

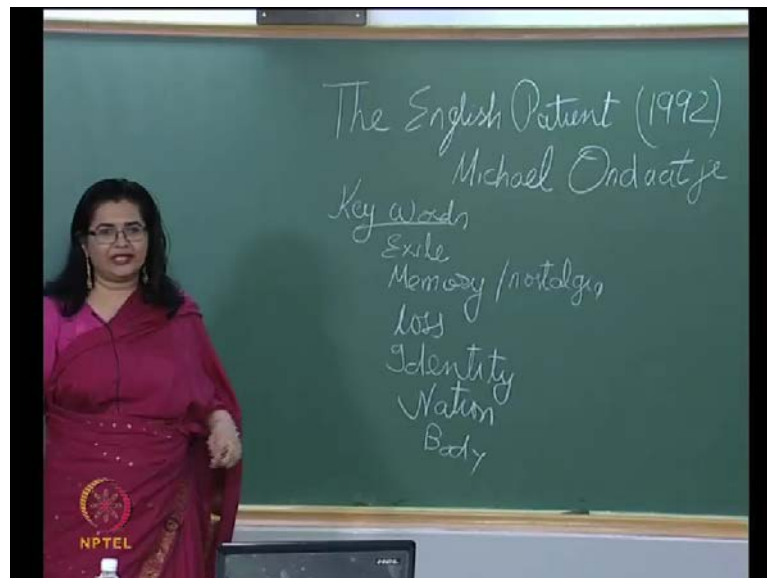
Contemporary Literature
Prof. Aysha
Department of Mathematics & Statistics
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras.

Module No.# 01

Lecture No. # 33

Good morning, we continue with the reading of the English patient, 1992 booker prize winning novel by Michael Ondaatje, a Srilankan Canadian novelist. So, key words in today's lectures would be exile, the constructs of memory nostalgia, loss and death, identity or the loss of identity of what makes for an identity, nation and what is a nation, what are the boundaries that define or redefine us, and of course, the body. So, bodies are an integral feature of the English patient as we were seen last time, it is about a man who lost his body where and he is in a place where there are people representing all kinds of nations, all kinds of identities, and all of them have their bodies.

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So, we have Kip's dark body, we have Hana's slender body, and the English patient's burnt body. So, the construct of memory as we were talking about, so count almost on the English patient, his memory transports him back to prewar Sahara desert, remember, he

is burnt and he fell of a burning aircraft - a damaged aircraft -while he was trying to escape with his, not exactly escape, but when he was in the plane along with his married lover Katherine and her jealous husband Geoffrey Clifton, and we are told the Geoffrey Clifton because of his jealous rages he cause the plane to meet with an accident and he wants to crash the plane and wants to kill all the three of them.

And when Almasi, when after the crash Geoffrey Clifton dies instantly Katherine, we will see what happens to her, and Almasi is badly burnt. So, now he finds himself in the secluded villa in Italy Tuscany, villas san girolomo, and now his memory transports him back to the prewar Sahara desert, where he was working on a map making expedition in North Africa. So, Ondaatje does employ maps geography cartography as metaphors for people, map making is all about representing or defining the territories on the basis of their boundaries.

But here, we find that how people are defined, how people can be read as we read a map or as a territory, and whether those territories are genuine or not genuine. So, the maps given in the novel they also help us to explore and comprehend or to map the **complex in** the complexities of people we love the relationships we have.

As he lays there in very nostalgic mood in a reminiscing frame of mind, he starts narrating his story to Hana - the French Canadian nurse - and Almasi reveals how his life was disrupted when an English couple Geoffrey and Katherine they arrived from England and join the expedition. You see Geoffrey comes from an extremely aristocratic family, he owns a plane, and he just got married a week before, he learned something about from his circle of friends that an expedition is happening in the Gilfkebir, there is a group of cartographers who are doing some sort of expedition in search of a place called the Zarzura, and he is entreat, Geoffrey Clifton himself is a seasoned geologist and he wants to know what is happening and comes there and he join with his wife.

So, through a series of events, and primarily while reading from ancient classics Almasi and Katherine fall in love, and this is an emotion that happens very secretly - I mean - that unfolds very gradually and its everything is kept secret from Geoffrey her husband. So, I will read you the passage when they first discover each other through books, I am on page 44.

