

A Space of their Own: Representing Migrant Experience in *In the Skin of a Lion* and *Me Migrant*

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Abstract

The representation of migrant experience is fraught with challenges. Not only is the writer increasingly forced into restrictive narratives, which are founded upon reductive assumptions of the migrant subject, in some cases, he or she also has to transcend the barriers of writing in a language that is not their characters' mother tongue. This paper aims to examine the ways in which Michael Ondaatje and Md Mukul Hossine tackle these issues and expand upon the representation of migrant experience by challenging existing grand narratives. It also examines the way in which both writers reconfigure narrative spaces through the use of metaphors in their attempt to represent the peculiarities of migrant experience. Adding to their challenge is that migrant experience is often characterized by a trauma that inherently resists representation. This, coupled with the fact that any representation of migration has to grapple with the politics of language, can pose problems of accessibility. This paper considers how both writers negotiate these difficulties, arguing that both Ondaatje and Hossine ultimately transcend language in order to convey the distinctive contours of migrant experience.

Keywords: migrant, representation, trauma, language, Michael Ondaatje, *In the Skin of a Lion*, Mukul Hossine, *Me Migrant*

In an increasingly interconnected world, migration has become synonymous with globalisation. However, the representation of the migrant experience is a problematic one. Increasingly, it runs the danger of becoming overly dichotomous and restrictive, predicated on the assumption that identity is always tied to a nation-state and hence, that migrant experience is always characterised by alienation. However, critics such as Sonja Lehmann have argued that such a lens is reductive and have redefined the contemporary migrant as one who is transnational, an individual whose identity is tied to multiple nation states (282). Even then, the question of the representation of migrant experience is also inextricably tied to questions surrounding the politics of language, specifically the politics of representing an experience in a language other than the migrant's mother tongue. This essay thus aims to explore the ways in which Michael Ondaatje, a Sri Lanka-born, Canada-based writer, and Md Mukul Hossine, a Bangladeshi migrant worker and poet who is currently based in Singapore, transcend these dichotomies and restrictions in *In the Skin of A Lion* and *Me Migrant* respectively. Given the challenges of representation, the migrant experience is perhaps not only limited to its association with trauma but one might go as far as to say that it parallels the experience of trauma. As such, this essay aims to explore the ways in which both writers create the necessary narrative spaces for representing migrant experience, some aspects of which inherently resist representation.

Migrant narratives have typically focused on the alienation and isolation the migrant subject experiences as a result of the displacement from one's home country. As Salman Rushdie aptly puts it in his 1982 essay, *Imaginary Homelands*, "It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt" (10). Rushdie aptly captures what are now considered traditional conceptions of the migrant experience as one characterised by a sense of loss. The migrant subject is unable to return to the city he has left and is also unable to fully assimilate into his newly adopted country. It is in this sense of loss and the threat of the destruction of the self that the experience of migrants parallels the experience of trauma. Migrants inhabit a liminal space, caught between a past to which they can no longer return and a present to which they don't yet belong. This is more evidently illustrated in Hossine's *Me Migrant*.

However, such a view of the experience of migrants also creates a false dichotomy, as Arun Mukherjee's criticism of Ondaatje's work demonstrates. Mukherjee asks, "How has Ondaatje managed to remain silent about his experience of displacement or otherness in Canada when it is generally known to be

quite a traumatic experience?" (50). This suggests that the representation of migrant experiences almost becomes restrictive, its narrative expected to adhere to a certain politicised trajectory. Lehmann has also challenged this representation of migrant workers by questioning the underlying assumption that locates identity within the nation-state, hence a displacement from the nation-state would mean a resulting dislocation of identity. Lehmann posits a shift from the traditional conception of migrants that locates them within the frame of the nation-state to one that views them as transmigrants, or those who develop social relationships and identities within multiple societies simultaneously (297). Importantly, this poses new questions for the identity of migrant subjects. As Lehmann puts it, "Both rootedness in a nation-state and uncertain ideas of home in diasporas thus do not adequately capture the realities of people who live in transnational social spaces for whom questions of identity, home and belonging bring up very different answers" (301). Lehmann is right to point out that traditional views of the migrant experience seem to assume that given that dislocation arises from a disjoint between nation and identity, belonging arises from an assimilation of the migrant into the culture of the host country. As such, the first section of this essay aims to explore how both writers challenge these underlying assumptions about place and identity.

