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Fictionalization of History in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*

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Fictionalization of History in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*

The research explores the historical elements in Michael Ondaatje's Anil's Ghost. In the text, Ondaatje brings the historical war between the Sirlankan government and rebellion Tamil Tigers from mid 1980s to early 1990s. This research probes into the unreliable character Sarath, and his narration about Sirilanka. He narrates the incidents in broken English with several discontinuities. Sarath presents a dreary, hellish picture of Srilanka during the civil war. However, he withdraws his own narration in the course of novel. He even claims that he is not sure about the incidents happened in his life because he is suffering from mental illness. Throughout the unreliable narrative of Sarath, Ondaatje deconstructs the traditional notion of history as the matter of facts and he claims that history is the matter of fabricated power politics.

Key Words: History, Discourse, Fictionalization, Truth

This research project focuses on Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*, a novel that discusses about human history and human life. Ondaatje, through the character of Sarath who is intelligent, thoughtful, and philosophical person, observes upon the truth and fixity of history. Sarath also discusses about the pre-established legal and formal general principles of human condition such as death, marriage, separation etc. He has vast reading of literary history, as he states in the novel, but quiet discontent with it due to its falsity and analyzes the generalizations about history and human conditions. He memorizes and examines various incidents of his own personal life as well as historical incidents by analyzing himself and history but he fails to capture the realistic evidences. Sarath is a unreliable narrator who has been damaged both physically and psychologically. *Anil's Ghost*, is the story of a new high school student, Sarath, told through his letters to a person never identified to the reader.

Sarath struggles with apparent mental illness throughout his letters, but he never clearly tells about the problem. Rather, it becomes evident in the background of many of his accounts. So, she critiques generalizations about history and human conditions, questions such pattern and deconstruct them. On this basis, the research aims to prove the notion of critiquing generalizations about history and human conditions inside the text.

The purpose of the research is to investigate how historical generalizations or claim which is unable to carry fixity and truth behind any occurrences. At the same time, the study's focus is on how a predetermined principle behind various human conditions fails to be applied in each individual condition thoroughly. Since antiquity, some rationalists, historians and political thinkers have created the fixed knowledge, ideologies, truths and principles but such canonical boundaries are being questioned and demolished in the course of time. So, this research aims to create radical thought and action to question and break such massive and authorized boundaries through the character of Sarath.

The protagonist of *Anil's Ghost*, Anil is a Sri Lankan woman who left her native country to become a forensic pathologist in the United Kingdom and eventually the United States. She returns to Sri Lanka with her newly learned skills as part of a Human Rights Investigation along with a group of people. During her investigation, she finds a strange, unidentified skeleton which leads her to attempt to advocate and bring justice to all the nameless victims of the civil war currently taking place in Sri Lanka. The writer explores postmodern boundaries, weaving together a narrative of the writer's own past throughout the narration of Sarath. This element comes through forcefully in *Anil's Ghost* as the whole narrative is a collage of old places and memories. It is the work of the protagonist to find her way in this maze. In

this narrative, history coalesces with the personal histories of the characters and builds on a larger theme of war.

Anil's Ghost questions the existence of the contemporary grand narrative inside the story of Sarath, which also helps to question human history. Human history and truth are taken as the matter of truth and reliable but they are unable to be fixed and to be applied in each and every cases due to changeability of time and truth. Various ideological characteristics, incomprehensible nature of human phenomena, impossibility of certainty, and changeable nature of memories in the narration of Sarath appear as unreliable.

The study dramatizes the logic of historical truth and generalizations of principles about human condition. Sarath, a character of the novel, travels over his long course of life to find truth or conclusion. He memorizes and examines the time and events in his life such The Civil War of Srilanka, his escape from concentration camp, sex, separation, re-meeting, job and makes his own history but without any proofs. He finds no historical fixity and true general principles behind the human conditions. He finally comes to question and deconstruct the notion of historicity and certain principles behind the phenomena of human life. Such issues in the novel examines the problem in historicity and generalization on human conditions and raises the issue of deconstruction of both of historicism and new historicism and authoritative general principle about human life. How do the so-called rationalists, historians and authoritative institutions create false history? How are fixed canonical boundaries created by the certain person in the power? Why historical truth cannot be created? How generalizations about history and human conditions fail to speak the truths? Why and how such canonical boundaries are questioned and demolished in the course of time? How pre-determined fix general knowledge and principles cannot be

applied in each time and each particular case? These are some of the questions, this research raise to solve. The novel is the story of Sarath who travels long course of his life with several ups and downs. Sarath is now living in New York with his family. He is a student of Anil who is knowldgeous about Archeology. With his one good eye, he looks through the telescope of history, exploring the cultural landscape of asrilnka. Ondaatje uses language to show how Sarath grows during this year. His sentences becomes more structured and organized and he learns many new words that he constantly tries to implement in his letters. Every time Sarath is not certain about the meaning of a word he puts them in brackets, but he still learns the confidence to use them: “It seems like a rather ‘auspicious’ beginning” (Ondaatje 91). Our focus is often moved onto how Sarath writes, since he talks about it multiple times during the novel: “I should stick to the subject, though. That is what my teacher Anil tells me to do because I write kind of the way I talk” (Ondaatje 12). The language is also a sign of how Sarath is doing. In a letter at the end, where he is realizing what his aunt Helen did to him, his writing is in disarray in terms of structure and language. A critic named Donald Cromwell puts forwards his concept aboutl Ondaatje’s discussion about memory in the novel:

