological conflation between the personal body and the body politic, Harris sees the new Waterworks building as "a human body" while simultaneously ignoring the actual human bodies that have been injured or lost in the making of it – "Do you know how many of us died in there?" Patrick asks; "There was no record kept," Harris replies (220, 236). Harris' ideal of social progress, represented by the Bloor Viaduct and Waterworks, isolates him: "no one, not even military personnel, was admitted into the building at night. Only Harris, who now insisted on sleeping there in his office, was allowed in" (220-21). This literal isolation of Harris in his "palace of water" is starkly contrasted against the workers and residents of Toronto that secretly gather as a community in the Waterworks earlier in the novel, unbeknownst to Harris (221). The gathering consists of the very bodies that Harris has dis-counted and ignored: "an illegal gathering of various nationalities" (115). Patrick confronts Harris about his wealth, and to a larger extent, the city's wealth and power, for the unequal and unjust pay given to the workers: "your goddamn herringbone tiles in the toilets cost more than half our salaries put together," Patrick says (236). However, the novel is not merely concerned with those broad and overreaching power structures, but with the lived bodily experience of those who do the work.

Those bodies, like Patrick and Nicholas', are changed by the work they do and are compensated very little for: "each blow against the shale wall jars up from the palms into the shoulders as if the body is hit. Exhaustion overpowers Patrick and the other tunnellers within twenty minutes" (105). This method of work threatens isolation for those working and obliterates both community and intimacy, distilling the body to only its production value as Patrick is "paid extra" for his dynamite work (107). This problem is echoed later in the novel in the bodies of those who work in the leather tanneries: "What remained in the dyers' skin was the odour that no woman in bed would ever lean towards. Alice lay beside Patrick's exhausted body, her tongue on his neck...knowing the dyers' wives would never taste or smell their husbands in such a way" (132). Here, not only is the hierarchy of difference between the wealthy and the working class particularly embodied, it also becomes a gap of intimacy. According to Sara Cantillon and Kathleen Lynch,

love is...a political matter because the laws, economies, and institutions created by the state have profound implications for who is loved and how they are loved... When wages are so low that people need two or more jobs to survive, they have little time for loving and caring in their intimate lives. (179)

Yet by gathering as a community, the bodies of those damaged by their economic circumstances are reformulated through relationships that involve love. Therefore, the gathering in the unfinished Waterworks exemplifies a model of loving, community, and social responsibility in resistance to the isolation of capitalism as modeled by Commissioner Harris.

Patrick's invitation to "the gathering" begins with an encounter. In the Macedonian community in which he lives, Patrick is finally able to translate one word,

and with this translation, he “leap[s] over the codes of languages between them” and is then “surrounded” (113). Previous to this moment, Patrick had been “their alien,” “reduc[ing] himself almost to nothing,” but in this encounter he is embraced and made whole again, giving the Macedonians his name, “Patrick. Patrick. Patrick,” and receiving theirs, Elena, Kosta, Emil etc. (113-14). In this surprise encounter Patrick is deeply moved: “suddenly Patrick, surrounded by friendship, concern, was smiling, feeling the tears on his face” (113). Patrick’s response is an emotional one that *moves* him. It is important to Ahmed that emotions involve movement; she writes, “we should note that the word ‘emotion’ comes from the Latin, *emovere*, referring to ‘to move, to move out’” (11). Yet, Ahmed adds, “what moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place. Hence movement does not cut the body off from the ‘where’ of its inhabitation, but connects bodies to other bodies” (11). Patrick’s emotional response, or movement outward, connects him to a community; he is emotionally moved by that movement from isolation to the community of friendship. Therefore, the moment of this encounter also constitutes a love event including both differences of language and their sameness in shared emotions. This encounter then leads to the invitation to “the gathering,” where Patrick, moved again by her theatrical performance, meets Alice for the third time (115).

