The English Patient

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MICHAEL ONDAATJE

Ondaatje was born in 1943 to Mervyn Ondaatje and Doris Gratiaen in Colombo, the capital city of Ceylon, a former British colony located in present day Sri Lanka. Ondaatje is a Burgher, meaning he is of Sinhalese, Tamil, and Dutch ancestry. After his parents divorced, he was raised in Colombo by relatives. When Ondaatje was 11 years old, he moved to England to live with his mother and siblings. After high school, he attended Dulwich College in London before immigrating to Montreal, Quebec, Canada in 1962. In Quebec, Ondaatje enrolled at Bishop's University, where he began to publish his poetry through the university press. Ondaatje graduated from the University of Toronto with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1965, and in 1967, he earned a Master of Arts degree from Queen's University in Ontario. After college, Ondaatje taught at both the University of Western Ontario in London and Glendon College, York University all while gaining a reputation as a talented writer of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. In 1970, Ondaatje won the Governor General's Award, a Canadian award for artistic achievement, for his book of poetry, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. He served as an editor for Coach House Press, an independent Canadian publishing company, from 1970 to 1990, helping to foster new Canadian talent. His first novel, *Coming Through Slaughter*, was published in 1976 and won the Books in Canada First Novel Award. Ondaatje was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1988, and in 2016, he was upgraded to Companion, the highest honor of the merit based order. Ondaatje published perhaps his most successful novel, *The English Patient*, in 1992, which won the prestigious Booker Prize that same year. His next novel, *Anil's Ghost*, was published to popular and critical acclaim in 2000 and won the Giller Prize, a Canadian literary award. In 2005, Ondaatje was honored with Sri Lanka Ratna, the highest honor awarded to Sri Lanka foreign nationals. Ondaatje is the father of two children with his former wife, artist Kim Ondaatje. He lives in Toronto with his current wife, Linda Spalding, a Canadian novelist and academic.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The English Patient is based on real-life Hungarian desert explorer, László Almásy. Almásy is credited with the 1933 discovery of the Cave of Swimmers, a cave containing ancient rock art in the Gilf Kebir plateau of the Libyan Desert. The paintings on the walls of the Cave of Swimmers depicts people who appear to be swimming, as well as animals such as giraffes and hippopotamuses. Almásy theorized that the paintings were a representation of life in the Sahara as it was more than 10,000 years ago prior to a massive climate shift, when the area had been a temperate climate rather than desert. Almásy's contemporaries thought his theory farfetched and absurd; however, in 2007 a large ancient lake was discovered deep beneath the Sahara near the Sudan by Eman Ghoneim, an Egyptian American geomorphologist. In addition to discovering the Cave of Swimmers, Almásy really did guide Johannes Eppler, a German spy, though the North African desert in 1942 during Operation Salam, in an attempt to insert the German Africa Corps into British-held Egypt during World War II. While Almásy was successful in bringing Eppler and his radio operator, Hans-Gerd Sandstede, into Egypt, British code breakers were able to break the cypher used by Almásy and his German contacts, and both Eppler and Sandstede were apprehended by British forces in Cairo. Almásy returned to Hungary after the war and later escaped the country during the Communist takeover with, ironically, the help of British Intelligence. He died in Austria in 1951 due to complications of amebic dysentery.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The English Patient is an important piece of postcolonial literature, which means it examines the effect of Western power and colonization, particularly by the British, on the people of the East. One of the earliest and most significant postcolonial novels is Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe's novel follows an Igbo village leader in Nigeria named Okonkwo, whose culture is erased by British colonialism. Other popular works of postcolonial literature include Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, a novel about Saleem, a boy born with magical powers on the eve of India's independence from Britain; and *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem* by French Guadeloupean writer Maryse Condé. Condé's novel tells the story of Tituba, a young biracial woman from Barbados brought to Massachusetts against her will and forced to work as a slave in the home of Samuel Paris, a clergyman and key player in the notorious Salem Witch Trials of 1692. *The English Patient* is heavily intertextual—meaning it references other literary works—Ondaatje frequently mentions *The Last of the Mohicans* by James Fenimore Copper, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy. Ondaatje cites Puerto Rican American poet William Carlos Williams and his hybrid work, *Spring and All*, as a major influence on his own writing, as well as William Butler Yeats, an Irish poet and playwright, who is well-known for poems such as "When You Are Old" and "The Second Coming."

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The English Patient
- **When Written:** 1992
- **Where Written:** Toronto, Ontario, Canada
- **When Published:** 1993
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Novel; Historical Fiction
- **Setting:** An Italian villa near the end of World War II, as well as the North African desert (mainly the Gilf Kebir) during the 1930s and early 1940s.
- **Climax:** Kip threatens to kill the English patient after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II.
- **Antagonist:** World War II
- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

And the Oscar Goes to. *The English Patient* was adapted into a 1996 film by director Anthony Minghella. The film was nominated for 12 Academy Awards that year and won nine, including Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Supporting Actress, won by Juliette Binoche for her performance as Hana.

The Real Kip. While a student at Dulwich College in London, Ondaatje went by the nickname Kip, the same nickname given to Kirpal Singh in *The English Patient*.

PLOT SUMMARY

Hana stands up in the garden near the orchard of a **villa** and heads in the direction of the house. She walks through the kitchen and up the dark stairs to a back bedroom that is painted like a garden. In the bed is a badly burned man, and he turns to look at Hana as she enters the room. She bathes him every four days, dripping water onto his open and weeping wounds. As Hana works, the man, known only as the English patient, tells her a story about the **desert**. He had fallen flaming from the sky, he says, and the Bedouin, a native tribe of desert Arabs, saved his life and carried him out of the desert. Selected from the villa's library, Hana reads various **books** to the English patient, including his own copy of Herodotus's *The Histories*. It is the final days of World War II, and they are the villa's only residents. The Italian villa had served as a makeshift hospital for the Allies. When the other nurses and doctors moved the patients north, Hana insisted on staying behind with the English patient, who is not stable enough to move. The villa has been nearly destroyed by the war. The structure itself has endured countless mortar strikes, and **bombs** and mines litter the property, making many of the room unsafe to enter.

A man with bandaged hands named Caravaggio has been at the military hospital in Rome for nearly four months now. He hears a group of doctors talking about a nurse and her patient in a villa to the north and stops to ask her name. The woman, Hana, is suffering from shell shock and had refused to leave the villa on account of her patient, a badly burned amnesiac presumed to be English. The war in Europe is over, the doctors say, and they can no longer force Hana, or anyone else, to do anything. Arriving at the villa, Caravaggio enters the house quietly and approaches Hana, kneeling down next to her "like an uncle." Hana is shocked. This man—who was a friend of her late father, Patrick, and whom she has known for so long—has come all this way to see her. If Caravaggio is to stay at the villa, Hana says, they must secure more food. Hana knows where they can find some chickens if Caravaggio will offer his skills as a thief. "I've lost my nerve," he says holding up his bandaged hands. As an Italian, the Allied forces had utilized Caravaggio's skills and sent him to steal important papers and maps; however, he had been caught by the Germans, and they nearly cut off his hands. One night, after leaving the English patient, Hana goes downstairs and removes the cover from an old piano and begins to play. As she plays, a storm rolls in and lightning streaks the sky. The room is illuminated, and Hana sees that two soldiers, one of whom is wearing a **turban**, have entered the room.

The man in the turban, an Indian sapper named Kip, puts up a tent near the villa's garden. The other soldier, Hardy, is stationed in a nearby town. The men have been sent in to sweep the area for bombs and land mines, and they know that musical instruments are popular hiding spots. Luckily there is not a bomb in the villa's piano, but there are plenty of others. Hana is intrigued by Kip's dark skin, and she watches him as he moves around the property, diffusing bombs left in the German's retreat. One day, Hana hears Kip shouting in a field near the villa and finds him standing with his arms in the air, holding up two wires. It is a "trick" bomb, he says, and he needs Hana to hold the wires so he can diffuse it. Hana takes the wires, and Kip suggests taping them to the tree so Hana can leave. He doesn't quite know how this bomb is wired, and it isn't safe for her to stay. Hana refuses, and Kip is able to diffuse the bomb, but he is badly shaken. They could have been killed, and Hana approaches her life with a nonchalance that Kip doesn't quite understand. Afterward, Hana falls asleep on Kip's chest, and Kip sits awake, angry at Hana for making him responsible for her life. Soon, Hana begins to visit Kip's tent at night. She knows that Kip loves her, even they he doesn't need her like the English patient does, and Kip thinks that she is "remarkable."

There was little interest in the desert before the 20th century, the English patient tells Hana. By the early 1900s, European men were exploring and mapping the desert, finding ancient cave paintings and evidence of lost civilizations. In 1930, the English patient went into the desert in search of Zerzura, an ancient city in the Gilf Kebir. The European explorers, including the English patient and his friend, Madox, were "nationless" in the desert among the native tribes. In 1936, the English patient's expedition was joined by Geoffrey Clifton, an

Englishman, and his wife, Katharine. Geoffrey was a pilot and had done some work with British archaeologists. In the desert, the English patient and Katharine quickly fell in love, but Katharine worried that Geoffrey would go "mad" if he found out, and she quit the affair just as quickly as it started.

One day, Caravaggio tells Hana about a Hungarian desert explorer named László Almásy, who guided German spies across the desert in the early days of the war. Caravaggio believes that the English patient is actually Almásy, and even though Hana thinks it is absurd, Caravaggio gives the English patient a cocktail of morphine and alcohol to get him talking. Caravaggio asks the English patient to tell him about 1942, and the English patient says that he had just arrived in Cairo and was headed back into the desert. Madox had left a plane out there, and the English patient had to get Katharine from the Cave of Swimmers, where he had left her after Geoffrey's murder-suicide attempt. Geoffrey had attempted to crash his plane into the English patient in an effort to kill Katharine, the English patient, and himself. Geoffrey, however, was the only one to die on impact. He missed the English patient completely, and Katharine, the plane's passenger, was badly wounded. The English patient's only choice was to leave Katharine and go for help, but no one would listen to him, and he was forced to go back alone. Now, years later, he found Katharine's dead body in the cave where he left her, and implies that he had sex with her dead body. Unearthing the Madox's plane from the sand, the English patient loaded Katharine's body into the plane and took off. Oil leaked into the cockpit and sparks ignited the plane, forcing the English patient, now on fire, to eject from the plane.

Caravaggio confirms that the English patient is indeed Almásy, but he ultimately decides that it doesn't matter on which side of the war he fought. Caravaggio has grown fond of the English patient and sees no point in turning the burned main in to British Intelligence. One day, as Hana sits in the kitchen, she sees Kip grab the earphones he wears for communication with the military. He screams and falls to his knees, then he goes to his tent and returns with a rifle. He walks into the villa, past Hana in the kitchen, up to the English patient's room. Kip fires at the fountain out the window and then levels the gun at the English patient. Two bombs have been dropped on Japan, and both Nagasaki and Hiroshima have been annihilated. Hana and Caravaggio run into the room, and the English patient tells Kip to kill him. Caravaggio tries to tell Kip that the English patient isn't really English, but he won't hear it. Anyone who drops a bomb on brown people is an Englishman, Kip says. Caravaggio falls into a nearby chair. He knows that Kip is right; such bombs would never be dropped on white cities.

Kip puts down the gun and leaves the villa. He strips his uniform and takes off his turban, tying his long hair into a topknot. He finds an old Triumph motorcycle hidden in the chapel and rides away from the villa. As he does, Caravaggio is waiting near the exit. He steps into Kip's path, stopping him, and embraces the man before allowing him to continue on. As Kip rides farther and farther away from the war, Hana writes to Clara, her stepmother, and prepares to return home to Canada. Hana can't quite remember the year, but she knows the date, as it is the day after the bombs were dropped on Japan. "If we can rationalize this," Hana writes Clara, "we can rationalize anything." Meanwhile, as the English patient tries to sleep, he notices a dark figure in his room and hopes that it is Kip. He stays awake all night waiting for the figure to move, but it doesn't. Years later, Kip is living in India. He is now a doctor, and he has two kids and a "laughing wife," but he still thinks about Hana. He can see her in his mind, moving about her life, grown now into a woman. As Kip sits down to dinner with his family, Hana bumps into a cupboard in Canada, knocking a glass from the shelf. As the glass falls to the floor, Kip reaches down and catches a fork his daughter drops from the table.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

The English Patient/László Almásy – The protagonist and title character of *The English Patient*. The English patient is first introduced as Hana's patient at an abandoned Italian **villa** during World War II. He has been badly burned and is suffering from amnesia. His only possession is a **book**, a worn and heavily annotated copy of *The Histories* by Herodotus, which Hana reads to him. While the English patient claims to not remember his name or nationality—it is only assumed that he is English—he seems to remember everything else, and he tells Hana all about his life as a **desert** explorer. The English patient has a deep love for the desert, which he sees a vast, impermanent place that is always changing and evolving. Moreover, he loves the desert because he sees it as a "nationless" place were divisions of nationality are "insignificant." Like the desert, the English patient attempts to become "nationless" by spending years in the Gilf Kebir looking for Zerzura, a mythical city thought to have existed in the Sahara. During this time, the English patient has a love affair with Katharine, a married Englishwoman he meets while her husband, Geoffrey, is working as part of the English patient's exploration time. Katharine and the English patient have a short but intense affair that ends tragically after Geoffrey's botched murder-suicide attempt. Caravaggio, an old friend of Hana's who comes to stay at the villa, discovers that the English patient is actually László Almásy, a Hungarian desert explorer and cartographer who helped guide German spies through the desert into Egypt during World War II. Almásy has been hiding his guilt, and his nationality, behind his amnesia. At the novel's climax, Kip, an Indian sapper who is diffusing bombs at the villa, threatens to kill the English patient after atomic bombs are dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. As Kip believes the English patient to be from England, he sees him as a

representation of the British and their efforts to colonize and oppress the people of the East. Kip ultimately does not kill him, and the English patient's fate is never revealed. Through his relationship with Katharine, his character serves to illustrate the power of love to transcend anything, including marriage, war, and even death. The English patient also exemplifies the connection between storytelling and history, as he suggests that history cannot be fully understood or appreciated without personal stories.

Hana – Patrick's daughter and Kip's lover. Hana is a 20-year-old Canadian nurse during World War II. She is stationed at the **Villa** San Girolamo, a former nunnery and makeshift war hospital in Northern Italy, but she refuses to leave the villa near the end of the war because of her unstable patient, known to her only as the English patient. The English patient has been badly burned and suffers from amnesia, and Hana spends all her time caring for him. She plants a garden in the villa's orchard to feed them, and she frequently reads to him, either **books** from the villa's library or the English patient's own copy of Herodotus's *The Histories*. Books are an exceedingly important part of Hana's life, and since she is isolated at the abandoned villa, books are her only access to the outside world. The violence and trauma of the war has taken its toll on Hana, and she is likely suffering from shell-shock, or post-traumatic stress. Her trauma is exacerbated by the death of her father, Patrick, who was killed in the war. Like the English patient, Patrick was badly burned and died alone in France, something over which Hana feels intense guilt. As a nurse, Hana believes she should have been with Patrick as he died, and she wonders if she may have been able to help him. Because of this deep guilt, Hana puts all her energy into the English patient, for whom she develops both romantic and familial love. Through her love for the English patient, Hana comes to terms with the profound loss of her father and begins to heal after the stress of war. Caravaggio, an old friend of Patrick's, comes to stay at the villa with her, as does Kip, an Indian sapper who is there to diffuse bombs on the property. Hana, enchanted by Kip's exoticism, has a love affair with him during his time there. She begins to move toward positive healing after the war through the love she shares with the others at the villa. By the end of the novel, she is ready to return home to Canada, where her stepmother Clara lives. Hana's character illustrates the power of love to give one strength and reason when there is little will to go on. Through her love for the three men at the villa, Hana begins the long and slow process of healing after the traumas of war.

Kip/Kirpal Singh – An Indian sapper during World War II and Hana's lover. Kip is a Sikh from Punjab, and he joins an experimental **bomb** unit led by Lord Suffolk, an "eccentric" Englishman. Kip grows close with both Suffolk and Hardy, Kip's second-in-command, who teaches him Western songs and customs. In a reflection of colonial-era racism, the men in Kip's unit hesitate to call him "sir" as his rank dictates, and he is treated as an "anonymous member of another race." Kip is received as an "other," both in the military and later at the Italian **villa**. Kip immerses himself in Western culture and practices, and even develops a deep love for English tea, but he is never accepted as an equal in the eyes of the white Westerners. Attention is constantly drawn to Kip's brown skin, and his **turban** serves as a physical symbol of his Indian identity. Hana is intrigued and attracted to Kip's dark skin, finding him exotic, while Caravaggio is initially critical of Kip because of his race and cultural differences. Hana even tries to keep Kip away from the English patient, fearing they will not get along, but they, too, develop a deep friendship. Kip has, in his efforts to conform to Western society, developed an affinity for Englishmen. Yet, at the climax of the novel, Kip learns of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and threatens to kill the English patient. The tragic bombing of Japan opens Kip's eyes to the racism and injustice of British colonialism, and he considers the English patient to be a representation of England and their systemic oppression and abuse of Asia. Kip does not kill the English patient, but Kip strips himself of his Western clothing and leaves the villa, and all of Europe. Kip returns to India, where he embraces his native culture and lives a full and happy life. Kip's character highlights the racism of colonial-era society and underscores Ondaatje's central argument that despite efforts to conform to the Western world, those from the East will always be viewed as "other" and inferior by those in the West.

Caravaggio – An Italian immigrant to Canada who fights on behalf of the Allies during World War II. Caravaggio is a thief whose "skills" are "legitimized" during the war, and he is enlisted by the Allies to infiltrate German strongholds and steal various documents. Caravaggio is caught by the Germans near the end of the war, and they nearly cut off his hands. He is sent to a military hospital in Rome, where he is received as a hero and hears about a nurse, Hana, who has refused to evacuate an unsafe **villa** in the north on account of her unstable patient, a burned amnesiac known only as the English patient. Caravaggio was close to Hana's father, Patrick, before the war, and has known her for years. Arriving at the villa, Caravaggio falls in love with the woman he knew as a child, but she is in love with the English patient, a man she sees as a representation of her father, who was also badly burned and killed during the war. When Kip arrives at the villa, Caravaggio has a difficult time adjusting to life with the Indian sapper. Caravaggio is critical of Kip's customs and habits; however, it is not long before Caravaggio grows fond of Kip and overcomes his obvious prejudice. Caravaggio soon grows fond of the English patient as well, despite the fact that he knows the English patient is really László Almásy, a wanted Hungarian explorer known to assist German spies through the **desert** during the war. Ondaatje never reveals what happens to Caravaggio after Kip threatens to kill the English patient and life at the villa unravels, but

Caravaggio's character serves to illustrate the power of love to heal psychological wounds after the violence of war. Caravaggio arrives at the villa an emotionally-distant and damaged thief, but by the end of the novel, he has transformed into a loving and honest man.

Katharine Clifton – Geoffrey Clifton's wife and the English patient's lover. After Katharine and Geoffrey are married, she goes with him to Cairo when he is hired to be part of the English's patient's **desert** exploration team. Katharine falls in love with the desert and begins to "discover herself" there, which, the English patient says, is "painful to watch" because Geoffrey is completely oblivious to it. Without realizing it, Katharine falls in love with the English patient, whom she knows as the Hungarian explorer László Almásy, and they soon begin an affair. Katharine's love and attraction for Almásy is closely related to violence in the novel, and it frequently manifests as physical abuse throughout their affair. Despite her deep love for Almásy, however, Katharine feels incredibly guilty and, fearing Geoffrey will "go mad" if he discovers her infidelity, breaks off her relationship with Almásy. Without Katharine, Almásy grows bitter and begins to treat her badly, which tips Geoffrey off to their affair after the fact. Katharine is seriously injured in Geoffrey's murder-suicide attempt in the Gilf Kebir, and Almásy is unable to carry her out of the desert. Almásy leaves Katharine in the Cave of Swimmers and goes for help, but he is detained by the British military in El Taj, and Katharine dies waiting. Years later, Almásy finally makes it back to Katharine, and after having sex with her dead body, loads her corpse into Madox's plane. However, the old, decrepit plane ignites in midair, and Almásy is forced to eject his flaming body, leaving Katharine to burn with the plane. The character of Katharine Clifton and her intense relationship with László Almásy underscore Ondaatje's primary argument that love has the power to transcend anything, including marriage, distance, and even death.

Geoffrey Clifton – Katharine Clifton's husband. Geoffrey is an Englishman who joins the English patient's **desert** exploration team as a pilot, but he is actually a member of British Intelligence sent to take aerial pictures of the North African desert, which is expected to soon become a theater of World War II. Geoffrey discovers Katharine and the English patient's affair long after it is over, and just as Katharine suspects, Geoffrey "goes mad." Geoffrey flies to the Gilf Kebir to pick the English patient up from base camp and attempts to crash his plane into the English patient in a poorly-executed murder-suicide. When the English patient, who is unharmed, runs to the wrecked plane, he finds Geoffrey dead, and Katharine, the passenger, badly wounded. British Intelligence finds Geoffrey's body in 1936 and are convinced that the English patient—who they know as László Almásy, a Hungarian explorer—has killed Geoffrey because of Almásy's own affair with Katharine.

Patrick – Hana's father, Clara's husband, and a long-time friend of Caravaggio. Patrick and his family are Canadian, and he enlists in the Canadian Army to fight in World War II. Patrick dies alone and badly burned in a dove-cot in France, far away from Hana. Not long after Patrick's death, Hana meets the English patient, who is also badly burned. Hana comes to terms with Patrick's death through her care of the English patient, and she finds comfort in the fact that Patrick died in a dove-cot, a "sacred place" much like a church. Patrick's death in the dove-cot reflects Ondaatje's claim that the post-war world offers possibilities for new forms of religious practice that are humbler and less structured, but that nevertheless offer meaningful and profound connections to God.

Madox – The English patient's friend and part of his **desert** exploration team. Madox is an Englishman, and like the English patient, he carries a **book**—Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*—through the desert. Madox uses Tolstoy's book to try to explain Geoffrey Clifton's connection to the British government, which underscores Ondaatje's overarching argument that literature offers a way to understand and shape the world. As World War II begins, Madox leaves the desert and returns to England, where he commits suicide with his revolver in the middle of a church during a sermon that supports the war. According to the English patient, Madox "died because of nations." Madox thought the church had "lost its holiness" in its support of the war, so "he committed what he believed was a holy act." Madox's final act is one of protest against what he considers to be a misuse of religion, which, to many characters in *The English Patient*, has "lost its holiness" in the violence of the war. The character of Madox is based on Patrick Clayton, a real-life British surveyor and soldier who mapped large areas of the North African desert in the early 1930s.

Hardy – Kip's second-in-command. Hardy is fond of Kip, and while the other men in their sapper unit find it difficult to call Kip, an Indian, "sir," Hardy uses this term of address without hesitation. Hardy teaches Kip Western songs, which Kip frequently sings and whistles around the **villa**. Hardy is killed when a **bomb** explodes the night Caravaggio finds a gramophone and throws a party in the English patient's room.

Lord Suffolk – An "eccentric" **bomb** expert in the British army and Kip's mentor. Lord Suffolk is a member of "the Holy Trinity" team along with his secretary, Miss Morden, and his chauffer, Mr. Harts, and they travel England diffusing bombs dropped by the Germans. Lord Suffolk accepts Kip into his elite unit, and the two quickly become close. To Kip, Lord Suffolk represents the absolute best of Britain, and Kip looks up to him as a sort of father figure. Lord Suffolk is killed in Erith with the rest of the Holy Trinity when a "trick" bomb explodes.

Kip's Brother – According to Indian tradition, Kip's older brother is supposed to join the army, but he adamantly refuses to agree to anything that gives the English power over him. Kip's brother is thrown into prison for his resistance, and he begs Kip not to trust the Europeans. He claims that Kip will

someday open his eyes to the oppression of Asia by the Western world, and Kip indeed understand this after atomic **bombs** are dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II.

Miss Morden – Lord Suffolk's secretary. Lord Suffolk accepts Kip into his experimental **bomb** squad on Miss Morden's recommendation, and she works closely with them in field, keeping notes as the men diffuse bombs. Miss Morden is part of "the Holy Trinity," along with Lord Suffolk and Mr. Harts, and all three are killed in an explosion in Erith.

Eppler – A German spy who was sent to Cairo in 1942. According to Caravaggio, Eppler was led across the desert by a Hungarian desert explorer named Almásy with a secret code **book** hidden in a copy of *Rebecca*. Eppler was apprehended by British Intelligence, but his guide, Almásy, disappeared into the desert. The character of Eppler is based on Johannes Eppler, an actual German spy during World War II who was raised in Egypt by his Egyptian stepfather.

Fenelon-Barnes – A European **desert** explorer whom the English patient meets in 1931. In Fenelon-Barnes's tent in the North African desert, the English patient notices a lump in the man's bed reflected in the tent's **mirror.** He pulls back the covers and, expecting a dog, finds a young Arab girl tied to the bed. Fenelon-Barnes's implied sexual abuse of this girl represents the oppression and abuse frequently suffered by indigenous people at the hands of white European colonists.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mr. Fred Harts – Lord Suffolk's chauffer and a member of "the Holy Trinity" with Suffolk and Miss Morden. Mr. Harts is killed in Erith along with Lord Suffolk and Miss Morden when a "trick" **bomb** explodes.