In addressing these questions, Ondaatje’ voice is potently enigmatic when objective details are purposely left out. He spares on physical details as if to shy away from the hard facts that memory can’t provide. The only physical detail we get about any of Sarath’s statement is the way they wear their hair. Dialogue and gossip instead form the basis of what Sarath remembers, which makes nearly every conversation doubly interpreted. As Sarath says later in life, All my ‘conclusions’ are reversible. (21)

Donald talks about the feeble memory of Sarath in this commentary. Another critic Daniel Hartman has analyzed the novel from the perspective of the memory.

Memory, individual rather than collective, accounts for who we are and what we have become. And early memory is particularly valuable, though it can be misconstrued. Its influence can persist throughout adult life, though what is cause and what effect may be difficult to judge.

In this short but compelling novel, a critic Hartman tracks the origin of one particular memory through a long and apparently uneventful life towards an explanation that leaves traces of unease that are difficult to dismiss. In this connection, he further adds:

The facts are quite simple. Three school-friends, of whom the narrator, Sarath, is one, are joined by a fourth, Adrian Patrick, who is much cleverer than any of them. Nor can he understand why Sarath's mother should leave him a small legacy and the news that she possesses... Sarath's diary, which was the virtual gallery of incidents of her own life. (52)

What remains in his memory is the discomfort he felt on that weekend, a discomfort he cannot explain even at an advanced age. The clue might lie in the diary, but attempts to get hold of it are unavailing. He is up against an initial misalliance to which others are being added, containing the same characters but no further explanation. However the present research does not go against the above mentioned criticisms, rather it seeks to find out the dialectics of the present grand narrative in every respect.

Ondaatje's novels are characterized by the way that carries regret, emotional conflict, nostalgia and yearning for freedom. Ondaatje's growing popularity has resulted in a substantial and wide-ranging body of critical responses to his novels,

primarily in the form of interviews and reviews in the press and popular media.

Ondaatje was thus for a time widely regarded as a writer of “popular” rather than “serious” fiction. Due to his public acknowledgement of his literary ability, he has won the Pulitzer Prize thrice (Hartman 12). A body of academic or scholarly criticism has been slow to emerge.

Peter Childs confirms Ondaatje as a “serious writer in his sensitivity to exploring issues facing contemporary humanism and liberalism such as the challenges of living in a changing world, the ability to create a balance between individual freedom and moral responsibility” (02). He regards Ondaatje as one of the key figures of contemporary English fiction. Arianna Vailas seeks to establish the triangular relationship amidst dystopia, present and future. His view about the power of *Anil's Ghost* to set up link amidst these three things is straightforwardly mentioned below:

Dystopian novels incriminate the present in their distorted representations of an imminent future. Ondaatje's novel recounts the story of The Boy, reflecting upon their prescribed life within a confined community. Her experiences take place in a world that is uncannily akin to our own, the only major difference being that human cloning is at the forefront of modern medicine, an issue over which scientists and ethicists of this world are still debating. (23)

The question of ethics is inherently involved in the nurturing of mechanical hounds' to securing and enhancing the lives of the people. This novel has raised several questions like whether is it ethically admissible to mechanical hounds' as subhuman beings or not and whether is it anti-humanistic to compel clones to donate their organs to those suffers from incurable diseases. Along with these questions, the notion of humanism comes to be intermingled.

There are an increasing number of critical commentaries, some of which have been referred to in this study, that demonstrate the range of Ondaatje's talent. Particularly on his fictions that move away from the disturbing and disruptive sensationalized themes. Critical evaluations of his later work agree that his fiction has become a discussion point for social and cultural commentary. For example, Peter Child again comments that Ondaatje's "opens the novel to a psychological realm in which the sense of crisis was felt focuses on a detailed discussion on the binary of Darwinism and literature in *Anil's Ghost*" (25). Child briefly draws parallels between historical accuracy in representations of The Civil War of Srilanka and the events the text drawing comparisons to other historical texts and news media clippings. He convincingly shows how Ondaatje reflects human consciousness of moral being in which we seek to find unity out of randomness, order out of chaos, and to pursue 'truth' in the process. For Child, the novel should emulate this dynamic moral thought.

The research draws on concept of New Historicism along with pre- established legal and formal principles behind any specific human conditions as the novel questions upon such agenda. Stephen Greenblatt's ideas of fictitious nature of truth is applied to make the thesis prove the hypothesis. Different extracts from novel related to the notion of inadequacy of history and principles on human condition will be brought to prove inadequacy of generalization about history and human life. Foucauldian concept of discursive knowledge and has been used to challenge the hitherto grand narrative and to prove the fictionalization of history in the novel *Anil's Ghost*.

