

Postmodern Historiography in Michael Ondaatje's *Running in The Family*

Michael Ondaatje' nin *Aile İçinde Olanlar* Adlı Romanında Postmodern Tarih Yazımı

Abdullah Emin YAZICI¹
Samet GÜVEN²

Araştırma Makalesi / *Research Article*
Geliş Tarihi / *Received*: 27.09.2021
Kabul Tarihi / *Accepted*: 09.01.2022
Doi: 10.48146/odusobiad.997638

Atıf / Citation: Yazıcı, A. E. ve Güven, S., (2022). "Postmodern Historiography in Michael Ondaatje's *Running in The Family*" *ODÜSOBİAD* 12 (1), 15-32, Doi: 10.48146/odusobiad.997638

Abstract

Postmodernism redefines the term of historiography, and it questions the clear-cut distinction of history and fiction since the movement maintains a notion that history is constructed by human beings just like literature. Furthermore, postmodern thinkers interrogate the role of a historiographer, and how history is generated. They claim that historiography cannot exclude itself from the subjective or ideological manners of the historiographer as he is a person with his own emotions and judgements. Along with the related premises of postmodern scholars, and with the framework of Linda Hutcheon's ideas upon historiography in particular, this study is based on a close reading of an autobiographical novel of Michael Ondaatje. The present article aims to analyze the novel in terms of how history is problematized in the context of the national history of the author's birthplace, the past of his family members, and the intertexts that Ondaatje offers to his readers. The article seeks answers to the questions that are related to the credibility of a historian and generating an objective history. In this regard, it is argued that history exists in a state of uncertainty due to the wealth of interpreters and interpretations.

Keywords: *Postmodernism, fiction, historiographic metafiction, Linda Hutcheon, credibility of historiography*

Öz

Postmodernizm, tarih yazımı kavramını tekrar gözden geçirir ve bu akım, tarihinde aynı edebiyat gibi insan tarafından oluşturulması nedeniyle tarih ve kurmaca arasındaki net ayrımı sorgular. Bunun yanı sıra, postmodern düşünürler tarihçinin rolünü ve tarihin nasıl üretildiğini irdeler. Tarih yazarının kendi duygu ve yargılarına sahip bir insan olmasından dolayı öznel ve ideolojik tutumlardan muaf tutulamayacağını savunur. Bu çalışmada postmodern düşünürlerin ilgili görüşleri ve özellikle Linda Hutcheon' ın tarih yazımı konusundaki fikirlerini temel alınarak Sri Lanka doğumlu Kanadalı yazar Michael Ondaatje' ye ait *Running in the Family* (Aile İçinde Olanlar, 1982) olan otobiyografik roman derinlemesine incelenmiştir. Sırasıyla yazarın doğum yerinin ulusal tarihini, aile bireylerinin geçmişlerini ve yazarın okurlarına sunduğu farklı metinlerle tarihin nasıl sorunsallaştırıldığını analiz etmek amaçlanmıştır. Bu makale tarih yazarının ve nesnel tarih yazımının güvenilirliği ile ilgili sorulara cevap aramaktadır. Bu bağlamda, tarihin yorumlar ve yorumcuların zenginliğinden dolayı, bir belirsizlik durumu olduğu tartışılmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Postmodernizm, kurmaca, tarihsel üstkurmaca, Linda Hutcheon, tarih yazımının güvenilirliği.

Introduction

Postmodernism modifies the term of historiography, and it interrogates the discrepancy of history and fiction as it upholds a premise that history is created by human beings just like literature. According to postmodern scholars, historiography is no longer seen as "accessible, as pure fact, independent of individual perception, ideology, or the process of selection necessitated simply by creating a written narrative" (Alison Lee, 1990, s. 29). Furthermore, Friedrich Nietzsche sets three methods of historiography: the monumental, which is generally employed by political historians to influence or encourage people; the antiquarian, coded with the intend of keeping past and protect it;

¹ Sorumlu Yazar, Yüksek Lisans, Karabük Üniversitesi, KARABÜK, e-mail: ae yazici@hotmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0001-6734-8261

² Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Karabük Üniversitesi, KARABÜK, e-mail: sametguven@karabuk.edu.tr, ORCID ID: 0000-0001-6883-5109



and the critical one that needs to be applied together with the previous two methods. The last one aims to "drag the past before the court of justice, investigate it meticulously, and finally condemn it" (Nietzsche, 2007, s. 21). Nietzsche rejects any absolute truth, and he states the necessity of interrogation before accepting.