Clara – Hana's stepmother and Patrick's wife. Clara writes Hana several letters during the war, but Hana doesn't answer them until the end of the book. After **bombs** are dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Hana finally writes Clara and tells her she will soon be coming home to Canada.

Prince Kemal el Din – A member of the English patient's **desert** exploration team. Prince Kemal el Din is based on Kamal el Dine Hussein, an actual Egyptian desert explorer who worked closely with Almásy in the early 1930s.

Bell – A European member of the English patient's **desert** exploration team.

THEMES

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LOVE

Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* focuses on the love story between the unidentified English patient—later revealed to be László Almásy, a Hungarian **desert** explorer—and Katharine Clifton, the wife of Geoffrey Clifton, a British spy posing as an archaeologist in North Africa in the years just before World War II. Badly burned in a plane crash and suffering from amnesia, Almásy is brought to a makeshift hospital in an abandoned Italian **villa** near the end of World War II. His nurse, Hana, believes her unknown patient to be too unstable to move, and she stays with him in the villa even though the war in Europe is largely over. Almásy doesn't remember his name or nationality, but he clearly remembers his love for Katharine, and he tells his story to Hana and the others at the villa, including Caravaggio, an Italian thief who fought for the Allied Forces, and Kip, an Indian sapper who sweeps the villa for undetonated **bombs** and mines. While Ondaatje's novel focuses primarily on the love between Almásy and Katharine, love is a driving force for the other characters as well, and it touches each of them in profound ways. Through the depiction of love in *The English Patient*, Ondaatje at once underscores the power of love to both heal and destroy and ultimately argues that love has the power to transcend anything, including war, distance, and even death.

Love in *The English Patient* is depicted as an immensely powerful force that, even as it offers passion and profound connection, changes people, driving them to jealousy or even insanity. Almásy's story captures the power of love, but also its destructiveness. As Almásy recounts falling in love with the married Katharine, he explicitly describes himself as "insane." His love for her also makes him extraordinarily jealous and possessive. He wants to completely separate Katharine from her husband Geoffrey, and feels that he does not have Katharine herself if her husband "can continue to hold her or be held by her." Almásy's relationship with Katharine is ends up being short-lived, but he falls so completely in love with her that he is nearly driven mad when he isn't able to have her. What brings Almásy and Katharine's love affair to an end is Katharine's guilt about what she has done to her husband, and her fear about how the affair will affect her husband should he learn of it. "How can I be your lover? He will go mad," Katharine says to Almásy in reference to Geoffrey. "I think he will go mad," Katharine says. "Do you understand?" And Katharine's fear is justified—Geoffrey does discover Katharine and Almásy's affair, and he is indeed driven to madness. Geoffrey, a pilot, attempts to kill Almásy by crashing his plane into Almásy in the North African desert. Geoffrey's plot fails and he misses Almásy, but Geoffrey does kill himself and almost fatally injures Katharine, who is in the plane with him. The novel portrays passionate

romantic love as overwhelming in both the ecstasy it can offer but also in the way it can overwhelm a person's reasoning. Further, it portrays such love as necessarily territorial and possessive. The competition over such love as a kind of warfare—the struggle between the Austrian Almásy and British Geoffrey parallels the global conflict that plays out in the months leading up to World War II, which will itself involve a massive campaign in North Africa.

Yet while *The English Patient* depicts love as a maddening, overwhelming and potentially destructive force, it also represents love as a healing power that comforts and restores the novel's characters in the aftermath of World War II. Almásy's love affair with Katharine and her subsequent death is the source of much of his suffering, but he finds comfort in telling his story to Hana and the others at the villa. "We die containing a richness of lovers," Almásy tells Caravaggio at the end of the novel. "I wish for all this to be marked on my body when I am dead." For Almásy there is healing and closure in his love story, and as he approaches death, he is compelled to share that story with others. Hana, too, finds healing and closure in love. She falls into a kind of familial or paternal love with the English patient, who, like her own actual father, Patrick, is badly burned during the war. Patrick dies from his burns alone and far away from his daughter, and Hana comes to terms with this profound loss through her love for the English patient. Kip, who is deeply scarred and likely shell-shocked from his time as a bomb and mine specialist during the war, finds comfort in his romantic love for Hana. Unlike Almásy and Geoffrey who are driven mad by love, Kip finds stability in his love for Hana and believes that if he can just touch her, he will "be sane." The emotional wounds Kip suffers because of the war begin to heal when he falls in love with Hana, and the love Hana feels for Kip similarly gives her a sense of connection after the war had filled her with nothing but loss.

By the very end of the novel, nearly 15 years have passed since the war and the occupants of the Italian villa have either died or gone their separate ways. Kip returns to India, where he becomes a doctor, marries, and has a family; however, he still thinks of Hana and the love they shared in the abandoned Italian villa. Kip's love for Hana transcends not only the violence of war but time and distance as well, just as Hana's love for her father and Almásy's love for Katharine transcends death. Through such enduring love, Ondaatje highlights both aspects of this powerful emotion: its capacity to break one's heart and spirit; but also its ability to give one strength and reason to live.

WAR AND NATIONALITY

As Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* takes place during World War II, nationality is an exceedingly important theme throughout the novel. Hana is a Canadian nurse who diligently cares for the wounded soldiers of the Allied powers, and Caravaggio is an Italian immigrant to Canada who spent time in Canada before the war and fights on behalf of the Allies. Kip is an Indian sapper and **bomb** specialist who embraces Western culture, and the English patient—who is actually a Hungarian **desert** explorer named László Almásy—is an amnesiac who hides both his national identity and his service to Germans during the war behind his flawed memory. While the English patient is unable to remember his name or nationality, he remembers nearly everything else, and he has a particular dislike for nations and the dissent and bias that comes from separately-defined national identities. "I came to hate nations," the English patient tells Hana as she attempts to nurse him back to health after he is nearly killed and burned beyond all recognition in a plane crash in the North African desert. Ondaatje draws a parallel between the English patient's hatred of nations and the events of World War II, through which he ultimately argues that divisions of nationality are largely to blame for the senseless violence of the war.

As the English patient recovers after a nearly fatal place crash, he tells Hana all about his life as a desert explorer. The English patient loves the desert and its ability to "erase everything" in sandstorms, including one's national identity. The people who made up the English patient's expedition team into the desert were German, English, Hungarian, and African; however, their national identities were "insignificant" to the desert tribes of North Africa, who had never heard of their faraway countries. "Gradually we became nationless," the English patient tells Hana of those in his desert expedition. In the isolation of the desert, one's national identity means very little and is eventually erased. Instead of separate identities from different countries, they were all just people exploring the desert. The English patient tells Hana he didn't want his name to exist in the desert. "Erase the family name!" the English patient says. "Erase nations! I was taught such things by the desert." By the start of the war, the English patient had been in the desert for over 10 years and "it was easy for [him] to slip across borders, not to belong to anyone, to any nation." The English patient feels trapped by his national identity, but he is completely free in the desert.

Not only does the English patient prefer the anonymity of the desert, he specifically points at national identity as a main source of dissent, violence, and pain within his life. The English patient's prized possession is a worn copy of *The Histories*, a **book** by the ancient Greek writer Herodotus, which the English patient continually rereads and annotates in the margins. He explains the book to Hana, describing it as "cul-de-sacs within the sweep of history—how people betray each other for the sake of nations." According to both Herodotus and the English patient, nations and nationality have always been the primary reason for hatred, conflict, and war. As the English patient explains his distaste for nations, he claims that the world is

"deformed by nation-states." To the English patient, national identity is not something that brings people together or instills a sense of unity; rather, it is something that alienates people and turns them ugly by breeding strife and war. Furthermore, the English patient blames nations for the death of Madox, his close friend and exploration partner. "Madox died because of nations," the English patient tells Hana. Madox returns home to England during the war and attended church with his wife. During the sermon, in which the minister speaks in honor of the English fighting in the war, Madox pulls out his revolver and kills himself in the middle of the church. Like the English patient, Madox was accustomed to living a nationless life, and he chooses death rather than to fight with the conflicting nations of the war.

At the same time, the novel also makes clear how impractical it is to try to live a life free from the compulsions and powers of nations and nationality. The English patient himself is in the end caught up with the forces of nationality. After Geoffrey attempts to kill Almásy in the North African Desert after finding out about the affair with Katharine, and instead kills himself and badly injures Katharine, Almásy brings Katharine to shelter in the Cave of Swimmers and then heads out to get help. But when he arrives at a town where he might get help, he is instead arrested on suspicion of being a spy—and Katharine dies in the cave, alone. Later, in order to get back to at least recover Katharine's body, Almásy, agrees to guide the Germans in the desert. Thus, even as the novel seems to agree with Almásy's condemnation of nations and nationality, it suggests through Almásy's fate, the fates of all the characters caught up in the war, and the fates of all the historical figures depicted in the "betrayals" of *The Histories*, that the ties and bonds of nationality are impossible to escape.

BRITISH COLONIALISM AND RACISM

Kip is the only character of color in *The English Patient*, and Ondaatje constantly draws attention to Kip's identity as a Punjabi Indian. According to tradition, the oldest son in an Indian family joins the army, and the second oldest, like Kip, becomes a doctor. However, when World War II begins, Kip joins the army, but his older brother adamantly refuses. Kip's brother will not "agree to any situation where the English have power," and he is thrown into prison for his resistance. India did not gain independence from British rule until 1947, so when Kip joins the army in 1939, he fights for the British. From his **turban** to his long hair and dark skin, Kip is always an "other," first among the British soldiers with whom he fights and then again among the ad-hoc "family" that develops in the Italian **villa**. Kip's experiences in the novel eventually allow him to see the lie at the heart of British Colonialism: that though he might conform he will never be allowed to fully join the British world, and, further, that in the eyes of the white world he and people like him will *always* be an "other," and will always be treated as inferior.

When Kip initially joins the army, he is willing to completely assimilate to Western culture and ways. This willingness reflects Kip's sense of the correctness and goodness of the British cause in the war, but it also (without Kip's realizing it) indicates the power of British colonialism to erase Kip's native identity. While in the army, Kip listens to American music from the AIF station and is constantly humming English songs he learns from his close friend and comrade, an Englishman named Hardy. Yet Kip does not recognize at this point that in conforming to Western life by embracing American and English culture, he is ignoring his own. Kip loves English tea and stands "dutifully in line at the crack of dawn" each morning during the war just to get a cup of the tea he loves so much. This ritual, though, carries heavy symbolic weight. The English colonized India—and became wealthy doing so—in large part because doing so gave the English empire access to a population of Indian indentured servants to raise tea on "tea estates." Kip's adoption of tea might seem simple, but it is an adoption of a pleasant ritual that is connected to the British exploitation of India for more than a century. Later, at the abandoned Italian villa, Hana "imagines all of Asia" through Kip, although she notes he has "assumed English fathers" during the war and follows their orders "like a dutiful son." Even Hana, who loves Kip, sees him as exotic, as an other. No matter how Kip tries to assimilate and conform, Hana and the army see Kip as someone who does not completely fit into their Western world.

The novel also shows how, despite Kip's desire to assimilate and conform to Western ways and culture, he is still met with a fair amount of overt and explicit discrimination, which reflects the racism of colonial era society. When Kip applies to be part of Lord Suffolk's experimental **bomb** squad at the beginning of the war, Kip breezes through all of the entrance exams and senses "he would be admitted easily if it were not for his race." Kip is smart and qualified for the job, but he feels he will be discriminated against because of his identity as an Indian. Surprisingly, Kip is selected for Lord Suffolk's squad, and while Suffolk himself is kind and accepting of Kip, Kip is ignored by most of the men. As a person of color in an overwhelmingly white army, Kip becomes "the anonymous member of another race, a part of the invisible world." Kip fights for the British, but they continue to sideline and marginalize him. As Kip's intelligence and capability guide him through the ranks, there is "always hesitation by the soldiers to call him 'sir.'" Most of the soldiers in Kip's unit are Englishmen, and they can't easily bring themselves to show Kip, an Indian who is beneath them according to their racist standards, the respect his station has earned him. But perhaps the most profound instance of racism in the novel occurs at the villa, precisely because it is less overt. The others at the villa like and admire or even love Kip, but they never see him as being English, despite being a subject of the English empire. In contrast, the English patient—who they all

think of as being "the English patient"—is easily accepted as being English by the residents of the villa simply because of his accent. But in fact the English patient is Austrian, a nation that fought against England in the war. Because he is white, the "English" patient is accepted. Because he is not white, Kip never entirely is.

Kip comes to realize his position relative to the other residents of the villa—and to the British Empire and white society more generally—near the end of the novel, when he hears of the nuclear bombs dropped on Japan. These bombs, the single most brutal destructive force brought to bear in the war, were used not against the Germans, but the Japanese. In this moment, Kip (who worked in the war to protect Allied soldiers from German bombs) realizes that the Allies "would never have dropped such a bomb on a white nation." Kip realizes that even despite the fact that a war has ravaged Europe, that white society will always treat non-white people even worse. As Kip puts it: "When you start bombing the brown races of the world, you're an Englishman," Kip says as he levels a rifle at the English patient. "You all learned it from the English." Kip then leaves the villa, abandoning Hana, whom he loves but also recognizes as being part of the white society that will always treat him as an inferior. He returns to India, where he becomes a doctor as his cultural tradition dictates. Realizing that he can never truly be a part of white society, he reconnects with the traditions of his own. Meanwhile, no one at the villa can deny Kip's anger after the bombing. Shortly before Hana returns home to Canada, she writes her stepmother a letter. "If we can rationalize this," Hana says of the Japanese bombings, "we can rationalize anything," and this indeed appears to be Ondaatje's overarching point. The racism and Western superiority that led to British colonialism has also led directly to the annihilation of two Japanese cities full of civilians. In a story about love torn apart by jealousy and passion, and Europe torn apart by nationalism, Ondaatje makes clear that the racism of white people toward non-white people is even more powerful, pervasive, and destructive.

HISTORY, WORDS, AND STORYTELLING

Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* is a fictional account of historic events, and several of his characters—such as the English patient, László Almásy, a Hungarian **desert** explorer who guided German spies across the North African desert during World War II—are based on actual historical figures. The novel unfolds in a series of stories told by the main characters, including Almásy, his Canadian nurse, Hana, an Italian-Canadian thief named Caravaggio, and Kip, an Indian sapper, after they all converge at an abandoned Italian **villa** near the end of World War II. Almásy has been badly burned in a plane crash and suffers from amnesia, and he is known by Hana and the others as simply the English patient. In the English patient's possession is a copy of *The Histories*, a **book** by the ancient Greek writer Herodotus, which the English patient continually reads, rereads, and writes in. The relationship between books and stories is a repeated theme in the novel. Through the stories read and told in *The English Patient*, Ondaatje effectively argues that literature offers not just entertainment but a way to understand and shape the world, and that history is best kept and told through personal experiences and stories, not through official records and history books.

In addition to Almásy's copy of *The Histories*, Ondaatje mentions several other literary works, which reflects the importance of storytelling in the characters' lives. Further, the novel shows how characters uses these texts as a means of understanding the world, and of creating understanding between each other. Madox carries a copy of Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* across the North African desert, and tries to explain to Almásy the people they meet in terms of Tolstoy's novel. Madox interprets his unfamiliar surroundings through Tolstoy, and he tries to share this with Almásy. As Hana watches Kip befriend the English patient, she understands their strange friendship through "a reversal" of Rudyard Kipling's novel *Kim*, only "the young student is now Indian, [and] the wise old teacher is English." Hana has been reading the novel to the English patient, and like Madox, she turns to the novel to better appreciate her surroundings. Hana also uses a blank page at the back of James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* to keep a personal journal. Like Almásy's annotated copy of *The Histories*, Hana's life and experiences mix and mingle with book until they are one. It is not just the characters who use these texts as a way to relate to the world and each other, though. Ondaatje purposefully included each of the titles mentioned, and the novel of *The English Patient* also exists in relation to those titles. *Anna Karenina*, for instance, is perhaps the most famous novel about an affair ever written, referenced in this novel about a passionate affair. *The English Patient* doesn't always use texts as mere reference points, but rather seems to be engaged in a kind of argument with those previous texts. For instance, Kipling's *Kim* is a coming-of-age story about an Irish orphan in India who, through a series of adventures, grows up to become an important spy in service to the British Empire. It is a novel that portrays the Empire as great, and the British presence in India as welcome and mutually beneficial. The title of the novel and the author's last name closely resemble Kip's own name, which is purposeful. But Kip's story is a kind of corrective to *Kim*, in which Kip, an Indian, has adventures not in India but in Europe, and comes to see the evil of the British Empire and its fundamentally racist and exploitative attitudes toward India. *The English Patient* treats books seriously, and sees itself as existing in conversation with those books, sometimes in agreement, sometimes not. "Words, Caravaggio," Almásy says at one point. "They have a power." Both *The English Patient*, and its characters, exist in a world in which words—in

which stories—give the world meaning.

While storytelling and literature serves as a means for Ondaatje's characters to enrich and interpret their lives and surroundings, there is a direct connection between stories and history. According to the English patient, whenever he is left alone in someone's house, he always goes to the bookcase, "pulls down a volume and inhales it. So history enter us," he says. Both Almásy and Ondaatje draw a parallel between stories and history, which is often relayed through the telling and reading of stories. When Almásy falls in love with Katharine Clifton, the love of his life, he does so as she read aloud from *The Histories*. She chooses a passage of the book that Almásy usually passes over, but by the time she has finished reading, he has completely fallen in love with her. Almásy's connection to both history and literature is reflected in his love for Katharine. But Almásy's copy of *The Histories* plays another role in the way that the novel engages with history. *The Histories*, as it turns out, is a rather odd book of history. In fact, it might be more accurate to call it a book of historical stories, rather than a book of straight history—it concerns itself with the stories of people, with personal histories, rather than the sweep of big historical events. While Almásy's fate in the novel is never actually revealed, Hana and Caravaggio decide that if and when the English patient dies from his burns, they will bury everything except his copy of *The Histories*. In death, then, Almásy's story will live on through Herodotus's book, his own personal history and interpretations become tied up and preserved along with those in the book. Almásy tells Caravaggio at one point that all people are "communal histories, communal books," who carry stories of the past into the future. *The English Patient* seems to suggest an even bolder idea: that such personal histories—which are often overlooked in the broad view of "history"—are vital to understanding both the past and the present.

GOD AND RELIGION

God and religion do not appear be an important part of the lives of the characters in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*. As the characters converge at the abandoned Italian **villa** during the end of World War II, they each begin to heal from the traumas of war, but neither God nor organized religion seem to have a place within that recovery. None of the characters partake in formal religious practices, nor do they pray or otherwise interact with God. Despite this noticeable lack, however, there are numerous biblical references throughout the book. As Hana, a Canadian nurse, cares for the unidentified burn victim she knows only as the English patient, she thinks that her patient has the "hipbones of Christ," and she comes to look at the man as her "despairing saint." The novel also takes care to describe the religious architecture of Italy, though this description also makes clear that most of the chapels and religious sculptures have been in some way damaged—if not destroyed—by the violence of the war. Yet while the practices and structures of organized religion in the story seem to have been destroyed by the war, many of the characters do seem to seek out some kind of religious solace in moments of pain or death. This suggests that a kind of religious spirit can survive the most terrible events, still remaining even in the aftermath of war.

The novel depicts World War II as having essentially broken religion. This breaking is evident in a number of ways. First, it is made clear in the way that the combatants in the war—a war fought in the Christian lands of Europe—show no respect for religious structures. The Italian villa that serves as a makeshift hospital during the war (and later becomes the home of Hana, the English patient, Caravaggio, and Kip) has a chapel that has been "scarred" by "phosphorus **bombs** and explosions." Cathedrals and chapels all through Italy have been destroyed. As Kip makes his way through Italy diffusing German bombs and landmines, he finds himself sweeping several chapels and churches, including the Sistine Chapel, perhaps the most famous religious structure in Europe. Through the wanton neglect of the Europeans for their religious structures, the novel implies that perhaps the religion itself never held as much sway over Europe as any and all Europeans would have attested before the war. The novel also portrays religion during the war as having become hypocritical by having been bent to political ends. Madox, the English patient's close friend and fellow **desert** explorer, attends church in England during the war, and listens to a sermon praising the English war effort. Madox believes the church has "lost its holiness," clearly because the sermon, in being pro-England, is also pro-war. Madox then commits an act that he believes to be "a holy act," an act of protest against this use of religion: he kills himself with his desert revolver. For Madox, and seemingly for many of the characters, the organized religion has been revealed as having "lost its holiness" in the destruction and trauma of the war.

And yet, the novel also contains numerous moments when a connection to God or religion seems to offer characters a degree of comfort or protection. For instance, after the retreating Germans wire all of Naples to explode when the power is restored, Kip does his best to sweep the city for bombs. Before finally giving up in exhaustion, without being certain that he and his fellow sappers have finished the job, Kip goes to sleep in the Church of San Giovanni a Carbonara. Kip is not a Christian, but in this moment when it is possible that he will die when the power is turned back on, he retreats to a sacred place. This is not his religion, but a holy place still offers a sense of peace and comfort. Similarly, while trying to survive all alone at the abandoned villa with the English patient, who is too unstable to move, Hana is forced to grow vegetables in the meadow outside the villa. She removes the six-foot crucifix from the villa chapel and erects it her garden as a scarecrow. Hana's use of the crucifix could certainly be taken as being

sacrilegious, but at the same time it could be taken as a new, if tentative, religious form. The crucifix, after all, continues to ward off evil, to offer support, to protect the weak and the innocent. The novel seems to imply that Hana maybe misusing the crucifix according to official rules, but not in spirit. And, by extension, the novel implies that perhaps it is the new spirit that should be heeded, and not the old rules (which, after all, were a part of the society that led to the destruction of World War II). Patrick, Hana's father, who is also killed during the war, dies in a dove-cot in France, which is a structure used for housing doves. Dove-cots are considered sacred places in France, "like a church in many ways," Hana tells her stepmother in a letter after Patrick's death. Yet while it is like a church in many ways, it is certainly humbler than a church. And yet it is also still standing, and its association with doves make it a structure that is strongly associated with peace. Here, again, the novel seems to suggest that the old forms of religion may have been destroyed in the war, but that the human need for religion and spiritual sustenance remains. Further, the novel implies through Hana's use of the crucifix and Patrick's death in the church of the dove-cot, that in the post-war world there are possibilities for the experience of *new* forms of religious practice that are perhaps humbler, less organized, less rule-bound, but that nonetheless offer a connection with God.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE VILLA

Hana refuses to leave the Italian bombed-out villa she inhabits with the English patient, a structure which symbolizes the damaged physical and emotional state of Ondaatje's characters after the violence of World War II. The villa, a former German stronghold, was nearly destroyed by **bombs** during the war, and as the German's retreated, they mined the villa with numerous explosives. Many of the villa's rooms are boarded up and impassable, and others are missing walls and ceilings, allowing the elements to contaminate the space. The excessive destruction of the villa mirrors that of its residents, who are each suffering from trauma connected to the war, both physically and psychologically.

While the villa represents the characters' trauma, it also represents their collective healing. Through the villa's history as a nunnery before the war, there is an undeniable religious connection that connotes hope, and Hana's garden in the villa's orchard and the painted garden on the walls of the English patient's room hearken to rebirth and renewal. Similarly, the villa's ad hoc "family" converges there to heal and renew as well. The characters' emotional healing is reflected in the meaningful relationships they foster while living at the villa, and it is seen in their shared celebrations, both when Caravaggio finds the gramophone and they have a makeshift party, and when Kip surprises Hana for her birthday. Perhaps the most profound evidence of the healing of Ondaatje's characters is the playful joking of Hana, Caravaggio, and Kip in the villa's library. Like the Italian villa, Ondaatje's characters are severely damaged by the violence of war, but they are still standing and slowly rebuilding.

THE DESERT

Much of *The English Patient* takes place in the Gilf Kebir, a desert plateau in North Africa, and this desert landscape is symbolic of the English patient, László Almásy's, lack of a national identity. Almásy spends most of the 1930s in the Gilf Kebir looking for the mythical city, Zerzura, and he falls in love with the isolated impermanence of the desert. According to Almásy, the desert cannot be claimed or owned. It is "a piece of cloth carried by winds, never held down by stones, and given a hundred shifting names long before Canterbury existed, long before battles and treaties quilted Europe and the East." The desert's legendary windstorms bury and erase anything standing still, and the remote location means that one's nationality becomes "insignificant."

In the desert, Almásy, a Hungarian desert explorer, becomes nationless and soon grows to "hate nations." Almásy claims one is "deformed by nation-states," and his good friend and fellow desert explorer, Madox, dies "because of nations." While Almásy does his best to become nationless like desert, he ultimately discovers that escaping one's national identity isn't so easy. After Katharine, Almásy's former lover, is injured deep in the Gilf Kebir and Almásy must go for help, the British military refuses to listen to him because he is Hungarian, and Katharine dies waiting. Almásy later leads a German spy across the desert into Cairo during World War II, and after a plane crash leaves Almásy burned and nearly dead while trying to recover Katharine's body, he must conceal his identity to avoid capture and certain death. Even when Almásy is burned beyond recognition and being cared for by Hana, a stranger for all intents and purposes, he is still unable to conceal his national identity. Unlike the boundaryless and unclaimed desert, Almásy is never able to fully severe ties with his nationality, which suggests the link between identity and nationality is one that cannot be broken.