New historicism, which emerged in the late 1970s, rejects both traditional historicism's marginalization of literature and new criticism's covered of the literary

text in a timeless dimension beyond history. For new historical critics, a literary text does not presents the author's intention or illustrate the spirit of the age that produced it, as traditional literary historians asserted. New historicists ask, "How has the event been interpreted?" and "what do the interpretations tells us about the interpreters?"(Vesser 288) New historicists, strictly a matter of interpretation are not fact. There is no such thing as a presentation of facts, but there is only interpretation.

Furthermore, new historicists argue that reliable interpretations are, difficult to produce for many reasons. Any two historians may disagree about the constitutes progress and those terms which are not the matters of definition. The main concept of new historicism is that new historicists believe in the impossibility of objective analysis. Discourse is a social language created by particular cultural conditions at a particular time and place, and it expresses a particular way of understanding human experience. Although the word discourse has roughly the same meaning as the word ideology, and the two terms are often used interchangeably, the word discourse draws attention to the role of language as the vehicle of ideology.

New historicism views historical accounts as narratives, as stories, that are inevitably biased according to the point of view, conscious or unconscious, for those who write them. The more unaware historians are of their biases-that is, the more "objective" they think are-the more those biases are able to control their narratives.

Miichael Foucault is quite possibly the most influential critic of the last quarter-century. His interest in history is about nonlinearity of history. His enterprise is essentially to historical discourse and to textualized history. Foucault refuses to see history in terms of linearity and development. Rather, he sees it in terms of a kind of power struggle. Power for Foucault is not necessarily a repressive, tyrannical things; it is a generative, productive force. Power is that which binds together the disparate

forces of a society (even though that binding is illusory). No event stems from a single, coherent cause, but is the product of a vast network of signification and 'power'. This is evident in his volume *Discipline and Punish* (1997).

Stephen Greenblatt's established as a major figure of New Historicism from studies of the Renaissance. He in his book *Poetics of Culture* takes history as a text that is interpreted by different cultures to fit the ideological needs of their own power structures, which is a new historical concern. In this context, new historicism might be defined as the history of stories cultures tell themselves about themselves for Greenblatt. Or, as a corrective to some traditional historical accounts, new historicism might be defined as the history of lies cultures tell themselves. Thus, there is no history, in the traditional sense of the term. There are only representations of history for him. Likewise another critic Louis A. Montrose takes history as texts and textualization of history. He emphasis on a dynamic, temporal model of culture and ideology-a ceaseless jostling among dominant and subordinate positions, a ceaseless interplay of continuity and change-such a perspective opens both the object and the practice of cultural poetics to history.

Alun Munslow in his text *Deconstructing History* questions the reliability of the history. For Munslow, history (as a discrete body of institutionalized knowledge-production, i.e., discourse) must reconcile itself with its postmodern self-consciousness; a reflexive self-consciousness that drapes a curtain of doubt over the hard-line empiricism that has defined history as a distinct and organized discipline since the late 19th century. Munslow provides an admirable survey of how our postmodern suspicion of representational thinking and the "metaphysics of presence" undermines and transforms conventional historical thinking and practice.

Deconstructing History does not entail an actual "deconstructive" reading of history

(780). Rather, it is an introduction to the intellectual and academic problems pertaining to history as discipline – specifically; “the challenges that a deconstructive impulse poses for the vast nexus of foundational beliefs and unshakable certitudes underlying modern academic historical writing and research” (87). Munslow uses the word “deconstruction” he is using the work of Jacques Derrida, or any particular deconstructive thinker; but rather, “deconstruction” for Munslo stands for an intellectual skepticism with regards many predominating assumptions and presuppositions held immutable in Western thinking and culture. And while Munslow’s definition of “deconstruction” inevitably draws on many of the ideas and problems commonly associated with that body of thought, he relinquishes any responsibility or obligation to pay particular fidelity to any definitive “theory” or “school” resembling “deconstruction.” In addition, this is where the first problem arises: Munslow understands deconstruction as a way of “reading” history is purely functional. “The deconstructive impulse rests in a peeling-back process [that] seeks out that which is repressed in the text (primary or secondary) – not only what is hidden from the naïve reader but also what is hidden from the intention of author(s)” (111). What’s lost here is the way in which the text is supposed to deconstruct itself.

The Anil’s Ghost is about the elusiveness of identity and the treachery of memory, regret and the hope of redemption. Though its atmosphere is dreamlike, it actually is hyper-realistic, portraying with enigmatic precision of a very high order “real” life as each of us actually experiences it. Thus, the novel is the first person account of mentally deformed narrator Sarath who lives in New York. He wants to account the historical truth and personal truth as real eyewitness. However her all efforts topple down like the house of cards.