In that desert she dragged her university days into her mids to describe the stars the way adam tenderly taught a woman with gracious metaphors and she reads him a poem. This is what almasy says, that night I fell in love with her voice, only her voice, I wanted to hear nothing more I got up and walked away, she was a willow - so again look at the way Katherine's body is described. So, as we were talking about the English patient is also exploration of territories mapping out boundaries and also understanding bodies. So, Katherine's body becomes he compares to a willow, what would she be like in winter at my age, I see her still always with the eye of Adam.

The first man falling in love with the first woman, she had been these awkward limbs climbing out of a plane bending down in our midst to prod at a fire her elbow up and pointed towards me as she drank from a canteen, a few months later she waltzed with me as we danced as a group in cairo, though slightly drunk she wore an unconquerable face, even now the face I believe that most revealed her was the one she had that time when we were both half-drunk not lovers.

So, this love affair which happens very secretly in cairo in 1938, it causes an irreparable and irretrievable damage to their own lives and to also to the lives of others around them. So, years later when recalls how he fell in love with Katherine it is, with a sense of acceleration and also with a sense of regret, so love also is tinged with some bitter emotions. Their romance blooms when katherine narrates the story of- ancient story - of candaules and gyges from Herodotus histories, and Herodotus history is it sort of (()) late motive throughout the novel, reading is an important symbol- an important motive - and Herodotus histories connects the novel - the major themes of the novel. So, I will take you to page 16 where we are told that the only thing that the English patient could save or salvage from the plane crash was his copy, his worn out old copy, of histories by Herodotus.

And this is what Hana says - I mean - Hana looks at the book she picks up the note book that lies on the small table beside his bed, it is the book he brought with him through the fire, a copy of the histories by Herodotus that he has added to cutting and gluing in pages from other books or writing in his own observations, so they all are cradled within the text of Herodotus.

So, you see Herodotus's text or histories are not just Herodotus, it belongs to everyone to everybody, so it is not just the text that he was actually written by Herodotus, but it also the cutting and gluing and all the pasting's that Almasy has done. So, he has given a totally new form to the histories, he has added his personal histories, so the idea what is history, so you have Herodotus's history, and you have the English patient's history running side by side, running parallel to each other, so he has added to he has cut and glued in pages from others books or writing in his own observations.

So, histories is not no longer the history, the way it was intended to be, it is reshaped remodeled and redefined book which existing Hana's or in Almasy's hands. So, the reference to the Candaules and Gyges from histories that King Candaules who is a very powerful king, he flatters his wife's beauty and desirability to his favorite spearman Gyges, and he persuades her to him, sorry, to look at his wife's naked body.

So, at night when she is in bed Gyges creeps in and watches her as she sleeps unaware of his presence in the room, later when she discovers and realizes that she has been watched in this state, the queen is furious and she asked Gyges to kill her husband and assume the thrown as well as her, so this is the story that runs parallel to the story of the Clifton and Almasy.

So, the love triangle, so it their love triangle, their love story sort of recaptures the fears and bitter emotions of jealousy and revenge and betrayal, and as well as the tragic patients. So, in the story of Almasy and Katherine, we find the retelling of the story of Candaules and Gyges and the queen. So, enriched by jealousy now Clifton now plans a revenge, a triple suicide, a triple murder cum suicide, and he ask them to come and aboard a plane while they are flying he attempts to or he actually crashes the plane, the idea is to kill everyone that is on the plane, so his suicide and the murder of these 2 people who have betrayed him. Now, reading occurs throughout the novel in various forms and capacities, Hana reads to Almasy to connect with him to try to make him interested in the present life, we are told at the beginning that they are reading except from the last of the Mohicans and several times there are certain pages missing, the last half the Mohicans is also about exploration and conquest of the frontier and it is also a love story, it is also thrilling adventures tale written by James Fenimore Cooper one of the first major American novels.

So, Hana reads to Almasy from the last half of *The Mohicans* she reads voraciously to learn all she can about Cairo and the desert, and Almasy consistently reads from Herodotus histories. Now, in each of these instances of readings the characters use books to inform their own lives and to connect to another place or time, so as we have seen in the section on King Candaules and Gyges, every story is connected to the lives of the characters there is some kind of a metaphor, so reading thus becomes a metaphor for reading beyond oneself to connect with the people.