In *In the Skin of a Lion*, Ondaatje uses the motif of language to question the notion that belonging is fostered by the adoption of the host country's mother tongue and culture and the subsuming of the experience of the migrant subject by the latter. Language occupies a curious position in the novel. It is, at once, a bridge, a means to connect and be understood, but that alone is not enough, Ondaatje seems to suggest. Ondaatje illustrates this through the character of Nicholas Telmelcoff, a Macedonian immigrant in the city of Toronto. As Ondaatje writes, "He has no portrait of himself. So, he appears to Harris and the others as a boy: say a fanatic about toy cars, some stage they all passed through years ago." (45). Here, the choice of diction "portrait" suggests that a lack of self-understanding leads to a misrepresentation of one's self. The infantilisation of Telmelcoff by Harris is perhaps not deliberately condescending, but also a suggestion of a lack of self-awareness and self-understanding that is integral to growing up. Here, Ondaatje suggests that language is key for communication, but also a tool for self-understanding and, consequently, self-representation. This is most evidently seen in Telmelcoff's musing, "If he did not learn the language he would be lost" (49) which is shortly followed by "When he returned to Toronto all he needed was a voice for all this language" (49). The distinction between voice and language is crucial. This is once again exemplified in the linguistic performance, "*He* knows Harris. He *knows* Harris by the time it takes him to walk the sixty-four feet six inches from the sidewalk" (45) On one hand, the scene demonstrates how the user dictates the way in which language is used and hence the way in which language can be used for representation. However, the scene also powerfully demonstrates how language moves beyond its function as a borrowed tool for communication, but becomes a critical avenue by which the user reclaims authorship of his narrative, consequentially, allowing him or her to rewrite the representation of his experiences.

Here, Ondaatje suggests that while language is a bridge between the migrant subject and those around him, it is crucial for the migrant subject to find a mode of expression that is unique to him. In other words, it is not about finding a language, but about finding a voice. It is only then that one can represent one's experience, paving the way for a creation of a transnational identity within the dominant culture. This challenges traditional stereotypes that the migrant experience is characterised by the proverbial tug-of-war between the desire to assimilate and a rejection of the migrant's adopted country. In this sense, Ondaatje challenges this dichotomy, suggesting instead that belonging is not about fitting into or rejecting a dominant culture, but finding and representing one's voice within a cacophony of voices.

This is further illustrated by the character of Patrick Lewis, acting as a character foil for Telmelcoff. For a large part of the novel, Lewis is isolated, inaccessible as a character, not even through gestures, as he states, "Patrick felt ashamed they could discover so little about him. He had reduced himself to almost nothing" (117). From the outset, Patrick is defined in relation to others, first in relation to his father, then to the immigrants. For instance, as the novel states of Patrick and his father, "He lies down sideways on the ice and plunges his arm down again, the water inches from his face. Patrick, in a mirror image, swirls his hand underwater but again" (12) and later again in the novel, "The people on the street, the Macedonians and

Bulgarians, were his only mirror” (117). Importantly, the image of the mirror suggests that Patrick’s only form of self-representation was through others, in other words, he had no voice of his own. However, by the novel’s end, Patrick is finally able to represent his experience in a symbolic act of storytelling. This moment of climax comes when Patrick confronts Harris and he states “I worked for you, Mr. Harris”, “I’m Patrick Lewis” (247).

Significantly, it is in this moment that Patrick narrativises the disparate parts of his identity, encapsulated in his introduction. The assertion of his name is a signifier of his experiences and hence his identity. This is once again seen when he makes a seemingly innocuous comment “Feldspar” (247). However, “Feldspar” becomes symbolic for it is how his father was killed, literally buried within his life’s work. Crucially, its meaning is lost on Harris here. However, its significance within Patrick’s life suggests that while language as a means of communication is important, its position as a tool for self-understanding, and hence self-representation, is even more critical. Again, it is in this moment of self-representation that he is able to confront Harris, who is symbolic of the dominant culture. This is most evidently illustrated in the line “He was thinking. Then he began to speak. He talked about how he hated the officials of the city but how he loved city hall” (247). Hence, Ondaatje seems to suggest that before the dialectic between the dominant culture and the migrant subject can occur, there needs to be self-representation, born of the migrant subject’s own voice. It is important to note here that the migrant subject’s voice is not subsumed, he is not looking for a sense of belonging, but rather seeks a witness, a conversation, a desire for his story to be heard. This is once again further illustrated in the same scene as Patrick interrupts Harris’s attempt to politicize Patrick’s narrative as he states:

“You’re as much of the fabric as the aldermans and the millionaires. But you’re among the dwarfs of the enterprise who never get accepted or acknowledged... You’re a lost heir. So, you stay in the woods. You reject power” (250).

