



THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SYMBOLS IN *THE ENGLISH PATIENT*: AN ESSAY

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RESUMO – Água, vento, fogo e o deserto são símbolos recorrentes no romance *O Paciente Inglês*, de Michael Ondaatje. Como esses símbolos estão direta ou indiretamente ligados aos personagens mais representativos e às diferentes situações, este ensaio busca demonstrar que o conhecimento dos significados simbólicos desses elementos permite ao leitor uma compreensão mais aprofundada do texto e o acesso às sutilezas da elaboração da obra.

Palavras-chave – água, vento, fogo, deserto, significado simbólico.

ABSTRACT – Water, wind, fire and the desert are recurrent symbols on the novel *The English Patient*, by Michael Ondaatje. As these symbols are direct or indirectly linked to almost all the characters and situations, this essay aims to demonstrate that the knowledge of their meaning enlightens the reading and the understanding of the text.

Keywords – water, wind, fire, the desert, symbolic meaning

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Introduction

This essay analyzes the novel *The English Patient*, by Michael Ondaatje, focusing on some recurrent symbols that appear all through the narrative and seem to exert a very important role in its structure and development.

Among other symbolic references, we have chosen those whose interpretation seems to be fundamental to the book: water, wind, fire and the desert. As it can be seen, these symbols are directly related to the four elements of Nature: water, air, fire and earth.

This work intends to demonstrate that the knowledge of symbolic meanings help the comprehension of the book, adding some insights to the inner richness of the text and offering basis for a deeper understanding of both the characters and the plot.

Each chosen symbol is analyzed in a separate chapter, and for each one is offered as theoretical basis some definitions given by specialized dictionaries.



Water

The element “water” as a symbol acquires mainly three different meanings: beginning of life, purification and rebirth. As said by Chevalier and Gheerbrant:

As significações simbólicas da água podem reduzir-se a três temas dominantes: fonte de vida, meio de purificação, centro de regenerescência. [...] Mergulhar nas águas, para dela sair sem se dissolver totalmente, salvo por uma morte simbólica, é retornar às origens, carregar-se de novo num imenso reservatório de energia e nele beber uma força nova: fase passageira de regressão e desintegração, condicionando uma fase progressiva de reintegração e regenerescência. (1994:15)

In *The English Patient*, the element water is always present, although it is shown in different aspects: bathing, the search for water in the desert, the fountain, the well, drowning, among others. An example of the use of water as purification – a kind of ritualistic bath – and healing can be seen just at the beginning of the book, and it is performed by Hana on the English Patient:

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Every four days she washes his black body, beginning at the destroyed feet. She wets a washcloth and holding it above his ankles squeezes the water onto him, looking up as he murmurs, seeing his smile. Above the shins the burns are worst. Beyond purple. Bone. (p.3)

Water, or the necessity of water, is a way to show the different points of view of the English Patient and his lover Katharine. He loves the desert and its dryness; she clearly belongs to another world:

He himself would have been happier to die in a cave, with its privacy, the swimmers caught in the rock around them. Bermann had told that in Asian gardens you could look at rock and imagine water, you could gaze at a still pool and believe it had the hardness of rock. But she was a woman who had grown up within gardens, among moistness, with words like trellis and hedgehog. Her passion for desert was temporary. She'd come to love its sternness because of him, wanting to understand his comfort in its solitude. She was always happier in rain, in bathrooms steaming with liquid air, in sleepy wetness, climbing back in from his window that rainy night in Cairo and putting on her clothes still wet, in order to hold it all. (p.170)



It is relevant to mention that Katharine Clifton was having an affair with the English Patient. For the love of Almásy (maybe the English Patient's real name), she betrayed her husband. Perhaps Katharine's closeness to water could be explained as an attempt to redeem herself from the sin: "(a água) possui, por si mesma, uma virtude purificadora e, por esse motivo, é considerada sagrada. Donde seu uso nas abluções rituais. Por sua virtude, a água apaga todas as infrações e toda mácula. A água [...] lava os pecados..." (CHEVALLIER & GHEERBRANT, 1994, p. 18)

It is important to remember that the English patient – Count Almásy – was looking for the oasis of Zerzura. The same authors above mentioned offer an explanation about wells, fountains and oasis in the desert:

Na Bíblia, os poços no deserto, as fontes que se oferecem aos nômades são outros tantos lugares de alegria e encantamento. Junto das fontes e poços operam-se os encontros essenciais. Como lugares sagrados, os pontos de água têm papel incomparável. Perto deles, nasce o amor e os casamentos principiam. A marcha dos hebreus e a caminhada de todo homem na sua peregrinação terrena estão intimamente ligadas ao contato interior ou exterior com a água. Esta se torna, então, um centro de paz e de luz, oasis. [...] Os rios são agentes de fertilização de origem divina, as chuvas e o orvalho trazem consigo a fecundidade e manifestam a benevolência divina. Sem água, o nômade seria imediatamente condenado à morte [...]. Assim, a água que ele encontra pelo caminho é comparável ao maná celeste: desalterando-o, ela o alimenta. (p 16-7)

After his plane accident, the English Patient was saved by Bedouins. These nomads of the desert keep a close relationship with water. In the book, there are several references to water, as seen when the Bedouins rescued him and cared for his health. The origin of the nomad tribes and their way-of-life are described as follows:

He could smell the oasis before he saw it. The liquid in the air. The rustle of things. Palms and bridles. The banging of tin cans whose deep pitch revealed they were full of water. [...] I knew the customs of nomads besotted by silk or wells. One tribe dyed a whole valley floor, blackening it to increase convection and thereby the possibility of rainfall, and built high structures to pierce the belly of a cloud. (p. 6)

The following passage reinforces the connection between the tribes and their environment:



In Tassili I have seen rock engravings from a time when the Sahara people hunted water horses from reed boats. In Wadi Sura I saw caves whose walls were covered with paintings of swimmers. Here there has been a lake. I could draw its shape on a wall for them. [...] Harpoons are still found in the desert. There were water people. Even today caravans look like a river. Water is the exile, carried back in cans and flasks, the ghost between your hands and your mouth. (pp. 18-9)

The healing and soothing sensation brought by water is apparent in the letter Hana writes to her stepmother Clara, where she compares Clara to a canoe:

Dear Clara – Dear Maman,
Maman is a French word, Clara, a circular word, suggesting cuddles, a personal word that can even be shouted in public. Something as comforting and as eternal as a barge. Though you, in spirit, I know are still a canoe. Can swerve one round and enter a creek in seconds. (p. 292)

The idea of water as relieve or refuge is repeated on Hana's second letter:

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[...] I am sick of Europe, Clara. I want to go home. To your small cabin and pink rock in Georgian Bay. [...] And wait for you; wait to see the silhouette of you in a canoe coming to rescue me from this place. (p. 296)

Water is a symbol of construction but it can be also a symbol of destruction. This ambivalence gets the following definition from Biedermann (1993):

Como fluxo primordial (a água) representa, em muitos mitos da criação do mundo, a fonte de toda forma de vida, mas é também um elemento de dissolução e de afogamento. [...] Psicologicamente. [...] é símbolo das camadas mais profundas e inconscientes da personalidade. Como um dos símbolos elementares tem um significado ambivalente (conflitual), porque de um lado dá a vida e torna fértil, mas do outro alude ao afundamento e ao declínio. (p.15)

Kip is the character most connected with water, probably because he is Indian, a Sikh, and much significance is given by Indians to symbols, especially water. He used to bath and to wash his long hair frequently, what can be seen as a daily form of purification.

At first he will not come into the house at all. He walks past on some duty or other to do with dismantling of mines. Always courteous. A little nod of his head. Hana sees him wash at a basin of collected rainwater, placed formally on



top of a sundial. The garden tap, used in previous times for the seed beds, is now dry. She sees his shirtless brown body as he tosses water over himself like a bird using his wings. (p.72)

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He is always washing his hands. Caravaggio at first thinks he is too fussy. "How did you get through a war?" Caravaggio laughs.

"I grew up in India, Uncle. You wash your hands all the time. Before meals. A habit. I was born in the Punjab." (p.76)

The idea of purification is reinforced by this passage:

When there is a hot day at the Villa San Girolamo they all wash their hair, first with kerosene to remove all the possibility of lice, and then with water. Lying back, his hair spread out, eyes closed against the sun, Kip seems suddenly vulnerable. [...]