So, coming back to the plot Clifton dies in the crash leaving a severely wounded Katherine and Almasy behind, and there you reunite after 3 years in the cave of swimmers. So, a lot of time has passed between the accident and when the incident takes place in the cave of swimmers. So, when Almasy tries to fly out with Katherine in an old buried plane, the plane meets with an accident and that is the accident that brings him now, back to this place that brings him to Villa San Girolamo.

So, the plane is soon on fire Katherine dies and Almasy is left severely damaged and burnt, now what we feel is that **when he falls in the** what we find is when he falls in the desert, he is found by a group of tribal's the Bedouins in the desert, and they mask his face with ointment, and smother his body with ointments to reduce his pain, a heel of burn, the bones - grounded bones - of peacock its believe that is the best kind of healing a treatment for any skin damage.

So, into his charge skin grounded bones of peacock are applied, so people take care of him and he is carried from one place to another for example, they leave him at a British base, at the age of the Libyan deserts, and then he travels across the land and finally, ends up in this particular villa with Hana. So, now we find some kind of an affectionate bond, a very tender love story that develops between the emotionally ravished Hana, and the physically beaten damaged English patient, and this is also because both of them are left alone in a world that has gone completely crazy completely alright, they have no one else to turn to.

So, both damaged people both these emotionally burnt and physically worn out people define solace in each other's company, and therefore, Hana's decision to take care of only one patient throughout her life and that is going to be the English patient. So, therefore, her decision is to stay back as the rest of the military troupe as rest of the

hospital personnel they decide to leave the place and go to a safer place but she chooses to stay back and take care of just one patient.

We are told about Hana that as a nurse in a hospital during the second world war, she has learned to repress her needs as well as her sorrows, she has been through enough she has seen death all around - the death of soldiers - she also come through the death of her own father and the death of her own unborn child, she is an unwed mother, there has been someone and her fiancée died in the war as well and the child also died.

Now, she wants to connect the external with the internal, she is striving to minimize her worldly possessions, all she possesses is a pair of tiny shoes that is all she cares about, because that gives her the freedom to walk about. And also interesting - something interesting - is that she uses the same name buddy to refer to everyone. So, she is not interested in names, so much like the English patient who refuses to tell people his actual name, Hana have also uses the word buddy for everyone. In the villa she refuses to move out with the rest of the hospital staff and spends her time in nursing him, nursing the English patient and it is at the villa that we encounter two more characters, one kip - the Indian Sikh, the army man - and Caravaggio - the spy- who has a history of knowing who has some knowledge of Hana, he knows about Hana.

So, while Caravaggio is in hospital, so he is also a damaged person, he is also recovering for something and what is it we will soon see when he hears about Hana he decides to join her in the villa. And kips story is that following the atomic bomb disaster of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, he tries to abandoned the villa and reenter Indian culture and life, but that is what he is going to happen to him later, but this is not what he is right now, right now we find all you know a big mix of characters somewhat of different characters from different nations and different identities they are all living together.

In last class, we were talking about the concept of names how important names are in the English patient, I will take you to page 20, where the English patient when he is being cared for by the Bedouins - the tribes in the desert. People realize that he has a distinctive skill, he knows every nook and cranny of the desert everything that relates to war, he is an expert mapmaker, so the tribal's try to make use of this skill, so this is what they do it him.

He leaves towards and touches something with a purpose his arm still held, his palm facing down and opened he touches the sten barrel and the hand lets go of him, a pause among the voices he was there to translate the guns. So, now, what is his job he has to touch guns and to identify the make of the guns, and this is what he says, 12 millimeters Breda machine gun from Italy, so he knows the name, he knows the nationality, this is the gun he pulled back the bolt, inserted his finger to find no bullet pushed it back, and pulled the trigger, famous gun he muttered he was moved forward again.