Significantly, Patrick interrupts Harris’s narrative of inclusion and exclusion with his question, “Did you know a woman named Alice Gull” (250). By shifting the focus from a larger political narrative to that of an individual, the passage beautifully demonstrates Ondaatje’s focus on representing individual experiences, hence resisting restrictive dichotomies. This is once again illustrated when Harris repeatedly tries to fit Patrick’s narrative within a wider political narrative as he states, “Alice Gull, Harris said very slowly, was killed by an anarchist” (250), to which Patrick simply answers, “No” (251). Once again, there is an outright rejection of a larger grand narrative. Rather, Patrick’s narrative here is focused on the narrativisation of his trauma, with Harris as a witness. This is illustrated at the end of Patrick’s account of the death of Alice as Harris observes, ‘Patrick was almost inaudible, whispering. If he were writing this down, Harris thought, his handwriting would be getting smaller and smaller’ (251). Notably, the line can be interpreted both as an illustration of how narrativisation becomes a mode of catharsis for Patrick and the failure of narrativisation to adequately represent trauma as Patrick’s voice becomes “inaudible”. Here, what is noteworthy is that Patrick’s narrativisation is presented using the metaphor of writing. On the one hand, the comparison of Patrick’s oral narrative to a written narrative illustrates the power of art as a tool for catharsis and the working through of trauma. On the other hand, and more importantly, it demonstrates how art and metaphor can represent trauma, which transcends the medium of language. Although language begins to fail Patrick, his experience of trauma is reflected in the extended metaphor of handwriting. The fact that the handwriting begins to get “smaller and smaller” suggests catharsis or the failure of language to represent trauma, which is arguably inextricable from the experience of trauma. As such, Patrick’s narrative highlights Ondaatje’s focus on the representation of individual experiences that also includes a working through of personal trauma. The focus is on representing Patrick’s narrative within a web of narratives, rather than a political move. In this sense, Ondaatje moves away from the politicised dichotomies that can sometimes characterise the representation of the migrant experience. Instead, Ondaatje takes a more personalised approach, focusing on the narrativisation of an individual’s experience, hence depoliticising the representation of the migrant experience.

However, while Ondaatje’s novel focuses on the individuality of the migrant experience, he is also aware of the dangers of taking one voice as being representative of a collective experience. As such, while

Patrick is the main protagonist within the narrative, Ondaatje constantly highlights how his narrative is embedded within a web of narratives. The novel's end in which Patrick is driving with Hana, Alice's daughter, to pick Clara after Ambrose Small's death illustrates the interconnectivity of narratives. The fact that this comes after the reader bears witness to Patrick's trauma, an intensely private experience, illustrates the constant dialectic between the individual and the community that is an inherent aspect of the migrant experience. The migrant experience, the novel suggests, is held together by a web of narratives, once again underpinning the importance of finding one's own voice in order to be able to represent one's narrative within such a web. Yet, the novel's focus on the representation of individual narratives resists a collectivisation of the experience and hence an usurpation of individual narratives.

Similarly, in Hossein's *Me Migrant*, the desire to find a voice is not so much to represent one's identity within a heterogeneous society, but rather, a desire to understand one's own experience. Like Ondaatje, Hossein challenges the assumption that the migrant subject always seeks belonging within the host country.

While there is a deep sense of isolation within Hossein's poetry, it is not belonging within the host country that he seeks. For instance, in "I Stand at the Red Light", he proclaims:

I don't want to lose my self-respect
They stare at us like vultures waiting to peck (26)

Already, the distinction between "I" and "they" suggests a deliberate enforcement of distance, further accentuated by equating "them" with "vultures", the latter hinting at an air of predation, of the taking advantage of weaknesses. Again, this is most evocatively seen in the collection's titular poem "Me Migrant":

Me migrant
Live outdoors
Outside from you (16)

The choice of diction "you" confronts the reader, immediately implicating him or her, akin to Patrick's confrontation of Harris. The line break further encapsulates the distance the persona enforces from those around him. Hence, Hossein once again challenges the assumption that the alienation the migrant subject experiences can be rectified by the migrant subject's assimilation within the host country.

Given that the migrant experience is associated with the experience of trauma, Hossein's collection of poems can be described as a working through of trauma. Trauma inherently defies understanding; as such, it repeatedly haunts the victim, demanding to be witnessed and understood, and yet remaining just out of epistemic reach. This is reflected in the persona's repeated questions in "The branches of the Poinciana Tree":

Who has stained it so?
Why are workers and labourers dying?
Why is there no justice!