MIRRORS

Mirrors are symbolic of the characters' struggles with their respective identities within the novel. When Hana, a nurse, first arrives in Italy during World War II, she cuts her hair after it in falls into a bloody wound, and she doesn't look in a mirror for over a year. Later, after months of nursing the never-ending line of critically-wounded soldiers

who arrive at the makeshift hospital, Hana catches a glimpse of herself in her roommate's mirror. Looking at her reflection in the tiny mirror, Hana barely recognizes the harden woman she has become. "Hi Buddy," Hana says to herself, borrowing the name she uses for each of her many nameless, faceless patients. The mirror, then, forces Hanna to confront how the trauma of her role as a war nurse has changed her both inside and out, presenting an unrecognizable reflection that highlights the disconnect Hana feels with her former civilian life.

At the end of the war, when Hana refuses to leave the Italian **villa** due to the English patient's unstable condition, she takes down every mirror in the villa and stacks them in the attic. Hana is traumatized by the war and her place in it, and in her refusal to look in the mirror, she effectively avoids confronting herself. Hana isn't the only one who refuses to look in the mirror. Kip, the Indian sapper, struggles with his native identity in the whitewashed British military. He willingly conforms to Western culture, but he continues to wear a traditional **turban**, which he wraps around his head each day without looking in a mirror. Similar to Hana's struggle with her place in the war, Kip struggles with the implications of his racial identity in a racist society, and by avoiding mirrors, he avoids this truth as well.

BOOKS

Books help Ondaatje's characters to understand and interpret the world and each other, but books also symbolize the incredible connection between personal narratives and history within the novel. Books are important on many levels in *The English Patient*. The English patient, the title character and protagonist, carries a worn and heavily-annotated copy of Herodotus's *Histories*, and his close friend, Madox, cherishes a copy of Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Books and stories are profoundly powerful in the novel and are often described as a life-sustaining force. For example, when Hana reads books from the **villa**'s library to the English patient, he swallows "her words like water," and whenever he enters the home of new friend, he goes directly to the bookshelf and "inhales" the books. Hana even uses books from the villa's library to rebuild the destroyed staircase, suggesting that books are not only a part of people but are essential to the building of the world as well.

Within the English patient's copy of *The Histories*, a historical book that focuses on personal narratives, are his personal notes and thoughts, and he has glued in snippets that are important to him: parts of other books, Bible passages, important maps, and even a fern. The English patient's copy of *The Histories* thus represents his own history as well as that of others, much like the copy of *The Last of the Mohicans* Hana uses as a journal. After reading the book by James Fenimore Cooper, Hana turns to a blank page near the back and writes her own story before closing the book and replacing it on the highest shelf of the villa's library. According to the English patient, people are "communal books, communal histories," carrying stories of the past into the future. Ondaatje argues that these personal narratives, often overlooked in the broad view of history, are crucial to understanding both the past and the present.

KIP'S TURBAN

As the only character of color in the novel, attention is repeatedly drawn to Kip's differences, often through his turban, which is an ongoing symbol of his Indian identity. When Kip first arrives at the Italian **villa** while Hana plays the piano during a thunderstorm, Hana catches a quick glimpse of Kip's turban as lightning streaks the room and immediately knows he is a Sikh. When Hana sees Kip's turban, she is "somewhat amazed." This reaction is contrast to when Morden (the secretary of Kip's military mentor) first encounters Kip—she is obviously suspicious of the Indian man, following him with her eyes around the room. "She [has] probably never seen a turban before," Kip thinks, feeling Miss Morden's eyes upon him. He knows that his turban is not only an obvious emblem of his native culture, but a representation of the stark cultural divide between himself as an Indian man and the West at large.

Kip does willingly conform to Western culture as a sapper in the British military, but he is never without his turban for the entirety of the novel. Each day when he emerges from his tent near the orchard of the villa, Kip's military uniform is "immaculate," and his turban is "symmetrically layered." At one point, Kip is caught in a sudden rainstorm, and he immediately removes the wet turban and winds a dry one around his head. Kip's turban remains the one undeniably Indian part of him in the whitewashed British military, but after atomic **bombs** are dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, he removes his turban. The tragedy of the bombings convince Kip that the East will never be fully accepted by the West; however, he doesn't remove his turban to deny his native identity. On the contrary, Kip feels a certain kinship with the Japanese, so he removes his turban and places his long, dark hair in a topknot, a traditional hairstyle popular in Asia, especially in Japan. When Kip removes his turban and dons a topknot, he does so in solidarity as a fellow Asian and promptly leaves Europe, returning to India and his native culture.

BOMBS

Bombs are a constant and threatening presence in *The English Patient*, and they represent the violence and destruction of World War II within Ondaatje's novel. When Hana refuses to leave the Italian **villa** due to the English patient's fragile condition, she is warned that there are numerous unexploded bombs and mines hidden in the building

and on the surrounding land. The villa itself is nearly destroyed by the countless bombs dropped on Italy during the war, and later, after the city of Florence fell as a stronghold, the Germans laid numerous mines in their retreat. Kip, the Indian sapper, is a bomb specialist, and he sweeps the villa and grounds for unexploded bombs, finding several, including a "trick" bomb in the orchard and one behind the library valance, both places frequented by the villa's residents. This constant threat of bombs at the villa is a small-scale representation of the relentless violence and danger of the war, and it's significant that the villa itself use to be a nunnery. Even a site of religious faith, holiness, and hope has been ravaged and corrupted by World War II.

Bombs are continually evolving throughout the novel, becoming more complicated and posing new and deadly threats to civilians and the military alike. For example, the bombs dropped in Erith, England, have a "second, hidden gaine," or explosive booster, set to explode an hour after the first gaine is diffused. The bombs in Erith kill Lord Suffolk, Kip's mentor, and the rest of the "Holy Trinity" before Kip discovers the trick. The violence and destruction of the bombs during World War II is not limited within the novel to those dropped on Europe. At the novel's climax, the United States drops two atomic bombs on Japan—one on Nagasaki and one on Hiroshima—an act that holds great symbolic weight, as it lets Kip and the others at the Italian villa, as well as the entire world, know that there is no end to the destruction and inhumanity of war.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *The English Patient* published in 1993.

Chapter I Quotes

She entered the story knowing she would emerge from it feeling she had been immersed in the lives of others, in plots that stretched back twenty years, her body full of sentences and moments, as if awaking from sleep with a heaviness caused by unremembered dreams.

Related Characters: Hana

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs in the beginning of the novel, when Hana goes into the villa's library to select a book, and it is significant because it underscores the importance of books and storytelling in *The English Patient*. For Hana, and many other characters, books and stories are not just entertainment or a way to pass the time. On the contrary, books and stories are like a life force, which give the characters strength and, at times, the will to go on even when it seems futile. Here, Hana is quite literally made up of books and stories. She is "full of sentences and moments," which implies she consumes these stories, and they, in a way, become a part of her.

This passage also reflects the connection between history and books. Hana goes "back twenty years" and has a vicarious experience through books. While reading, she is "immersed in the lives of others." This immersion allows her insight into others not like herself, such as the Indian sapper, Kip, whom she will meet later in the novel. *The English Patient* itself immerses the reader "in the lives of others," and it very much carries the "heaviness caused by unremembered dreams." Ondaatje's novel *is* like a dream; it floats from story to story, often with little or no transition, and it does not follow a linear timeline. In this way, Ondaatje's novel is an authentic look at history through the lives of others.

She worked in the garden and orchard. She carried the six-foot crucifix from the bombed chapel and used it to build a scarecrow above her seedbed, hanging empty sardine cans from it which clattered and clanked whenever the wind lifted.

Related Characters: Hana

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears as Hana works in the villa's garden, and it is significant because it reflects the importance of religion in the novel. At first glance, religion and God seem to fall to the background within the story and even seem to be outright disrespected, as many churches and religious landmarks have been destroyed by bombings. Here, Hana's use of the crucifix can be interpreted as sacrilegious. She removes the crucifix from the chapel, presumably from the altar, and she then turns into a scarecrow. The "empty sardine cans" further add to the sense of disregard for

religion, as Hana hangs garbage from the sacred cross.

However, Hana's use of the crucifix can also be interpreted as a new, tentative form of religious practice and worship. She places the crucifix "above her seedbed," arguably the most important part of the garden and not unlike an altar. In warding off harmful predators—crows, that is—the cross offers Hana protection, as well as nourishment in the vegetables it will help to produce. In this way, Hana's use of the crucifix may violate the traditional practice of religion, but her spirit behind the crucifix's use is still very much in keeping with the spirit of God and religion. Hana and the others at the villa cannot survive without the garden, and, through the crucifix, God and religion symbolically provide them with this sustenance.

Chapter II Quotes

He sits with his hands below the table, watching the girl eat. He still prefers to eat alone, though he always sits with Hana during meals. Vanity, he thinks. Mortal vanity. She has seen him from a window eating with his hands as he sits on one of the thirty-six steps by the chapel, not a fork or a knife in sight, as if he were learning to eat like someone from the East. In his greying stubble-beard, in his dark jacket, she sees the Italian finally in him. She notices this more and more.

Related Characters: Kip/Kirpal Singh, Hana, Caravaggio

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39-40

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears not long after Caravaggio arrives at the villa, and it is important because it lends valuable insight into Caravaggio's character and the shame he feels related to his identity as a thief and as an Italian during World War II. Caravaggio sits with his hands beneath the table as if to hide the bandaged limbs from Hana. Caravaggio's thumbs were cut off by the Germans because he is a thief, and his clumsy, bandaged hands are now symbols of his dishonest trade. He would rather eat alone so as not to draw attention to his identity as a thief by fumbling with his silverware, or worse, eating with his hands. The Italians fought on behalf of the Germans during the war, and Hana equates the "dark" side of Caravaggio's identity—his career as a thief, his rough appearance—with the Italian part of him.

This passage also reflects the prejudice against those from the East that pervades most of the novel. Here, Caravaggio equates the sloppy way in which he eats to the people of the East, like Kip, who is from India. This quote implies that those from the East must be taught to eat in civilized way by those in the West, which assumes that the West is superior to the East. This, of course, is not true; Kip, for example, eats in an almost obsessively organized way. Yet, due to the racism encouraged by the nationalistic divisions of World War II, Caravaggio believes that people from the East are all savages.

This passage also has subtle religious connotations. Ondaatje frequently draws attention to the 36 steps to chapel. In some religions, the number 18 is associated with life, and since the number 36 is twice 18, the number 36 can be interpreted to represent two lives. As Caravaggio climbs the 36 steps to the chapel, an act that symbolically connotes repentance and atonement, Caravaggio leaves behind his life as a thief (and by the end of the novel, many of his racist assumptions as well), and moves towards a new life free from such shame.

The Villa San Girolamo, built to protect inhabitants from the flesh of the devil, had the look of a besieged fortress, the limbs of most of the statues blown off during the first days of shelling. There seemed little demarcation between house and landscape, between damaged building and the burned and shelled remnants of the earth. To Hana the wild gardens were like further rooms. She worked along the edges of them aware always of unexploded mines. In one soil-rich area beside the house she began to garden with a furious passion that could come only to someone who had grown up in a city. In spite of the burned earth, in spite of the lack of water. Someday there would be a bower of limes, rooms of green light.

Related Characters: Hana

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears as Ondaatje more thoroughly describes the villa, and it is significant because it again reflects the wanton disrespect of religion and God seen during the war, but it also reflects the villa's significance as a symbol of the emotional and physical trauma of its residents, and the healing and renewal that takes place after the war. The villa, formerly a nunnery, has been all but

completely blown up. The statues are destroyed and the walls have fallen in. The ground is scorched and unexploded bombs wait to wreak further havoc. This landscape, destroyed by the war, mirrors the villa's inhabitants. The war has scarred them physically, such as in Caravaggio and the English patient, but is has wrecked them emotionally as well. Hana is most certainly shell-shocked, and Kip likely is too.

Despite the destruction of the villa, however, the old nunnery still protects them, albeit precariously, by (sometimes) shielding them from the elements and providing a bed for the English patient. In this way, the villa is still protecting its "inhabitants from the flesh of the devil." Under the superficial burns, the soil is still "rich," and it will provide them with food and security. The damaged earth will regrow and someday be fruitful. Like the physical symbol of the villa, Hana and the other residents are recuperating and renewing as well, and will again someday be full of "green light."

Chapter III Quotes

❝ At lunch there is Caravaggio's avuncular glance at the objects on the blue handkerchief. There is probably some rare animal, Caravaggio thinks, who eats the same foods that this young soldier eats with his right hand, his fingers carrying it to his mouth. He uses the knife only to peel the skin from the onion, to slice fruit.

Related Characters: Kip/Kirpal Singh, Caravaggio

Related Themes:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs after Kip has been living at the villa for about a week. Caravaggio is still not used to Kip's foreign customs and habits, and this quote is important because it again reflects prejudice against those from the East. Caravaggio's "avuncular glance" means that he looks to Kip like an uncle, or someone in an authority position who has something to teach. In this case, the way Kip eats, with his hands, is the problem. Caravaggio equates eating with one's hands to the behavior of "some rare animal," which not only dehumanizes Kip but also views him as exotic and completely "other."

What Caravaggio sees as the behavior of an "animal" is actually Kip's culture and customs at work. In Indian culture, eating is considered a sensual activity that should be enjoyed using as many bodily senses as possible, including the feeling of the food in one's hand. This also allows one to test the temperature of food before placing it in the mouth. Utensils and cutlery are rarely used, and knives are only used in preparation, to cut up food into finger sized pieces. The right hand is usually used to bring food to the mouth, while the left hand is left clean to pass items around the table. To Kip, eating in this way is both clean (hands are washed thoroughly prior to eating) and in keeping with proper table etiquette. In this way, it is eating with utensils, like Hana and Caravaggio do, that is poor etiquette and the behavior of an "animal," which subverts the traditional racist notion that Westerners are civilized while Easterners are savage.

❝ If he were a hero in a painting, he could claim just sleep. But as even she had said, he was the brownness of a rock, the brownness of a muddy storm-fed river. And something in him made him step back from even the naive innocence of such a remark. The successful defusing of a bomb ended novels. Wise white fatherly men shook hands, were acknowledged, and limped away, having been coaxed out of solitude for this special occasion. But he was a professional. And he remained the foreigner, the Sikh.

Related Characters: Hana, Kip/Kirpal Singh

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 104-5

Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears after Kip diffuses a large bomb in the field near the villa, and it is important because it underscores Kip's experience as an Indian in the West. After the stress of the bomb, Hana sleeps soundly on Kip's chest, but Kip sits awake. He feels he could sleep if he was "a hero in a painting." "Heroes" in paintings, and in literature for that matter, are overwhelmingly white Europeans, which suggests that Kip could sleep if he was white, like Hana. Kip doesn't fit this narrow ideal, however, and is frequently viewed as "other" by the sappers in his unit and those at the villa—Hana's remark about the "brownness" of Kip's skin is further evidence of this. For Hana, Kip's dark skin is exotic and attractive, but, as Kip says, there is a "naïve innocence" to such a remark. Hana's remark relies on how Kip is

different or "other," which further marginalizes him.

The notion that "the successful defusing of a bomb ended novels" aligns with the Ondaatje's ongoing point that books are a powerful tool for preserving history, but it also illustrates the importance of Kip's job and his contribution to the war effort. Kip's skills are invaluable and many undoubtedly owe Kip their lives. In other words, Kip *is* a "hero." He diffuses bombs all day long, repeatedly risking his life, and "wise white fatherly men" take all the credit. Kip, on the other hand, goes back to work, diffusing bombs and saving lives, with men who hesitate to call him "sir" because of his race. As Kip says here, he is always "the foreigner, the Sikh," both in his military life and in this intimate moment with Hana.

"I have seen editions of *The Histories* with a sculpted portrait on the cover. Some statue found in a French museum. But I never imagine Herodotus this way. I see him more as one of those spare men of the desert who travel from oasis to oasis, trading legends as if it is the exchange of seeds, consuming everything without suspicion, piecing together a mirage. 'This history of mine,' Herodotus says, 'has from the beginning sought out the supplementary to the main argument.' What you find in him are cul-de-sacs within the sweep of history—[…]"

Related Characters: The English Patient/László Almásy (speaker), Hana

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 118-9

Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears as Hana sits reading to the English patient, and it is important because it underscores the importance of books and personal stories in understanding and appreciating history. The image of the cover of Herodotus's *The Histories*, depicting a statue from a French museum connotes a rather formal approach to history—one that involves official records and a general consensus, as if to authoritatively say, "This is how it all happened." This quote, spoken by the English patient, challenges this narrow view of history.

The Histories focuses not on a formal sweep of history, but on the personal stories and histories of people. For Herodotus, and the English patient as well, authentic history is found in people, in their stories. Ondaatje frequently refers to books and stories as a type of sustenance or life-giving force, and the English patient's words here reflect this. He talks about stories as "seeds," which he then "consumes." These stories, and the history they represent, become a part of him, and everyone else they touch as well. According to Herodotus, these stories are "supplementary to the main argument." In other words, these stories may not be in formal history books or depicted in famous artwork, but they are nevertheless important and crucial to a better understanding of history and humanity.

Chapter IV Quotes

By 1932, Bagnold was finished and Madox and the rest of us were everywhere. Looking for the lost army of Cambyses. Looking for Zerzura. 1932 and 1933 and 1934. Not seeing each other for months. Just the Bedouin and us, crisscrossing the Forty Days Road. There were rivers of desert tribes, the most beautiful humans I've met in my life. We were German, English, Hungarian, African— all of us insignificant to them. Gradually we became nationless. I came to hate nations. We are deformed by nation-states. Madox died because of nations.

Related Characters: The English Patient/László Almásy (speaker), Madox

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 138

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears as the English patient begins to tell his story. It is important because it reflects his connection to the desert, but it also underscores Ondaatje's argument about the divisive nature of nations. The English patient and Madox spend much of the early 1930s looking for the mythical city Zerzura, and they both fall in love with the anonymity and isolation of the desert. The indigenous people of the desert know nothing of European countries; thus, one's nationality is "insignificant" in the desert. This lends valuable insight into why the English patient, actually the Hungarian explorer Almásy, helped the German spy across the desert into Cairo. Almásy, much like the indigenous people of the North African desert, doesn't look at people in terms of nationality. From his perspective, he simply helped a man, not an enemy spy, across the desert. While the novel ultimately implies that one's nationality

cannot be escaped or erased, Almásy gives every effort to do so, and continues to deny who he is for most of the novel.

The English patient considers himself "nationless," and his remark that he "came to hate nations" has increased meaning in context with World War II. He claims, "we are deformed by nations-states," which suggests that nationality and nationalism, which should bring people together, actually tear them apart, creating division and strife between those of different backgrounds. Madox ultimately commits suicide during a church sermon that supports the war, which further highlights this division. World War II pitted nations against nations, resulting in massive death and destruction, and this passage suggests that this senseless violence was the direct result of nationalities.

❝ The ends of the earth are never the points on a map that colonists push against, enlarging their sphere of influence. On one side servants and slaves and tides of power and correspondence with the Geographical Society. On the other the first step by a white man across a great river, the first sight (by a white eye) of a mountain that has been there forever.

Related Characters: Hana, The English Patient/László Almásy

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs when the English patient explains the desert to Hana, and it is significant because it underscores the disastrous effects of British colonialism and highlights the mindset of Western superiority that invariably goes along with it. The "ends of the earth" the English patient mentions aren't "points on a map"—they represent the homelands of people who have suffered, and continue to suffer, because of the colonists' desire to "enlarge their sphere of influence." Often times, colonists went to Eastern counties, like Kip's native India or the North African desert, where indigenous people were exploited as "servants and slaves" by European "tides of power."

This quote highlights the Western assumption that Eastern countries and landmarks don't really exist until they are discovered by a "white eye," and Ondaatje's novel illustrates the ridiculousness of such a racist assumption. Eastern countries are home to rich cultures, noteworthy people, and unique histories, and they existed long before Western takeover. This quote also illustrates the selfishness of colonialism, such as that of the explorers of the Royal Geographical Society of London. Western colonists saw Eastern countries as exotic places to explore and exploit, with very little, if any, consideration for the people they colonized and the cultures they affected.

Chapter V Quotes

❝ She picks up a cushion and places it onto her lap as a shield against him. "If you make love to me I won't lie about it. If I make love to you I won't lie about it."

She moves the cushion against her heart, as if she would suffocate that part of herself which has broken free.

"What do you hate most?" he asks.

"A lie. And you?"

"Ownership," he says. "When you leave me, forget me."

Her fist swings towards him and hits hard into the bone just below his eye. She dresses and leaves.

Related Characters: The English Patient/László Almásy, Katharine Clifton (speaker), Geoffrey Clifton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 152

Explanation and Analysis

This exchange between Katharine and the English patient occurs early in their affair, and it is important because it highlights the deceitfulness of their relationship, as well as the abuse that Katharine heaps upon the English patient. Katharine claims that she "won't lie about" their love, but this isn't exactly true. Katharine may be honest to the English patient, but since she is married, their entire relationship is a lie. Katharine places the cushion on her lap her as if to "shield" herself because she knows deep down that their relationship will end badly. She loves the English patient, perhaps more than Geoffrey, but she must "suffocate that part of herself which has broken free." In other words, Katharine knows their affair cannot continue.

Katharine frequently abuses the English patient as she does here, and this suggests that she feels immense guilt over the dishonesty of their affair. Here, Katharine says she most hates a lie, yet their entire relationship is based on a lie. The English patient's hatred of "ownership" reflects his desire to

remain nationless and completely unattached. He lives for the impermanence of the desert and isn't interested in long-term attachments. This doesn't mean he doesn't love Katharine; on the contrary, his love for her is quite strong and endures long after her tragic death. In this way, Ondaatje implies that there really is a thin line between love and hate. For both Katharine and the English patient, their love involves that which they hate most: lies and ownership, respectively.

Chapter VI Quotes

"Let me tell you a story," Caravaggio says to Hana. 'There was a Hungarian named Almásy, who worked for the Germans during the war. He flew a bit with the Afrika Korps, but he was more valuable than that. In the 1930s he had been one of the great desert explorers. He knew every water hole and had helped map the Sand Sea. He knew all about the desert. He knew all about dialects. Does this sound familiar? Between the two wars he was always on expeditions out of Cairo. One was to search for Zerzura— the lost oasis. Then when war broke out he joined the Germans. In 1941 he became a guide for spies, taking them across the desert into Cairo. What I want to tell you is, I think the English patient is not English."

Related Characters: Caravaggio (speaker), The English Patient/László Almásy, Hana

Related Themes:

Page Number: 163

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears as Caravaggio begins to realize who the English patient really is, and it is significant because it reveals the English patient's true identity as László Almásy. The character of the English patient is based in part on the real-life Almásy, a Hungarian explorer who was affiliated with the Afrika Korps, a German expeditionary force in North Africa during World War II. During the 1930s, Almásy extensively explored and mapped the Sahara, making him increasingly valuable to the Germans, who were trying to get a stronghold in North Africa, which was mostly British-held.

Almásy was the utmost European authority on the North African desert during the late 1930s, during which time it became increasingly apparent that the Middle East would soon become a major theater in the war. Caravaggio asks Hana if this all sounds familiar, as it is the exact story the English patient has already told her. From the English patient's many desert expeditions to his continued search for Zerzura, a mythical desert city, his story is almost exactly the same as Almásy's, and like the English patient, Almásy really guided German spies across the desert. Just as Caravaggio suspects, the English patient is not English, but a Hungarian who supported the Germans during the war.

Chapter VII Quotes

He looked back at the others, peered around the room and caught the gaze of the middle-aged secretary. She watched him sternly. An Indian boy. He smiled and walked towards the bookshelves. Again he touched nothing. At one point he put his nose close to a volume called *Raymond, or Life and Death* by Sir Oliver Hodge. He found another, similar title. *Pierre, or the Ambiguities*. He turned and caught the woman's eyes on him again. He felt as guilty as if he had put the book in his pocket. She had probably never seen a turban before. The English! They expect you to fight for them but won't talk to you. Singh. And the ambiguities.

Related Characters: Lord Suffolk, Miss Morden, Kip/Kirpal Singh

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 187-8

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs when Kip applies for Lord Suffolk's experimental bomb squad, and it is significant because it further underscores the importance of books and literature within the novel, but it also highlights the blatant racism Kip mush endure as an Indian man in the British military. Miss Morden, the "middle-aged secretary," eyes Kip suspiciously and "sternly" simply because he is Indian. She stares at him so intently that he is afraid to even touch the books in the library. She makes him feel "guilty" for merely existing, and he is certain that she has never seen a turban, which symbolizes Kip's Indian identity.

This quote also reflects the importance of literature within the novel, and the books Kip mentions have increased meaning within the context of *The English Patient*. Sir Oliver Hodge's *Raymond, or Life and Death* is a true account of Hodge's son's experiences during World War I, and *Pierre, or the Ambiguities*, a novel by Herman Melville, is an experimental novel that can also be interpreted as Melville's autobiography. In this way, by referencing the "ambiguities"

of the English, Ondaatje implies that Miss Morden's own doubtful interpretation of Kip is in fact a misunderstanding, or a misinterpretation, based solely on the racist assumptions perpetuated by colonialism. Miss Morden refuses, at first, to interact with Kip or speak to him, yet he is expected to go to war and die for the very people who obviously do not respect him.