So, the tribal's are impressed they want him to identify name another gun, French 7.5 millimeter chatellerault, light machine gun 1924, so this is also this correct, now German 7.9 millimeter mg shift in air service, so this is the way he becomes of great use to the tribals. He was brought to each of the guns the weapons seemed to be from different time periods and from many countries a museum in the desert, he brushed the contours of the stock and magazine or finger the side, he spoke out the gun's name and was carried to another gun, 8 weapons formally handed to him, he called the names out loud speaking in French and then the tribes own language, but what did that matter to them, perhaps they needed not the name but to know that he knew what the gun was, he was held by the wrist again and his hands sunk into a box of cartridges.

And this is what he feels that tribes wanted to know the name as well as whether he knew the names, so that is important, information is important. There are villages he will travel into with them where there are no women his knowledge is pass like a counter of usefulness from tribe to tribe, tribes representing 8000 individuals, he enters specific customs and specific music mostly blindfolded he hears the water drawing songs of the masina tribe with their exultations dahhiya dances pipe-flutes which are used for carrying messages in times of emergency, the makruna double pipe 1 pipe constantly sounding a drone, then into the territory of 5-stringed lyres a village or oasis of preludes and interludes hand-clapping antiphonal dance.

So, this is the world which has its customs, it cultures it is very distinctive rituals, and he knows them all. Now, what does it call him? A fully named world, now which is faced blindfolded in a mask of grass fibers, remember he is being treated and this mask of reeds applied on his face, he picked up a shell and moved with his carries guiding them towards a gun inserted a bullet bolted it and holding it up in the air fired, the noise

cracking crazily down the canyon walls, for echo is the soul of the voice exciting itself in hollow places.

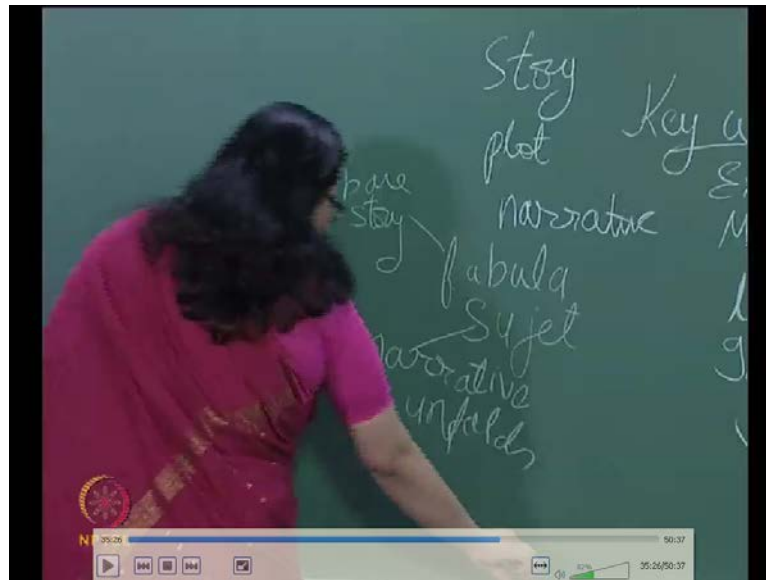
So, a fully named world, how important names are in this place, so winds have name, tribes have names, every ritual has a name, guns have names, and the English patients seems to know everything. In the desert you celebrate nothing but water, all they want in spite of his phenomenon knowledge is water, because in desert water is the most precious commodity, oasis is the part that is celebrated.

And all this is recalling, and he is telling to Hana, she stands over the sink gripping it looking at stucco wall, she has removed all mirrors and stacked them away in an empty room, she grips the sink and moves her hand, sorry, head from side to side releasing a movement of shadow she wets her hands and combs water in to her hair till it is completely wet, this cools her and she likes it when she goes outside and the breezes hit her erasing the thunder.

So, this is Hana, she has made her life minimal, she listens to the stories of the English patient who is so, we all know that he is going to die, this is established from the outside, a man this severely burnt, he has very few days to live. So, what Hana is trying to do is, in his condition - in his damage condition - she sees a reflection of her own life and we only to survive this world to minimize once requirements, once material possession and needs.

Now, I will take you to the intricacies of the narrative in the English patient, so the most fundamental element of narrative representation one is a story plot and narrative. So, these are the terms that we normally use story, plot and narrative.