In his book *The Fiction of Narrative* Hyden White perceives narrative as a

prose written lingual utterance that has a development of events in a way that grants them with coherence and understandability. White views narrative as a complex of events spread across a sequence of verbally organized times in a manner that creates a gradual development of the events into a comprehensible form. For White, of more importance than the distinction between fiction and nonfiction is the distinction between confrontations and representations, that is, “between things happening in our immediate environment and things being represented to us as happening at other times or in other places” (03). This coincides roughly, he says, “with the distinction between situations that afford the possibility of action and those that do not” (03). He further asserts:

All this shows is that it might be unclear at the outset whether a representation relation could be turned into a confrontation relation. Representation relations which cannot will include all fictional representations and also all non-fictional representations where we lack instrumental beliefs that would enable us to act: that is, all non-fictional representations that are out of our grasp because they are separated in time, or space, or both. (50)

In terms of history, White, after discussing the literary technique of foreshadowing, that and so with history: to confer meaning retrospectively, to see one event in light of another as narrativistically connected is precisely what history does. So in viewing a past via present knowledge surely changes how that past is interpreted, and how it is explained.

Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* depicts the narrative of Anil who is a brilliant, young woman who spent quite a few years abroad and was hence unaware of the political climate of Sri Lanka. After having been outside the country for 15 years, she finally returns to her homeland. The reason for her visit is that there has been a report of mysterious deaths in Sri Lanka in the wake of the civil war. Her companion in her journey is an archaeologist, Sarath, who helps her in the expedition. On their expedition, they find bones there are clearly out of place and don't match the timeline of the place. They come to the conclusion that these bones must be the body of a person who has recently died. Anil becomes increasingly skeptical of Sarath on her quest to find the truth. She starts to censor herself in front of him just to be on the safer side. Anil and Sarath then meet Gamini, an emergency doctor and Sarath's brother. She finds out that Gamini has an involvement in the political dynamics of the country. He tells them about the quotidian atrocities faced by the people in the face of the war. Eventually Anil and Sarath identify the body and Anil starts writing a report on her findings. However, there is a mysterious disappearance of the skeleton which complicates matters.

The concept of new historicism was developed from the concept of genealogy developed by Friedrich Nietzsche. Later Michel Foucault developed the concept of new historicism questioning the old archeological model of history. Historicists, greatly influenced by Michel Foucault's concept of discursive analysis of Power relation, come to give another strategy of political reading of the texts. The power relations get reflected through discourses which do not find overt manifestations but implicitly expressed in the text. Foucault further focused upon the intricately structured power relations in a given culture at a given time to demonstrate, how that society controls its member through constructing and defining what appears to be

universal. It implies that New Historicists “aspired to a politics of culture” which is covertly manifested in a text because power structure is administered by the state. “The state’s control of its citizenry was internal rather than external. The state subjected its people by creating them as subjects, devising fixed categories under which people could be described and thus controlled.” This was the conjunction Foucault evoked as “Power Knowledge” (Foucault 86). Foucault observes History as the discourse between the social and the aesthetic circular in his text *Discipline and Punish*. He further defines history as:

The final traits of history is its affirmation with knowledge as perspective. Historians take unusual pains to erase the element in their work which reveal their ground in in a particular time and place, their preferences in a controversy the unavoidable obstacles of their passion. Nietzsche’s version of historical sense is explicit in its perspective and acknowledge in its system of injustice. (90)

Foucault attempts to discover the system of particular discourse and relate it with the study of power and knowledge. He interprets it as essential historical discourse and textualization of history. He refuses history in terms of linearity and development. Rather he observes history in terms of power struggle. Historical continuity for Foucault is paradoxically discontinuity. Knowledge is not knowledge of self rather it is only perspective.

The very beginning of *Anil’s Ghost* arouses feeble situation of the protagonist. Sarath’s biography is conflicting wit in his own narrations. As an adult, he lays claim to be a clever wit memory: “I figure that maybe I can write something that you can relate to” (16). He gains this symbolic dimension because, like someone in a myth, he came back from the death. However, he is reluctant to claim the authority that seems

to belong to him as a survivor. His life seems sorted out, a chain of little victories and failures with no real unresolved past mysteries.

Sarath fails to capture the reality and lost in the maze-like experiences. He is psychologically deformed due to regular use of drugs. His eyes are also dull due to misshapen of accident. In Greek myth, Tiresias's blindness is the price of his ability to see the future, but Sarath, who has lost only one eye, seems to have gained only partial insight into the cosmos which is enough to ask questions but not enough to find answers. This incomplete mysticism is captured in one of the novel's most memorable passages, when Sarath sees some illegible graffiti on a vacant building: "Most scrawls could be ignored. These for some reason caught on with Mr. Sarath as pertinent. Eloquent. Of what ? Of future nonbeing . . . But also of the greatness of eternity which shall lift us from this present shallowness" (45).

Anil's Ghost is loaded with Sarath's past activities and his present responses. He looks back and tries to find truth about events which happened in the past not so much to him, but to people with whom he was once connected. He tries to find out what exactly happened and how he was personally involved in it. The novel is concerned almost exclusively with memories. For Sarath, there is no evidence to support or disprove truthfulness of his memories in the first part of the book, apart from his own reflections of their reliability. In addition, Sarath gives the reliability of his memories many thoughts. Through the whole novel, Sarath challenges the exactness of memory, either by his own thinking, or through his recollections of discussions between his friends. Sarath spent most of the years as a reader in school, revolving around with English teacher Anil. In particular, he was good friends with English teacher, however he claims that he was good friend of different writers. However, about this incident there is no objective record.