He will sit up and flip his hair forward, and begin to rub the length of it with a towel. She imagines all the Asia through the gestures of this man. The way he lazily moves, his quiet civilization. He speaks of warrior saints and she feels he is one, stern and visionary, pausing only in these rare times of sunlight to be godless, informal. (p. 217)

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At the end of the book, Kip experiences the destructive power of water, when he is returning to his country:

Around two in the afternoon he reached Ortona, where the sappers had laid the Bailey bridges, nearly drowning in the storm in mid-river. It began to rain and he stopped to put on a rubber cape. He walked around the machine in the wetness. [...] he was riding deeper into thick rain. [...] The rubber lining on the goggles had cracked during the past months and the rain began filling each pocket of air in front of his eyes. [...] He was removing the goggles as he came out of the curve and onto the bridge over Ofanto River. And with his left arm up holding the goggles free he began to skid. [...] He was suddenly sliding with it along the skin of rainwater down the centre of the bridge, blue sparks from the scratching metal around his arms and face. [...] Then he and the bike veered to the left, there was no side to the bridge, and they hurtled out parallel to the water, he and his bike sideways, his arms flung back above his head. The cape released itself away from him, from whatever was machine and mortal, part of the element of air. The motorbike and the soldier stilled in midair, the pivoted down into the water, the metal body between his legs as they slammed into it, jarring a white path through it, disappearing, the rain too entering the river. [...] The sapper's bare head comes out of the water, and he gasps in all the air above the river. (pp. 295-6)



Kip was a sapper, a soldier whose duty was disarming bombs and dismantling mines; he joined the English Army because his country, India, was at that time an English colony. Against his parents' will – they wanted him to become a doctor – and against his older brother's political beliefs, he came to Europe to save Europeans' lives. He seemed to assimilate the new culture without great problems – then it could be understood as a new life. When he listens to the news about Hiroshima and Nagasaki's bombing, he is so shocked that it could be compared to death. So he decides to return to his country, to his own culture. On his way home, under heavy rain, he falls from a bridge and he almost drowns. That experience of almost-death could be seen as a ritual of rebirth or resurrection, when he is *washed* from the English culture and civilization and he returns to his origins. Cirlot (1984) offers the following explanation for this highly symbolic passage:

[...] as águas simbolizam a união universal de virtualidades, *fons et origo*, que se encontram na precedência de toda forma ou criação. A imersão nas águas significa o retorno ao pré-formal, com seu duplo sentido de morte e dissolução, mas também de renascimento e nova circulação, pois a imersão multiplica o potencial de vida. [...] a morte afeta apenas o homem natural, enquanto que o novo nascimento é do homem espiritual, nesta particularização do simbolismo geral das águas. (p. 63, italics from the author)

Among the main characters, Kip is the only one who is able to build a new life, for after returning to India he becomes a doctor, gets married and has children. Through water, Kip experiences life, death, and rebirth.

Wind

Wind is so important to people who live in that of the African continent mentioned in the book that the text offers to the readers a long and detailed explanation about the different types of winds that blow over there and their influence upon people and places:

There is a whirlwind in southern Morocco, the aajej, against which the fellahin defend themselves with knives. There is the africo, which has at times reached into the city of Rome. The alm, a fall wind out of Yugoslavia. The arifi, also christened aref or rifi, which scorches with numerous tongues. These are permanent winds that live in the present tense.

There are other, less constant winds that change direction, that can knock down horse and rider and realign themselves anticlockwise. [...] Other, private



winds. Travelling along the ground like a flood. Blasting off paint, throwing down telephone poles, transporting stones and statue heads. [...]

There are always millions of tons of dust in the air, just as there millions of cubes of air in the earth and more living flesh in the soil (worms, beetles, underground creatures) than is grazing and existing on it. Herodotus records the death of various armies engulfed in the simoon who were never seen again. One nation was so enraged by this evil wind that they declared war on it and marched out in full battle array, only to be rapidly and completely interred.

Dust storms in three shapes. The whirl. The column. The sheet. In the first the horizon is lost. In the second you are surrounded by “waltzing Ginns”. The third, the sheet, is “cooper-tinted. Nature seems to be on fire”. (pp. 16-7)

The symbolic meaning of wind presents different aspects, as Chevalier and Gheerbrant point out:

Devido à agitação que o caracteriza, é um símbolo de vaidade, de instabilidade, de inconstância. É uma força elementar que pertence aos Titãs, o que indica suficientemente a sua violência e sua cegueira. Por outro lado, o vento é sinônimo do sopro e, por conseguinte, do espírito, do influxo espiritual de ordem celeste. [...]