During the performance at the Waterworks gathering Patrick is moved by the “noise” and frenzy of the audience to help the main character, played by Alice, in its “terror” (117). Touch produces the encounter: “he knelt and held her by the shoulders, his arm on her damp back...He felt his hand slide against the sweat of her cheek...She pulled herself up, her arm on his shoulder” (118). The intimacy between them continues

backstage, where Patrick recognizes Alice as the actress. The transition from performer to ‘real’ human also occurs through touch: “He touched an arm in the darkness not fully realizing it was human. A hand came from somewhere and held his wrist. ‘Hello, Patrick’” (120). While both are recognized as the other, Alice Gull and Patrick Lewis respectively, touch draws them into an intimate encounter. This intimacy dissolves the boundaries of their distinct physical bodies, exemplified in the moment Patrick helps Alice remove her make-up: “cloth over one finger for precision, the blue left iris wavering at the closeness...so that it was not Alice Gull but something more intimate – an eye muscle having to trust a fingertip to remove that quarter-inch of bright yellow around her sight” (121). This moment establishes a love event that extends into a romantic relationship between Patrick and Alice. For Patrick, it is as if “he has come across a love story” (160). Ondaatje writes, “this is *only* a love story,” and as such Patrick “does not wish for plot and all its consequences” (160, emphasis mine). The importance of naming it “only a love story” demarcates the contents within a familiar framework, separating it from its political “consequences.” Indeed, critics like Frank Davey have certainly seen the “intense intimate experiences” as taking “precedence...over any quest for political justice or systemic social change” (152). However, I would argue that there is some irony to the claim that it is “only a love story,” for love, specifically that between Alice and Patrick, has many political consequences in the novel. Love, or “intense intimate experiences,” and “systemic social change” are not mutually exclusive acts in the novel, which is the very point of the love ethic the novel is formulating.

The influence of Alice’s active political engagement constitutes the novel’s political argument more broadly. Patrick says, “I think I have a passive sense of

justice...I don't believe in the language of politics, but I'll protect the friends I have. It's all I can handle" (*Skin* 122). For Alice, this perspective is "not enough," and she chooses instead to be more active in her political radicalism (123). While Alice importantly makes Patrick aware of his privilege – "you can afford to be romantic because you are self-sufficient...they can't afford your choices, your *languor*," she says – and activates his political interest, the novel ultimately falls on the side of Patrick's protection of his friends through the formation of community (123). While Patrick begins in a state of isolation – "a space between him and community. A gap of love" – his meeting of those in his neighbourhood and Alice widens the circle of his friends (*Skin* 157). Alice articulates this: "I'm your friend. Hana there sleeping is your friend. The people tonight in the audience were your friends" (124). As I've demonstrated, intimacy creates a sphere of community, which in turn has wider reaching political consequences. Martha Nussbaum explains this concept: "We fear damages that threaten ourselves and those we care about... [T]he ones who will stir deep emotions in us are the ones to whom we are somehow connected...what I shall...call our 'circle of concern'" (11). Because Patrick's "circle of concern" continually increases, his political engagement increases as well.

The novel consistently favours human tenderness over aggressive political or institutional action. Alice verbalizes this when she says, "I don't think I'm big enough to put someone in a position where they have to hurt another" (125). This sense of her own smallness, frailty, and humanity – an expression of "tenderness" – is what makes Patrick love her "most" (160). Yet, in a way, Alice's death is caused by the compromise of this position through her involvement with a bombing plot that goes awry. Despite the vague details surrounding the bombing and Alice's death, it is clear that Alice was involved in

the bombing plan, and in that act of violence chooses to “hurt another.” Davey argues that Alice’s death and choice to be involved in the bombing “operates in the novel as an argument against both violence and group political action” (148). However, considering the novel’s various instances of positive collective and community engagement (ie. “the gathering”), it is more likely that Alice’s death operates in the novel to signify the risks of compromising one’s personal humanity for the sake of a larger ideology. Patrick also articulates this argument when he says, “the trouble with ideology, Alice, is that it hates the private. You must make it human” (135). The “human” aspect is what Alice compromises in her participation in an act of violence. Patrick also compromises this position by blowing up the Muskoka Hotel, which necessitates and prefigures his meeting with Elizabeth in the Garden of the Blind. The moment, as argued earlier, reminds Patrick of life and its vital connection to human intimacy. While Patrick’s act may result from the grief he feels and his love of Alice, the novel’s larger argument implies that such deliberate violence perpetrated against human life can never constitute an act of love. However, violence in the realm of the human holds a particularly ambivalent position in the novel. In defining what it means to “hurt another,” the novel seems to offer many perspectives.