Sarath's constant questioning of truthfulness of his own memory makes the reader aware of her unreliability. Paradoxically, at the same time, it gives Sarath an aura of frankness and honesty. Sarath of course is an unreliable character, but his unreliability seems to result from fallibility of memory, not from a twisted personality and intentional lying. Sarath seems to be as honest with the reader just as he is with himself. This appears as the problem, however, because it is often hard for her to confess himself bad feelings or to recall unpleasant or shameful memories. This tendency can be observed:

To tell you the truth I do not know where they are appropriate to use. I am not saying that you should not know them. You should absolutely. But I just have never heard any one use the word corpulent. And jaundice ever in my life.

That includes teachers. So what is the point of using words nobody else knows or can say comfortably? (Ondaatje 14)

Problem in objective truth is accepted by Sarath himself. Truth is no more than representation. It is difficult to reach nearer to objective truth. One should be satisfied with symbols.

Sarath sometimes turns to the reader in search of compassion or in an attempt to be emphatic. Indeed a boy involving in reading of various novels like *The Cather in the Rhys* and *The Side of Paradise*, he involves in social and political questions. He is not an self-denying man. Whatever May have been the statement for Sarath about sexual intercourse he is not reliable in his account. His perception towards Helen, a rich, beautiful and promiscuous young woman whose sexuality is offensively ripe justifies the same fact of his sexual attraction: "And she kissed me she kissed me. It was a kind of kiss that I cannot tell my friend" (78). That comment on sexual smell is not new for Sarath.

Pioneers of new historicism theory are Michel Foucault and Stephen Greenblatt. The New Historicists have drawn upon Foucauldian tenet of discursive nature of literature which is a cultural construct; however, a complete harmony in society is illusory because constant but repressed struggles keep on running parallel between powerful and powerless in the society. In literature, the suppressive and marginalized voices against dominant power structure and stricture is heard implicitly, meaning thereby, text does not display the dominant and overt history, however hidden history or histories are intertwined in literature.

Stephen Greenblatt allows the strategy of speaking with the dead, as an ethnographer and writer speak with the living being while alive, so the reader / critic and New Historicist can speak with the writer through his text, thus positioning the new historicist as a second interpreter. Thus a New Historicist tries to read the text of a past author who was present in his own time as an ethnographer. Seturaman remarks that this condition does not allow a New Historicist to be objective in his study of the work composed in remote past: “The New Historicism, while trying to understand history cannot be objective and we can never recover the past without our own present self modifying what used to be considered objective and stable” (574).

Likewise, Jackson too speaks with the same canon as he writes:

Nevertheless, as readers of past literature, we are demonstrably decayed because we do not bring to it the experience that it required for its imaginative and intellectual realization in its own time; instead we bring the experience that is required for the realization of literature in our time, an experience in which only fragments of the earlier experience survive. The consequence is in several respects analogous to the antique statue’s loss of limbs. (38)

Just as an antique and broken image needs repair to come in its previous condition, similarly the text can be actualized by the reader with his present perception because through this he tries to reconstruct the past with his imaginative faculty, while at the same time maintaining a close nexus with the present too. The suggestion being that the New Historicists lay emphasis on the necessity of awareness of the critic while analyzing a text because he belongs to present but has to read the text written in the past and has to reconstruct the past with two sorts of historicity working parallel.

The narrative of Sarath shows that how his memories which did not fit into his own perception have altered the incidents of the novel. He is “. . . Big Boy just like we always did," (Ondaatje 212). It is late night in his house, Sarath cannot sleep, partly because he is obsessed with the pickpocket he has seen at work on the bus he takes to.

He notices that pickpocket as "a powerful Negro in a camel's-hair coat, dressed with extraordinary elegance" (Ondaatje 48). He has cornered on that man and is going through an old man's wallet, "still in rapid currents with his heart, like an escaping creature racing away from him"(49). Sarath pulls the cord and gets off the bus, hoping that the pickpocket will not follow. He dodges into a building and waits for a while, then makes his way to a hamburger joint where he orders a cup of tea. He does not see the pickpocket and thinks pickpocket has eluded him. "By now Sarath's greatest need was for his bed. But he knew something about lying low. He had learned at school, in forests, cellars, passageways, cemeteries" (50). He fails to recognize and remember who exactly that pick pocket was? Sarath has seen the pickpocket at work several times since the first sighting, but when he tried to report to the police, He fails to report the exact incident. It is Sarath, however, who always found it difficult to unrest that incident of pick pocketing and perceived it as an issue.

Sarath also fears, that it will also happen to him, who will be “left with a lifetime of bitterness” - that is the reason, why he decided to suppress memories of that incident (50). Sarath’s present situation, concerning his present state of mind, it is ironic to see. What he narrates is no more than fabricated narration. Moreover, Sarath’s character falls rather in the category of the “social backdrop”, or “cartoonist’s doodle” (Smith 12).