Why did my mother's saree fall off her shoulder
Eyes drip with salty tears? (18)

The line "Who has stained it so" perhaps suggests a coloring of his memory of his homeland. However, the lack of explanation or context establishes an epistemic gap, mimicking the way in which trauma defies understanding, both in the subject as well as the reader as an empathetic witness to trauma. However, the disparate images coupled with the repeated questions highlight the persona's desire to understand his experience, to find answers. Crucially, Hossein does attempt to answer his own questions in "Old Age Home":

Mother begs her son,
Child, come back.
I don't need anything else
But you. (13)

The direct address of the lines "Why did my mother's saree fall off her shoulder//Eyes drip with salty tears?" suggests an attempt to understand his own experience. However, the fact that this answer precedes his own questions is indicative that his questions repeatedly haunt him, much like the experience of trauma. Thus,

the poems become a narrative space to work through his experiences, representing an inward desire for self-understanding.

Similar to Ondaatje's novel, Hossein's poetry collection becomes a platform for self-understanding, an insular turn inwards. Hossein's poems capture the trauma within the migrant experience, the persona's intense isolation in yearning to be understood mimics the ways in which trauma demands to be understood, pointing to the ways in which narrative spaces engender understanding within the subject. This is most evidently seen in the transition from "Today My Mind's Sky" (10), the opening poem of the collection, to "I" (28), the final poem. In "Today My Mind's Sky", Hossein exclaims:

Today my mind's sky
Has become cloudy
Then it's raining heavily"

Don't know where it is I'm lost
Don't know the destination

This is contrasted against the aptly titled "I" as Hossein writes:

Today the sky of the mind
Becomes clouded
Then rains forcefully

How I lost myself I don't know
I possess no address

Crucially, there is a transition between the use of the passive voice in "Today My Mind's Sky" to the active voice in "I", suggesting a greater ownership of his experience. Although there is still a deep sense of alienation, there is the suggestion that the persona has gained a greater understanding and hence ownership of his experience. This is reflected in the aptly titled "I", suggesting a self-portrait, an ownership of one's identity and experience, similar to Patrick Lewis's exertion "I am Patrick Lewis" (247). Thus, while questions may still be unanswered, Hossein's collection of poems represents a desire for self-understanding. This is once again illustrated by the poem's title, "Today my mind's sky", at once suggesting the representation of the persona's inner landscape but also only at a particular point. This is critical as it reflects how the persona's self-understanding continually shifts, once again bringing to mind the collection's transition from a representation at a particular juncture, to a more holistic representation, captured in the title, "I". As such, Hossein's desire for self-understanding challenges the assumption that the experience of migrant subjects follows a grand narrative of alienation and a desire for assimilation within the host country. It is important to note that while at first glance, Hossein appears to reinforce the dichotomy between the migrant and non-migrant experience, reinstating the distance between both, his emphasis on self-understanding collapses these binaries by emphasising the universal experience of trauma and its demand to be understood. Hossein's collection appeals to the fact that we are all both victims and witnesses of trauma in one way or another. As such, Hossein's poems stress the importance of narrative spaces both in representing individual experiences, hence resisting totalising narratives, but also as a space which engenders self-understanding.

However, while Ondaatje's and Hossein's work tackle similar thematic concerns, it is important to note that trauma in Patrick's case differs from that of the persona's in Hossein's poetry as Patrick's trauma is predicated upon the death of Alice Gull. As such, the difference in both writers' representations of trauma further challenges a unifying grand narrative, illustrating the plethora of narratives and the respect that each individual narrative needs to be accorded.

The representation of the migrant experience is also plagued by questions surrounding the medium in which they represent their experiences. As the poet and novelist Ha Jin argues in *The Writer as Migrant*, "Yet the ultimate betrayal is to choose to write in another language. No matter how the writer attempts to rationalise and justify adopting a foreign language, it is an act of betrayal that alienates him from his mother tongue and directs his creative energy to another language" (31). In this sense, the migrant subject becomes doubly

alienated, both physically displaced from the place of his or her birth, and also linguistically and culturally detached. Furthermore, there is also the question of authorship when migrant writers use a medium that is not their own mother tongue. This is most evident in Hossine's transcreated work, *Me Migrant*. Questions of language once again draw parallels between the migrant experience and the experience of trauma, an experience that is inaccessible but yet demands representation. Critically, representation depends on a common signifier understood by both reader and writer, but as Ha Jin points out, this in itself is fraught with problems.