Moreover, the loss of faith in past has caused diversified focal points in history. The focus of historiography has gravitated to the marginal and the excluded along with the fictional elements, which are not possible to be seen in conventional history writing. The premise that history cannot produce a universal, objective or all-encompassing account of the past has displaced the traditional ways of historiography, which is based on a scientific search of objective truth. Mark Currie claims that "the combination of history and fiction that takes place in 'historiographic metafiction'" can be considered as one of the determining characteristics of postmodern novels (Currie, 2013, s. 93). This leads a conclusion that there can never be a whole comprehension of the past as there is no single reality but an altered one.

Postmodern Historiography

Changes in beliefs, social structure, and any attitudes towards to point of view about the world, inevitably, have affected people and authors of the postmodern era. The literary texts are influenced by these notions as well. Plurality in meaning and self-reflexivity have become the most apparent elements in the literary texts of postmodernism, and postmodern novels are no exceptions. The authors of postmodern historical novels include facts along with their own ideas or fantastic elements as "the deliberate departure from the limits of what is usually accepted as real and normal (Hume, 1984, s. xii). While historical novels of the previous eras deal with truth, postmodern authors of historical novels question it and adopt subjectivity. As Keith Jenkins claims, historiography is "inevitably a personal construct, a manifestation of the historian's perspective as a 'narrator'" (Jenkins, 2003, s. 14). Unlike the traditional idea that regards historiographers as scientists, the postmodernist notion questions the reliability of any documents. In other words, traditional historians are expected to prove their assertions with evidence, however, they are never questioned. Contrary to this kind of traditional understanding of history, postmodern thinkers claim that reality cannot be known thoroughly and historians cannot be seen as authorities on historical events.

Questioning and rejecting the imposed truths or sceptical approach towards any assumptions can also be stated as the major notions for the very recent idea of postmodernism. Likewise, postmodern writers are engaged with, and they interpret history and historical fiction in new ways in the light of scepticism. Due to the sceptical attitude towards any beliefs or truths, they manipulate and re-imagine historical incidents that deviate from the historical records. Postmodern authors, who deal with history in their novels, tend to rewrite the past and subvert the genre of historical fiction. As writers aim to deconstruct binaries, they are also aware of both fact and fiction yet, they problematize them. Gertrude Himmelfarb asserts that postmodern thinkers reject any realist idea of facts and treat "history (the past as well as the writing about past) as inevitably 'fictive'" (Himmelfarb, 2002, s. 164). According to Himmelfarb, this notion leads historians to be both imaginative and inventive. Likewise, postmodern authors resist against the reliability of any truths by including inventions to established facts and they defamiliarize the readers' processing of historical knowledge. Novels that attempt to mirror history and create a sense of self-awareness that interact with readers are defined by Canadian professor Linda Hutcheon as 'Historiographic Metafiction'. The theory consists of two contrasting terms: historiography, which can be defined as the science of history writing, and metafiction, which is a literary element that rejects to represent the real. The former implies something reliable, but the latter refutes it by indicating fictionality or, in other words, subjectivity.

Historiographic metafiction is a literary, self-conscious combination of history and fiction. It raises the issue of what writing about history contains and questions the sense and various possible interpretations of the past. While claiming reference to the historical records, it doubts and plays with such a science. Historiographic metafiction interrogates the nature of history and problematizes the writing of it by underlining issues of subjectivity, intertextuality, reference and ideology. It focuses on the possibility of manipulation and misrepresentation of past reality in accordance with

dominant discourses of the given period as well as on the multiplicity of truth. The term refers to postmodern attempts of history writing. The rise of the term has its roots within the changing views of history and fiction. Hutcheon claims that “both history and fiction are discourses” (Hutcheon, 1988, s. 89). Therefore, they are constructed, and they are far from being objective. To Hutcheon, it is useless to expect a single history from discourses. History is constructed by man via language both of which are fallible.

Hutcheon, who is one of the leading theorists in postmodern fiction, has remarkable contributions to postmodern historical novels. While stating the function of the term that she coined, she asserts that “what historiographic metafiction explicitly does, though is the cast doubt on the very possibility of any firm guarantee of meaning” (Hutcheon, 1988, s. 55). Additionally, to Hutcheon, the major aims of historiographic metafiction are to problematize historiography and to question history by refuting “the view that only history has a truth claim” (Hutcheon, 1988, s. 93). Historiographic metafiction aims to question the constructed nature of the past as history by using literature, history and theory. Therefore, historiographic metafiction explores the relationship between historiography and fiction.