Anil’s Ghost is a frame story the fact that readers learn late in the plot. Part one, two, and three describes a fictional realistic universe, which is shattered in the novel’s epilogue where it is revealed that the novel’s protagonist is Sarath. In the beginning, he explains how he has manipulated events to fit into her narrative intended to make amend for the damage of his life. The narrative, thus, entails a historical perspective, because it is self-consciously aware of its own status as fiction and automatically questions the relationship between fiction and reality. The novel questions what is considered the truth when fiction is presented as reality. Postmodern theory focuses on what history and literature share, rather than what separates them:

They have both been seen to derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic construct, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality. (Hutcheon 105)

In postmodern theory, history is not considered obsolete, but is rethought as a human construct. In other words, history is a factual representation rather than a fact. It does not deny that the past existed, it only argues that history only will be accessible through text: “We cannot know the past except through its texts: its documents, its

evidence, even its eye-witness accounts are texts.”(16). Historical facts will only be accessible through a representation, made available in textual form. Linda Hutcheon has coined novels that combine history with a historical perspective as ‘historiographic fiction’, because they implement a self-reflective perspective while claiming to portray historical events and personages. Hutcheon considers these novels not just metafictional, nor historical because they are both metafictionally self-reflexive while speaking about real historical realities (Hutcheon 5).

Anil's Ghost is a historical novel because it is about The Civil War of Srilanka. Jie Han and Zhenli Wang argue that the novel is historical because of how “the fates of individuals are intermingled which resembles the reality of history and society. And history, fact and fiction are knitted into the narrative framework.” (136).

What makes *Anil's Ghost* different from the classic understanding of a historical novel is that Ondaatje offers more information than the historian. Ondaatje combines historical facts with fiction, therefore, automatically blurring the lines between fact and fiction. The effect is that he creates a new version of the whole by narrating the past in anew manner. As a result of this, Ondaatje provides a number of possibilities that would have been ignored by the historians, as these are not part of the historical truth. However, Han and Wang argue that these possibilities are no less real than historical facts: “Those possibilities, whether they are real history of the past or not, are no less real in his fictionalized world.” (137). Ondaatje, especially, blurs the lines between fact and fiction in the scenes where he depicts Sarath's presentation about the novel *On The Road*. Here, he combines the historical event with his storytelling. In their article, Han and Wange count that many of Sarath's depictions of war are influenced by his father's experiences during the Second The Civil War of Srilanka, which makes his methods similar to that of the historians. While the

historical facts may not be depicted mimetically, they are still historical facts because “in his fictional world, history becomes fictionalized. The writer’s design of plot and structure reflects his attitude towards history.” (137). In that way, *Anil’s Ghost* becomes a historical novel with a postmodern perspective, because the intention is not to depict real life events mimetically, but to depict a representation, or a revision, rather, of the past in a new context .

The historical aspect that is added to the narrative in *Anil’s Ghost* creates a parallel between the storyline of Ondaatje’s novel and the construction of his novel. In the construction of his novel, Ondaatje implements historical facts particularly his aspect of presenting literary history in order to underline the history of The Civil War of Srilanka . Additionally, the historical aspect is added in the meta fictional frame, because Ondaatje is using Sarath to make the reader aware of the choices he has made in the process of rewriting his own historical past. Sarath’s presentation of novels he read never be factual and will always be a reconstruction of a factual event from the perspective of the present. The constructed nature of the depiction of novels, therefore, serves as a parallel to Sarath’s plot construction. Sarath can never factually represent his own historical past, but will again be a particular construction seeking to achieve a particular effect his relationship between history as an objective, external set of events and individual experience as subjective and fallible is an interesting tension. The historical novel use both the individual experience of the character with the historical context in order to create a multidimensional narrative as Manzoni explains “The historical novelist is required to give not just the bare bones of history, but something richer, more complete. In a way you want him to put the flesh back on the skeleton that is history” (3). The individual experience is the breathing flesh whilst the history is the sturdy skeleton and both novelists bring this metaphor alive in

their novels.

Foucault considers history in the model of discursive knowledge. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* he rejects the traditional historians' tendency to read straightforward narratives of progress in the historical record: "For many years now," he writes, "historians have preferred to turn their attention to long periods, as if, beneath the shifts and changes of political events, they were trying to reveal the stable, almost indestructible system of checks and balances, the irreversible processes, the constant readjustments, the underlying tendencies that gather force, and are then suddenly reversed after centuries of continuity, the movements of accumulation and slow saturation, the great silent, motionless bases that traditional history has covered with a thick layer of events" (3). Foucault, by contrast, argues that one should seek to reconstitute not large "periods" or "centuries" but "phenomena of rupture, of discontinuity" (4). The problem, he argues, "is no longer one of tradition, of tracing a line, but one of division, of limits" (5). Instead of presenting a monolithic version of a given period, Foucault argues that we must reveal how any given period reveals "several pasts, several forms of connection, several hierarchies of importance, several networks of determination, several teleologies, for one and the same science, as its present undergoes change: thus historical descriptions are necessarily ordered by the present state of knowledge, they increase with every transformation and never cease, in turn, to break with themselves" (5). Foucault adopts the term "archaeology" to designate his historical method and he articulates what he means by that term by specifying how his method differs from both traditional history and the traditional history of ideas.