❝ He was accustomed to his invisibility. In England he was ignored in the various barracks, and he came to prefer that. The self-sufficiency and privacy Hana saw in him later were caused not just by his being a sapper in the Italian campaign. It was as much a result of being the anonymous member of another race, a part of the invisible world. He had built up defences of character against all that, trusting only those who befriended him.

Related Characters: Hana, Kip/Kirpal Singh

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 196-7

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs as Ondaatje continues to introduce Kip, and it is significant because it further highlights the racism Kip is forced to endure in the British military because of his Indian identity. As Kip is an Indian and does not fit in with the white sappers in his unit, he is largely invisible and ignored by the other men. Hana assumes that Kip's quiet nature is due to the stress of his job as a bomb specialist, and while this is partly true, it is not why he avoids other people. Kip avoids people, including the men in his unit, not because he fears they will be killed in the line of duty, but because he has learned not to trust them.

To the white sappers in Kip's unit, Kip is "anonymous," a nonentity that does not deserve their attention or their respect. Yet he is also their superior officer and is by far the most talented bomb expert. Hardy is the only sapper who respects and befriends Kip, and he is the only the only man in their unit who does not hesitate to call Kip "sir." Kip endangers his life daily for men who offer him zero respect, and as such he has learned not to trust or care about others who clearly do not care about him, making him increasingly distant and emotionally guarded.

Chapter VIII Quotes

❝ He will sit up and flip his hair forward, and begin to rub the length of it with a towel. She imagines all of Asia through the gestures of this one man. The way he lazily moves, his quiet civilisation. He speaks of warrior saints and she now feels he is one, stern and visionary, pausing only in these rare times of sunlight to be godless, informal, his head back again on the table so the sun can dry his spread hair like grain in a fan-shaped straw basket. Although he is a man from Asia who has in these last years of war assumed English fathers, following their codes like a dutiful son.

Related Characters: Hana, Kip/Kirpal Singh

Related Themes:

Page Number: 217

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears as Hana finds herself attracted to Kip's dark skin and his exotic ways, and it again reflects how Kip is "other" in Hana's eyes. Hana largely see Kip in relation to his Indian identity, and she constantly focuses on the way he is different from Western men. Here, she watches as he washes his long, dark hair, and she "imagines all of Asia through the gestures of this one man," quickly associating him not just with India but with all of the East. Hana refers to his movements as "lazy," which is degrading in itself, but she also refers to his "quiet civilization," an ironic description as the West typically views those from the East as uncivilized and savage. While Hana clearly cares deeply about Kip and likely does not intend to harm him or add to the discrimination he endures, she still focuses largely on his race, and thereby fails to see who he truly is.

Hana often refers to Kip as a "warrior saint," an ancient Indian warrior and savior. While Hinduism and Sikhism do not officially recognize saints, warrior saints have existed since antiquity, and they are known to be peaceful men who fearlessly protect women and their religion. This is reflected in Hana's description of Kip as "stern and visionary" and always sweeping the villa for bombs and danger. Kip is at once a living representation of the East, but he is also a dedicated British soldier who has deep respect for his English superiors. He follows orders and conforms to Western ways "like a dutiful son," yet it is clear that Kip will never be fully accepted by the West. Like Hana, even Kip's "English fathers" will always see Kip as "other," as somehow less than his white counterparts. This suggests that Kip will never be accepted, regardless of his efforts to conform to Western society—his nationality alienates him from those around him.

Chapter IX Quotes

She had always wanted words, she loved them, grew up on them. Words gave her clarity, brought reason, shape. Whereas I thought words bent emotions like sticks in water. She returned to her husband.

Related Characters: The English Patient/László Almásy (speaker), Katharine Clifton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs as the English patient tells the story of his love affair with Katharine, and it is important because it reflects the importance of words within the novel, but it also underscores how words can be deceptive, ironic, or misleading. Words and stories are exceedingly important to Katharine, as they are to Hana—they seem to fill her up and offer her sustenance or some form of nourishment. Katharine "loves" words and "grew up on them," which suggests that she is built by words and stories and that they are part of her existence in a crucial, physical way. Words clarify the world for Katharine, and the give her life "reason" and "shape." In other words, Katharine is able to interpret and understand her world because of words, but this is not Almásy's experience.

Words do not give Almásy's life shape and reason, and they do not seem to bring him any clarity. For example, Katharine says she loves Almásy, but she refuses to leave her husband, and she instead turns her back on Almásy. In this way, Katharine's words bend Almásy's emotions "like sticks in water." When a stick is placed in the water, it appears to bend even though it is straight, much like the way Katharine's false words bend Almásy's feelings. Her words mean one thing but look like something else entirely. Thus, Almásy does not feel the same attachment to words as Katharine, as they have largely caused him pain in the past.

We die containing a richness of lovers and tribes, tastes we have swallowed, bodies we have plunged into and swum up as if rivers of wisdom, characters we have climbed into as if trees, fears we have hidden in as if caves. I wish for all this to be marked on my body when I am dead. I believe in such cartography— to be marked by nature, not just to label ourselves on a map like the names of rich men and women on buildings. We are communal histories, communal books.

Related Characters: The English Patient/László Almásy (speaker), Katharine Clifton, Caravaggio

Related Themes:

Page Number: 261

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs as the English patient tells Caravaggio the story of his love affair with Katharine, and it is significant because it underscores the power of love within the novel, but it also illustrates Ondaatje's overreaching argument of the importance of personal stories in understanding and interpreting history. As the English patient recovers from his severe burns and the emotional turmoil of his affair with Katharine, telling his story to Caravaggio and Hana gives him strength and a reason to keep living when it seems most futile. For the English patient, there is healing and closure in the telling of his love story, and as he approaches death, he is compelled to tell it.

In death, the English patient's stories, and thus his love for Katharine, will live on in Hana and Caravaggio. He claims people are "communal histories, communal books," which implies that people carry stories of the past into the future, and these stories are written on them like maps, or "cartography." *The English Patient* thus seems to imply that such personal stories, while not necessarily recognized as part of official history, are absolutely vital to understanding both the past and present. True history is reflected in personal stories, not in history books, Ondaatje thus implies, and appreciating these stories is required for an authentic view of history.

Chapter X Quotes

I grew up with traditions from my country, but later, more often, from your country. Your fragile white island that with customs and manners and books and prefects and reason somehow converted the rest of the world. You stood for precise behaviour. I knew if I lifted a teacup with the wrong finger I'd be banished. If I tied the wrong kind of knot in a tie I was out. Was it just ships that gave you such power? Was it, as my brother said, because you had the histories and printing presses?

Related Characters: Kip/Kirpal Singh (speaker), Kip's Brother, The English Patient/László Almásy

Related Themes:

Page Number: 283

Explanation and Analysis

This quote, spoken by Kip to the English patient, occurs after atomic bombs are dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and it again reflects the racism and oppression Kip is forced to endure in the West due to the racist precedent set by colonialism. Kip abandoned many of his cultural traditions to join the British military, and he throws himself wholly into Western culture, yet it is clear that Kip, and anyone else from the East, will never fully fit into Western culture. This quote also reflects the power of England, a "fragile white island," which has influenced much of the Western world to see the East as they do: savage, uncivilized, and completely inferior.

Kip does everything in his power to conform to the expectations of the West, and he is constantly worried that he isn't good enough. He still fears rejection and banishment because he can never be Westernized enough to be accepted—his Indian heritage cannot be hidden or denied, so will always be seen as an Easterner. Kip wonders if the British military is what gives England their power, but he ultimately decides it is because they own the "printing presses," which means they control "histories" and the way that history is communicated to people. This aligns with Ondaatje's primary argument regarding the importance of personal stories in relaying history. Personal stories are not subject to the power of Western printing presses and offer an authentic voice and experience, which in turn empowers those who are traditionally marginalized and sidelined within official Western history.

❝ My brother told me. Never turn your back on Europe. The deal makers. The contract makers. The map drawers. Never trust Europeans, he said. Never shake hands with them. But we, oh, we were easily impressed— by speeches and medals and your ceremonies. What have I been doing these last few years? Cutting away, defusing, limbs of evil. For what? For this to happen?

Related Characters: Kip/Kirpal Singh (speaker), Kip's Brother, The English Patient/László Almásy

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 284-5

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs after the atomic bombs are dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and is significant because it represents the exact moment when Kip realizes (just like his brother said he would) that the West cannot be trusted. By the 1940s, India has been under the control of England, both officially and unofficially, for nearly 200 years. To Kip's brother, who initially sees colonialism for the evil that it is, tries to convince Kip that the West, who makes the "deals," "contracts," and the "maps," only seeks to oppress and exploit Indians for their own selfish gain.

Just as Kip says, he is "easily impressed" by the medals and ceremonies of the British military. He deeply respects the Englishmen he meets, like Lord Suffolk (and, presumably, the English patient), and he nearly dies time and time again laying his life on the line for the British and trying to conform to Western culture. He diffuses bombs for them left and right, cutting "limbs of evil" dropped by the Germans, but it doesn't bring him any closer to respect, and it does nothing to change the West's overall racist assumptions of the East. Regardless of how hard Kip works to conform, the West will always see the East as "other" and inferior, which Ondaatje implies is the reason Japan was annihilated instead of Germany or another European country associated with the Axis.

❝ Before light failed he stripped the tent of all military objects, all bomb disposal equipment, stripped all insignia off his uniform. Before lying down he undid the turban and combed his hair out and then tied it up into a topknot and lay back, saw the light on the skin of the tent slowly disperse, his eyes holding onto the last blue of light, hearing the drop of wind into windlessness and then hearing the swerve of the hawks as their wings thudded. And all the delicate noises of the air.

Related Characters: Kip/Kirpal Singh

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 287

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs after the atomic bombing of Japan, when Kip threatens to kill the English patient, whom he now sees as a representation of both the English and of colonialism. After Kip leaves the English patient alive, he

returns to his tent in the orchard of the villa and completely strips himself of Western clothing and culture. He removes all "military objects," which is his formal affiliation with the British, and he gets rids of all his "bomb disposal equipment." Kip's position as a sapper in the bomb unit represents his exploitation by the British—he is given the most dangerous job with few resources and little care if he lives or dies. Lastly, Kip strips his uniform of all military signs, which identifies him as part of Western culture. Kip's stripping of his uniform represents his rejection of Western culture and his return to his Eastern roots.

Kip even removes his turban, a physical symbol of his Indian identity, but he doesn't do this in an attempt to deny his native identity. Kip ties his hair into a topknot, a traditional hairstyle popular in India, but more so in Japan. As Kip feels a connection to the Eastern people of Japan, he removes his traditional head wrap and dons a hairstyle traditional to both cultures, in what can be interpreted as a show of solidarity for the countless lives which have undoubtedly been lost to Western racism and oppression.

> He was riding deeper into thick rain. Because he had loved the face on the ceiling he had loved the words. As he had believed in the burned man and the meadows of civilisation he tended. Isaiah and Jeremiah and Solomon were in the burned man's bedside book, his holy book, whatever he had loved glued into his own. He had passed his book to the sapper, and the sapper had said we have a Holy Book too.

Related Characters: The English Patient/László Almásy, Kip/Kirpal Singh

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 294

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears as Kip flees from Italy and all of Europe and heads back in the direction of India and his native life and culture, and it is significant because it reflects the level of commitment Kip put into trying to conform to Western culture, and the amount of betrayal he feels after the atomic bombings of Japan. Kip's thoughts about "the face on the ceiling" reflect his prior experience in the Sistine Chapel. Kip respected Western culture and religion even though it was not his own, and he even grew to "love the words" of it, in a way. He believed in the Englishmen he has looked up to, like Lord Suffolk and the English patient, and now he feels completely deceived and let down.

Kip references the English patient's copy of Herodotus's *The Histories*, the English patient's "holy book" for all intents and purposes, which he has added to with pages and writing of his, reflecting his own story and history. He had tried to give Kip the book, which reflects the English patient's own love for Kip, as he had even once been hesitant to give the book to Katharine, the love of his life. Kip, however, is no longer committed to the Western culture depicted in the book, and prefers his own "Holy Book," the Guru Granth Sahib of his own Eastern culture and Sikh faith.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER I. THE VILLA

Hana stops working in the garden and stands up. She can feel the weather changing, and a breeze shakes the nearby trees. Turning toward the house, Hana heads for the kitchen, but she doesn't stop. She continues up the dark stairs to a room at the back of a hallway. Light pours from the room, which is painted like a garden. A man, the English patient, lies in a bed in the center of the room. As Hana enters, he turns to look at her.

The English patient's room painted like a garden hearkens to the growth and renewal the inhabitants have come to the villa to find, as does the villa's actual garden where Hana is working. They are each, in different ways, traumatized by the war, and they have come to the villa to heal.

Hana bathes the English patient every four days. She starts at his feet, wrecked and mangled by fire, and squeezes water from a washcloth up his legs. His shins are the worst, and bone is visible below the open and weeping wounds. She has been caring for him for months, and she knows every inch of his body. "Hipbones of Christ," Hana thinks as she washes up his body. She has come to think of the English patient as her "despairing saint." Her favorite part of his body is the indentation below his lowest rib. She looks at this "cliff of skin," and draws a plum from her pocket. She removes the plum's skin with her teeth and passes it into the English patient's mouth. He begins to tell her a story.

Hana's description of the English patient's hipbones as Christlike and her reference to him as a "despairing saint" carry obvious religious connotations. Hana doesn't seem to be particularly religious, as she never prays or partakes in any other religious observation, and this implies that God and religion are completely absent during times of war. However, thoughts of God and religion are still present and surface in other ways, such as Hana's description of the English patient, suggesting that the religious spirit has survived the war after all.

The English patient tells Hana about the **desert** and picnics with a woman who used to kiss his body that is now covered with burns. Hana asks how he was burned, and he says that he fell from the desert sky. The Bedouin, the nomadic Arab people of North Africa, had carried him across the desert on a "boat of sticks." The Bedouin were used to men falling from the sky. Since 1939, planes frequently crashed in the desert. The Bedouin did not know him, and he did not know them. Hana again asks the English patient for his name, but he doesn't remember it—he only knows that he is English.

Throughout the novel, the desert is often described in terms of water, and here the English patient is carried out of the desert on a "boat of sticks." This ironic description creates a competing image, which heightens and emphasizes the barren and dry state of the desert. The English patient reveals that his burns stem from a plane crash, which frequently happened over the desert, as North Africa was a theater of World War II.

The English patient can never sleep at night, so Hana finds a **book** in the library and reads to him. If it is cold, she climbs into bed with him, careful not to touch him, and reads late into the night. He listens to Hana's voice in the candlelight, "swallowing her words like water."

Books and stories are seen throughout the novel as a type of life force that gives the characters strength and reason to go on. Here, Hana climbs into bed with the English patient and reads in an effort to keep him warm, and he "swallows her words like water," which implies that stories provide him with a kind of emotional or intellectual sustenance—a means to heal.

The Bedouin had placed cloth soaked in oils over the English patient's burnt skin, "anointing" him. Each evening at nightfall, they would change the bandages and inspect his charred skin. One man, who never spoke, stayed with the English patient 24 hours a day and fed him dates that he would first chew in his mouth.

The way the Bedouin man feeds the English patient is very similar to Hana's method, which reflects the extent of the English patient's injuries, as he cannot feed himself and can barely chew. The word "anointing" again connotes religion, suggesting that God is still near despite the violence of war.

As Hana reads to the English patient, she looks down the hall, but she knows that no one is coming. The abandoned **villa** had been a makeshift war hospital, and Hana had lived here with the others nurses. The others nurses, however, are long gone. The war has moved north and is nearly over. Living in the villa alone with the English patient, **books** are Hana's only escape. She looks down at the book on her lap and stares at page 17 for several minutes, noticing the bend at the corner of the page where someone previously marked their spot.

This, too, reflects the importance of books within the novel. Books are Hana's only access to the outside world. She is completely isolated at the villa. She knows, after all, that no one is coming down the hall. The novel also implies that books are not inanimate objects but living things that carry the stories of those who have read them. Here, as Hana stares at page 17, she considers those who have left their mark before her.

Hana has planted enough vegetables in the orchard near the **Villa San Girolamo** to keep the English patient and herself alive, and she occasionally trades hospital supplies for meat and beans with a man in town. The villa is a shell of what it once was. Large sections of the building have been destroyed by **bombs** and many rooms cannot even be entered. Much of the roof is missing, allowing rain and moonlight to spill in.

The destroyed villa is symbolic of the inhabitants' trauma. Like the physical structure that has been destroyed by war, those in the villa are shells of what they once were as well. They struggle with physical trauma as well as psychological trauma, and they have walled themselves off emotionally, like a room that cannot be entered.

The Bedouin taught the English patient how to raise his hands and arms to the sky to draw energy from the universe. One day, the English patient heard the sound of wind chimes, and a man wearing a large yoke with hundreds of hanging bottles approached him. The man carried different ointments in the bottles, and after propping the yoke between two sticks, he mixed different ointments together in a "skin cup" made with the soles of his feet. He rubbed the ointment—made of ground peacock bone, "the most potent healer"—onto the English patient's burnt chest.

This passage underscores the differences between Western medicine, which Hana practices, and the Eastern practice of the Bedouin. Hana later implies that healing with peacock bone is ridiculous, but Ondaatje implies that it isn't. The Bedouin and their medical practices (including the man who mixes topical medication on his feet) undeniably saved the English patient's life, which suggests that Eastern medicine is not inferior to Western medicine, it is simply different.

The **villa**'s library sits between the kitchen and the chapel. Although there have been holes blown into the walls and roof by **bombs**, the library seems safe enough to Hana. A piano sits in the middle of the room, and birds and weather often enter the space. The rain has soaked many of the **books**, and the shelves groan under the added weight of the water. A set of doors at the far end of the room have been boarded up. If Hana could go through them, it would lead down the 36 "penitent steps" to the chapel. The Germans placed mines in many of the buildings before retreating, so any room that isn't absolutely necessary is blocked off.

The bombed-out condition of the library foreshadows that the structure is not, in fact, as safe as Hana would like to believe. Her sense of safety is an illusion and a product of her denial. She has not fully come to terms with how awful the war has been—if she did, she would then have to face it, which she simply isn't ready to do yet. Ondaatje again draws attention to the 36 "penitent steps" to the chapel, which implies that the war and everything about it is a sin for which humanity must atone.

In the library, Hana takes **The Last of the Mohicans** off a shelf and walks backward out of the room, stepping into her own footprints. She takes the book to the English patient's room and sits in the window alcove. Opening the book, Hana is about to enter the lives of others. She loves losing herself in stories and going back in time, "her body full of sentences and moments," like waking from a dream she can't quite remember.

Hana must walk back out through her own footsteps so that she doesn't trip an unknown bomb outside of this path. This, too, reflects just how unsafe the villa is. Hana's "body full of sentences and moments" again reflects the importance of books in the novel. Here, Hana is quite literally made up of the stories she reads, and these stories in turn become a part of her.

The Italian town where the **Villa San Girolamo** is located had been besieged for weeks, and the villa, which had previously been a nunnery, was the last stronghold of the German army. When the Allies took over, they converted the villa into a hospital. The medical staff and patients were transferred south to a safer area, but Hana insisted on staying behind with the English patient. They have no electricity, and the winter has been cold. Much of the villa was blown up by **bombs**, including the lower stairs of the large staircase, which Hana rebuilt by nailing **books** together.

Hana's use of books to rebuild the bombed staircase again reflects the importance of books in the novel. Books and storytelling are crucial to Hana's healing and regrowth after the trauma of the war, and that importance is reflected here as books are crucial to the physical rebuilding of the villa's structure as well.

There are few beds remaining in the **villa**—Hana prefers to sleep in a hammock. She frequently sleeps in different rooms, at times in rooms that have very few standing walls, and she occasionally sleeps in the English patient's room. Hana lives "like a vagrant," while the English patient is "reposed in his bed like a king." Hana is 20 years old, and completely untouched by concerns of safety. Now that the war is ending, she has drawn up a new set of rules for herself, and she will no longer carry out orders for the good of others.

Ondaatje draws a parallel between the royal treatment of the English patient and the fact that he is assumed to be English—this seems to be one of the reasons why he is treated like a "king." Hana herself, the one who does all the work, is forced to live in substandard conditions. This mirrors society at large, and the sense of English superiority that emerged with British colonialism in the 19th century.

Hana carries the six-foot crucifix from the chapel to the orchard and erects it as a scarecrow near her seedbed. Empty sardine cans hang from the cross, clanking and clinking in the wind. Her only possessions include a small suitcase containing letters, some clothing, and extra medical supplies. She could burn down all of this if she wanted to.

Hana's use of the crucifix as a scarecrow is nearly sacrilegious, which again suggests that God and religion have all but disappeared in the war. However, the crucifix, a symbol of Christ, still protects Hana by protecting her garden, which is in keeping with the spirit of religion.

Hana picks up the copy of **The Histories** by Herodotus from the English patient's bedside table. He had brought the book with him to the **villa**, and pages from other books have been glued into it. The English patient's handwriting fills the pages and margins, and Hana begins to read. Herodotus writes of the different winds that cross the **desert**, including the *africo*, which can blow all the way to Rome, and the hot and dry *ghibli*, which blows out of Tunis and can cause anxiety. The *khamsin* from Egypt blows for 50 days and nights, and is known as the ninth plague.

The English patient's copy of The Histories *underscores the connection between history and personal stories in the novel. Ondaatje argues that history is personal and reflected in stories, like it is Herodotus's book, and the English patient's history and his own story become part of that book as well, as he fills the margins and inserts pages with his own writing.*

Hana reads about the —, a wind out of Arabia whose name was erased by a king after it killed his son. She reads about other winds and learns that there are millions of tons of dust floating about the air at any given moment, waiting to bury entire armies and civilizations. Herodotus writes of the *simoom*, a wind so evil that a nation once declared war on it and marched into it dressed in full battle gear.

The wind and sand of the desert has the ability to erase people and things, just as it erases the English patient's nationality and identity. The desert is also a symbol of the English patient's identity in this sense, as Ondaatje suggests that both he and the desert are "nationless" and impermanent.

The English patient interrupts Hana's reading and tells her that the Bedouin kept him alive for a reason. The English patient can recognize any location on a map, and he is extremely knowledgeable. Whenever he enters someone's house, the English patient says, he goes directly to the bookshelves and "inhales" the **books**. "So history enters us," he tells Hana. He knew all about the Bedouin's customs and culture when he crashed his plane, and even though they were in the **desert**, he knew they were once "water people."

Books again are seen as a type of force that sustains and enriches life. The English patient likens books to air that he "inhales" and can't live without. The "history" of the book, that is the story, then becomes part of him as it "enters" him. Books are more than just stories in The English Patient*; they keep people connected and impart personal, and therefore more authentic, histories and stories.*

The English patient saw engravings on the rocks in Tassili depicting Sahara people hunting water horses, and in a cave in Wadi Sura, he saw paintings of people swimming. At one point, the English patient says, there was a large lake in the **desert**. We don't know much about Africa, he says to Hana. Now, armies of thousands of men move across the desert, but the English patient isn't sure who the enemy is. Who are the allies of the desert, he asks Hana, as all of Europe fights their way across North Africa?

Almásy, the actual explorer on whom the English patient is based, really did theorize that a large lake once existed in the desert. His contemporaries called his theory absurd, but in 2007, an ancient lake was found deep beneath the Sahara, supporting Almásy's theory. This passage also reflects the ugly truth behind British colonialism. The West has taken over the East, whose people, for the most part, have nothing to do with the war being fought. Yet their lives are disrupted and disrespected because of World War II.


The Bedouin kept the English patient alive "because of the buried guns." They handed him eight guns along with ammunition, and he identified each one. There were guns from different countries and time periods, and he said each name out loud, both in French and in the tribe's language. This was his payment in exchange for the Bedouin saving his life.

The English patient says the words in French as well as in the tribe's native language, which is again evidence of colonialism. French was brought to Africa by European colonialists, which minimized and jeopardized the region's native languages.

In the **desert**, the only thing that is celebrated is water. Nothing is permanent, everything drifts, and some of the wells are considered cursed. Small towns spring up out of nowhere, and desert people dig down into ancient water nests, remnants of an "old sea" that had once been there.

This, too, reflects history and the ancient sea beneath the desert, which further highlights the impermanence and mystery of the region. The desert is transient and changing, like the English patient himself, whose identity has been erased by the desert.


Hana stands at a sink after leaving the English patient. She splashes water on her face and stands staring at the wall. She has long since removed all the **mirrors** in the **villa** and stored them in an unused room. She wets her hair and, walking outside, cool "breezes hit her, erasing the thunder."

As the characters in the novel struggle with certain aspects of their identity and with the violence of the war, they refuse to look into mirrors, which suggests a certain shame or indignity in the violence they were forced to participate in during the war.

CHAPTER II. IN NEAR RUINS

Caravaggio, with his bandaged hands, has been a patient at the military hospital in Rome for over four months now. He heard in passing about the nurse with the burned patient, and he stops now to ask a group of doctors for the woman's name. The doctors are surprised; Caravaggio hasn't spoken a word since coming to the hospital. When he first arrived, he wrote down only his serial number, which proved he was with the Allies. After confirming his identity with London, the hospital staff received him as a "war hero," and they left him to sit silently, waiting for the next dose of morphine for the terrible pain in his hands.