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So, the analysis of these elements they go back to the Russian formalist especially to the works of Victor Shklovsky who distinguishes between the 2 terms fabula and sujet. Now, according to Shklovsky, fabula is the raw material of a story and sujet is the way a story is organized. So, raw material is fabula, sujet is the way a narrator organizes a story, it is important to acknowledge that these influential terms are usually translated in works by Anglophone narratologists as a story and discourse. So, what we understand as a story and discourse are fabula and sujet. Although there are sometimes translated as a story and plot, so this is what (()) , on the other hand, generalizes the French term *resu* that is narrative and discourse.

So, this is to distinguish between the events of a narrative, and how these events are arranged by the devices and figures of narrative. So, it might be set that story comprises all the events that take place in a narrative, not compressive the underlying causality that binds these events together and demands that some events be narrated and not others, a narrative is how all these events with underlying causality are narrated. So, you see there is a difference between fabula between the story plot, narrative and sujet. So, while the fabula of the novel can be encapsulated in a few paragraphs, you see this is the story the basic outline, this is the story, the sujet or the weight is organizing tool, sujet is something that problematizes the story enhance and enhances the pleasure of story.

So, two important terms, fabula and sujet, so fabula it can be encapsulated this is the bare story, the outline story, the way the narrative is told, sujet is the way a narrative unfolds or unruffled, unravels itself. So, how can narrative unfolds itself, how is a sujet constructed, so a sujet the effect of sujet is achieved through unique use of the language, it can challenge the traditional construction of plot construction, it can employ constant shifts in points of view, it can employ implosion of time and transcend spatial barriers, you see a lot happens - a lot happens when sujet, when we look or when we detail the sujet of a story of the English patient is bare minimum.

What happened during the Second World War, there was a man count almsy who wouldn't easily give away his name, he had an affair with married women and later the affairs leads to certain disasters consequences. At the same time you have, because the story said during the Second World War, you have a soldier - an Indian soldier kripal Singh or kip - as he likes to be referred as, and we have Caravaggio as spy and we have Hana, all these people this disparate group of people come together and there is the story, so that is all the story has.

But how the story is unrevealed, that is what we find in plot construction or in the construction of narrative or better known as the sujet of the novel, sujet employs implosion of time, it involves transcending the spatial boundaries. So, the story of English patient although most of the stories focused on villas san girolmo, much of the plot also takes place outside the villa.

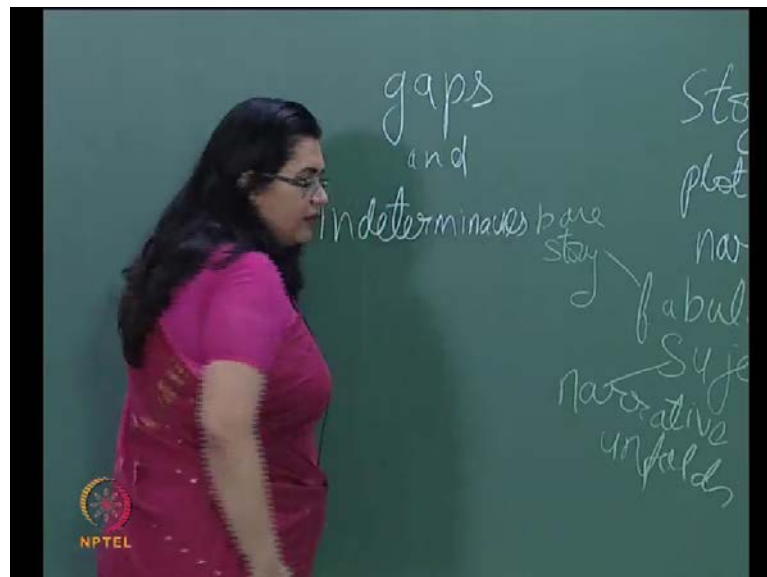
So, we have the deserts of Cairo, we have some references to England and Canada and also to India, it is not just one place that the narrative is focused on or is centered on, implosion of time, the narrative moves back and forth in time, there lots of flash backs and flash forwards, and also some multiple points of view, this is one of the most important characteristic of the English patient, the multiple points of view, so the story is told through the points of view of different characters, this is not when single point of view as we have saw recently in the remains of the day, the entire story is unfolded through the eyes of the butler Mr stevens, but not here every person has his own or her own story to tell and a way of looking at things.

