

is set in Italy during the 1940s. Germans have retreated from dessert campaigns northward across Italy. They destroy what they can and booby-trap the rest. A young Canadian nurse, Hana, deserts her military convoy, refuses to travel farther, and with her dying English patient takes residence in the bombed-out relic of a former nunnery. The structure had served many purposes, but is now dead rubble.

“Sections of the chapel were blown up. Parts of the top storey of the villa crumbled under explosions...Some rooms faced onto the valley with no walls at all. She would open a door and see just a sodden bed huddled against a corner, covered with leaves. Doors opened into landscape. Some rooms had become an open aviary” (Ondaatje, 1993, p. 12-13).

Quyen DeRoule’s illustration of the Villa, see Figure 1, captures the setting for the novel. The villa is a mausoleum. Texture in the foreground represents the intertwining of death and life.

Even the countryside is death. “It is terrible out there. Dead cattle. Horses shot dead, half eaten. People hanging upside down from bridges. The last vices of war... The smell of the dead is the worst. We need a good snowfall to clean up this country. We need ravens” (Ondaatje, 1993, p. 29).

Hana is, herself, plagued by death; her own father, her baby, and the baby’s father are all dead. “I was almost going to have a baby a year ago”...“I lost the child. I mean, I had to lose it. The father was already dead” (Ondaatje, 1993, p. 82).

So many of her young soldiers die that she dehumanizes them. They become indistinct and nameless. “She called everyone ‘Buddy’ ” (Ondaatje, 1993; p 50).

Hana’s last living patient, the English patient, represents the

interface of life and death and also the continuum they share. He had been burned beyond recovery or rehabilitation, salved with ointments, and wrapped with bandages by the Bedouins who saw him crash into the desert. He was a breathing mummy: enshrouded, anointed, and awaiting burial -- a breathing dead man in a dead nunnery.

“They found my body and made me a boat of sticks and dragged me across the desert...They strapped me onto a cradle...” (Ondaatje, 1993, p. 5) “They poured oil onto large pieces of soft cloth and placed them on him. He was anointed.” (Ondaatje, 1993, p. 6)

Euthanasia derives from two Greek words, meaning well or good and meaning death (Saunders Company, 1965, p. 518 and p. 520). It is often described as mercy killing. In clinical settings, medical euthanasia is used to end the suffering of terminally and hopelessly ill patients. It is certainly homicide, but not always suicide.

Michael Ondaatje portrays medical euthanasia as a routine part of Hana’s nursing practice. The reader might wonder: just what is it to administer lethal doses of morphine to a patient who is in terrible pain and has a life-expectancy of mere seconds?

Hana explains medical mercy to Caravaggio: “I know death now David. I know all the smells. I know how to divert them from agony. When to give the quick jolt of morphine in a major vein. The saline solution. To make them empty their bowels before they die”

to the cave of swimmers where he had left the injured Katherine -- just as he had promised -- but much too late. Katherine has been long dead. Here, he ravages her remains. "She had dragged herself into a corner, had wrapped herself tight in the parachute material... She was on her back, positioned the way the mediaeval dead lie" (Ondaatje, 1993, p. 170). "I approach her naked as I would have done in our South Cairo room, wanting to undress her, still wanting to love her" (Ondaatje, 1993, p. 170).

(Ondaatje, 1993, p. 83-84).

Ondaatje's euthanasia is compassionate, even benevolent but it is not assisted suicide because the patient is not capable of suicide; nor is it manslaughter. It is murder, and inducing that one last bowel movement before the lethal morphine – to avoid perhaps the greater untidiness of a post-mortem evacuation – shows clear premeditation. It is murder in the first degree, no question.

Hana resents that such tasks fall to her. "Who the hell were we to be given this responsibility, expected to be wise as old priests, to know how to lead people towards something no one wanted and somehow make them feel comfortable" (Ondaatje, 1993; p. 84). Such euthanasia is presented as essential and ethical in nursing practice, but it is a task that takes a heavy toll.

Hana has little choice in the grim obligations that befall her. She must discharge her obligations no matter the cost. DeRoule's faceless figure (Figure 2) shows Hana's grim circumstance. She must discharge her obligations even while her own humanity deserts her.

Necrophilia is also derived from two Greek words, *nekros* or dead and *philia* or to love. It is the abnormal attraction to the dead, including perhaps sexual intercourse with a corpse (W. B. Saunders Company, 1965, p. 984).

Ondaatje uses necrophilia to again demonstrate that life and death are not discrete, but indeed continuous. The English patient returns