Ondaatje provides several distinct examples of violence: politically motivated and deliberate violence, work-related violence, random chaotic violence, and intimate violence. Politically motivated and deliberate acts of violence are consistently unsuccessful in the novel. While a bomb does detonate in Alice’s hands, it is a mistake that she has it at all. Similarly, Patrick’s threat to bomb the waterworks is not realized, as I will discuss in more detail later, and his burning of a Muskoka hotel ultimately results

in his jail sentence. Certainly the novel does not seem to advocate or justify political violence; nor does the novel encourage work-related violence, but continually gives examples of the painful experiences of the bodies of labourers, as I've demonstrated. However, the novel does seem to recognize a type of violence that is random and chaotic, and therefore politically neutral. This type of violence may appear to be disconnected from or ultimately opposed to the formation of a love ethic in the novel; however, it is in fact intrinsically connected to that ethic, specifically through the notion of safety.

Badiou sees safety as a “threat” to love as it pretends to “insur[e] against all risks,” “nothing random, no chance encounters” (6, 8). Love does not guarantee safety against random violence. Such random violence is demonstrated in the moment that Alice is thrown off the bridge by the wind. Love does not guarantee her safety in this scene, yet it does offer healing from the violence of that event, as I've explained. The novel recognizes this in a self-reflexive moment: “The first sentence of every novel should be: ‘Trust me, this will take time but there is order here, very faint, very human’” (*Skin* 146). The “human element” is connected to random violence in its chaotic nature, but Ondaatje privileges it above all else. This is evident in several moments throughout the text. For example, when Alice visits Patrick in his apartment years after Clara has left, she sits “on the counter opposite, watching him at the stove” (87). Her distance from Patrick in this moment allows her to be “safe there” as opposed to the moment when “she slid[es] off the counter and approache[s] him,” saying “the next move, Patrick” (87). Movement in this scene, like other scenes in the novel, suggests the “possibility” of risk. Earlier in the novel, when Patrick is demonstrating his ability to navigate a room blindfolded, a gesture of control and order, he asks Clara not to move, but Clara “refuses all of this and moves

off the bed”; in her movement, Clara displaces the order of Patrick’s gesture and he slams into her, “knocking her over,” and both Patrick and Clara are injured (80). Patrick says to Clara, “you moved. I told you not to move. You moved” and thinks to himself, “so much for the human element” (81). This “human element” is an example of intimate violence, a type of violence created through the unpredictability of “the coming together of (at least) two subjects” (Ahmed, *Encounters* 7). Intimate violence is particularly distinct from domestic violence, which is a deliberate and malicious perpetration of violence, as opposed to accidental and/or unintentional violence between bodies.

The novel’s depiction of intimate violence is a necessary recognition that love is not immune to violence. Indeed, acts of intimacy leave both physical and metaphorical marks and traces. This is perhaps most obvious in the riotous love making between Giannetta and Caravaggio. In their passion, Giannetta and Caravaggio destroy the kitchen (“a kitchen being fucked”) with “glass and crockery and thin china plates tumbling down from shelf to shelf losing their order,” and Giannetta cuts her foot on something and leaves her blood on Caravaggio’s shoulder (*Skin* 205). Giannetta also “pins” her earring “into his arm muscle, beginning a tattoo of blood” (205). As Karen Overbye observes, Caravaggio’s “body bears her marks”: “The scene reminds us of both the body’s strength (as objects crash around them) and its fragility (blood)” (3). Here we can think again of Ahmed’s concept of the “impression” of emotions: Giannetta literally pins Caravaggio in place while simultaneously breaking the barrier of the skin. This is not a gesture of safety, but a gesture of intimacy that connects two bodies.

