

Public Abstract

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Title:THIS SWEET TOUCH: ALIENATION AND PHYSICAL CONNECTION IN THE WORKS OF MICHAEL ONDAATJE, SHYAM SELVADURAI, AND SALMAN RUSHDIE

My dissertation argues that diasporic Michael Ondaatje, Shyam Selvadurai, and Salman Rushdie, in response to the alienating and Othering effects of colonialist labeling, explore the possibilities of reciprocal recognition through the body as a means of forming interpersonal connections and articulating identity. I examine *Anil's Ghost* and *The English Patient* by Ondaatje, *Funny Boy* by Selvadurai, and *Shalimar the Clown* and *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie. Much of postcolonial theory focuses on the negative effects of Western discourse without offering possible solutions, while my work shows that possible solutions are provided by writers of postcolonial fiction.

Ondaatje, Selvadurai, and Rushdie suggest that colonialist discourse still alienates postcolonial citizens from themselves and their communities despite the demise of colonialism. Colonial and neocolonial discourse continues to try to control and construct postcolonial subjects through naming. These three writers offer instigating moments of reciprocal recognition through physical connection as a solution to the alienating effects of colonial discourse. Their characters overcome the alienating effects of colonial discourse as they experience moments of reciprocal recognition with other characters. These moments are instigated through touch or body language. While each author believes in the power of reciprocal recognition, their ideas about how recognition is instigated are different. Whereas Ondaatje focuses on touch in small isolated communities, Selvadurai looks at body language in one on one interactions, and Rushdie looks at how the allegorical impulse of his characters acts as a barrier to reciprocal recognition.