When asked how writers who chose to write in a language other than their mother tongue deal with the criticism of betrayal, Ha Jin remarks, "In such a case, he may have to sacrifice his mother tongue, while borrowing its strength and resources in order to accomplish a style in his adopted tongue. In short, he must be loyal only to his art" (60). Ha Jin's response suggests that the writer's aim or message must transcend the medium in which he writes, transcending the boundaries of language. Thus, based on this response, the second section of this essay aims to explore the ways in which both Ondaatje and Hossein deal with the politics of representation and how both transcend the boundaries of language in order to represent the experiences of migrant subjects. This section will also consider Jonathan Sell's argument that diasporic subjects are akin to metaphors and thus the importance of metaphors in the representation of diasporic experiences. As Sell argues:

Once regarded as agent or channel of 'cultural translation', the diasporic subject is inevitably figured as metaphor...a vessel of meaning that shuttles back and forth between two different realms of significance, its 'homeland' and its 'new home', just as the metaphor takes its reader on a journey between origin and target domains (9).

This, he argues, fosters a sense of empathy as readers begin to understand the homeland that is left behind. While classifying migrant experiences as diaspora may be problematic, using Sell's argument, questions of whether voluntary migrations can count as diaspora pales when looking at diaspora as metaphor, a way in which we can understand contemporary migration (4). Sell's argument is important as the experiences of migrant subjects are marked by a sense of dislocation, permanent alienation and hence liminality. The use of metaphors may foster understanding by engendering new meaning, allowing the reader to be an empathetic witness to the individual experiences of migrant subjects. However, metaphor use is also curious in the sense that by arguing that diasporic subjects seek understanding through metaphor, the interpretative distance is also doubled. This essay also wishes to consider the implications of that, particularly in Hossein's poetry collection.

As demonstrated in the previous section, language is not about an eradication of the migrant subject's voice, but rather a platform for finding a voice within a new environment, paving the way for the formation of a transnational identity. In Ondaatje's novel, metaphor and storytelling become powerful avenues for both representing the individual experiences of migrant subjects and also to generate empathy without subsuming individual narratives. Critically, while metaphor's medium is language, as Telmelcoff notes, it is also about how you use it. This is most evidently seen in Patrick's conversation with Alice:

'That's not enough, Patrick. We're in a thunderstorm.'

'Is that a line from one of your tracts?'

'No, it's a metaphor. You reach people through metaphor. It's what I reached you with earlier tonight in the performance.' (128)

Here, the multiplicity of ways in which language is used is presented, it can be a meaningless "line" or a way in which one connects, echoing Ha Jin's argument that a writer's message must transcend the language in which he writes it, language becoming but a tool.

However, it is important to qualify that Ondaatje is not interested in the aesthetisation of the migrant experience through the use of metaphor, for to do so would be to collectivize individual experiences. The episode in which Patrick regards the dyers is an illustration of this as Ondaatje writes:

If he were an artist he would have painted them but that was false celebration. What did it mean in the end to look aesthetically plumaged ... What would the painting tell? That they were twenty to thirty-five years old, were Macedonians mostly, though there were a few Poles and Lithuanians. That on average they had

three or four sentences of English, that they have never read the *Mail and Empire* or *Saturday Night*. (137)

Critically, this suggests that Ondaatje is not interested in portraying a superficial representation of the migrant experience, an aesthetisation gleaned from surface details such as their age and race. The questions “What did it mean in the end to look aesthetically plumaged”, with the emphasis on the choice of the word “look” suggests that Ondaatje wishes to go beyond that. Hence, it is significant that the novel ends with Patrick Lewis telling Hana a story of Alice. Storytelling is significant as it is a mode of self-representation and as it suggests the ordering of an experience, and hence an understanding. It at once hints at the experiences of the storyteller so that we may understand the storyteller, but also a way in which the storyteller represents himself. Storytelling becomes a metaphor in this sense, shuttling between the origin (the storyteller) and the target (the reader).

Significantly, metaphors establish interpretative gaps. For instance, at the end of Patrick’s confrontation with Harris, the latter gazes upon an exhausted Patrick and muses: “He lay down to sleep, until he was woken out of a dream. He saw the lions around him glorying in life; then he took his axe in his hand, he draws his sword from his belt, and fell upon them like an arrow from the string”(254).