During their lovemaking Giannetta “feels the scar on his throat” left by the racial violence perpetrated against Caravaggio while in prison (204). Giannetta places “her soft

kiss across it,” a healing gesture reminiscent of Ondaatje’s poem “The Cinnamon Peeler”: “the responsibility of the cinnamon peeler’s lover [is] to read the scars of history, to claim them as one’s own, though perhaps not to speak for them, nor to conclude authoritatively how they might be interpreted” (McVey 144). Scars here act as remnants of how injury “shapes the body” and leaves traces on the skin (Ahmed, *Emotions* 202). Giannetta’s gesture of kissing the scars functions as a recognition of Caravaggio’s history in a loving and healing embrace, but not to “authoritatively” claim those scars as her own. However, the gesture of pinning the earring into Caravaggio’s shoulder acts as a way of forming a scar of intimacy, to counteract the scars of injustice. Thus, gestures of intimacy work to reformulate acts of violence throughout the novel – not through the removal of risk, but by prioritizing the human in gestures of healing, or even intimate violence, that displace the violence of politics and/or hatred.

Analogously, trespassing, a potentially violent action, is consistently defused of violence throughout the novel; instead it is transfigured into instances of transformation and disruption. Trespassing in these cases constitutes the very “surprise and conflict” found in an encounter that disrupts “the boundaries of the familiar” and identity (Ahmed, *Encounters* 6-7). For example, the encounter between Anne and Caravaggio in her cottage is made possible through Caravaggio’s act of trespassing on her property to use the telephone. Here the violence of trespassing is instantly defused when Anne says to him, “David, why am I not scared of you?” while he too “feel[s] relaxed with her” (*Skin*, 201). In witnessing Anne’s deep solitude, a “woman trying to discover what she was or what she was capable of making,” Caravaggio recognizes that “there was such an intimacy in what he was seeing that not even a husband could get closer than him” (198).

These intimacies – between Anne and herself, and Caravaggio as witness – arise from trespassing, from being in places one does not belong, which in turn enables connections and emotional interactions between strangers. Two lost characters gathering their “bearings” (187). Thus, trespassing functions as a transformative action; like Patrick and Elizabeth in the Garden of the Blind, Anne and Caravaggio are able to see the world through each other’s perspectives, if only for a brief moment. By being in places one does not belong, these instances of trespassing reconstitute the very boundaries of both space and self (determined by the physical body and interior self-hood). Susan Spearey writes,

Ondaatje not only offers the reader alternative means of knowing and understanding the realm of spatial dimension, but also draws attention to the negotiation of spatial boundaries, which is most successfully carried out when allowance is made for the presence of multiple agents of change. (55)

That it is change-makers, represented by the figure of the trespasser, who reformulate spatial boundaries in the novel signals a broader political argument about the affectiveness of encounter.

The disruption of “structure” is one of the tenets of the novel, repeated in the phrase, “let me now re-emphasize the extreme looseness of the structure of all objects” (135). This phrase most obviously highlights the permeability of structures as “objects” – what we think of as rigid, hard, and seemingly impenetrable forms – but more broadly gestures toward the structures of ideologies, categories, and even bodies. These are “structures” that the novel is constantly working to dismantle. Those structures come loose through secret and hidden acts of boundary crossing (ie. trespassing) that occur on

the peripheral fringes. Ondaatje articulates this in his novel, *The Cat's Table*, when he writes: “what is interesting and important happens mostly in secret, in places where there is no power. Nothing much of lasting value ever happens at the head table, held together by a familiar rhetoric” (75). Repeating the language of structure here – “held together” – Ondaatje notes that change comes from the outside by those working in secret. Intimacy itself functions as a secret action, which has private resonances for the individuals involved in the gesture. Badiou writes, a “secret resonance...is created in the most intimate human experience,” and in turn that an “apparently insignificant act, but one that is a really radical event in life at a micro-level, bears universal meaning in the way it persists and endures” (75, 41). The gathering that occurs in the unfinished Waterworks is just such an example of working in secret in *In the Skin of a Lion* – “a party and a political meeting, all of them trespassing” – which in turn leads to Patrick’s act of trespassing into the Waterworks later in the novel (115).