Nas tradições bíblicas, os ventos são o sopro de Deus. O sopro de deus que ordenou o caos primitivo; animou o primeiro homem. [...] Os ventos são instrumento da força divina; dão vida, castigam, ensinam; são sinais e, como anjos, portadores de mensagens. São manifestação de um divino, que deseja comunicar as suas emoções, desde a mais terna doçura até a mais tempestuosa cólera. (1994, p. 935-6)

Biedermann (1993) adds the following information about the symbolism of wind:

Na ciência dos símbolos não se trata apenas de simples movimentos de ar, mas manifestações sobrenaturais dos deuses. De um lado, considera-se a ausência de confiabilidade do vento, e de outro, constata-se seu efeito sensível, apesar de sua invisibilidade. [...] Em geral, o vento representa um “efeito invisível”, mas reconhecível por suas consequências: a respiração da divindade. (pp. 383-4)

There are, in the text, several references to Wind, and how it helped or obstructed the accomplishment of some goals:

Hours late we were in the sandstorm that hit us out of clear morning, coming from nowhere. The breeze that had been refreshing had gradually strengthened. Eventually we looked down, and the surface of the desert was changed. [...]



We had to keep moving. If you pause sand builds up as it would around anything stationary, and locks you in. You are lost forever. A sandstorm can last five hours. [...] The worst terrors came at night. [...] The gale swept the tents from their moorings and we rolled with them, taking in sand like a sinking boat takes water, weighed down, suffocating, till we were cut free by a camel driver. We travelled through three sandstorms during nine days. [...] (pp. 136-7)

Fire

Biedermann describes fire as an ambivalent element:

O elemento que parece ter vida, porque consome, aquece e ilumina, mas também pode causar dor e morte, é simbolicamente ambivalente. [...] Por ser entre os elementos o único que o homem pode produzir, o fogo torna-se uma prova de sua semelhança com os deuses. [...] Geralmente o fogo é considerado um elemento masculino (em contraposição com a água, elemento feminino), e símbolo da energia vital, do coração, da capacidade procriadora, da iluminação e do Sol. [...] De um modo geral, os deuses do fogo ou aqueles seres sobrenaturais associados a esse elemento participam de sua natureza ambígua e são por esse motivo considerados “ardilosos”, indignos de total confiança por parte do homem. (1993, pp.162-3)

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Adding some information to the description given above, we can find in Cirlot (1984) these sentences about the element “fire”:

Os alquimistas conservam em especial o sentido dado por Heráclito ao fogo, de agente de transformação, pois todas as coisas nascem do fogo e a ele retornam. É o germe que se reproduz nas vidas sucessivas (em associação à libido e à fecundidade). Nesse sentido de mediador entre as formas em desaparecimento e criação, o fogo se assimila à água, é também um símbolo de transformação e regeneração. (p. 258)

The English Patient – who is presumed to be the Hungarian explorer Ladislaus de Almásy – has his physical identity destroyed by fire in a plane accident. Saved from the flames by nomads, he has most of his body burned and completely disfigured.

In Pisa hospital she had seen the English patient for the first time. A man with no face. An ebony pool. All identification consumed by a fire. Parts of his burned body and face had been sprayed with tannic acid, that hardened into a protective shell over his raw skin. The area around his eyes was coated with a thick layer of gentian violet. There was nothing to recognize in him. (p. 48)



As he cannot be recognized through his face or fingerprints, in order to protect himself he impersonates as an Englishman of ignored past: *He was interrogated again. Everything about him was very English except for the fact that his skin was tarred black [...]. He rambled down on, driving them mad, traitor or ally, leaving them never quite sure who he was.* (p. 96). The time of the narrative is around the end of World War II, and Count Almásy is supposed to have helped the Germans, working as a spy.

The connection between the English Patient's ordeal and the symbolic meaning of fire as above cited seems to be easily established: at the same time fire burnt and consumed Almásy's past life and offered him a possibility of regeneration, through the identity of the English Patient, a man with no past, no future, just a brief moment in the present time to heal his emotional burden.