Caravaggio is equally ashamed of his identity as a thief and an Italian. To Caravaggio, his Italian identity aligns him with the Axis, or the Germans, and all the unspeakable atrocities they have committed during the war. By giving only his serial number and not his name, Caravaggio is merely a member of the Allied forces, not an Italian with a moral objection to the actions of his country and government. He also does not have to admit to being a thief, and can instead be considered a "war hero" and a good person.

The doctors tell Caravaggio that the nurse, Hana, is in an old nunnery just north of Florence. The **villa** is incredibly unsafe, but she claims her patient isn't stable enough to move. The doctors figure that Hana is suffering from shellshock, and she should have been sent home, but the war is over here, and they can't force anyone to do anything anymore. Patients and soldiers are going AWOL left and right. No one has any idea who her patient, a burned Englishman, is, and he doesn't know who he is either. The Bedouin brought him in from the **desert**, but he had no identification with him. The Bedouin keep military name tags as "great charms," and no pilot ever comes out of the desert with identification.

The Bedouin keeping the pilots' identification tags reflects the impermanence of the desert and the power it has to erase things, such as one's identity and nationality. Ondaatje later writes that such distinctions are "insignificant" in the desert, and he even implies that such differences are responsible for the violence of the war. By taking the name tags, the Bedouin wipe the pilots clean of such unnecessary distinctions, putting everyone on more even ground.

The doctors tell Caravaggio that they can arrange a ride for him to the **villa**, but they remind him that it is very unsafe. The Germans laid bombs and mines during their retreat, and the sappers have yet to clear the area. Caravaggio thanks them and walks outside. "I need *gelato*," he thinks to himself.

This again is evidence that Hana's sense of safety at the villa is only an illusion. It is still just as dangerous at the villa as it was when the war was active in the area. Hana can, at any time, trip one of several bombs left by the Germans.

On the train moving north, Caravaggio can't sleep as he is tossed about the small, smoke-filled cabin. He suddenly remembers that *gelato* is good for sore tonsils, and remembers accompanying the father of an obstinate young girl to the children's ward of a hospital, where the girl stubbornly refused to allow the surgeons to remove her inflamed tonsils. Arriving at the **villa**, Caravaggio silently enters the room Hana is sitting in and kneels down next to her, "like an uncle."

Caravaggio is often seen as a father figure, or "like an uncle" as he is here. His desire for gelato has prompted a memory—in tandem with his arrival at the villa, it is implied that Hana is, in fact, the little girl he knew years ago. In this sense, their history together is recalled through a story. Ondaatje's novel unfolds through many nonlinear leaps such as this, which gives the story, and the history it reflects, a more authentic feel.

"I keep remembering how you stormed out of the hospital followed by two grown men," Caravaggio says to Hana. He asks her where the kitchen is and goes to look around. Hana sits at the table shaking. This man she has known for so long has come all this way to see her. Hana stands up and goes to the English patient's room.

Caravaggio has not seen Hana for some time, and his presence is completely unexpected, yet he approaches Hana and their reunion with nonchalance. Hana, however, does not, as she begins to shake. She later reveals that she has always loved Caravaggio, but she loves the English patient as well now, so she goes to him directly.

The next day, Caravaggio finds Hana washing sheets in the fountain outside the **villa**. The Allies destroyed the water pipes in an effort to get her to leave, and the fountain is the villa's only water source. Hana tells Caravaggio that she hopes he hasn't come to try to convince her to leave. He hasn't. Caravaggio just wants to sit, have a drink, and listen to some Frank Sinatra without getting blown up. He says they should find some music as soon as possible; it will be good for her patient, but Hana says that her patient is still in Africa. The English love Africa, Caravaggio says. They have a connection to the desert, and "they're not foreigners there."

Caravaggio claims that the English love the desert because "they're not foreigners there," which implies that they are foreigners nearly everywhere else they go. This implication again reflects the impact of British colonialism. By the early 1900s, the English had colonized nearly a quarter of the world's population, which not only reflects how frequently the English lived as foreigners, but how many places and people they presumed to control and exploit.

Hana says that if Caravaggio plans on staying at the **villa**, they will need more food. The vegetables won't be enough, but she knows where they can find some chickens. She looks to Caravaggio hopefully. She is hoping he will use his skills to secure them some chickens. Caravaggio claims that he no longer has the "nerve," and Hana offers to go with him, hoping he can teach her. Caravaggio again refuses. Hana asks him why, and he responds, "I was caught. They nearly chopped off my fucking hands."

Here, Hana is hoping that Caravaggio will use his skills as a thief to steal them some chickens. It's implied that he was caught stealing during the war, which resulted in his hands being mutilated as a punishment. As such, Caravaggio has "lost his nerve" to steal (even though the war legitimized his skills), as it ended so badly the last time he did it.

Hana often looks for Caravaggio late at night, after she has left the English patient. She finds him on the roof and sits next to him. The English patient thinks that ground-up peacock bones are a miracle cure, she tells Caravaggio. She asks Caravaggio if he was a spy, and he says he wasn't. Caravaggio is a thief, and an Italian, and the Allies had been excited to use him. There were other Italians as well, five total, and they were sent into German strongholds to steal various things. Once, Caravaggio was sent to a German party to steal some important papers, and he was accidentally photographed by the girlfriend of a German general. Caravaggio knew all photos were reviewed by the Gestapo, so now he had to steal the camera, too.

The Italians sided with the Germans during the war, so Caravaggio is useful to the Allies. Italians drew less suspicion than people of other nationalities among the Germans, and could sneak in more easily to steal. Caravaggio's identity as a thief is seen as beneficial and useful, too, which highlights just how unethical the war really is. Prior to the war (and undoubtedly after it as well), Caravaggio's identity as a thief was condemned, yet this dishonesty is legitimized by the war and even makes Caravaggio a hero.

Caravaggio had snuck into the girlfriend's room late that night while she was having sex with the general. A beam of light from a car outside illuminated the room, and the woman saw him. He made a silent cutting motion across his neck as a way of silencing her and reached for the camera.

Caravaggio isn't a violent man, and he doesn't wish to kill the woman, but the war forces him to do things he ordinarily wouldn't. Like the English patient, Caravaggio needs to tell the story of how the war has traumatized him in order to heal from it. In this way, Caravaggio and the others heal both by listening to and telling stories.

Caravaggio stares at Hana sitting at the table and thinks about his wife, which he hardly does at all anymore. He keeps his bandaged hands under the table and watches as Hana eats. He eats all his meals with Hana, although he would rather eat alone. She has seen him eat with his hands "like someone from the East," and it wounds his "vanity." Caravaggio had known both Hana and her father, Patrick, when Caravaggio was a thief in Toronto before the war. Now they are both in Florence, and Hana has committed herself to the English patient, so Caravaggio just watches her eat.

Caravaggio doesn't think of his wife anymore because of the distance created between them by war but also because he is in love with Hana. Caravaggio is ashamed by the way he must eat without thumbs, and he doesn't want to eat this way in front of Hana. Caravaggio equates his sloppy eating with how "someone from the East" eats—with their hands—which he obviously considers uncivilized. This racist assumption further reflects the prejudice and Western superiority created by colonialism.

The makeshift hospital is part of the old monastery grounds. The nurses who came to the hospital to work were often just as shell-shocked as the men for whom they cared. They were broken down by letters, or severed limbs, or wounds that never stopped bleeding. Hana was broken when the war official handed her the letter that notified her of her father, Patrick's, death.

Hana is absolutely traumatized by the violence of war, even though she was not involved in the actual fighting of it. Cleaning up the mess after such violence has taken its toll on Hana, as has losing her father to such violence. Hana is not physically harmed, but her psychological state is severely damaged all the same.

Hana met the English patient not long after Patrick's death. At that time, most of the North American troops were being sent home, and Hana washed and folded her uniform and handed it in. The war in Europe was over, but the officers said she would still be guilty of desertion. Hana thought that was ridiculous. How could it be desertion if she wasn't going anywhere? They warned her of unexploded **bombs** and left. Hana immediately began her garden in the rich soil next to the wrecked **villa**. Even though the ground was scorched and there wasn't much water, she knew it would become green again.

When Hana removes her uniform, she turns her back on the part of her that was involved with the war. In essence, she leaves that part of herself behind and tries to move on and heal. The English patient, who is burned like Patrick was, helps Hana to move past the deep guilt she feels for not being able to care for Patrick as he died. In caring for the English patient, Hana herself heals and grows new, like the villa's garden.

Later that night, Caravaggio finds Hana weeping shirtless at the kitchen table. He touches her gently on her bare shoulder and softly says her name. "Don't touch me if you're going to try and fuck me," Hana says as she stands from the table. Caravaggio asks Hana why she loves the English patient so much. She tells him that the English patient is a "despairing saint," and that she must protect him. Caravaggio is angry. Hana is only 20 years old, he says, and she has abandoned the world "to love a ghost."

Caravaggio claims that Hana has abandoned the world "to love a ghost" because he sees how the English patient has replaced Patrick in Hana's life, even if she is not yet able to perceive this. However, the English patient really is, in a way, Hana's "despairing saint," or savior. As caring for him helps her to overcome the loss of her father, the English patient does indeed save her from succumbing to despair.

Hana goes to her hammock to sleep. She took the hammock from a dead man some time ago. Throughout the duration of the war, she took only the hammock and a pair of tennis shoes, unlike Caravaggio, who has made a career stealing from others. Caravaggio had been Patrick's friend before the war, and Hana has fond childhood memories of him. She isn't sure how long Caravaggio has been in Italy. She came during the Sicilian invasion of 1943 and managed to survive by keeping a cold distance from her patients.

Like the other residents at the villa, Hana is able to survive the violence and atrocities of war by building walls and keeping a cold distance from others. They are able to survive, in essence, by not caring about others, but this is perhaps most damaging to their emotional health. Hana showed little concern and respect for those she stole from, and now feels deep guilt over her actions.

On Hana's first day in Italy, her hair kept falling into bloody wounds, so she cut it all off and hasn't looked in the **mirror** since. She grew increasingly distant, and called all of her patients "Buddy" instead of learning their names. She dressed wounds that bled constantly and removed shrapnel from countless bodies. Once, after her patient died, Hana ignored the rules and took his tennis shoes. Now, Hana is exhausted and always hungry, and she finds it exceedingly difficult to keep feeding the English patient, who can't or won't eat.

Hana's impersonal approach to nursing during the war let her deny not only who she was, but who her patients were as well, which made it easier for her to stomach the atrocities of war and the frequent death. In cutting off her hair—a symbol of her identity—and refusing to look in the mirror, Hana denies the person she was before the war and becomes just another soldier, or "Buddy."

When Hana first arrived at the **villa**, she was one of four nurses, two doctors, and 100 patients. She had little time to spend with any one patient, and most of her time was spent saying "hello Buddy" and "good-bye Buddy." One day, while in the room she shared with another nurse, Hana caught the glint of a **mirror** out of the corner of her eye. She picked up the mirror and looked into it. It was small, and she could only see her cheek, so she moved it about trying to capture more of her face. She had not looked at herself for over a year. "Hi Buddy," Hana said to the reflection.

Hana's reference to herself as "Buddy" suggests that she is a stranger to herself after spending so much time in the war, which is an exceedingly violent and stressful situation. 100 patients to four nurses and two doctors is a completely unrealistic ratio, especially considering the extent of the trauma with which patients have been admitted. Hana said nothing but "hello Buddy" and "good-bye Buddy" because new patients were constantly arriving and quickly dying.

The next day, while sitting in the garden, Hana offers to remove Caravaggio's bandages. After all, she *is* a nurse, she says. He is hesitant; he has come to think of the bandages as comfortable—something like a glove. Hana asks him how it happened, and Caravaggio tells her that he was caught jumping from the window of the general's girlfriend. As he talks, Hana loosens the bandages, and Caravaggio takes a few steps backward, letting the fabric unravel from his hands. He turns his hands over and reveals two missing thumbs.

When Caravaggio allows Hana to remove his bandages and shows her his hands, he is effectively beginning to heal, both physically and emotionally. Hana can offer him medical care, but she can also offer him companionship and support—a family of sorts—that is necessary for them each to heal from the psychological trauma of the war.

As Hana inspects Caravaggio's hands, she tells him that she used to think of him as the Scarlet Pimpernel when she was a child, and then she asks him who, specifically, cut of his thumbs. Caravaggio says that the Germans made one of their nurses do it, but that it wasn't her fault. She had known nothing about him—not his name, nationality, or crime.

The Scarlet Pimpernel is a literary character in The Scarlet Pimpernel *series by Baroness Orczy, which again reflects the importance of books in Hana's life. Hana understands and interprets her life and the people in it in relation to books and stories.*

Hana and Caravaggio suddenly become aware of the English patient shouting, and Hana immediately runs up the stairs. Caravaggio quietly follows, and when he enters the room, he finds Hana and the English patient staring at a stray dog in the middle of the room. Caravaggio hasn't seen a dog in years, so he walks over and picks it up. The English patient stares at him, stunned, and Caravaggio walks out of the room.

The English patient is just as surprised to see the dog as he is to see Caravaggio. He thought they were alone at the villa and had no idea anyone else was there. The dog, and the presence of another, offers some normalcy and is evidence of the slow healing that is taking place at the villa after the war.

In the kitchen, Caravaggio gets the dog some water. He thinks of the **villa** as Hana's house, so he is careful not to disturb or move anything. He thinks back to the day he lost his thumbs. They had handcuffed him to a wooden table, and after the nurse cut off his thumbs, his hands slid easily out of the handcuffs. He fell from his chair and rolled under the table, bleeding profusely. Afterward, he noticed everyone's thumbs, almost like the Germans had instilled him with envy. But mostly he just felt old, like they had given him something to slow him down.

The war has aged Caravaggio, which is evidence of the trauma he has suffered. Like Hana, Caravaggio is likely shell-shocked, or suffering from post-traumatic stress, which is why he randomly, and frequently, is taken back to the war and the horrors he endured there. His memories are sudden, and often unrelated to what is going on, which suggests that Caravaggio's trauma has consumed him.

Later that night, Hana pulls **The Last of the Mohicans** off of the library shelf and begins to write on a blank page near the back. She writes about Caravaggio, whom she has always loved, even though he must be at least 45 years old now. When she is done writing, Hana closes the book and puts it back on the highest possible shelf.

By writing in The Last of the Mohicans, Hana and her own story becomes part of the book. There is an interconnectedness between people and history in the novel through the books they read and the stories they tell, and Hana's personal writing in James Fenimore Cooper's book is evidence of this connection.

That night, after the English patient falls asleep, Hana slips from his room and goes downstairs. She suddenly feels claustrophobic, and a storm is brewing in the distance. Downstairs, she removes the old grey sheet covering the piano. As lightning steaks the sky, Hana sits down and begins to play. She thinks about her mother teaching her piano back in Canada, and as lightning illuminates the room, she notices that two soldiers have entered the **villa**. Hana can see that one man wears a **turban**, and she nods at them, continuing the song. Later, Caravaggio returns to the villa and finds Hana making sandwiches in the kitchen with two sappers.

The soldier's turban immediately alerts Hana to his difference from her, and his turban is thus a physical symbol of his native identity and cultural differences. In this way, Hana does not notice the soldier for who he is, necessarily—she notices him for the reasons he is different, or "other," from her. This difference is further evidence of the impact of British colonialism on the colonized, as the first and most distinguishing aspect Hana notices about the soldier is that he obviously isn't European.

CHAPTER III. SOMETIME A FIRE

The Sikh, an Indian sapper named Kip, sets up his tent near the **villa**'s garden. Beginning outside, he immediately takes to dismantling the **bombs** left behind by the retreating Germans. He is always polite, and Hana watches as he takes his shirt off to bathe in a small basin of rainwater, staring as the water pours over his brown skin. Caravaggio is irritated by Kip's constant humming of Western songs, which Kip learned from Hardy, the other sapper who accompanied Kip to the villa. Hardy, however, has been relocated to a nearby town, and Kip has remained alone to sweep the villa for any remaining bombs and mines.

Again, Hana seems to be attracted to Kip for the reasons he is not like her—his dark skin. The water pouring over his skin makes its color more noticeable, and she can't help but stare. Kip's constant humming of Western songs is proof that he has largely assimilated and accepted Western culture and ways. However, Caravaggio's irritation reflects his latent prejudice against Kip as someone from the East. Caravaggio seems to not want to share his Western culture with Kip.

Kip notices that Caravaggio often wanders at night, and he begins to trail him. After two nights, Caravaggio corners Kip and tells him to stop following him. Kip tries to deny it, but Caravaggio silences Kip by slapping him across "his lying face."

Caravaggio's physical abuse of Kip can also be interpreted as racism brought on by colonialism. As a Westerner, Caravaggio assumes a position of superiority over Kip, which, in Caravaggio's eyes, makes it appropriate for him to physically strike Kip when he disapprove of his behavior.

One day, Caravaggio enters the library and, looking around to make sure he is alone, notices Kip up near the ceiling. Kip snaps his fingers at Caravaggio and motions for him to the leave the room, as he cuts the fuse to a **bomb** hidden behind a window valence.

Here, it is Kip who is in a position of superiority over Caravaggio. Not only is he physically towering over Caravaggio, but at this moment Kip has complete control over whether Caravaggio lives or dies.

Kip is the only one at the **villa** who still wears a military uniform. The uniform is "immaculate," and his shoes are always polished to a high shine. Hana thinks that Kip is "unconsciously in love with his body," and he moves with a sureness that catches her eye. He had come to the villa not because he enjoyed Hana's piano playing, but because he feared that there may have been a bomb in the piano. There wasn't, but musical instruments and grandfather clocks are favorite hiding spots for the Germans' **bombs**. Unsuspecting civilians returning home to set their clocks or play their favorite instruments are often blown up.

Again, Hana sense of safety at the villa is just an illusion. There are bombs everywhere, and she could blow up at any moment. Kip's uniform is a reflection of his acceptance of Western ways. As India was a colony of Britain during this time, Kip fights for Britain, and his uniform identifies him as a member of the English military, not a Punjabi Indian. Kip takes pride in his new Western identity, which is reflected in his polished shoes and his "unconscious" love for his body. He still retains his traditional turban, however, which indicates that he has not fully let go of his Indian roots.

Kip remembers lying on the floor of a massive church and looking up to the vaulted ceiling through the scope of his rifle. The sergeant lit a signal flare so Kip could see better, even though they knew they would get into trouble for lighting weapons in the Sistine Chapel. Kip looked to the ceiling, to the images of Noah and Abraham, and could hear the approaching guards. He quickly asked the sergeant who the painted figure was directly over their heads. It was Isaiah, the sergeant had said as the flare went out.

Kip is sweeping the Sistine Chapel for bombs, which further reflect the wanton disregard for religion and God throughout the war. Even though Kip is obviously not Christian, he is still interested in the ceiling's fresco, and the image of Isaiah in particular, a prophet believed to have lived several hundreds of years before Christ. Isaiah is often seen as a suffering servant, which has significance when considered in context with Kip, who is given few freedoms by the British.

When Kip arrived in Gabicce near the east coast of Italy, he was the lead sapper on a patrol guarding a local ceremony of the Virgin Mary. He watched as Italian men carried a five-foot-tall statue of Mary through the city. He didn't want to get too close to the children with his guns, so he moved over one street and walked slowly, keeping pace with the procession. The men put the statue down and stood guard around it. Kip considered leaving something at the statue "as his gesture," but he had nothing to give, and he had his own religion.

Of course, Kip's Eastern religion, Sikhism, is not observed in the West, which is a predominately Christian part of the world. This means that Christian religions are given precedence over Eastern religions, which are denied or disregarded. This again reflects the superiority and domination of the West in relation to the East. Still, Kip clearly has respect and reverence for this different religion and does not want to get too close to it with his gun, suggesting that those from Eastern cultures may have more respect for the West than vice versa.

Caravaggio walks into the library, where he has been spending most of his time lately. He is so distracted by the **books**, he doesn't at first notice Hana sleeping on the couch. He sneezes suddenly, and she opens her eyes. They talk a bit, and then Hana tells him that she lost a baby a year ago. "I mean, I had to lose it," she says, after the baby's father was killed in the war. Even after this, though, Hana continued talking to the child as if it were still alive.

When Hana says she "had to lose" her baby, this implies that she was forced to abort it because of the violence and hardship of the war. Hana could not possibly birth and care for a baby alone in the middle of a war, and she therefore was forced to make a difficult decision. This, too, is a source of trauma for Hana, evidenced by the fact that she continues talking to the baby long after she aborts it.

Patrick must have died not long after the baby, Caravaggio says to Hana. Yes, she says, but she wasn't aware that Caravaggio knew about her father. He says he heard about it in a letter from home. Hana asks if Caravaggio came to the **villa** because Patrick had died, and he assures her that he didn't. That's good, Hana says. Patrick wasn't a sentimental man, and he wouldn't want them mourning him.

The death of Patrick not long after Hana's abortion is further evidence of the trauma she is forced to endure because of the war. Hana feels immense guilt over not being with her father when he died, especially since she is a nurse and might have been able to help him. This is why Hana puts so much energy into caring for the English patient, who is burned just like Patrick was.

Caravaggio asks Hana when she stopped talking to the baby, but she can't really remember. Things got so busy during the war, and there was so much death. Once, Hana had closed a patient's eyes thinking he was dead, but he wasn't yet. The man had screamed at her and insulted her. She knows death much better now and doesn't make that mistake anymore. Hana thinks that all the war generals should have to work as nurses. It should be "a prerequisite," she says.

Hana believes that generals should have experience as nurses so they can see firsthand the pain and destruction that is caused by war. As a nurse, Hana was forced to spend every day confronting death. If the war generals were privy to the intimate aspects of suffering, pain, and death, they wouldn't be so keen on war, Hana implies.

After about a week, Hana and Caravaggio grow more used to Kip's strange eating habits. He sits with Hana and Caravaggio, pulling onions and herbs from his bag, which Caravaggio suspects he stole from a nearby garden. Caravaggio thinks that Kip probably never ate in a mess canteen throughout the entire war. But Kip actually *had* stood in the mess line each day, waiting for the English tea he loved, to which he would add condensed milk.

Kip's love of English tea may seem like a way for him to adopt Western culture and practices, but it also highlights the exploitation of Indians by the English. The English were made rich by forcing Indians to work as indentured servants on "tea estates," which is further evidence of the systemic abuse of the Indians by the English.

Sitting at the table with Hana and Caravaggio, Kip thinks everything looks "temporary," as if nothing is permanent. He looks down at his onions, which he had carefully pulled from the ground. The Germans had mined even the gardens when they retreated. Caravaggio stares at Kip and thinks that there is probably some "animal" somewhere that eats the same way Kip does, always with his right hand.

Caravaggio's inner thought that Kip's identity as an Indian and his cultural practices somehow make him an "animal" reflect the racism produced by British colonialism. Caravaggio considers himself superior and considers Kip an "animal" simply because of his race.

Kip and Caravaggio take a cart into the village to pick up some flour, and they talk about Hana to avoid talking about themselves. Caravaggio tells Kip that he has known Hana for years, even before the war, and Kip tells Caravaggio that his real name is Kirpal Singh. He had been given the nickname Kip by an army officer when he handed in his first **bomb** disposal report with butter all over it. "What's this?" the officer asked. "Kipper grease?" The men laughed and the Indian man was known from then on as "a salty English fish." Kip didn't mind too much being called by the nickname, as he hated the English custom of calling people by their last name.

By giving Kip a nickname that is reminiscent of a "a salty English fish," his native Indian identity, that of Kirpal Singh, is effectively erased and replaced by an identity that is distinctly English.

The English patient begins wearing his hearing aid so he can hear what is going on around the **villa**. He knows about the sapper, even though Hana does her best to keep them separated. She doesn't think they will like each other. One day, she goes into the English patient's room and finds Kip standing near the bed, the two men talking. "We're getting along famously!" the English patient says. The English patient knows all about Italian fuses and bombs, and they draw bomb outlines and talk about the best ways to defuse them.

Hana figures Kip will dislike the English patient because he believes the man to be English, the country that colonized India and robbed the country's people of their independence and cultural identity. However, Kip is somewhat brainwashed by colonialism, and he, too, seems to believe in Western superiority, and his obvious affinity for Englishmen is evidence of this.

As Hana leaves the room, she thinks about Patrick. She wonders what his death was like. Did he struggle? Was he alone? Her father was a shy man and never really comfortable in the world. She read in a **book** recommended by the English patient that "a novel is a **mirror** walking down a road," and that is how she thought of her father. Caravaggio says Patrick died in a dove-cot. Everything she knows about Patrick's death is from Caravaggio, or Clara, her stepmother. Clara has written her several letters from their island in Georgian Bay, and Hana carries them with her, but she has never answered them.

Hana's thoughts are further evidence of her guilt and trauma related to her father's death. Her comparison of her father with "a mirror walking down the road" suggests that Patrick, unlike Hana (who denies who she is by not looking in the mirror), could not deny who he was, even in war. This made him more vulnerable to the war's destructive forces. Hana will later find comfort in the fact that Patrick died in a dove-cot (a sacred, almost religious, place), but she has not yet healed enough to come to this realization.

Later, Hana sits reading **Kim** by Rudyard Kipling to the English patient. He asks her to slow down. Kipling must be read slowly, the English patient says, as Kipling wrote with pen and ink and paused often. Hana reads until the English patient falls asleep, and then she closes the book and picks up his copy of *The Histories*.