To Hutcheon, any historical documents or facts are produced by the selection and narrative positioning of a historiographer. She states that “historians are now being urged to take the contexts of their own inevitably interpretative act into account” (Hutcheon, 1988, s. 97). It is implied in the words of Hutcheon that, even if an author bases his assertions on a historical document, he is in charge of including the information that he chooses. In other words, the author decides what to write among the present data that he finds necessary. Consequently, with his self-reflexive attitude, he determines what is important and ignores the other parts. Besides, a historiographer’s perception of any event may differ from another’s, so does their interpretation. Similar to the views of Hutcheon, E. H. Carr claims that “history consists of a corpus of ascertained facts” that are collected by a historian and he provides the gathered data “in whatever style appeals to him” (Carr, 1990, s. 9). Thus, it can be inferred that the science of historiography is unable to present the past wholly. As a reaction against this conclusion, historiographic metafiction’s one of the most crucial features is its inclusion of silent voices in literary texts. That is to say, it aims to tell the untold. As a result, the main themes of historiographic metafictional novels may be irrelevant or unknown historical details and the ignored people in traditional historiography.

Historiographic metafiction acknowledges the unreliability of the author by putting him in the position of “overtly controlling” one. (Hutcheon, 1988, s. 117). The author’s self-reflexivity plays an important role within the sense of blurring fact and fiction. In fact, according to Beverley Southgate, history is an “act of self-creation” (Southgate, 2005, s. 2). He lays bare the existence of subjectivity. Moreover, protagonists in historiographic metafictional novels “are anything but proper types” (Southgate, 2005, s. 114). They implement the role of one that is responsible for the documentation of history. Unconventional acts of both authors and protagonists are crucial in the premise of historiographic metafiction as they lead readers to question the nature of truths in history.

In order to emphasize the textuality of history, historiographic metafiction benefits from the intertextual references as well. It can be stated that intertextuality is an inevitable aspect of historical novels as the term implies a relation of at least two texts. The first is the historical data or document from which the novelist produce his story, and the second is a literary text that he creates out of the previous one. Roland Barthes claims that “any text is a new tissue of past citations” (Barthes, 1981, s. 39). By making use of other texts, he indicates the impossibility of a single truth. Historiographic metafictional novels also use and abuse anything such as almanacks, newspapers and diaries as intertexts to question how the idea of truth is constructed and manipulated through the printed media, which is a device to record history. Hutcheon also clarifies the idea of power and discourse relation by stating, “both history and fiction are cultural sign systems, ideological constructions whose ideology includes their appearance of being autonomous and self-contained” (Hutcheon, 1988, s. 112). She implies the possibility of a man that has the power and may use it to alter history for his own benefits or for his ideological reasons.

In short, historiographic metafiction clearly depicts that naming and establishing past incidents into historical facts are done by selection and narrative positioning, and the source of knowledge for such events stems from discursive inscriptions. Hutcheon defines the term as the “most problematic art” (Hutcheon, 1988, s. 112). Its interrogative nature forces readers not to accept any historical



document as a truth. Differing from the traditional historical novels, historiographic metafiction adopts the idea of reimagining and rewriting history. Self-reflexivity is a dominant premise of this theory, and it highlights the inevitability of subjectivity during the process of history writing. In the following chapter, the problematic nature of historiography will be analyzed in Ondaatje's novel.

Rewriting History in Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*

Michael Ondaatje was born in Colombo, Sri Lanka in 1943. He is a Canadian novelist, poet and movie maker. He published his autobiographical novel *Running in the Family* in 1982. The novel centres on the author's quest to understand his father, Mervyn Philip Ondaatje but in doing so, he also explores his ancestors and the country itself. Even though the novel is based on a search for ancestors, Ondaatje also explores the history of Sri Lanka. While narrating the past of his country, the author emphasizes the dominant and the silenced figures so as to demonstrate the impossibility of a historical narration that is free of any biases or ideological attitudes. As Hutcheon states, it is not feasible for an author or a historiographer to deal with the past of a nation "without ideological and institutional analysis" (Hutcheon, 1988; s. 91), Ondaatje, in his novel, conveys his country's history from his perspective and viewpoints of islanders and foreigners. In this regard, he provides multiplicity and stresses the impossibility of reaching an accurate history of a nation.