The aspect of purification through fire is deeply felt in Hana's attitudes towards the English Patient: she sees him like a saint.

She has nursed him for months and she knows the body well, the penis sleeping like a sea horse, the thin tight hips. Hipbones of Christ, she thinks. He is her despairing saint. (p. 3)

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It was sometime after this that she had come across the English Patient – someone who looked liked a burned animal, taut and dark, a pool for her. (p. 41)

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“Hana.”

“Do you understand?”

“Why do you adore him so much?”

“I love him.”

“You don't love him, you adore him.”

“Go away, Caravaggio. Please.”

“You've tied yourself to a corpse for some reason.”

“He is a saint. I think. A despairing saint. Are there such things? Our desire is to protect them.” (p.45)

The idea of worshipping a supernatural being is clearly seen in the way Hana cares for the wounded man:

She would remain with the one burned man the called “The English patient”, who, it was now clear to her, should never b moved because of the fragility of his limbs. She would lay belladonna over his eyes, give him saline baths for the keloided skin and extensive burns. [...] There was something about him she



wanted to learn, grow into, and hide in, where she could turn away from being adult. There was some little waltz in the way he spoke to her and the way he thought. She wanted to save him, the nameless, almost faceless man who had been one of the two hundred or so placed in her care during the invasion north. (p. 52)

The process of purification works for both Hana and the English Patient in different ways: he must suffer in order to redeem himself for ‘killing’ Katharine (although he could not be directly blamed for it); Hana must worship the burned man in order to fill her emotional emptiness after the death of her father and the abortion.

“I lost the child. I mean, I had to lose it The father was already dead. There was a war.”

“Were you in Italy?”

“In Sicily, about the time it happened. All through the time we came up to the Adriatic behind the troops I thought of it. I had continued conversations with the child. I worked very hard in the hospitals and retreated from everybody around me. Except the child, who shared everything with. In my head, I was talking to him while I bathed and nursed patients. I was a little crazy.”

“And then your father died.”

“Yes. Then Patrick died. I was in Pisa when I heard.” (p. 82)

...

[...] and I was sick of Europe. Sick of being treated like gold because I was a female. I courted one man and he died and the child died. I mean, the child didn’t just die; I was the one who destroyed it. After I stepped so far back no one could get near me. Not with anyone’s death. Then I met him, the man burned black. Who turned out to be, up close, an Englishman.” (p. 85)

The use of fire for illumination is present in the book through many references to candles, especially related to the English Patient. It seems also possible that the light of these candles could the enlightening clues do the feelings of the characters:

The English man was asleep, breathing through his mouth as he always did, awake or asleep. She got up from her chair and gently pulled free the lit candle held in his hands. She walked to the window and blew it out there, so the smoke went out of the room. She disliked his lying there with a candle in his hands, mocking a deathlike posture, wax falling unnoticed onto his wrist. As he was preparing himself, as if wanted to slip into his own death by imitating its climate and light. (p. 62)



The desert

The desert could be considered a character in the book, because it plays a very important role in the development of the plot; it is the scenery where all the facts related to the English Patient take place. Although Hana, the English Patient, Caravaggio and Kip are placed in a villa in Italy, the desert occupies all the memories of the patient. The symbolic meaning of the desert is in this way explained by Cirlot:

Seu significado simbólico é profundo e claro. [...] Isto confirma o valor específico do deserto como lugar propício à revelação divina [...]. A causa disto é que, embora como paisagem seja de certo modo negativo, o deserto é o domínio da abstração, que se encontra fora do campo vital e existencial, aberto apenas à transcendência. [...] a sequeidão ardente é, por excelência, o clima da espiritualidade pura e ascética, da extenuação do corpo para a salvação da alma. (1984, p. 203)

In the narrative, the desert is described as a place to be conquered by explorers: *the ends of the earth are never the points on a map that colonists push against, enlarging their sphere of influence* (p. 141), a site full of mysteries and possibility of fame and glory, or death and oblivion.