In *Anil's Ghost*, Sarath uses narrative in order to account the history, as an external set of events, to reshape it using his story. Throughout the novel, the first

person narration gives the readers a false sense of reassurance where at the end of the novel, it is revealed that it is in fact Sarath's unreliability. Barnes argues "How are we, as readers, to believe in the validity of the innermost thoughts and motivations of these characters when, as it turns out, they are told from the perspective of someone who has a clear interest in how we judge the story." The diverse narrative perspective gives the reader a chance to experience history in different perspective based on the characters individual experience. However Sarath believed that unlike objective sense of history, her stories was "under no obligation to the truth, he had promised no- one a chronicle 280)". He blurs the link between history and stories and it appears that neither is telling the truth but they both work together in order to create meaning. History is created because someone has to give their account what has happened, how else one would know about the suffering of soldiers in The Civil War of Srilanka or the French Revolution and it is the person's individual experience is that account is from. The account of a German in the Holocaust and a Jew would be distinctly different but it is in literature that "the only place Sarath could be free. (280)" to create what she wishes, whatever ending she wanted, it was a place she could reshape history. However, he discovers that "in later years, he regretted not being more factual, not providing himself with a store of raw material. I would have been useful to know what happened, what it looked like, who was there, what was said" (Ondaatje 280). His memory, his individual experience of history does not compare to the objective and factual idea of history, it is that "raw material" (280).

Discursive nature of truth can be further explored through Sarath's character. Sarath is characterized as an adult, who cannot distinguish between the fictive world and real life, we must remember how that presentation of Sarath derives from himself. In other words, he has chosen to represent himself this way because it will give a particular

effect. A critic Finney characterizes Sarath as a man who lets art shape his life just as much as he shapes that life into his art: “His observation of life around him is conditioned by the fictive world that holds his in its grip” (78).

Sarath perceives both the dream and reality in the same line. Sarath’s life is shaped around the books he reads and he only understands the world through familiar narratives. In the library, her first reaction is to understand the scene from a point of view he is already familiar with:

Couldn’t remember where I heard it or read it. I said maybe it was in *This Side of Paradise* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. There’s a place near the end of the book where the main kid is picked up by some older gentleman. They are both going to an Ivy League football game, and they have this debate. The older gentleman is established. The kid is “jaded”. Anyway, they have this discussion, and the kid is an idealist in a temporary way. He talks about his “restless generation” and things like that. (Ondaatje 105)

The misinterpretations of events that make her notice Sarath looking “so huge and wild” (Ondaatje 123) and his previous mention of him as “a maniac” (Ondaatje 119) are indications that “Sarath is shaped by a melodramatic imagination that originates in the books he has read.” (Finney 79). Sarath draws on literature in all shapes of her life, which makes him enable to disentangle his life from the things he reads in her books. Literature is intervened in every decision he makes and everything he perceives, causing his to misinterpret particular events.

The reader, however, does not have enough information to decide whether to believe Sarath and whether to stand on his side or not. For instance, Sarath did not say how and why exactly he came to New York. There is a basic paradox in the way.

Ondaatje makes use of Sarath’s voice. Even as Sarath disclaims the moral authority of

the survivor, the logic of the novel depends on that very authority to sustain its deep criticisms of Sirilankan society. Ondaatje elides the contradiction somewhat by making Sarath a very untypical Sirilankan. We learn that he spent most of the years as a student in school, palling around with English intellectuals and the books. In particular, he claims that he was good friends with J.D .Salinger, “who acts in several ways the novel’s imaginative foil” (Smith 12).

Sarath seems very little interested in social and political questions. The disaster he sees unfolding around him is spiritual, moral, and above all Sarath’s view of his past is challenged only by his own thoughts about (un)reliability of memory. He does not have any other sources of information about his past than his memories - no tangible records, and with people who could remember the same events as him he is either no longer in contact, or they are dead. So he does not expect to find out much about his past anymore. Yet, with the strange inheritance, new questions arise. He does not deserve knowledge about literary texts and writers. He does not know anything about the situational context in which it was written, he does not know what precedes and what follows. Yet he tries for its interpretation, especially of the last, unfinished sentence. At the point Sarath starts to think, whether his settling for a content, peaceable life was a good option. “Yes indeed if Sarath had seen more clearly, acted more decisively, held to truer moral values, settled less easily for a passive peaceableness which he first called happiness and later contentment. If Sarath hadn’t been fearful, hadn’t counted on the approval of others for his own self-approval...” (Barnes 88 – 89). As Sarath searches for tangible evidence of his past, his old feelings start to reappear and with them, long buried, suppressed memories. “Just when you think, everything is a matter of decrease, of subtraction and division, your brain, your memory Maysurprise you. As if it’s saying: Don’t imagine you can rely

on some comforting process of gradual decline life's much more complicated than that" (Barnes 112). When his old feelings for his past renew, the old memories connected with it come up. All these memories are strongly connected with emotions, which he forgot thanks to his "instinct for self preservation" (Barnes 112). Again, apart from political reading of the text, New Historicists also suggest that since literary text embodies numerous voices and is discursive in nature, hence, an innovative process of reading is but a quintessential methodology to be adopted and that best method is of dismantling the text which is the prominent feature of deconstruction.