Patrick’s entering of the Waterworks through the tunnels works to dismantle and loosen the structure of the building that Harris believes to be secure. The politics of Patrick’s attempted act of bombing the Waterworks is bound up in all his previous encounters: Harris’ culpability for the deaths and painful lives of the underpaid workers; Patrick’s connection to them and belonging in their community, exemplified by the gathering; and his love of Alice, along with her influential political ideology. A conversation with Alice earlier in the novel is particularly influential on Patrick’s decision, as Alice’s solution for social injustice is to “name the enemy and destroy their power” (124). However, despite his preparation to bomb the Waterworks, Harris’ structure of power, Patrick ultimately decides not to push the detonator. What unfolds

instead is a conversation between Patrick and Commissioner Harris: one that has unknown consequences by the end of the novel, but comprises the re-structuring of humanity and care between Harris and Patrick within the confines of the Waterworks building.

Both men ask the other to “talk” and both men listen as the other is speaking (237, 239). Harris speaks of his dreams and ambitions, while Patrick tells him the story of Alice’s death. During the course of their encounter both men transform “from someone angry and aggressive to someone aggrieved and comforted” (Davey 154). In Patrick’s “subversive act” of falling asleep, Milena Marinkova argues that he “responds to his body rather than to Harris’s praise of capitalist initiative or Alice’s lofty politics” and therefore his sleep “constitutes a response that is different from the simple reversal of power positions” (111). Furthermore, Spearey argues that in the secretive act of trespassing, “Patrick reveals to [Harris] the instability of his own position...and in so doing, suggests the need constantly to reassess subject position and to call into question the fixity of order upon which such assertive formulation is based” (58). Similarly, by responding to Patrick’s hurt body through an act of care instead of power, Harris displaces their hierarchical power positions; Harris says to the officer, “Take the blasting-box and defuse it. Let him sleep on. Don’t talk. Just take it away. Bring a nurse with some medical supplies here, he’s hurt himself” (242). By letting Patrick sleep, Harris attends to the real human needs of the other and therefore completes a gesture of intimacy that constitutes an event of love as determined by the shift from One to the perspective of Two (Badiou, 29). In this way, Harris and Patrick move from strangers, and enemies, to friends.

This moment of friendship recalls again the earlier conversation between Alice and Patrick, where Patrick asks the question, what if the enemy “is your friend?” (124). Patrick suggests you can “teach” the enemy and “make him aware,” whereas Alice’s response to this is to not “leave the power in his hands” (123). Alain Badiou argues that “the enemy is completely foreign to the question of love”: “In love...there are in fact, no enemies. The enemy forms part of the essence of politics. ... the rival remains absolutely external, he isn’t part of the definition of love” (59). Despite the logic of Badiou’s argument, Ondaatje seems to argue the opposite, including Harris in a loving connection (defined by care and concern) with Patrick. Therefore, if the enemy defines the political realm then Ondaatje changes that external hierarchy through an internal, compassionate encounter of friendship that includes Harris, as the enemy, within the definition of love. Compassion is a vital component of this transition. Martha Nussbaum defines compassion as “a painful emotion directed at the serious suffering of another” which enables an important shift through the “recognition of the other as a center of experience” (142, 146). In the novel, Alice argues, “compassion forgives too much. You could forgive the worst man. You forgive him and nothing changes” (123). Yet the novel more broadly argues that in the secretive, hidden moments of trespass and accident, transformative change can occur.