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The desert could not be claimed or owned – it was a piece of cloth carried by winds, never held by stones, and given a hundred shifting names long before Canterbury existed, long before battles and treaties quilted Europe and East. Its caravans, those strange rambling feasts and cultures, left nothing behind, not an ember. All of us, even those with European homes and children, in the distance, wished to remove the clothing of our countries. It was a place of faith. We disappeared into landscape. Fire and sand. We left the harbours of oasis. [...] I didn't want my name against such beautiful names. Erase the family name! Erase nations! I was taught such things by the desert. Still, some wanted their mark there. On the dry water-course, on this shingled knoll. [...] But I wanted to erase my name and the place I had come from. By the time war arrived, after ten years in the desert, it is easy for me to slip across borders, not to belong to anyone, to any nation. (pp. 138-9)

Through this passage, we can understand how deeply Almásy was influenced by the desert. The solitude he experienced and the loss of identity resulted from his life in the desert. That sensation of not-belonging to anybody or to anywhere would undermine his future relationship with Katharine: *“What do you hate most?” he asks. “A lie. And you?” “Ownership”, he says. “When you leave me, forget me.”* (p. 152)



The knowledge about the desert makes possible to link the English Patient to Almásy:

(...) The man who guided Eppler through the desert into Cairo on Rommel's personal orders – from Tripoli all the way to Cairo – was Count Ladislaus de Almásy. This was a stretch of desert that, it was assumed, no one could cross. [...]

In the 1930s he had discovered caves with rock paintings there. [...] When they were spotted from air they hid in the wadis for as long as three days, completely still. Baking to death in the sand. [...]

I thought that at first. He was very like Almásy. A desert lover as well. He had spent his childhood in the Levant and knew the Bedouin. But the thing about Almásy was, he could fly. We are talking about someone who crashed. Here is this man, burned beyond recognition, who somehow end up in the arms of the English at Pisa. Also, he can get away with sounding English. Almásy went to school in England. In Cairo he was referred to as the English spy. (pp. 164-5)

For the English Patient, the desert could have been his grave; for Katharine, it really was. She was hurt in a plane accident caused by her husband, in a rage of jealousy. Almásy took his wounded lover to a cave in the desert, and went away trying to get some help: *He walked out of the cave, out of the flare of firelight, down through darkness and into the desert full of moon.* (p. 249) But his attempt was not successful, and she died alone in the middle of the desert.

“She had been injured. In 1939. Her husband had crashed his plane. It had been planned as a suicide-murder by her husband that would involve all three of us. We were not even lovers at the time. I suppose information of the affair trickled down to him somehow.”

“So she was too wounded to take with you.”

“Yes. The only chance to save her was for me to try and reach help alone.” (p. 171)

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A husband gone mad. Killing all of them. Killing himself and his wife – and him by the fact there was now no way out of the desert. (p. 173)

Katharine's death represents a moment of epiphany to Almásy. He prepares a kind of ritualistic burial for her body; that action could be explained in a symbolic way:

Há enterros simbólicos, semelhantes à imersão batismal, seja para curar e fortificar, seja para satisfazer a ritos iniciáticos. A ideia é sempre a mesma: regenerar pelo contato com as forças da terra, morrer para uma forma de vida para renascer em uma outra forma. (CHEVALIER & GHEERBRANT, 1994, p. 879)



Almásy transforms the burial into a magic moment, and he describes it in a highly poetic way:

It is important to die in holy places. That is one of the secrets of the desert. [...] When I turned her around, her whole body was covered in bright pigment. Herbs and stones and light and the ash of acacia to make her eternal. The body pressed against sacred colour. [...]

And all the names of the tribes, the nomads of faith who walked in the monotone of the desert and saw brightness and faith and colour. The way a stone or found metal box or bone can become loved and turn eternal in a prayer. Such glory of this country she enters now and becomes part of it. 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. All I desired was to walk upon such an earth that had no maps.

I carried Katharine Clifton into the desert, where there is the communal book of moonlight. We were among the rumour of wells. In the place of winds. (pp. 260-1)

Conclusion

After the analysis of the recurrent symbols presented in Michael Ondaatje's novel *The English Patient*, we believe that they were intentionally chosen for the specific purpose of helping the elaboration of the characters and the story.

Water, wind, fire and the desert are direct or indirectly linked with almost all the situations, and the characters are influenced by or act on them. The persistence of their use may indicate the importance they assume in the construction and the development of the plot.

Analyzing the narrative based on the knowledge of the meaning of symbols can, certainly, improve our interpretation and show us many subtle details that could be otherwise lost in the reading. The symbols enlighten our reading, and make us aware of each precise effect intended by the author.

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