So, the manner in which Ondaatje recalls almsy attempts to obscure his identity, what would he do heabort play brown cigarette papers and glued them into sections of the

histories that recorded wars that were of no interest to him glued into the book giving him only the voice of watcher, the listener the heat, so the way elmsy distances himself from himself, it is not just he trying achieve for a disconnect from others, he is also aiming for disconnect from his own self, I will take you to page 172 where this effect is achieved.

He bought pale brown cigarette papers and glued them in to sections of the histories, is on page 172, that look recorded was that were of no interest to him, he wrote down all her arguments against him, glued into the book, giving himself only the voice of the watcher the listener the heat. So, he no longer almsy, he has separated himself from himself during the last days, before the war he had gone for a last time to the gilfkebir to clear out the base camp her husband was supposed to pick her up, the husband they had both loved until they began to love each other. Another aspect of the sujet of the English patient is the way Michel Ondaatje deliberately creates gaps and indeterminacies, there are several gaps, even the villa san girolmo is full of gaps.

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We are told at the very beginning that the villa has in certain rooms an entire wall is missing in certain rooms the ceiling is missing, because of the frequent bombings there are gaps in the construction of the, they are gaps in the body of the villa which parallel the gaps in the personality of the dramatist personnel everyone has certain lapses, **which**

are these gaps are never filled and that all these things which are not told to us not revealed to us, they add to the unlimited pleasure of reading of the English patient.

So, the narrative is full of gaps and indeterminacies even the idea that the English patient name is not revealed to us for a long time, this is also a kind of gap, we are never told what happens to Almásy between 1939 and 1942, and there are gaps that parallel Almásy's stories and the stories that Hana leads to him, and we will look at those stories.

So, on page 7 for example, I will just give you an instance, the gaps that the stories have and the gaps in Almásy's own stories. So, the books for the Englishman as he listened intently or not, had gaps of plots like sections of a road washed out by storms missing incidents as if locusts had consumed a section of tapestry as if plaster loosened by the bombing had fallen away from a mural at night, the villa that she and the English man inhabited now was much like that, and also look at the irony implicit, the Englishman is not actually an Englishman.

Some rooms could not be entered because of rubble, one bomb crater allowed moon and rain into the library downstairs where there was in one corner a permanently soaked armchair, she was not concerned about the Englishman as far as the gaps in plot were concerned, she gave no summary of the missing chapters, she simply brought out the book and said page 96 or page 111, so while you are looking at reading as an aesthetic in the English patient, this is a very good example.

She would just take him she would take him on a journey of reading a book, she would read him aloud, but if it is an old villa and some of the books are damaged, badly damaged there are several pages missing, she never bothers to give him the details of the summaries of the things of the incidents missing, if a page is missing. So, from page 96 she would take him to page 111, whatever happened in between is not important and that what Michel Ondaatje is also doing to us whatever happens is not important and we need not to be told.

And there are gaps and indeterminacies what happened to Almásy after the plane crash, and by the time he read the cave of swimmers, we never know what happened during all these three years. That was the only locator she lifted both of his hands to her face and smelled them the odor of sickness still in them. And from here, I will introduce to

another character we have been talking about Caravaggio for a long time. Now, the Caravaggio is an old friend of Hana and her family, he is a friend of Hana's late father and when he hears about Hana's existence in a remote villa he is entreat and he wants to join her, so this chapter is called in near ruins chapter 2, and this is how it begins.

The man with bandaged hands, now look at the parallel between the way Caravaggio is introduced and between the way Hana is introduced at the beginning of the novel. So, we are talking how she is constantly referred to in aby using a pronoun she or her, and that is the similar technique employed by Ondaatje here also while he introduces Caravaggio to us, so he is the man with bandaged hands, so again look at the broken body that damaged body.

I had been in the military hospital in Rome for more than 4 months when by accident he heard about the burned patient and a nurse heard name. So, we are not told the names of the, it is not like we are told that he heard Hana's name, we are told her name the French nurse. He turned from the doorway and walked back into the clutch of doctors he had just passed to discover where she he had been recuperating there for a long time and they knew him as an evasive man. Now, again where gaps there are indeterminacies about this man this man like the English patient he does not like talking about himself, he is another a very reclusive and an elusive man, he does not like to be talked about, but now he spoke to them asking about the name and startle them.