Badiou’s assertion that one should not “mix up love and politics” because “there are people in politics one doesn’t love” is a relevant argument in the realm of political enemies, yet Ondaatje’s love ethic in *In the Skin of a Lion* implies that even those in the political realm can be included in a love event, and therefore love *does* have political ramifications. Politics without love isolates strangers from community and eradicates

democracy. This type of political isolation is demonstrated in the character of Ambrose Small, who is unable to encounter love from a perspective of two that establishes a concern for the other. Ambrose Small is described as an example of “bare-knuckle capitalism”; “a jackal of Toronto’s business world” and as such he “either own[s] people or they [are] his enemies. No compatriots” (57-58). While Clara is his lover, she knows him “only as he wanted to be known by her” (213). Ambrose’s type of “love,” infiltrated by wealth, capitalism, and privilege, does not build community; instead, as the novel explains, “Ambrose Small, as a millionaire, had always kept the landscapes of his world separate, high walls between them. Lovers, compatriots, businessmen, were anonymous to each other” (213). Indeed, Ambrose eventually completely disappears and withdraws from the world around him. His whereabouts are known only by Clara, yet even in their isolation together she does not know him: “when Clara Dickens joined Ambrose Small after he evaporated from the world of financial power she thought she would see the vista of his nature... After all these years she would not be satisfied, would not know him” (213, 215). The consequence of his withdrawal is insanity and death: “Small’s mind slipped free of its compartments...so he talked and mutters towards Clara events fell against each other” (213). Ambrose’s absolutist, highly-compartmentalized structure functions as a barrier to love. Democracy needs love to attach one to another and form community, as opposed to highly isolated and separate individuals concerned with their own gain, as exemplified by capitalism and neo-liberalism. In other words, love allows individuals to take responsibility for others, instead of only taking responsibility for one’s self alone. Love, however, does not need politics, but recognizes its own value internally; Badiou explains, “[Love’s] value resides in itself alone and goes beyond the immediate

interests of the two individuals involved” (73). This is particularly exemplified in the two instances of political deaths in the novel.

Alice’s lover, and Hana’s father, Cato is murdered by those in power attempting to stop his political action of a planned strike at the lumber camp (155). Despite his death, Cato’s letters are delivered to Alice: “The man with the swede saw posts [Cato’s] bundle of letters in Algoma unaware that the sender is dead” (156). And “when Alice opens the package five weeks later she pulls the exercise book to her face and smells whatever she can of him, for he has been dead a month” (155). Love’s longevity and influence is undeterred by time or political consequences, but exists in and of itself. Similarly after Alice’s death, Patrick cares for Hana, passing the agency of story-telling onto her: “‘do you want to drive?’ he asked...Hana sat upright, adapting the rear-view mirror to her height... ‘Lights,’ he said” (243). Badiou speaks to love’s “endurance”: “One has to understand that love invents a different way of lasting in life...[love] is the desire for an unknown duration. Because, as we all know, love is a re-invention of life” (33). Love is therefore transformative beyond politics, and endures beyond any political action. Love’s value exists within itself.

CHAPTER 5. ASPIRATIONS: IN CONCLUSION

The love ethic established in *In the Skin of a Lion* is one that begins with encounter. The encounter involves two others and moves out from the body, through skin, touch, and emotion, to shift one's central experience into an experience of difference and recognition of the other. Such encounters in the novel comprise an event of love through acts of intimacy that demonstrate care and concern. These moments of intimacy disrupt the established or comprehensible order to engage humans in realms of community. Such community and love has far reaching political implications that go beyond the experience of One or Two, but can include even strangers and enemies in acts of intimacy and understanding. The love ethic Ondaatje is suggesting is radically important to shifting fixed political and economic ideologies, such as capitalism and neo-liberalism, to include difference and community, both necessary to a larger aspirational project of democracy. In Martha Nussbaum's words, "Love...matters for justice—especially when justice is incomplete and an aspiration (as in all real nations)" (380). Democracy and community – and even sometimes love – are aspirational projects that require bodily and emotional work and practice. Sarah Ahmed notes that 'being moved' is a form of work, "which opens up different kinds of attachments to others, in part through the recognition of this work as work" (*Emotions* 201). These projects are also "real," as Nussbaum writes, because they involve the reality of human life: "The nation we imagine is a nation of, and for, human beings...and its constitution is a good one only to the extent that it incorporates an understanding of human life as it really is" (384). *In the Skin of a Lion* recognizes those bodies that have been ignored by the nation and the effect of that isolation on the body and its intimate relationships. For Ondaatje, large-