Problematizing the History of Self and Nation

The novel takes place in late 1970, in Sri Lanka, which was called Ceylon until 1972. Sri Lanka was colonized at various times by the Portuguese, Dutch and British and, it is a culturally rich country with diverse ethnic groups. The heterogeneity of Ondaatje's origins can be interpreted as a plurality of perspectives, which leads to alternative histories. It also makes the author's task difficult to reach the scarce facts about his family. It is very probable that the West has a crucial impact on the author's point of view as he has spent most of his life in England and in Canada. He is aware of his hybridity as he states "I am the foreigner. I am the prodigal who hates the foreigner" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 79). His narrative springs from his consciousness and partial identity. Thus, he conveys his country from a double perspective, which is probably dominated by the cities that he has grown in.

Running in the Family starts with two epigraphs that present two contrary and irrelevant ideas about Sri Lanka. The first one belongs to a friar that states "I saw in this island fowls as big as our country geese having two heads... and the other miraculous things which I will not here write of" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 15). This epigraph indicates how the island is perceived by European visitors. The island is depicted as a kind of mythical paradise that has the potential of astonishing its guests. The other epigraph is from a journalist, named Douglas Amarasekara, who mentions the superiority of Americans and their language over the indigenous people. It is evident that the island is represented differently in each epigraph. The initial one features its fantastic side, while the latter highlights the inferiority of islanders, both of which refers to subjectivity and alternative histories that exist within the same setting.

According to Hutcheon, postmodernism "establishes, differentiates, and then disperses stable narrative voices (and bodies) that use memory to try to make sense of the past. It both installs and then subverts traditional concepts of subjectivity" (Hutcheon, 1988, s. 118). Michael Ondaatje's principle discursive manner in constructing his past is collecting information about histories of both his hometown and his ancestors. When the facts are not sufficient enough to present the intended, the author benefits from myths to give explanations to fill in the gaps. According to the writer, deeper comprehension of Sri Lanka is possible first through relating to it by experiencing it directly and intensely. "My body must remember everything, the brief insect bite, smell of wet fruit, the slow snail light, rain and underneath the hint of colors" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 202). The sounds, smell and colors evoke the memories from the narrator's childhood. By establishing this kind of link, he internalizes the sensuous experience and appropriates his past. However, he does not limit himself only to sensuous experience, he listens to and retells stories. Through the very act of retelling tales about his family and country, the narrator becomes a protagonist who participates in the cultural memory of the community. In this respect, he passes through three stages; memory, imagination, which implies imitation and alteration, and invention or a new creation from the old.

Ondaatje presents the island that "falls on a map and its outline is the shape of a tear" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 65). Besides, it is the island that "seduced all of Europe... the wife of many marriages"

(Ondaatje, 1982, s. 64). By drawing an analogy to the shape of the island with a tear, the author may imply the bad fate of his hometown, which has been a colony of various invaders throughout its history. Its being a wife of many marriages is another sign that indicates the plurality of cultures within the island, and the heterogeneity of races that have lived there. Invasion of the Dutch, for instance, has resulted in a new origin that is called "Burghers". It is a very privileged society that descends from the Sinhalese and Dutch, and the author's ancestors belong to it. The Burghers are supported by the colonizers, and they get the most important positions in Ceylon's history. To exemplify, the author's father Mervyn Philip Ondaatje has a position in the Ceylon Light Infantry and he is a member of the Ceylon Cactus and Succulent Society. Many other relatives of the author, who are mostly priests and lawyers, play important roles in the history of the island. Francois Lyotard, for instance, asserts that "whoever is wealthiest has the best chance of being right" (Lyotard, 1989, s. 45). The impact of ancestors on the history of Ceylon along with the colonizers contradicts the objectivity and reliability of the author because the majority of the history is a product of colonizers and wealthy people that does not reflect the whole society or population.

As a chain reaction of discoveries and the impacts of colonialism, local people and culture face changes. The desire for independence leads them to reconstruct their country and identity. Some of them leave the country for being in need of a better life, others search for protection and refuge in the countries of their previous colonizers. As a result, multiple perception of home occurs, which is different from the past. The colonized confront the struggles of adapting to new homes or getting used to living in the previous but altered ones. Similarly, the novel deals with the issue of returning back to a home, which is not the same anymore. Hutcheon questions the nature of truth by stating that "there are only truths in the plural, and never one 'Truth'" (Hutcheon, 1988, s. 109). Hence, the plurality of truths forces the author to select among them. Along with the feelings of loss and alienation, the author tries to reconstruct his hometown's history with his childhood memories and from the scars that the colonizers have left, so the outcome is a mixed, altered, and complicated data among which the author chooses and presents to his readers. On the other hand, readers are forced to accept the given data as facts because "there is rarely falseness" among them but "just others' truths" (Hutcheon, 1988, s. 109).