So, first time he makes an inquiry and what is that inquiry about the names of these people, but during all that time he had never spoken communicating by signals and grimaces, now and then a grin he had revealed nothing not even his name just wrote out his serial number which showed he was with the allies.

His status had been double checked and confirmed in messages from London, there was the cluster of known scars on him, so the doctors had come back to him. So, look at the way his identity is formed, it is not just he does not give away his name, but he gives his number, and that number tells the doctor that he is not a German, he is on his friendly side. His identity is double checked and the information that comes back is that he is a man whose body bears a cluster of scars, and these scars they are not just physical, there also lot of psychological scars which no one can see.

But for the sake of identification, he has his number, and he has his scars to be identified with, and what we find here. So, the doctors had come back to him nodded at the bandages on him a celebrity after all wanting silence a war hero, he is a war hero a celebrity, a famous person who is admired by the people there and everyone is just proud to have him around, that was how he felt safest revealing nothing whether they came at him with tenderness or subterfuges or knives, for more than 4 months he had not said a word.

So, an elusive man, so this also adds to the charm or to the pleasure of reading English patient, why does not this man revile anything about himself, after all he is among a group of friends, but he does not talk about himself at all, he was a large animal in their presence in near ruins when he was brought in and given regular doses of morphine for the pain in his hands. So, look at the way his story parallels that of the English patients both of them are given morphine to ease the pain and although they belong to different sites, so the question that then that arises is, what make for a boundary when both are equally wounded both are equally illusive, both are hesitant to reveal their national identity as well as their names even.

Both men are severely damaged and they are given a specific kind of morphing to ease the pain, but still they very different by virtue of several things. He would sit in an armchair in the darkness watching the tide of movement among patients and nurses in and out of the wards and stockrooms. So, again gaps in the English patient defined by the namelessness of characters the lack of specific identities of the characters and also in the and which is parallel to everything around the mat this confusion about identities - the blurring of identities - are recurring motive, the recurring theme in English patient which runs through the entire novel.

Look at the way again how the villa is described she and the English patient, I am on page 13 - she and the Englishman had insisted on remaining behind when the other nurses and patients move to a safer location in the south, during this time there were very cold without electricity, some rooms faced on the valley with no walls at all, she would open a door and see just a sudden bed huddled against a corner covered with leaves, doors opened into landscape, some rooms had become an open aviary, the stair case had lost its lower steps during the fire that was set before the soldiers left, she had gone into

the library removed 20 books and kneel them to that floor and then on to each other in this way rebuilding the 2 lowest steps, most of the chairs had been used for fires.

The arm chair in the library was left there, because it was always wet drenched by evening storms that came into through motor hole, whatever was wet escape burning during that April of 1945. So, gaps all around destruction all around, and how these people - this group of people - they survive a midst all the destructions that is what the English patient is all about.

So, all these gaps and indeterminacies they are used as literally technique of course, they enhance the literally pleasure of the story of course, they also lead to plenty of intertextualities and creation of pastiche in the novel and whenever doing the class on postmodernism, we looked at what is intertextuality and pastiches. So, these gaps and indeterminacy is lead to that aspect of postmodernist novel, story writing, story telling as well. We have deliberate exclusions and interruption as well as disruptions, we have splits and shifting points of view, and everything serves to create a very polyphonic narrative and which in turn enhances the narrate of the English patient, what ondatje seems to be asking as can there ever be a totalized meaning which is a very significant aspect of all postmodern fiction, we can ever be a totalize meaning because, everyone and everything around us has gaps, and indeterminacies and certain loose ends, so the entire notion of a fixed stable meaning is interrogated here.

So, the plot of the novel with all its gaps and holes and indeterminacies actually points to the fact that one can never achieve or aim even aim for arriving at totalize meaning, a to completely stable meaning. So, the English patient novel addressees all these issues and although it attempts to fill gaps at the same time it also recognizes that there are certain gaps which can never be filled and this leads to the excitement of reading a postmodern novel like the English patient, so we will continue, thank you very much.