Kipling's Kim *proves to be an important part of the book later on, as it helps Hana to better understand Kip and the presence of British colonialism in his life as an Indian.*

The Bedouin had taken the English patient's burned body to a British base in 1944. He was soon brought to Italy, where he was held near the cage where they kept Ezra Pound. Military officials interrogated him, but he didn't seem to know who he was. He could speak fluent German, but he spoke other languages as well. They never could tell if he was ally or enemy, and he nearly drove them insane with his incessant talking.

The English patient's own story is mixed in with The Histories, *as he has added to Herodotus's book and written in the margins. In this way, the English patient's history is part of the book as well, which Hana now reads, and she is thus able to gain insight into the English patient and his identity.*

As Hana flips through **The Histories**, she reads some of the English patient's personal writing. He writes about a woman named Katharine and her reading of a Stephen Crane poem. He also writes of "a love story" and "human betrayals." Feeling guilty for invading his privacy, she puts the book down and leaves the room.

The English patient notices Katharine for the first time in a romantic way as she reads the Crane poem, which again reflects the power that literature and books have over the English patient, and the importance of stories in making sense of his own identity and in relating to others.

In the field just north of the **villa**, Kip finds a large **bomb** hidden beneath a slab of concrete. The grass has grown over the wires, and Kip takes out his scissors and begins to clear it away. He takes the earphones and radio out as well, and tunes into the American music from the AIF station. The music helps him to concentrate, as he brushes dust off the six black wires.

Kip's affinity for American music is more evidence of his assimilation and the white-washing of his Eastern culture by the West. Kip not only enjoys the Western music, it helps to him to better concentrate and diffuse the bomb. Kip seems to actually believe in the superiority of the West, yet this opinion could potentially change as World War II progresses and Western countries take increasingly drastic measures to exert their dominance.

Inside the villa, Hana carries a large **mirror** down the upstairs hallway. The English patient wants to see himself. At the foot of the bed, Hana stands on a chair and tilts the mirror towards him. As the English patient tells her hold the mirror still, she hears faint shouting from outside. She puts the mirror down and walks outside, stopping to listen. Again, she hears shouting and begins to run in the direction of the field.

The English patient's desire to look in the mirror suggests that he is yearning for a true sense of identity—it's unclear at this point whether he really doesn't remember who he is, or if he is feigning amnesia to hide this information from the others at the villa.

When Hana gets to the field, she can see Kip standing near a tree with his hands in the air. He yells at her to stop and walk to the left. There are wires and **bombs** everywhere, he says. Hana slows and takes the directed path, thinking of all the times she walked through this field, never thinking of bombs. When she gets to the tree, Kip says he has been "tricked" and is holding two live wires. He needs her to hold the wires up so he can defuse the bomb. Kip passes the wires to Hana, shaking the blood back into his arms.

This again reflects just how unsafe the villa really is. Hana has spent much time in the field, and it is a miracle that she never tripped the bomb. This also reflects the stress and obvious trauma that goes along with Kip's job as a sapper and bomb specialist. Kip could quite literally die at any moment, of any day, and this stress is taking a toll on him mentally and emotionally.

Kip offers to tape the wires to the tree so Hana can leave, but she refuses. She doesn't think the wires will reach, so she will just hold them. The **bomb** is a "trick," Kip says, and he doesn't know how to disarm it. He puts his earphones back on and lets the sound "fill him with clarity." He tells Hana again to go, but she insists she will hold the wires. He follows the wires up to the tree and cuts just below Hana's left hand. The bomb makes an audible sound and Kip knows it is defused. Dropping his scissors, he puts his hand on Hana's shoulder, "to touch something human."

Notably, the music that Kip turns back on is obviously American, and it "fills him with clarity," enabling him to concentrate. The trick bomb again underscores the danger of Kip's job. The bomb is meant to explode and kill them all, and it is solely up to Kip to save them. Kip touches Hana after finally diffusing the bomb because he is further traumatized by the stress, and needs "human" contact to begin to heal.

Hana is speaking, but Kip doesn't hear her. He begins to shake. Hana repeats herself. She thought she was going to die, she says, and she had wanted to. "We should have lain down together, you in my arms, before we died," Hana says to Kip. She had wanted to touch his collarbone, like a "wing under [his] skin." She has always liked dark skin she says, "the colour of rivers and rocks." Hana is tired and wants to sleep, she says, but she first wants to know how he knew which wire to cut. He kept saying that he didn't know, but he really did. "Right?" Hana asks.

Hana is clearly attracted to Kip, which is why she wants to lay down with him, and this attraction is obviously related to his dark skin—the "color of rivers and rocks"—which she finds exotic. Furthermore, his collarbone like a "wing under his skin" a description that paints him as angelic and again hearkens to religion. Hana, too, seems traumatized by the stress of the bomb, and her first reaction, like Kip's, is human contact. This again suggests that meaningful connections are crucial for healing and are, in a way, a religious experience.

Under the tree, Hana sleeps deeply with her head on Kip's chest. He is irritated that she had stayed and didn't listen to him. Now he feels as if he owes her something, as if he is somehow responsible for her in hindsight. He thinks about Hana's comment about his skin having "the brownness of a rock, the brownness of a muddy storm-fed river" and looks beyond the "naïve innocence of such a remark." Kip is a "professional" but it is "wise white fatherly men" who are acknowledged after *he* defuses a large bomb. To them, Kip will always be "the foreigner, the Sikh."

Kip is beginning to realize that he will never be fully accepted in the West. Hana may find his skin appealing and attractive, but the same skin causes others to sideline and exploit him—like by sending him to diffuse bombs as white men take the credit for his work. Kip's skin is always an issue in the West, and attention is constantly drawn to it. Kip is again merely noticed for how he is different, not recognized for who he truly is.

As he watches Hana sleep, Kip is wide awake, wondering why he can never sleep. He thinks about a sapper he had once watched enter a mined house. Through his binoculars, Kip saw the sapper knock a box of matches off a table and become engulfed in a massive ball of fire seconds before the sound of the explosion reached him. Such explosions are like lightning in 1944, and Kip doesn't know how to trust anyone or anything anymore.

Kip is unable to sleep due to the toll that the stress and death of war have taken on him. He can't trust anything because everything is rigged to explode, and the Westerners rarely have his best interest at heart. Hana's deep sleep suggests she is beginning to heal, which Ondaatje implies is partly because of the love she develops for Kip, and he for her.

Later that night, the residents of the **villa** have a party in the English patient's room. Caravaggio has found a gramophone, and Kip, despite the fact that he doesn't drink, has come across two bottles of wine. Caravaggio asks Hana where she was all day, and she tells him that Kip defused a huge **bomb**. She looks to Kip to fill Caravaggio in, and he simply shrugs, not wanting to talk about it.

The wine, and the fact that Kip doesn't drink, is another example of Western dominance. Celebrations in the West are geared toward Western customs, not Eastern customs, and Kip is forced to adapt. The small celebration they throw further suggests that the residents of the villa are beginning to heal after the war, but Kip's refusal to talk about the bomb suggests they still have a long way to go.

Caravaggio places a record on the gramophone and declares it time to dance. Hana looks at Kip sitting in the window alcove. She wants to dance with Kip, she says. "Not until I've taught you, dear worm," Caravaggio says, taking Hana in his arms. Hana is a caught off guard. "Dear worm" was Patrick's pet name for her. The English patient decides to have some wine, and Kip pours him a glass. Suddenly, they hear an explosion in the distance. Kip doesn't think a **bomb** was tripped, he says, as the explosion seemed to come from a safe area that has already been cleared.

Caravaggio takes Hana in his arms as a way to exert power and dominance over her and Kip, by denying Kip the chance to dance with Hana. Caravaggio's behavior again suggests that he believes he has the power, and the superiority, to tell Kip (and Hana, for that matter) with whom they can dance. The explosion is further evidence that despite their impromptu celebration, the war is still not over, and none of them are wholly safe.

Kip returns to the window and can smell cordite in air. He quietly slips out of the room and runs outside, down the 36 chapel stairs to the road beyond. He wonders if it was a sapper or a civilian who tripped the **bomb**. Was it a terrible "accident" or a "wrong choice?" The sappers in Kip's unit are cordial to one another, but they've never really become friendly. All of their shared conversations consist of passing along information about bombs, such as new fuse techniques and devices, which is fine with Kip. Kip is only really at ease with men like the English patient and Kip's mentor, Lord Suffolk.

Kip now seems convinced that a bomb has been inadvertently tripped, even if he doesn't want to alarm the others and put a damper on their good time, which they all badly need. This again draws attention to the stress and danger of Kip's job, as he is in constant danger of becoming a victim of a terrible "accident" or a "wrong choice," which both bring instant death. Ondaatje again draws attention to the 36 chapel stairs and the need to atone or repent for the violence of war.

Kip doesn't believe in **books** the same way Hana does. As Hana watches Kip stand at the English patient's bedside, she thinks of the men as a sort of reversal of Kipling's *Kim*, in which the student is the Indian and the is teacher is English. Hana thinks books such as *Kim* have prepared her to meet Kip, but if anything, she is the young boy in Kipling's story and Kip is the officer Creighton.

Kip doesn't believe in books the same way Hana does because, as he later reveals, the white, Western world owns the printing presses and decides which stories are told. Kipling's Kim, *which paints colonialism as a good and mutually beneficial thing, is evidence of the marginalization of the East, even within books.*

Hours later, Kip returns from the mine explosion, which killed Hardy, Kip's second-in-command. After passing Caravaggio asleep on the library couch with the stray dog, Kip removes his shoes and silently goes upstairs. He finds the English patient sleeping and Hana sitting near his bed. She puts her finger to her lips, telling Kip to be quiet, and he sits in the window alcove. He is angry with Hana for treating her life so casually earlier that day with the **bomb**. Looking at Hana across the room, Kip thinks that if he could just reach out touch her, "he would be sane." Standing up, Kip goes to the English patient and snips the wire of his hearing aid. He will rewire it in the morning, he says.

Kip later reveals that Hardy is the only one who keeps him "human," and Hardy's death is more evidence of the hardships Kip is forced to live through during the war. Kip has fallen in love with Hana, and he believes he will go insane if he can't be with her. In this way, Ondaatje depicts love as an immensely powerful force that changes people in profound ways.

The next day, Caravaggio sits visiting with the English patient. The Englishman tells him that Caravaggio is "an absurd name for [him]." Caravaggio points out that he, at least, has a name, and the English patient agrees. He tells Caravaggio about the painter by the same name, who painted *David with the Head of Goliath*. In the painting, the English patient says, David holds the severed head of Goliath in his outstretched hand, only the face of David is Caravaggio the painter as he was in his youth and the head of Goliath is Caravaggio as an old man. "Youth judging age," the English patients says, the judging of one's morality. When the English patient sees Kip standing at his bed, he says, he thinks of Kip as his own David.

Like books and novels, the famous painting the English patient mentions also tells a story, relays history, and offers a way for the English patient and Caravaggio to interpret their world and each other. Furthermore, each of the residents of the villa seem to be judging their own morality as they recover after the war. They have each likely been called to do things they wouldn't normally do in the name of the greater good, yet those decisions still have moral implications that must be dealt with emotionally. In referring to Kip as his David, the English patient implies that colonization has moral implications that must be considered as well.

Later, Caravaggio sits in silence and thinks. He is nearly middle-aged and has nothing to show for it. He has avoided intimacy and permanence his entire life. He thinks that he must find out who the English patient is, for Hana's sake at least. Back in Cairo during the war, Caravaggio learned to take on false identities and live as a double agent, but here at the **villa** they are "shedding skins" instead of donning disguises.

Caravaggio implies that those at the villa cannot heal until they finally admit who they are, or until they shed their false personas. Caravaggio and the English patent seem to have impermanence and avoidance in common, as they both try to deny who they are.

The next day, after Hana goes to the English patient's room to read, he asks her to put down the **book** and instead read from Herodotus's *The Histories*. According to the English patient, Herodotus's book reveals "how people betray each other for the sake of nations." He asks Hana how old she is, and she answers 20. He was much older when he fell in love, the English patient says. Hana asks who the woman is, but the English patient looks away and doesn't answer.

The English patient cannot yet talk freely about the woman with whom he was in love, which suggests he is still not healed from the demise of their relationship. He also implies through the words of Herodotus that betrayal for the "sake of nations" is the cause of World War II. This suggests that nationalism and nationality do not that bring people together, but rather that divide them and breed strife and war.

Caravaggio, who is high on morphine, sits with Kip and Hana, and asks them if they think it is possible to fall in love with someone who isn't smarter than they are. This thought has bothered Caravaggio most of his life, he says. Caravaggio asks Kip if he could love Hana if she wasn't smarter than him. Maybe she's not, Caravaggio says, but could you still love her? Hana loves the English patient because he is smart, Caravaggio claims. "Talkers seduce, words direct us," he says.

This, too, reflects the power of words, and the power of those who control the words, as the English patient seduces Hana with words and stories. The English patient's intelligence is one of the reasons why they assume he is English, and Caravaggio implies this is why Hana is in love with him.

Hana tells Caravaggio to stop talking. After all, with the English patient upstairs, they already have one excessive talker. Caravaggio says Hana is "obsessed" with the English patient, and Caravaggio is "obsessed" with Hana's "sanity." And Kip, Caravaggio says, will probably blow up one day soon. Hana again asks him to stop talking, but he asks Kip the name of the sapper who was just killed. Hardy, Kip answers. Caravaggio receives Kip's answer as if it proves his point. Caravaggio claims that none of them should be there. "What are we doing in Africa, in Italy?" Caravaggio asks. And what is Kip doing fighting in an English war?

The love triangle of Hana, the English patient, and Caravaggio is beginning to make Hana uncomfortable. She loves the English patient (and later Kip), Caravaggio loves her, and the English patient loves a dead woman. Caravaggio worries that Hana's obsession is bad for her sanity, which again reflects the power of love to change and influence people. Caravaggio is beginning to see the Western presence as the imposition that it is.

Caravaggio tells Hana and Kip that they should all just leave the **villa**, but Hana refuses to leave the English patient. She assumes Caravaggio is angry because she loves someone else, but he claims he is not. In fact, Caravaggio rather likes the English patient, but that doesn't mean he wouldn't kill him if it meant that Hana would finally leave the villa. Kip sits without speaking, and Hana, pouring milk into a cup, moves the jug over Kip's hand, pouring the white liquid over his brown skin. He doesn't move.

Hana again draws attention to Kip's dark skin, which she obviously finds attractive and exotic. The darkness of Kip's skin is amplified next to the whiteness of the milk, and he makes no effort to stop her. Like Caravaggio, Kip loves Hana and would like to see her leave the villa and go somewhere safe, even though he is fond of the English patient just as Caravaggio is.

In the middle of the night, Hana walks quietly down to Kip's tent. Hana knows that Kip loves her, even though he does not want the food she grows or access to her stash of morphine, like Caravaggio. He doesn't need her to take care of him like the English patient. Kip finds her comfortable, and she loves the darkness of his skin. She loves how it changes from place to place on his body, such as the skin on his arms compared to his hands or the skin beneath his **turban**. She especially loves watching the water drip down his neck as he bathes.

Again, Hana is most attracted to Kip's dark skin and the ways he is exotic and completely "other." Additionally, Kip is self-sufficient and does not rely on her like the others at the villa do, which she finds attractive as well. Kip is used to relying on only himself, since he is mostly confronted with racism and discrimination in Western society and thus cannot trust those around him.

Kip thinks Hana is "remarkable." He loves her face and the sound of her voice as she disagrees with Caravaggio. And he loves the way she lays against his body "like a saint." She asks Kip to kiss her and says that she is in love with his teeth. She suggests they ask Caravaggio what love is. Patrick had always said that Caravaggio was a man in love. She is sure Caravaggio can explain, and then she will take Kip home to Canada to meet Clara, the last of her family.

Hana completely disregards Kip and his culture. She assumes that Caravaggio, a white man, knows more about love than Kip does, and she wants to take Kip to Canada with her, bringing him farther away from his life and family in India. Hana's love for Kip's teeth hearkens to the incident with the milk—the whiteness of Kip's teeth makes his skin seem darker by contrast, and therefore Hana loves them. In this sense, Hana's attraction to Kip could be interpreted as exoticizing or fetishizing him, since she is drawn primarily to the racialized features which distinguish him from Europeans. Kip's comment that Hana's body is "like a saint" again likens love, especially physical love, to a religious experience.

CHAPTER IV. SOUTH CAIRO 1930-1938

After Herodotus's time, the Western world cared little about the **desert** until the 20th century, and even then it was mostly private expeditions by members of the Geographical Society in London. Twice a month, the members gave lectures about their desert explorations, which were mostly presentations of facts and few assumptions or theories. They focused on only "interesting geographical problems," never people or the cost of their expeditions. The last great decade of desert exploration ended in 1939, when the desert became a theatre in World War II.

The presence of European explorers in the desert also hearkens to the dominance established through colonialism. Westerners assume that the East is not "discovered" until it is explored by them, and they care nothing about the people's lives they disrupt to do so. The war is further evidence of this as well—nations outside of the North America and Europe (other than Japan) have little to do with the war, yet the West extends the fighting to the African desert.

Hana sits by the English patient's bed and listens to his stories of the **desert**. In 1930, he had gone to the Gilf Kebir Plateau in search of a lost city named Zerzura. The English patient and his group of explorers were "desert Europeans," and Gilf Kebir was their "heart." The Gilf Kebir is located 400 miles west of the Nile, and according to early Egyptians, is where the world ends. There is little water, but one is always surrounded by lost history in the desert, the English patient says.

Zerzura is a mythical city for which the real László Almásy spent most of his life looking. The city is rumored to hold a great treasure, which again hearkens to the English patient's superiority as a Westerner. He wants to find the city, presumably, to find the treasure, which he assumes he can just take. Like the desert and the Gilf Kebir, the treasure is not his to take, but that doesn't stop him from trying.

The English patient tells Hana that his first **desert** exploration was in 1930 with a fellow explorer named Madox. They went on a seven-day journey to El Taj on which they were plagued by sandstorms, a supposed sign of good luck. Anything stationary was buried by sand, and at night their tents were swept from their moorings, tumbling and taking on sand like a ship taking on water. One of their horses disappeared and three camels were killed.

The desert is again described in terms of water, which makes it seem ever drier and more barren by comparison. The desert has the power to bury anything—essentially wipe it out—just as the English patient seems to have wiped himself clean of his identity. His identity is deeply tied to nationality, war, and racist assumptions, all of which he would like to rid himself of.

In 1931, the English patient met another explorer, Fenelon-Barnes, on a journey into the **desert**. One day, the English patient went to Fenelon-Barnes's tent, but he had gone on a small expedition to catalogue fossils. In Fenelon-Barnes's tent, the English patient noticed a small **mirror** on the wall, in which the bed was reflected. There was a small lump in the blankets and, thinking it must be a dog, the English patient pulled back the covers, revealing a sleeping and tied-up Arab girl.

The mirror in Fenelon-Barnes's tent both literally and figuratively reflects the ugly truth of colonialism, as it forces the English patient to confront the systemic abuse and exploitation of those from the East. It is implied that Fenelon-Barnes is sexually abusing the young Arab girl tied to his bed. Fenelon-Barnes is therefore the personification of colonialism—as a white Westerner, he assumes power over the Arab girl and uses this influence to malicious and selfish ends.

For most of the early 1930s, the English patient looked for Zerzura with a group of explorers. They were German, English, Hungarian, and African, but their nationalities were "insignificant" to the native **desert** people. In the desert, the explorers were "nationless," and the English patient grew to hate nations. He tells Hana that the world is "deformed by nation-states" and that Madox had "died because of nations." The explorers went to the desert to shed the clothing of their nations, and it was easy to slip from boarder to boarder and not belong to any one nation.

Here, the English patient implies that World War II has been caused by divisions of nationality, which have "deformed" the world. Madox commits suicide because of the war, and thus the English patient believes Madox "died because of nations." The desert, on the other hand, is so isolated that the native people know nothing of the divided state of the Western world, nor of the individual nations that make it up. In the desert, they are all just human beings, each on equal ground.

The English patient tells Hana that the end of the Earth is not a point on a map; maps simply reflect the first time a "white eye" sets sight on a mountain or **desert** that has always been there. He continues his story and tells Hana that one does not look in the **mirror** when they are young. It is only when one is older and concerned with their story that they begin to look in the mirror, the English patient says.

The English patient's explanation of maps again reflects the dominance of the West established though colonialism, as deserts and mountains don't exist until they are viewed by "white eyes." His mention of the mirror again implies that colonization is amoral, but Westerners are not yet concerned with the moral implications of their story and therefore haven't looked in the mirror.

In 1936, the English patient met Geoffrey Clifton. Geoffrey was newly married, and looking to go on an expedition into the **desert**. He soon came to Cairo and met up with the English patient's exploration team, including Madox, Bell, Prince Kemal el Din, and Almásy. They were still looking for Zerzura, a city whose name occurs in Arab writings as early as the 13th century. The English patient tells Hana that he doesn't think Geoffrey loved the desert quite in the same way he does, but that he had an awe and affection for it.

The fact that Geoffrey doesn't love the desert like the rest of the explorers foreshadows that he may not be who he pretends to be. The fact that the expedition team is searching for a city based on Arab writings is significant—although the novel suggests that Europeans tend to have disdain for other cultures, it's clear that they are willing to use the knowledge of other groups when it benefits them.

Geoffrey Clifton and his wife, Katharine, were still on their honeymoon, and the English patient had fallen in love with Katharine's voice as she recited a passage from John Milton's **Paradise Lost**. The English patient never enjoyed poetry until he heard it read by Katharine, and he wanted to hear nothing else except for her voice.

The fact that the English patient falls in love with Katharine as she recites Milton again reflects the importance of stories and literature. The English patient first notices Katharine when she reads the Crane poem, and he falls in love with her when she reads Milton, which implies that narratives in literature are intimately connected to one's personal life and emotions.

CHAPTER V. KATHARINE

The first time Katharine dreamed of the English patient, she woke up screaming in the bed she shared with Geoffrey. Her dream was the first time she realized her feelings for the other man, although when she saw him and listened to him talk about **desert** explorations, she had wanted to slap him. Katharine was always wanting to slap the English patient, and this feeling, even though she didn't readily recognize it, was sexual too.

Ondaatje implies throughout the novel that love is closely related to violence and hate, and these things seem to be nearly indistinguishable in Katharine's case. Katharine's love for the English patient often manifests in violence, as she is constantly striking or wanting to strike him. This is further evidence that the power love can change people, in negative ways as well as positive.

One day, before Katharine and the English patient made love for the first time, he asked her what she hated most. She told him that she most hated a lie and then asked him what he hated most. He answered "ownership" and told Katharine to leave and forget him. Making a fist, Katharine swung and connected with the bone just below the English patient's eye, leaving a large bruise. Later, he examined the welt in the **mirror**, and realized that he had not looked at himself in the mirror for years.

Looking in the mirror, the English patient realizes that the love he shares with Katharine has made them both into the thing that they hate. For Katharine, their love has made her into a liar, as she is unfaithful to Geoffrey. The English patient becomes indebted to Katharine because of their love, which can be seen as a type of possessive "ownership."

The English patient could not keep himself from Katharine, and when he was not in the **desert**, they were together. At night, he would lie in her arms, but Katharine often felt guilty about their relationship. She claimed she didn't know what to do; if Geoffrey ever found out about their affair, he would "go mad." As their affair progressed, Madox couldn't help but notice the English patient's multiple bruises and bandages, and he wondered why his friend was suddenly so prone to accidents.

Again, Katharine's love often manifests in violence, and this is likely a product of her guilt and her anger with herself for becoming what she hates: a liar. Katharine's insistence that Geoffrey will "go mad" foreshadows his eventual vengeance against the English patient and Katharine, which further reflects love's power to change people and even drive one to insanity.

Whenever Katharine had to leave the English patient and return to Geoffrey, the English patient was "insane." He couldn't stand to lose her if it meant he couldn't continue to hold her. It was not long before she told the English patient she could no longer see him, and he agreed. Again, Katharine was convinced that Geoffrey would "go mad." When Katharine left for the last time, the English patient told her that he didn't yet miss her. "You will," she said.

Love seemingly has the power to drive Geoffrey insane, and it has the same power over the English patient. In this way, love is not always a positive thing across the board. Love can enhance one's life and lend meaning, but it can also destroy one's life and lead to despair and "madness." Of course, Katharine is right—the English patient does miss her, especially in her death.

CHAPTER VI. A BURIED PLANE

After Hana injects the English patient with another dose of morphine, he begins to tell her about his time in Cairo. In 1937, he went gone on an expedition with Madox to Uweinat. The English patient asked Madox what the name for the small hollow at the base of a woman's neck was. Madox simply stared at him. "Pull yourself together," Madox said.

Madox knows that the English patient is in love and that he definitely misses someone, he just doesn't know who, which is why he tells him go "pull [himself] together." Morphine always gets the English patient talking, a fact that will prove to be important as Caravaggio tries to uncover the English patient's true identity.

Later, Caravaggio tells Hana a story about a Hungarian named Almásy who aided the Germans during the war. Almásy was a **desert** explorer who knew all about the landscape and the local dialects of the native people. When the war began, Almásy guided German spies across the desert. The point of Caravaggio's story, he tells Hana, is that he doesn't think the English patient is English.