scale political actions are not the solution, but rather hidden and secret moments of intimacy, and their ability to transform and move, work toward an aspirational love ethic. For this kind of love to work, it must be an embodied “effort” that attaches one to another in a growing sphere of intimacy and community.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahmed, Sara. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-coloniality*. New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.
- *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- Badiou, Alain, and Truong, Nicolas. *In Praise of Love*. New York: New, 2012. Print.
- Beddoes, Julie. "Which Side Is It On? Form, Class, and Politics in *In the Skin of a Lion*." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 53 (1994): 204-15. Web. 12 May 2017.
- Berlant, Lauren. "Intimacy: A Special Issue." *Critical Inquiry* 24.2 (1998): 281-88. Web. 12 May 2017.
- Brand, Dionne. *Inventory*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2006. Print.
- Brydon, Diana. "Dionne Brand's Global Intimacies: Practising Affective Citizenship." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 76.3 (2007): 990-1006. Web. 10 May 2017.
- Cantillon, Sara, and Kathleen Lynch. "Affective Equality: Love Matters." *Hypatia* 32.1 (2017): 169-86. Web. 13 May 2017.
- Davey, Frank. "Art Over History: *In the Skin of a Lion*." *Post-national Arguments: The Politics of the Anglophone-Canadian Novel since 1967*. Toronto: U of Toronto, 1993. Print. 141-156
- Gallant, Laura Margaret, and Dalhousie University. Dept. of English. *Writing the Ethics of Water in Michael Ondaatje, Thomas King, and Anne Michaels*. Halifax: Dalhousie University, 2010. Web. 5 July 2017.
- Hooks, Bell. *All About Love: New Visions*. New York: Perennial, 2001. Print.
- Hsu, Shou-Nan. "From Sexual Love to Peace: Endless Care and Respect for Strangers in Michael Ondaatje's *Secular Love*." *College Literature* 2014.4 (2014): 111-28. Web. 13 May 2017.
- Jackson, Sarah. "Expeausition: Ondaatje's Skin-Effects." *Tactile Poetics: Touch and Contemporary Writing*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2015. Print. 32-50.
- Klesse, Christian. "'Loving More Than One: On the Discourse of Polyamory.'" *Love: A Question for Feminism in the Twenty-First Century*. Ed. Anna G. Jónasdóttir and Ann Ferguson. New York: Routledge, 2014. Print. 200-215.
- Kluwick, Ursula. "The Personal and the Public: Michael Ondaatje's Historiographic

- Metafiction and the Question of Political Engagement." *A Sea for Encounters: Essays Towards a Postcolonial Commonwealth*. Ed. Stella Borg Barthet. New York: Rodopi, 2009. Print. 273-286.
- Lundgren, Jodi. "'Colour Disrobed itself from the Body:’ The Racialized Aesthetics of Liberation in Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*." *Canadian Literature* 190 (2006): 15-29. Web. 12 May 2017.
- Marinkova, Milena. *Michael Ondaatje: Haptic Aesthetics and Micropolitical Writing*. New York: Continuum, 2011. Print. 93-111.
- McVey, Christopher. "Reclaiming the Past: Michael Ondaatje and the Body of History." *Jml: Journal of Modern Literature* 37.2 (2014): 141-60. Web.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. "Existence: Corpus." *The Birth to Presence*. Trans. Claudette Startiliot. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993. Print. 189-207
- Nussbaum, Martha Craven. *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2015. Print.
- Ondaatje, Michael. *In the Skin of a Lion*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987. Print.
- . *The Cinnamon Peeler: Selected Poems*. New York: Vintage Books, 1991. Print.
- Overbye, Karen. "Re-membering the Body: Constructing the Self as Hero in *In the Skin of a Lion*." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 17.2 (1992): 1-13. Web.
- Rancière, Jacques, and Corcoran, Steve. "The Paradoxes of Political Art." *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. New York: Continuum, 2010. Print. 134-151.
- Spearey, Susan. "Mapping and Masking: The Migrant Experience in Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 29.2 (1994): 45. Web. 10 May 2017.