This enigmatic musing is significant as meaning flourishes in the interpretative gaps. The story is at once a reference to the myth of Gilgamesh, which also references the title of the novel, suggesting perhaps Patrick’s desire for vengeance for the death of Alice. However, it also references Patrick’s conversation with Alice in which she tells him, “Each person has their moment when they assumed the skins of wild animals, when they took responsibility for the story” (163), which in turn suggests Patrick taking ownership of his narrative by reclaiming his narrative from the powerful. Crucially, it is in this interpretative distance that meaning flourishes beyond the medium of language. This at once creates a signifier of Patrick’s experiences, encapsulating his narrative within a single story, yet the interpretative distance allows for a fluidity of meaning which resists a subsuming of his narrative. In this, Ondaatje demonstrates how art and storytelling can become a medium for the representation of disparate experiences without a collectivisation of individual narratives.

In *Me Migrant*, the metaphor becomes a way in which Hossine invites the reader to become an empathetic witness. This is significant as the deep sense of isolation that pervades the poems stems from a sense of alienation, echoing Rushdie’s argument that the migrant experience is characterised by a sense of displacement, of a home he or she can no longer return to. However, this essay wishes to argue that the use of metaphor in *Me Migrant* creates a third space, following Homi Bhabha’s argument, that challenges the dichotomy between home and the foreign land or nation-state. The metaphor in *Me Migrant* thus performs a dual function; it creates a space that represents Hossein’s unique experiences and also allows the reader to be an empathetic witness without encroaching upon an essentially private experience. This is especially significant in relation to Hossein’s collection of poetry as a transcreated work.

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha argues that a third space is engendered through the meeting of cultural borders; this takes place at “the boundary [which] becomes the place from which *something begins its presencing*” (7). Crucially, in *Me Migrant*, this third space is not an actual space in the sense of it being the migrant’s homeland or the current country he is residing in, but is a representation of his inner landscape. This is most evidently seen in “Weariness” (27), which portrays a surrealist landscape in which the Bengal of Hossine’s childhood is transformed:

In the Jamuna hopeless
Gallop waves slamming down
Is this living?

Bloodied heart
Sharp heat of Chaitra
Desert lands
Burn impassively

Significantly, the transformation of his homeland into a hostile environment captures the sense of isolation he feels, engendered from the experience of being in a foreign country. Hence, the fact that the experience of dislocation transforms the landscape of his home heartbreakingly evokes the sense of dislocation and the resultant deep isolation he feels, going beyond the metaphor. Here, the use of metaphor is powerful as it invites the reader to contemplate what is being compared, and hence invites the reader to understand the experiences of the migrant subject, drawing us into his inner landscape through the technique of defamiliarisation.

This is also particularly significant in Hossein's poetry collection as a transcreated work. On one hand, it could be argued that transcreation only problematises the representation of the traumatic experiences of migration, given that it potentially challenges Hossein's authorship, subsuming an essentially private experience and further widening the epistemic gulf inherent in the understanding of trauma. However, while transcreation lends him the medium of language for representation, it is metaphor that gives Hossein a voice for self-representation. As both Ha Jin and Ondaatje argue, the emphasis is not on the medium, but the message. Metaphor is curious in this sense; although its medium is language, its meaning flourishes beyond the words on a page, giving Hossein a voice that is uniquely his. Thus, metaphor becomes a powerful tool for a connection that transcends the limitations of language. This is especially significant as by representing the persona's deep isolation, he is also engendering empathy, understanding and hence connection.

Similar to *In the Skin of a Lion*, the disparate images within the poem also establish an interpretative gap. The interpretative gap is significant as it at once suggests the persona's own gaps in understanding the trauma of dislocation, thus creating a unique representation of his own experiences. However, given that the reader only posits the connections between the images, this at once renders the experience deeply personal to Hossein and also preserves the privacy that is integral to the individuality of his experiences, once again resisting a collectivisation of individual experiences.

Hence, in conclusion, both Ondaatje and Hossine challenge the grand narrative for representing migrant experience that assumes that migrant subjects desire assimilation within the culture of the host or adoptive society. Instead, both writers present narrative spaces as a powerful tool that engenders self-understanding, an important prerequisite before any dialectic between the migrant subject and his or her adopted country can occur. Both writers also transcend the politics of representation, be it in writing in a language that is not the migrant's mother tongue or avoiding the dangers of aestheticising migrant experiences. Both demonstrate how metaphor can be used as a tool for self-representation, and hence cultural connection, but in ways that avoid the whitewashing of individual narratives.

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