Caravaggio believes that the English patient is Almásy. Whether or not this is true is unclear at this point—if the English patient really is Almásy, he will not want to admit this because, among other reasons, to do so would mean admitting that he helped the Germans (the enemy) during the war.

Hana is dubious and tells Caravaggio that his suspicions about the English patient are ridiculous. Caravaggio reminds of Hana of when they named the stray dog. The English patient had suggested three names: Cicero, Zerzura, and Delilah. Cicero, Caravaggio says, is a code name for a German spy thought by the British to be a triple agent. Hana tells Caravaggio that she has already heard all about Zerzura from the English patient. Caravaggio nods. The "spy-helper" Almásy is upstairs, he says.

Cicero was a Roman orator and philosopher from the 1st century B.C.E. who is widely regarded as one of Rome's best prose writers, which aligns with the importance of books and literature throughout the novel. Cicero was the actual code name for Elyesa Bazna, a Nazi secret agent who operated in the Middle East during World War II.

According to Caravaggio, the Germans sent a spy named Eppler to Cairo in 1942 with a copy of the **book** *Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier as a code book to send messages back and forth. Almásy guided Eppler through the desert. After leaving Eppler in Cairo, Almásy went back into the desert and British Intelligence lost track of him. Plus, Caravaggio says, the man who caught Eppler in Cairo was named Sansom, which explains why the English patient wanted to name the dog Delilah.

The real-life Almásy really did guide a German spy named Eppler across the desert into Cairo, and they really used a copy of Rebecca *to send coded messages back and forth to German Intelligence. The English patient's suggestion of the Biblical name Delilah, in addition to its historical significance, is also in keeping with the theme of religion, which, although it seems absent in the war, is still present in subtle ways.*

Hana tells Caravaggio that it makes no difference who the English patient is. After all, she says, the war is over. Caravaggio isn't convinced. He wants to give the English patient a Brompton cocktail, which is a combination of morphine and alcohol, and see if he starts talking. Hana tells Caravaggio to leave the English patient alone, but he promises not to hurt him. If anything, the cocktail will ease his pain, Caravaggio says.

At this point, Caravaggio is clearly hung up on the English patient's nationality, since this aspect of a person defined their identity and loyalties during World War II, a global conflict that pitted myriad groups of people against one another, often solely on the basis of national identity.

After giving the English patient the Brompton cocktail, he begins to tell Caravaggio all about Cairo and the **desert**. Caravaggio asks him about 1942, and the English patient says he had just come to Cairo and was headed back into the desert when his truck exploded. The war meant that many vehicles were sabotaged, and the English patient was forced to travel to the buried plane by foot. It was an extra plane, owned by Madox, which the expedition didn't use anymore.

The sabotaged truck further highlights the incessant fear and violence caused by war. Like the hidden bombs in the villa, the English patient was clearly never safe or at ease during his time in the desert, which provides context to the emotional trauma with which he is suffering alongside his physical injuries.

After four days walking in the desert, the English patient finally reached the Cave of Swimmers, where he had left Katharine years earlier. Her dead body was still there, wrapped in a parachute. Still very much in love with her, he "approached her naked as [he] would have done in [their] South Cairo room, wanting to undress her, still wanting to love her." "What is terrible in what I did?" the English patient asks. "Don't we forgive everything of a lover?" The English patient carried Katharine's body out of the cave. She had been injured three years earlier, in 1939. Geoffrey had attempted a murder-suicide of himself, Katharine, and the English patient by crashing his plane. He killed only himself, however, and badly injured Katharine. She couldn't be moved, and the English patient's only choice was to go get help.

While he doesn't explicitly say it, the English patient implies that he had sex with Katharine's dead body, which again suggests that love can transcend anything—including death. Whether or not it is easy to "forgive" the English patient of such a taboo and grotesque act, his all-consuming love for Katharine cannot be denied, and he certainly suffers because of it. He knows that Katharine is obviously dead after three years in the desert, but he is still compelled to retrieve her body.

After the English patient's affair with Katharine ended, he became angry and introverted, and grew suspicious that Katharine had taken a new lover. Just before the war, he returned to Gilf Kebir to take down base camp. Geoffrey was scheduled to pick the English patient up in his plane, and when he arrived, Geoffrey flew the plane directly at the English patient, attempting to hit him. Geoffrey missed, and the plane crashed to the ground. Geoffrey was killed instantly, but Katharine, who was a passenger in the plane, was not.

Geoffrey's murder-suicide attempt is further evidence of the extremes one can be driven to by love. Geoffrey discovers Katharine's affair after the fact, and he is so destroyed by his wife's betrayal that he attempts to kill her along with her lover and himself. Just as Katharine had feared, Geoffrey indeed "goes mad" when he discovers Katharine and the English patient's affair.

When the English patient took Katharine's broken body from the plane, she asked him why he hated her so. Geoffrey began to suspect their affair long after it was over because the English patient treated her so badly. As the English patient talks, Caravaggio places another morphine tablet in the English patient's mouth, and the English patient tells him he left Katharine in the Cave of Swimmers with his copy of **The Histories**.

This passage again implies that love and hate are two very closely linked emotions, as the English patient's anger, or hate, for Katharine is what tips Geoffrey off to their affair in the first place. This is understandable, since love and hate are both deeply passionate feelings and suggest a significant level of investment in another person, for better or worse. Similar to Katharine's abuse, the English patient's love (at this point, at least) manifests as hate and anger.

When the English patient finally reached Madox's plane buried in the **desert** in 1942, he loaded Katharine's body into it and took off. The plane, however, was beginning to rot after being left in the desert for so long. Oil leaked all over, saturating the English patient's lower legs. A spark ignited the oil and the plane began to burn. He slipped into a parachute and ejected from the plane, and it wasn't until he was flying through the air that the English patient noticed he was on fire.

Hana notes earlier that the English patient's legs contain the worst of his burns because the fire begins around his lower legs, which here sustain the brunt of the damage. Katharine's body is presumably lost in the fire, and he is unable to get her out of the desert after all, which adds to his misery and pain later at the villa.

Later, Hana enters the English patient's room to find Kip standing at his bedside. The English patient claims he and Kip get along so well because they are both "international bastards." They were both born in one place but choose to live in another, and they spend their lives "fighting to get back or get away from [their] homelands."

While the English patient seems to fight to get away from his homeland, Kip must fight to get back to his, which reflects the English patient's privilege as a white Westerner and (in Kip's mind, at least) an Englishman.

Kip tells Hana and the English patient about his time as a sapper, diffusing **bombs** all over Europe. The English patient claims that Kip's teacher must have been Lord Suffolk, and Kip confirms that he was. Lord Suffolk, along with his secretary, Miss Morden, and his chauffer, Mr. Fred Harts, were known as "the Holy Trinity," Kip says, until they were blown up in 1941 at Erith.

"The Holy Trinity" is another obvious biblical reference as it connotes the father, the son, and the holy spirit, but this reference also reflects the near-complete disregard of religion and God during the war. The Holy Trinity, like many other religious symbols in the book, are blown up, too.

CHAPTER VII. IN SITU

In 1940, Kip was in Westbury, England, with Lord Suffolk, Miss Morden, and Mr. Fred Harts. Kip was fond of Miss Morden, and she was the first Englishwoman he had ever spoken to. As the second son in his family, it was always expected that Kip would become a doctor and his older brother would join the army, but the war changed all that. Kip joined a Sikh regiment and went to England, where he joined a **bomb** unit. At the time, there were 25 bomb units total, and they had little technical equipment.

Here, Kip's culture is completely disregarded and disrupted by the war. As a British colony, Indian men were expected to fight for the British, and cultural expectations and traditions did not matter. Kip is expected to put his life on the line for people he doesn't know and doesn't interact with, and he is given few resources, which suggests the British military cares little if he is killed in the process.

While Kip was training, he learned that the most dangerous **bombs** did not explode until after they landed. Unexploded bombs littered the European countryside, waiting to be tripped by unsuspecting soldiers, civilians, and animals. By August of 1940, there were 2,500 unexploded bombs, and by September that number grew to 3,700. The life expectancy of a sapper in a bomb unit was around 10 weeks.

This reflects the abject violence and destruction of the war. Bombs were constructed to inflict the maximum amount damage and death, and the climbing number of unexploded bombs adds to the trauma of Kip's experience. He diffuses multiple bombs each day, which as an isolated incident would be bad enough, but Kip is forced to do it time and time again.

"Lord Suffolk was the best of the English," Kip tells Hana. While in England, Kip quickly found the best places to drink tea, and Lord Suffolk would join him for a cup. He told Kip that he trusted him as he did Miss Morden and Mr. Harts, and Lord Suffolk and Kip soon grew close. Kip was just 21 then, and he was a long way from his family in the Punjab.

Kip's love of English tea reflects his assimilation to English ways, but it has a more ironic connection as well. In colonizing India, England became rich through "tea estates" where indentured servants—enslaved Indians—were forced to harvest tea for the English.

When Kip had first applied to Lord Suffolk's **bomb** unit, he was led into a library for testing with 15 other men, none of whom were Indian. Miss Morden sat at a nearby desk, staring at him. Kip took a **book** off a shelf, *Pierre; or The Ambiguities*, and felt the woman's eyes on him. She had probably never seen a **turban**, Kip thought. Putting the book back, Kip couldn't believe the English. They expected him to fight for them, but they wouldn't talk to him.

This, too, reflects the racism of colonialism. Miss Morden watches Kip move around the library with suspicion, which he assumes is because of his turban. Kip's selection of Herman Melville's Pierre; or The Ambiguities *has subtle meaning here. Ambiguity means being open to more than one interpretation—Melville's book, for instance, is at once a novel but is also autobiographical, depending on the interpretation. Similarly, Kip seems to suggest here that Miss Morden should be open to more than one interpretation, beyond the racist assumptions of colonialism, regarding his turban and Indian identity.*

When Lord Suffolk finally arrived at the library, the testing for the **bomb** unit began. Kip breezed through each round and began to believe that he would be easily admitted if not for his race. He was, however, one of three selected by Lord Suffolk at the recommendation of Miss Morden. "I know you don't drink," Miss Morden had said to Kip when she arrived with two glasses of sherry—one for Lord Suffolk, one for herself—to celebrate Kip's acceptance. "Congratulations," they said, raising their glasses.

While Lord Suffolk and Miss Morden seem to accept Kip easily enough, they still disregard his culture and identity. They are celebrating Kip's *accomplishment, yet they choose to celebrate in a way that excludes him. Had they really wanted to celebrate Kip and his accomplishment, they would actually focus on Kip and celebrate in a manner in which he can actually partake.*

Kip traveled England with Lord Suffolk, Miss Morden, Mr. Harts—"the Holy Trinity"—and five other sappers. After Kip had been in the unit for about one year, Lord Suffolk, Miss Morden, and Mr. Harts were killed in the explosion in Erith. Kip had been in London diffusing a different **bomb** when he learned of their deaths. Two bomb disposal officer had come to inform Kip, and they also told him that there was another bomb like the one that had killed the Holy Trinity. They needed Kip to diffuse it.

Kip looks to Lord Suffolk like a father figure, yet he has no time to mourn this profound loss. He must immediately go to Erith and diffuse the bomb—the same kind of bomb his mentor was unable to diffuse. The stress and trauma of such a situation is unimaginable, and it is more evidence of the hardships Kip is made to endure because of the war.

Holding back his emotions, Kip went to Erith with Hardy but insisted on diffusing the bomb alone. The bomb was a "trick," Kip tells Hana. He was lucky to have figured it out, but he had loved Lord Suffolk, and he now carried more of Lord Suffolk's knowledge than any other sapper. Kip was used to his "invisibility" and being ignored by the other soldiers. He was merely an "anonymous member of another race," but with his knowledge of **bombs**, he was expected to carry on Lord Suffolk's work.

This is more evidence of the racism Kip must face in the British military. The men in Kip's unit obviously do not respect him because of his Indian identity, yet he is the best bomb specialist among them. They should respect him for doing what the rest of them can't, but instead they ignore him and treat him as if he is invisible.

Kip tells Hana about his older brother, who refused to fight in the war. "He refused to agree to any situation where the English had power," Kip says, and his brother was soon thrown into jail for his resistance. Kip believes his brother is still alive, but is probably still sitting in jail.

Kip's brother also illustrates the blatant racism and injustice of colonialism. Kip and his brother are wholly oppressed by the British, as their country and culture have been completely taken over by colonialism. Kip's brother thus refuses to fight, and possibly die, for his oppressors.

CHAPTER VIII. THE HOLY FOREST

In the library of the **villa**, Caravaggio accidentally knocks a fuse box off a table as he turns towards Hana's voice in the hallway. Kip slides seamlessly to the ground and catches the **bomb** in his hands. Caravaggio looks to Kip on the floor and realizes suddenly that he "owes" Kip his life. Kip laughs awkwardly, holding the bomb and wires in his hands. Caravaggio knows that he will never forget Kip as long as he lives. Years later, Caravaggio will see an East Indian man getting out of a taxi in Toronto and think of Kip.

The idea of "owing" someone comes up repeatedly throughout the novel. Here, Caravaggio doesn't want to owe Kip, and Kip doesn't want to owe Hana or be responsible for her saving life earlier, when he diffused the trick bomb in the orchard. Of course, neither Kip nor Caravaggio are able to escape these ties, regardless of how much time passes, which Ondaatje seems to imply is the nature of love and relationships.

Not long after Kip was sent to Italy, he was lowered by Hardy into a pit with a large Esau **bomb**. In 1941, Esau bombs with a new kind of fuse began to surface, and this was the second one Kip had been called to diffuse. As he began to work, he hummed a song Hardy had taught him about Christopher Robin and Buckingham Palace. After working for more than an hour, Kip ordered Hardy to put him on microphone and get away of the pit. "Okay, sir," Hardy said. Hardy never hesitated to call Kip "sir," unlike the other men in their unit.

The song Kip hums is further evidence of his attempts to conform to Western culture. He doesn't hum songs from his own Indian culture; he hums songs about Christopher Robin, a British literary character, and Buckingham Palace, the residence of the British monarchy. Regardless of how hard Kip tries to conform to Western ways, he is still not accepted by the other men, and the fact that they hesitate to call him "sir" is evidence of this.

As Kip continued his work defusing the Esau **bomb**, he sang the song Hardy taught him out loud. Within five minutes, Kip had the fuse out of the bomb and the gaine removed. He climbed out of the pit, exhausted and shaken, and Hardy helped carry their equipment back to the truck. Kip was wasn't exactly scared when he was down in the pit with the bomb; he was mad at himself for nearly slipping up and detonating the bomb. Kip thought of himself as "an animal" trying to protect itself and realized that it was Hardy who kept him "human."

Kip calling himself "an animal" aligns with the racist assumptions of colonists. Those from the East were thought to be savages by those in the West, and Kip shares this belief here, thinking he is only made "human" by Hardy, an Englishman. This also reflects the power of love that Ondaatje highlights throughout the novel. Here, it is Kip's love and comradery for Hardy that enables him to go on despite extreme violence and racism.

On warm days, everyone at the **villa** washes their hair. They use kerosene to get out the lice and then rinse with water. Hana watches Kip as he lays with his hair spread out to dry. Through Kip, Hana pictures all of Asia, even though he has "assumed English fathers" and follows their rules "like a dutiful son."

This again reflects Kip's efforts to assimilate to Western culture. He has been forced to leave his country, family, and culture for the English, and he is a "dutiful son," yet the West does not fully accept him. Even Hana, who undoubtedly loves him, constantly sees Kip for the color of his skin and the ways that he is different from her.

As Kip's hair dries, he again tells Hana about his brother, who refused to fight with the British. Kip's brother said that Kip will one day "open [his] eyes" to the fact that Asia is not a free continent. Kip's brother didn't understand how Kip could fight so easily in an English war. Kip always reminded his brother that Japan was part of Asia, and the Japanese had killed many Sikhs in Malaya. Kip's brother, however, ignored this fact and said only that the British hang Sikhs who fight for independence.

Kip's brother's comment foreshadows the fact that Kip may indeed "open [his] eyes" to the West's mistreatment of Eastern people. While Kip points out that there is also infighting among Asian countries, the fact that the British hang Sikhs for merely trying to live freely suggests that the country fundamentally devalues Indian people in spite of the wealth and prosperity Britain has gained from colonizing India for the past century.

During all the time Kip has spent fighting in Europe, he has never once considered himself. He spends most of his time with Englishmen, thinking about England or Lord Suffolk. Kip does not carry a **mirror**, and he wraps his **turban** each day without one, facing the garden outside.

Like the other residents of the villa, Kip denies his identity when he refuses to look in the mirror. Kip blindly applies his turban, which implies he doesn't want to be reminded of his nationality and all the ways in which he is different.

At 2:00 in the morning, Hana blows out the candle and leaves the English patient's room. As she climbs the 36 steps outside the chapel, Kip slips out into the courtyard and quietly climbs into a well. Hana enters the library, as Caravaggio lay in the darkness on the far end of the room.

As Kip and Caravaggio prepare to play a trick on Hana, Ondaatje again draws attention to the 36 chapel steps. This suggests atonement and penitence, and implies that Hana feels considerable guilt related to the war, and especially to Patrick's death.

In the library, Hana lays on the couch and Caravaggio sneaks across the room in the dark. He reaches out to grab her, but she is gone. Suddenly, Kip's arm closes around Caravaggio's neck, and they both fall to the floor. On the ground, Hana appears out of nowhere and places her bare foot at Kip's throat, holding him down. "Got you," she cries. "*Got you.*" Caravaggio works his way out of Kip's grip and leaves the room without speaking.

Caravaggio leaves the room without speaking because he is obviously in love with Hana, but she doesn't love him in quite the same way. Here, Hana gives her attention to Kip, not Caravaggio, and Caravaggio feels slighted. Despite this, however, this playful interaction between Kip, Hana, and Caravaggio is evidence of their collective healing. They are beginning to leave behind the pain and trauma of the war, due in large part to their shared bond with one another.

CHAPTER IX. THE CAVE OF SWIMMERS

The English patient tells Hana and Caravaggio, that when he first met Katharine, she was a married woman. When Geoffrey Clifton arrived in the desert to join the English patient's expedition, they were all surprised when he arrived with his new wife. The couple went back to Cairo for a month, and when they returned, Katharine was quiet and kept to herself. She had begun to "discover herself," which the English patient tells Hana was particularly "painful to watch" because Geoffrey was completely blind to it.

The fact that Geoffrey is blind to Katharine's efforts to "discover herself" suggests that he is largely neglectful of her. Katharine is obviously going through a difficult and defining time in her life, and Geoffrey doesn't even notice. The fact that this is "painful to watch" implies that Katharine is deeply affected by Geoffrey's neglect, which makes her affair with the English patient all the more understandable.

Katharine became obsessed with the **desert** and began to read everything she could about it. The English patient was 15 years older than her, and did not "believe in permanence" or in relationships that lasted a lifetime, but Katharine was smarter than him. Once, when Katharine ran out of **books** to read, she asked the English patient for his copy of *The Histories*. He had refused, claiming it contained his personal notes, and he needed it when he went into the desert.

The English patient's dislike of "permanence" mirrors the impermanence of the desert, but his comment suggests that this isn't the smartest way to live one's life. Katharine believes in relationships and lasting love, and the English patient openly admits she is smarter than he is. This suggests that the English patient regrets his previous approach to love and relationships, which has always kept others at a distance, and now considers this approach wrong.

One night, Geoffrey asked Katharine to read a poem out loud, but she wanted to read something else. The English patient handed her his **book** of Herodotus, and she read the story of Candaules, one the English patient has always just skimmed over, in which Candaules falls "passionately" in love with his wife. The English patient had always used *The Histories* to learn about geography, but Katharine used it "as a window to her life." As she read, the English patient fell in love with her. "Words," the English patient says to Caravaggio, interrupting his own story. "They have power."

This is before Katharine's affair with the English patient, when she is upset over Geoffrey's neglect. Katharine reads the story of Candaules—a king of Lydia, an ancient kingdom, during the 7th century B.C.E.—hoping that Geoffrey will fall "passionately" in love with her as well. This illustrates the connection between people and the "power" of words and stories. Katharine uses literature "as a window to her life," meaning she uses literature to give meaning to her unfulfilling life and express to herself.

When Katharine and Geoffrey were not in the desert, they were in Cairo doing work for the English. Geoffrey had an uncle in the government, although the English patient was not sure of the exact nature of Geoffrey's job. Katharine and Geoffrey would frequent parties and dinners, and even though the English patient hated such social gatherings, he went just to be near Katharine.

The English patient's uncertainty of Geoffrey's role foreshadows the fact that Geoffrey may have been concealing his true identity, much like Caravaggio suspects the English patient of doing now. The English patient sacrificing his discomfort in order to spend time around Katharine again demonstrates love's capability to dictate people's decisions and behavior.

While in Cairo, the English patient worked for the Department of Egyptology and wrote a **book** about his explorations. It was a short book, only 70 pages, and he had wanted to dedicate it to Katharine, even though he did not end up doing so. He grew cold and distant in Katharine's company until the day she approached him and propositioned him. Their affair heated up, and the English patient became obsessed with Katharine's body, calling the little hollow at the base of her throat "the Bosphorus."

The English patient's obsession with Katharine's body mirrors the obsession Hana has later for the English patient's body. Just as the English patient loves the hollow at Katharine's throat, Hana loves the hollow below the English patient's ribs. This implies that love is as physical as it is emotional, and that the two are closely linked.

Although the English patient did not know it, Geoffrey Clifton was deeply involved with the English government, and they knew all about the English patient's affair with Katharine. The English patient had ignored all of Katharine's remarks about Geoffrey's relatives, but Madox had tried to warn him about Geoffrey's connection to the English. Like the English patient's **book** of Herodotus, Madox carried Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, and used the book to try to explain Geoffrey's connection to the British government. Half of Moscow and Petersburg were relatives or friends with Oblonsky, a character in Tolstoy's novel, and Madox said it was the same with Geoffrey.

This again illustrates how literature and stories help characters in the novel interpret and understand their world. Madox uses Anna Karenina to try to convince the English patient that Geoffrey is not who he says he is. Furthermore, Anna Karenina is a famous novel about an affair that ends in Anna Karenina's death, which is significant in context with Katharine and the English patient's adulterous affair and Katharine's subsequent death.

Katharine loved words, the English patient says to Caravaggio. In words Katharine found "clarity," "shape," and "reason," but the English patient says that words only bend emotions, "like sticks in water." Katharine eventually returned to Geoffrey, and the English patient returned to the desert. He had told Madox nothing specific about the woman he was seeing, only that she was a widow in Cairo. "Would've like to have met her," Madox said to him in 1939, before Madox pulled out his desert revolver and shot himself in a church during a sermon honoring the war.

Ironically, Madox has met Katharine and knows her very well, he simply doesn't know about her affair with the English patient. The English patient's claim that words bend emotions "like sticks in water" hearkens to Cleanth Brooks, a 20th century writer and critic's, definition of irony. Brooks says that irony is like a stick submerged in water—it appears bent but isn't, which highlights the difference between expectation and reality. The English patient expects to find "clarity" and "reason" in words like Katharine does, but he doesn't.

As Madox was leaving for England, he stopped and turned around. "This is called the vascular sizood," he said to the English patient, laughing and pointing to the hollow near the base of his neck. He left, carrying his **book** of Tolstoy. Once in England, Madox entered a church near Somerset with his wife, and when the priest began to preach in support of the war and the men who joined the battle, Madox shot himself, dying instantly. "Yes," the English patient says, "Madox was a man who died because of nations."

The English patient's last memory of Madox reflects the fondness and love he has for his friend, and this memory is intricately linked with the English patient's love for Katharine as well. Like the English patient, Madox has lived a nationless life in the desert, and he chooses death over aligning himself with any of the conflicting nations in the war.

On Madox's last night in Cairo, the English patient finally talked him into going into a bar, and there they saw Katharine and Geoffrey Clifton. The English patient was drunk and invented a dance called "the Bosphorus hug." He was devastated by the fact that Madox was leaving Cairo, and he hid his feelings in alcohol, obnoxiously trying to dance with everyone. He grabbed Katharine and "a maniac's tango ensued." The English patient spent very little time in Cairo and seemed like a distant man to many; yet there he was, dancing with Katharine Clifton.

The dance "the Bosphorus hug" refers to the name the English patient has given the hollow at the base of Katharine's neck, and it is more evidence of his love for her. When he and Katharine dance "the Bosphorus hug," it is a "maniac's tango," which recalls love's power to drive one insane, just as it later does to Geoffrey after he discovers Katharine's affair.

During this time, the only connection the English patient had with the cities of the outside world was through Herodotus's **book**. Soon, even the idea of a city became foreign to the English patient. In a phenomenon known as "geomorphology," he had selected a place "unconscious of ancestry" to discover himself.

This, too, reflects the English patient's nationless identity. He must go to a faraway desert to find out who he truly is, and he discovers that this has little to do with ancestry. Kip does this in a way, as well, as he finds out who he truly is in Italy—but he also discovers that one's ancestry cannot be escaped, and he ultimately returns to India.

In the Cave of Swimmers, after Geoffrey had crashed his plane, the English patient placed Katharine, grimacing in pain, on a stretched out parachute. Katharine always wore makeup, so the English patient "stole the colours" from the cave wall, and put it onto Katharine's face. He combed his hands through her hair and started a fire to keep her warm. He told her that he would not be able to carry her out of the desert but would soon return with help. When he left her, he gave her his Herodotus **book**. It was September of 1939.