This validates that fact that after dismantling the texts the multiplicity of meaning be put forth "On the one hand, therefore, historicism is suspicious of the stories the past tells about itself; on the other hand, it is equally suspicious of its own partisanship. It offers up both its past and its present for ideological scrutiny." (Hamilton Intro 3). This is because "the textuality of the text leads to its textuality is closer to deconstructive method of studying the text through its 'polysemy' and expanding traces" (Finney 223). Since text is the product of society and embodies it and hence contains multiple meanings as Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of 'dialogic' nature of text overlaps with this. Roger Webster says that language for Bakhtin has the potentiality of multiplicity because language "for Bakhtin is not in any sense fixed and stable but always in a state of flux; meaning is never singular and uncontested but rather plural and contested" (40). According to Bakhtin language is dialogic and the text displays 'many voiced' and 'heteroglossia.'

At the end of the novel Sarath writes letter to unknown reader. We come learn more about the circumstances of his own life through this note. However, we notice about his nerves -- "I do not know what is wrong with me. It's like all I can do is keep

writing this gibberish to keep from braking apart." (Ondaatje 205). Ananda agreed that he should move, and "told everyone that her father's lifework, his memoir of Salinger" (Ondaatje 256). Yet "once all the questions are answered, the reader is left in the same state that Sarath is in the book's final pages—floored at life's essential mysteries, and frustrated that they cannot be relived" (Hartman 12). Sarath's searching for answers about his past caused reappearance of his repressed emotions and memories: it induced Sarath to revise his past actions and his way of thinking. It removed Sarath's protective shield of self-deception and brought a strong feelings of remorse and unrest.

Finally, The theme of history in the novel discussed occurs on two levels – on the level of the narration and on the level of the plotline. In the narration the theme of memory is implemented by the unreliable narrator Sarath who tells story depending largely or exclusively on his subjective recollections of the past. Ondaatje essentially creates a plot with the purpose of presenting how narratives are constructed by plot structures. He does this by creating a character like Sarath, who is an 'author' himself. Sarath's story is autobiographical, however, with his manipulations of events we learn that has essentially created a plot structure, which has the purpose of achieving particular effects. Additionally, it is evident that he lets the plot actually produce events that never happened, again, emphasizing the constructed nature of her narrative. The different ontological levels of control in the story serve to understand how all narratives are plot structures, which has the purpose of creating particular effects. Ondaatje has, for example, chosen to let Sarath end up with vascular dementia, which lets him have an ethical dimension to his narrative. As readers, we are again confronted with the notion that what seemed like a realistic storyline is not at all realistic, because we never know whether Sarath have forgotten certain events.

Memory in the plot is covered by the interconnection with other themes and by the importance of the theme for the story. As Sarath searches for tangible evidence of his past, his old feelings start to reappear and with them, long buried, suppressed memories. “Just when you think, everything is a matter of decrease, of subtraction and division, your brain, your memory may surprise you. As if it’s saying: Don’t imagine you can rely on some comforting process of gradual decline – life’s much more complicated than that” (Ondaatje 112). When his old feelings for holocaust, the old memories connected with it come up. All these memories are strongly connected with emotions, which he forgot due to “instinct for self preservation”(112). Therefore, suddenly he remembers Hele’s dancing in her room and the feeling of intimacy between them, although earlier he mentioned Helen never danced. At the end of the novel, Sarath finds out why Helen leaves him a notebook. We learn more about the circumstances of mental disorder. Yet “I told this to my psychiatrist, but he said it was too soon to draw any conclusion” (Ondaatje 106). Sarath’s searching for answers about his past caused reappearance of his repressed emotions and memories: it induced Sarath to revise his past actions and his way of thinking. It removed Sarath’s protective shield of self-deception and brought a strong feelings of remorse and unrest.

In *Anil’s Ghost*, the retired narrator Sarath resumes his content and rather uninteresting life. He came to a point, when he accepted his life as it was, non-special and average, but as he says, peaceable, with no reason to feel regrets about his past. As a narrator, he tries to be honest, but he himself is aware of the unreliability of his memories and admits that he has no evidence to ground his story. For the reader, the clues for Sarath’s unreliability are his unwillingness to recall unpleasant memories or his searching for the reader’s compassion while recalling controversial matter. When

a mysterious bequest from literary history, The Civil War of Srilanka, and with it a corroboration of her past actions, appears on the scene, Sarath is induced to revise his notion of his past. His feelings and memories from the past which he deliberately forgot reappear. As his self-preserving shell breaks, Sarath is left with feeling of loneliness, remorse, and ultimately dies in the novel.

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