The English patient's gestures toward Katharine reflect his love for her. From fixing her hair to taking paint from an ancient cave painting to use as makeup, he obviously cares very much about her, and this is further implied when he leaves her his copy of The Histories. *Earlier in the novel, the English patient refuses to let her keep the book for any length of time, but now he freely gives it too her in a symbolic gesture of love and sacrifice.*


A man can only walk the speed of a camel, which is about two and a half miles per hour, the English patient tells Caravaggio. He walked for three days without food. When he arrived in El Taj, English military jeeps surrounded him immediately, and they refused to listen to his pleas to go get Katharine.

The British military surrounds the English patient because they fear he may be spy, which again suggests that he cannot really escape his nationality, whether real or perceived.

Caravaggio suddenly wants to leave the **villa**. He is only a thief, and he doesn't belong here with the English patient, a man he is now convinced is Almásy. Caravaggio is beginning to believe that it really doesn't matter which side the English patient supported during the war, but Caravaggio still needs to know if he murdered Katharine Clifton, and he asks him as much now. The English patient assures him that he did not, and Caravaggio tells him that he only asks because Geoffrey Clifton was no ordinary Englishman.

Caravaggio's change of heart that it now makes little difference whether or not the English patient is really Almásy suggests that he, too, is beginning to see the world in a nationless way. At this point, Caravaggio cares only if Almásy is a murderer, which could have further implications on Hana's safety. Like the Bedouin, nationality is becoming insignificant to Caravaggio.

Geoffrey Clifton had been ordered by British Intelligence to keep an eye on Almásy and his expeditions into the **desert**, Caravaggio says. The English knew that the desert would eventually become a theater of the war, and Geoffrey was an aerial photographer. British Intelligence thought that Geoffrey's death was suspicious (they still do, Caravaggio says) and they had always known about Almásy's affair with Katharine. British Intelligence had been waiting for Almásy in Cairo, but he never arrived and instead went back into the desert.

Geoffrey Clifton is likely based on an Englishman named Sir Robert Clayton, a pilot who accompanied the real Almásy into the desert in 1932. Clayton died of acute polio in the Gilf Kebir in 1932—not in a plane crash, like Geoffrey in the novel. However, Clayton's wife, Dorothy, was a pilot as well, and, like Katharine, she was killed in a mysterious plane crash in 1939.


The English patient asks Caravaggio if he came to the **villa** to finally apprehend him. No, Caravaggio says. He came to find Hana, since he has known her since before the war. In fact, the truth is that Caravaggio has grown too fond of Almásy to turn him over to the authorities. He sits facing the burned and dying man, but no words come to him. Almásy begs Caravaggio to speak to him and asks if he is "just a **book**" to be filled with morphine and read.

The English patient's question confirms Caravaggio's suspicion that he is, in fact, Almásy. Almásy has told Caravaggio his entire story—thus, he is "a book" to be read—but Caravaggio tells him very little about himself. Like the English patient, Caravaggio struggles with his identity during the war. Both Italy and Hungary sided with the Germans during the war, an allegiance witch which both Caravaggio and Almásy seem to struggle.

Caravaggio tells the English patient that he is just a thief who was "legitimized" during the war. He stole documents and various other things for British Intelligence, and he had first heard about Almásy while in the Middle East. British Intelligence worried that Almásy would use his knowledge of the **desert** to help the Germans, Caravaggio says. The English patient is quiet for a moment and then tells Caravaggio that he only did it so he could get back to Katharine.

Caravaggio struggles with his identity as a thief just as much as he struggles with his identity as an Italian. He is only "legitimized" during the war because his skills come in handy to the Allies. Obviously, Almásy did exactly what the British feared, but he didn't do it out of malice or hate. He guides the German spy to get back to Katharine, whom he still deeply loves, even though he knew she had to be dead.

Caravaggio tells the English patient that British Intelligence knew about Eppler long before he got to Cairo. They had broken a German code and were waiting for Eppler when he arrived in Egypt. Caravaggio says that they were waiting for Almásy, too, and planned to kill him, but he disappeared into the desert. British Intelligence was convinced that Almásy had killed Geoffrey Clifton because of his affair with Katharine. Caravaggio says that Almásy became Britain's enemy not when he agreed to help the Germans, but when he began his affair with Katharine.

The real-life Almásy really did guide a German spy named Eppler across the desert during World War II. The Germans were looking to plant Nazis in Egypt, which at the time was held by Britain. British Intelligence arrested Eppler not long after he arrived in Cairo, but Almásy was never apprehended and safely made it back to Hungary without being caught.

The English patient had to return to the Gilf Kebir, he tells Caravaggio, and Geoffrey was to pick him up in his plane. When Geoffrey arrived, he circled around in his plane and flew directly at the English patient, crashing into the sand nearby. The English patient ran to the plane and found Katharine in the passenger seat. Geoffrey was killed in the crash, and later that night, the English patient buried his body.

Just as Katharine fears, Geoffrey "goes mad" because of her affair with the Almásy, which reflects Ondaatje's overarching argument that love can drive one to extreme jealousy and even insanity. Katharine and Almásy's affair has been over for some time, but Geoffrey is still not able to handle it.

Katharine was not killed in the crash, but she was badly injured. The English patient pulled her from the mangled plane and carried her to the Cave of Swimmers. "It is important to die in holy places," the English patient tells Caravaggio, and that is why Madox killed himself in the church in Somerset. Madox thought the church "had lost its holiness, and he committed what he believed was a holy act."

Madox's believes that the church has "lost its holiness" because the priest very obviously supports the war, which Madox views as an unholy and violent thing. Madox's suicide is his protest against this misuse of religion, or loss of holiness.

The English patient tells Caravaggio that everyone dies "containing a richness of lovers and tribes." People are "communal histories, communal books," the English patient says. The night that Geoffrey Clifton crashed his plane, the English patient carried Katharine into the desert, into the "communal book of moonlight."

Even though it is undoubtedly painful for Almásy to talk about Katharine, he begins to heal by sharing this "richness of lovers and tribes" though his stories. His comment that people are "communal histories, communal books" implies that real history lives in personal stories, which must be appreciated in order to understand the past and the present.

CHAPTER X. AUGUST

Caravaggio enters the kitchen of the **villa**, where Hana sits quietly. She asks him how the English patient is, and Caravaggio tells her that he is sleeping. She then asks Caravaggio if the English patient indeed turned out to be the Hungarian, Almásy. "He's fine," Caravaggio says. "We can let him be." Caravaggio asks where Kip is, and Hana says he is on the terrace, planning something for her birthday.

Caravaggio's comment that Almásy is "fine" suggests that he really doesn't care anymore which side Almásy supported during the war. Caravaggio has begun to see Almásy as nationless, just as Almásy wants, but Ondaatje implies that nationality can't be escaped, and it indeed is about to come up again.

Caravaggio tells Hana that he would like to tell her a story for her birthday, but Hana doesn't want to hear it if it is about Patrick. He says it is only about Patrick at little bit but is mostly about her. She says again that she doesn't want to hear it. "Fathers die," Caravaggio says to Hana. "You keep on loving them in any way you can." Hana stands and wraps her arms around Caravaggio, kissing his cheek.

While Hana has likely not fully come to terms with her father's death, Caravaggio's comment about Patrick's death and Hana's embrace of Caravaggio suggests that she is beginning to heal, due in large part to the love and support she receives from Caravaggio.

Outside, tiny candles illuminate the terrace, and Caravaggio begins to think that Kip has gone overboard bringing candles out from the chapel, but then he realizes that the candles are actually seashells filled with oil. Kip says that there are 45 seashells total, one for each year of the century. Caravaggio notices three bottles of wine on the table and is shocked knowing that Kip won't drink any of it.

Kip's elaborate decorating for Hana's birthday demonstrates his love for her, and it again reflects a focus on Western customs and traditions. As a Sikh, Kip doesn't drink alcohol, but seemingly every Western celebration involves drinking. Thus, Kip is always on the outside looking in, not really able to participate in the same way as the others.

As Hana, Caravaggio, and Kip eat and drink, they toast each other and the English patient. Kip joins a glass of water with Hana and Caravaggio's wine and begins to talk a bit about himself with Caravaggio's encouragement. Caravaggio tells Hana and Kip he would like to see them marry one day, and Kip stands to refill the seashells with oil. They must keep burning until midnight, he says. They talk about what they will do when the war with Japan is over and everyone goes home. "And where will *you* go?" Caravaggio asks Kip, but he doesn't answer.

Kip's glass of water again draws attention to the fact that he cannot fully participate in this type of celebration, making him more of an outsider, as does Caravaggio's question. "Where will you *go?" with the emphasis on "you," implies that Kip doesn't really belong in Europe, and the fact that Kip doesn't answer suggests that he is beginning to agree.*

As they talk, Kip is interested in hearing stories about Hana, but she steers Caravaggio away from any stories from her childhood. She wants Kip to know her as she is now. Hana has already told him about Patrick and Clara, and for her, this is enough. Caravaggio begins to tell a story about Hana singing the "Marseillaise" as a child, and Kip says that he has heard the song sung by the troops in his unit. Kip begins to sing a version of it, but Hana stops him, telling him he must sing it standing up. Then she removes her tennis shoes and stands atop the table.

Kip's desire to hear about Hana's life in Canada is further evidence of his love for her, but Hana's hesitation to let Kip into her life suggests that she doesn't feel quite the same way. The "Marseillaise" is the French national anthem, which again reflects nationalism in the novel but also Kip's widespread acceptance of Western culture, as he is familiar with even France's customs.

"This is for you," Hana says to Kip as she begins to sing the "Marseillaise," letting her voice drift all the way up to the open window of the English patient's room. Caravaggio heard the song many times during the war in his own unit, but he doesn't like hearing it anymore. Whenever the men in Caravaggio's unit sang the song, he heard Hana as a child singing. Now, Hana's voice seems to have lost something from her youth. It is more "scarred," Caravaggio thinks.

Hana is more "scarred" after the trauma of the war. She is no longer the innocent young girl she was in Canada, and everything about her, including her voice, reflects this. It is ironic that Hana gives Kip a French song—a Western song—and it is further evidence of Western culture being pushed upon him.

At night in Kip's tent, Hana and Kip often talk until the sun comes up. Resting on Hana's neck while she sings and hums, Kip tells Hana all about India. He tells her about Indian rivers and the "great gurdwara," or place of Sikh worship, known as the Granth Sahib. The temple was built in 1601, destroyed in 1757, and rebuilt in gold and marble in 1830. At Granth Sahib, there is a shrine of the Holy **Book**, where the *ragis* sings the Book's verses. Kip tells Hana about Baba Gujhaji, the first priest of the temple, who is buried near the gurdwara.

Here, Kip finally tells Hana more about his life in India, but she doesn't seem overly interested to learn about his life or culture. Kip's mention of the Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy Book of Sikhism, comes into play when Kip is later offered a Christian Bible. Kip has his own religion and his own Holy Book, but it is insignificant within Western culture.

Hana loves spending time with Kip, but she does not think that can give herself completely to him and be his lover. He moves much more quickly than Hana in replacing the loss of the war, yet she does not fault him for this. Each morning, as she watches Kip leave his tent, she thinks that it may be the last time she sees him. Kip is her "warrior saint," and, like the English patient says, is the "*fato profugus*—fate's fugitive."

Hana is still having a difficult time finding peace after the war, which impacts her ability to fully love, but she also fears that Kip will be the next one to be killed, and she is hesitant to give herself over to him. Her description of Kip as a "warrior saint" again hearkens to religion, but it also suggests that Kip is her hero and savior. Kip protects those at the villa and escapes death himself each time he diffuses a bomb, making him a "fugitive" from death, or the "fate" of war.

In 1943, 30 sappers were flown into Naples, including Kip. When the Germans left Italy, they had laid thousands of **bombs**, and what should have taken the Allies a month to clear took almost a year. Mines were everywhere; galvanized pipes with explosives were left along military paths, and wooden boxes rigged to explode littered civilian homes. By the time Kip and the other sappers got to Naples, they didn't trust anything or anyone, and they immediately went to work clearing the city.

Kip's job as a sapper and bomb specialist, in addition to his identity as an Indian and the racism he faces because of this, goes a long way in explaining why he doesn't easily trust. In Kip's experience, people and objects are equally suspicious and can both be dangerous.

A German soldier turned himself in and told the Allies that thousands of **bombs** were wired in the harbor to explode when the city's dormant electrical system was restored. After interrogating the German seven times, the Allies could not decide if he was telling the truth, but they evacuated Naples anyway. Only 12 sappers, including Kip, remained behind to continue sweeping for bombs. The electricity was to be restored at 3:00 the next day, and in the deserted city, Kip experienced the "strangest and most disturbing hours" of his life.

Kip is virtually alone in the abandoned city as he sweeps it for bombs and mines, which is essentially how he feels during the entire war. The city of Naples was one of the hardest hit during the war with hundreds of air raids and attacks focused there. By the end of the war, it is estimated that a total of 25,000 civilians were killed in the city of Naples.

In the evening, thunderstorms gathered over the **villa**. Kip returns each night around 7:00, at which time a thunderstorm will begin, if there is to be one. Hana and Caravaggio watch Kip return each night as he walks to his tent, not sure if the rain will fall or not. If it does begin to rain before he reaches his tent, he never quickens his pace, but walks in his usual measured step. In his tent, Kip unwinds his wet **turban**, dries his hair, and wraps a new, dry turban around his head.

Hana and Caravaggio view Kip's daily return to the villa because of the weather as another way he is different from them, but Hana does the very same thing at the beginning of the novel. She senses the weather changing and immediately goes to the villa. This implies that there is really little difference between Easterners and Westerners, as they still share the same inherent human intuition.

The 12 sappers in Naples were told to evacuate at 2:00, one hour before the electricity was set to be restored. In the abandoned city, Kip could hear only birds and barking dogs. He came upon the Church of San Giovanni a Carbonara and, feeling exhausted, went inside, where a statue of an angle stood 15 feet tall. Kip stopped to rest, looking at the dusty light bulbs attached to the back of the angle. Soon, the electricity would be turned on. If Kip was to die, he wanted to die in the presence of the angel. Suddenly, all but two of the lightbulbs attached to the angle began to glow, illuminating the dark afternoon.

Like Almásy says earlier in the book, it is important to die is a holy place, and Kip enters the church for this very reason now. Kip obviously isn't Christian, but he still respects this Western religion—and since he doesn't know if he will live or die once the lights go on, he finds comfort in the church. The novel argues that war brings out the need for new or altered forms of religious practice and observation, and Kip's escape into the church is further evidence of this.

Hana looks down to the field from the **villa** and sees Kip grab his head. She thinks he is in pain but then realizes that he is attempting to listen to the earphones he constantly wears. She hears him scream as he falls to his knees. After a moment, Kip stands and walks to his tent. A moment later, he comes out holding a rifle and heads for the villa.

Kip is hearing the first radio communication about the atomic bombs dropped on Japan. As both India and Japan are part of Asia, Kip feels a cultural connection to the Japanese, and he acutely mourns the tragedy of the bombing.

Kip passes Hana sitting in the kitchen and goes to the stairs, taking three at a time. The English patient greets him as Kip enters the room, and Kip stares at him as if "condemned" with his "brown face weeping." He turns and fires the rifle out the window, blowing chunks of plaster from the fountain, then levels the rifle at the English patient. He asks Kip to put the gun down, and Kip backs up against the wall to stop from shaking, never moving the rifle.

Kip is crying on behalf of the Japanese, and Ondaatje again draws attention to his "brown face," which reflects Kip's cultural and racial connection to Asia, and therefore a sense of allegiance with Japan. In this moment, Kip sees the English patient as a representation of all of England, and indeed all of the West, and the violence brought about by this region against the East.

"I sat at the foot of this bed and listened to you, Uncle," Kip says to the English patient. Kip had done the same as a child and always thought he could fill himself with the wisdom of older people. He grew up with Indian traditions, and later with English traditions. He has always known that if he didn't behave as they wanted, they would reject him, but he wants to know what gives the English such power. Is it because they have ships or "the histories and printing presses?" Kip asks the English patient.

Kip has looked up to the Englishmen in his life, such as the English patient and Lord Suffolk, as wise "uncles." But just as his brother said, Kip is beginning to open his eyes to Europeans and the truth behind colonialism and war. This passage also underscores Ondaatje's overreaching argument about the importance of personal stories in understanding history. As the English control "histories and printing presses," the only way to get authentic Eastern history is through personal stories.

Kip tells the English patient that the English and the Americans have "converted" Indians to be "*pukkah*," and he tells him to listen to what the English patient's people have done. Kip throws the rifle on the bed and puts the earphones on the burned head of the English patient, who winces at his touch. Hana and Caravaggio enter the room as the English patient hears of the **bombs** dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Caravaggio tries to touch Kip's arm, but he grabs the rifle and hits Caravaggio in his ribs, like "a swat from the paw of an animal."

Pukkah *is a Hindi word that means to be made respectable for society, and this further underscores the racist way in which the West views those from the East. The English and the Americans think Indians must be "converted," or changed, to be made respectable or civilized, which again highlights the Western superiority of colonialism. By comparison, Kip is considered an "animal" that must be tamed.*

Kip says that his brother told him not to trust Europeans. They are the "deal makers," the "contract makers," the "map drawers," and they are cannot be trusted. Hana and Caravaggio ask what is going on, and Kip tells them to listen to the celebration on the radio. They tell him that he doesn't know who the man in the bed really is, and he again levels the rifle at him. "Do it," Almásy says. He doesn't want to listen anymore.

The East has been repeatedly oppressed by the West through colonialism. The West makes all the rules and laws, and they even make the maps, like Almásy does in the desert, drawing territorial lines and affecting people they know little about and have no right to control. Almásy seems to realize this, and coupled with his pain and history in the desert during the war, he feels Kip is more than justified in killing him.

Caravaggio tries to tell Kip that the English patient isn't really an Englishman, but Kip says that it doesn't really matter. "When you start bombing the brown races of the world, you're an Englishman," he says. Caravaggio continues to try to convince him otherwise. You don't understand, he says to Kip, "of all people he is probably on your side."

British colonialism has led to widespread prejudice and oppression of the East by other Western powers, so Kip sees little difference from one Western country to the next. Caravaggio says that Almásy is probably on Kip's side because he is Hungarian, which means he is probably an ally of the Axis powers, including the Germans and Japanese.

Caravaggio sits in a chair and looks away from Kip. He knows that Kip is right; **bombs** like those dropped on Japan would never have been dropped "on a white nation." Kip leaves the room, leaving Caravaggio and Hana behind. In the future, if and when the English patient dies, Hana and Caravaggio know that they will bury him, and everything he owns, except for Herodotus's **book**.

The United States and the Allies don't drop such destructive bombs on the European countries of the Axis, only Japan, and Ondaatje implies that these bombings are directly related to the racism brought about by colonialism.

Back in is tent, Kip stares into the darkness. He closes his eyes and sees people jumping into rivers as everything around them burns, including their skin and hair. He has already stripped the tent of anything to do with the military, including his **bomb** disposal equipment, and removed the insignia from his uniform. He had taken off his **turban** and tied his hair into a topknot.

Kip feels a cultural connection to the Japanese, and so he takes off his turban and ties his hair in a topknot (a traditional Japanese hairstyle) in a display of solidarity. By stripping his tent and uniform of military insignia, Kip rejects the Western identity he has assumed and returns to his Asian roots.

Kip knows nothing about the **bombs** that have been dropped on Japan. He does not know if they were quick and sudden explosions, or if "boiling air" slowly ripped through everything. All he knows for sure is that his name is Kirpal Singh, and he has no idea what he is doing in Europe. He leaves the tent wearing only a *kurta* and walks in the direction of the **villa**.

A kurta *is the traditional dress of India, and it is further proof that Kip is returning to his native roots. He even rejects his nickname, which is undeniably British, and returns to his real name, Kirpal Singh, again embracing his Indian culture.*

Hana can see Kip standing outside his tent and watches him disappear into the chapel. Inside, Kip removes the tarpaulin from the Triumph motorbike hidden in the back of the chapel, as Hana comes through the door. She tries to talk to him and asks him what any of them have to do with the **bombings** in Japan. She leans against him and places her head on his chest, listening to his heart.

Hana's comment that she had nothing to do with the bombings in Japan is again naïve and a bit insensitive. Of course Hana was not directly involved, but she seems more concerned with what Kip thinks of her than trying to understand his feelings of loss and betrayal.

As Kip climbs on the Triumph and "guns [it] to life," Caravaggio waits halfway down the path to the **villa**'s gate, holding the rifle. He steps into Kip's path as he approaches, but he never raises the rifle. Kip stops and Caravaggio embraces him. "I shall have to learn how to miss you," Caravaggio says.

Ondaatje's language here reflects the violence of the war, as Kip "guns" the motorcycle to life, though here it signifies Kip's escape from violence rather than his continued involvement in it. Caravaggio's comment hearkens to a comment Almásy made to Katharine about missing her, and it reflects the deep feelings Caravaggio has developed for Kip.

Kip rides away from the **villa** and heads south, steering clear of Florence. He goes through Greve and heads to Cortona, riding "against the direction of the invasion, as if rewinding the spool of war." He drives through every village and town without slowing, ignoring his memories of the war.

Kip rides against the direction of the war, "as if rewinding" it, in an effort to undo the Westernization he has endured because of the war and return to his native roots and culture.

In Cortona, Kip rides the Triumph up the steps of a church and goes inside. He finds a statue there, "bandaged in scaffold," but he can't get close enough to see it without the scope of his gun. He leaves the church and goes on to Arezzo, and then on to the mountains, moving in the direction of the coast.

The "bandaged" statue reflects Kip's own wounded state. As Kip leaves the villa, and moves further away from the West, he is no longer drawn to Western religion—especially without his rifle, a symbol of Western influence in his life and his involvement in World War II.

Hana writes Clara a letter. This is the first letter Hana has written in years, and while she has forgotten the exact year, she knows the date, because it is one day after the **bombs** were dropped on Japan. "If we can rationalize this," Hana tells Clara, "we can rationalize anything." Hana tells her that Patrick died in a dove-cot in France, which is a large house built just for doves. A dove-cot is "a sacred place," Hana says. "A comforting place. Patrick died in a comforting place."

Hana's comment that anything can be rationalized if the bombing of Japan can be rationalized seems to be Ondaatje's overarching point. The racism of white people toward non-white people is violent and destructive, and it has led to the annihilation of two Japanese cities, in which it is estimated that nearly 150,000 people were killed.

On the Triumph, Kip arrives in Ortona. He does not allow himself to think of Hana as he rides, but he does, however, carry the English patient with him, who sits facing him on the gas tank. He can hear the Englishman's voice talking about Isaiah. Riding in the rain, Kip thinks of the ceiling he had loved. Isaiah had been in the English patient's **book**, his "holy book," which he passed to Kip. Kip had refused the book, telling him that he has "a Holy Book too." As Kip rides around a curve near the Ofanto River, he takes off his goggles to clean them, and begins to skid on the bike. There is no side to the bridge he is on, and Kip finds himself thrown through the air, falling toward the water.

Kip continues thinking about the English patient because, like Lord Suffolk, he had looked up to these men and loved them, and he feels as if they have all betrayed him. Kip again thinks of the Sistine Chapel, where he saw Isaiah painted on the ceiling through his scope. The English patient's attempt to give Kip his copy of The Histories, *thereby imposing his beliefs and culture on Kip, reflects further disrespect for Kip's own culture and religion.*

As Kip's head breaks above water, a candle burns in the English patient's room back at the villa. In the middle of the night, he senses someone is in the room, and he sees a "slight brown figure" near the foot of the bed. He hopes it is Kip, and he stays awake waiting for the figure to come towards him, but the figure never moves.

Kip's fall into the river and his emergence from the water represents a symbolic rebirth of sorts. Kip is cleansing himself of the Western influence of the last several years and is preparing to return to his traditional culture and life. The English patient's obvious hallucination reflects his own guilt related to colonialism and the oppression of others like Kip.

Years later, Kirpal Singh still thinks about Hana. He is a doctor now, with two kids and a wife. Sitting in his garden in India, Kirpal is able to see Hana in her own country, as she goes about living her life. He can see Hana's life, but only in silence, and he can see nothing about the people in her life. He can see, however, that Hana is no longer a young girl and has grown into a woman.

Kip returns to his life and culture in India and becomes a doctor like he was supposed to do before the war. He still thinks about Hana, which suggests that love has the power to transcend time and distance.

As Kirpal Singh sits down to eat with his family, his daughter fumbles with her silverware. At Kirpal's table, "all of their hands are brown," and they live a life of comfort in their traditional "customs and habits." In Canada, Hana is 34 years old, and she still thinks of the English patient and the words he read from his **book**. She accidentally hits a cupboard with her shoulder, knocking a glass from the shelf. As the glass falls, Kirpal's left hand shoots out and catches the fork dropped by his daughter before it hits the ground and smiles.

Earlier in the novel, Caravaggio points out that Kip always eats with his right hand and that he doesn't use silverware, which is common practice in India. As Kip's daughter fumbles with her silverware, this suggests she isn't used to eating in this foreign, Western way. Interestingly enough, while Kip obviously has a deep connection to Hana that transcends time and space, she is thinking of the English patient instead of Kip, which again implies she doesn't quite reciprocate his feelings.

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