In some passages, the author presents the fantasized view of the island. In the chapter *The Karapothas*, for instance, he asserts that "captains would spill cinnamon onto the deck and invite passengers on board to smell Ceylon before the island even came onto view" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 81). Besides, he presents the island from different sources such as the invaders, his family and the writers who have been to the island. He also benefits from the fallible memory of his childhood. In some parts, he uses an ironic tone, but in others, he takes advantage of them, which let him blend the facts of his private story with myths. To illustrate, when he writes about the heat of the island, he states that it is more comfortable in the mornings before the sun rises. He draws an analogy with a big and wild animal that surrounds people like heat. This exaggeration manifests fantastic views and the negative aspect of the island. Similarly, a line by Leonard Woolf that describes the forests of the island as evils, shows his contempt for the island. By quoting a line from a writer that describes his experience, the author aims to convey how western people belittle the island and the local people. It may also refer to a reconstruction of the history of the silenced.

The author states that "the island was a paradise to be sacked" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 81) and the invaders plunder everything good that the island offers. As the main purpose of Europeans is the pursuit of wealth, the island is never considered as a home by them. However, it is not only the foreigners that report the island as a mysterious place but also one of the ancestors of the author named William Charles Ondaatje corroborates his view by stating "if this was a paradise, it had a darker side" (81). It can be inferred that all of the quotations mentioned above, create a false image of the island, which is either a heaven or a hell.

The pendant (the island) stood still, it became a mirror. It pretended to reflect each European power till newer ships arrived and spilt their nationalities, some of whom stayed and intermarried -my own ancestor arriving in 1600, a doctor who cured the residing governor's daughter with a strange herb and was rewarded with a land, a foreign wife, and a new name which was a Dutch spelling of his own. Ondaatje. A parody of the ruling language (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 64).



The island has become a settlement for different invaders. They come to the island to plunder, to teach and to impose their own notions. The island seduces many colonizers, and they claim to power by force, religion or language. The author uses the image of a mirror to suggest that the island reflects each invader's views. In other words, the island mimics the series of invaders and mirror their behaviour. Thus, it becomes impossible to grasp the history of the island thoroughly as it has been in constant change. Colonialism makes Ceylon a wife of many marriages that pretend to reflect the multitude of invaders' cultures. Ondaatje refers to invaders "who stepped ashore and claimed everything with the power of their sword or bible or language" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 64). The inevitable consequences of those invasions are the many names Ceylon has acquired that all of which reflect the power of newcomers. The same thing happens to people, too. As a result of intermarriage, they acquire new blood and new names. The name "Ondaatje" itself is a parody as it is a new one that is spelt in Dutch. By imposing their religion, the invaders also change the lifestyles and points of view of the islanders. The usage of the word "pretend" may suggest not only impermanence in the history of Ceylon but also its resistance to each invader by means of mimicry. The author aims to assert that nothing is like what it seems but what it pretends to be. The Ceylonese pretend to be Portuguese, later they pretend to be English and then Dutch. The names of the places are changed, identities and ethnicities are intertwined, and historical events are replaced and rewritten.

The charm and natural beauty, which is described by some visitors, are discredited by others, and it is reinforced by the author when he describes the country's heat by stating "which drove Englishmen crazy" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 78). By selecting different thoughts from various people, he indicates the subjectivity of interpretation towards the island. Ondaatje's family, which belongs to a privileged rank of the Ceylonese society, departs to live their ideal life outside the island in the hottest times of the year. They spend the boiling months in the mountains of the island. While talking about foreigners "who never grew ancient" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 80) in the land, the author himself is aware of the fact that the foreigners actually do not know the island accurately, and the island is not a perfect habitat for them. It can be inferred that those negative features have the possibility of affecting the judgment of the readers upon the island, too.

In the light of Hutcheon's claim, which highlights the premise of the ideological aspect within the process of history writing, it can be stated that historiography sorts out some events and omits others for ideological reasons. This fact leads to the hegemonic voices or their discourses dominate the less powerful societies. Hence, writing history is closely related to the representation of dominant ideologies. The island and people embody the dualism that is experienced by the colonizers and the colonized. Especially, the image of the island, which is created by foreigners and the islanders, is exotic and mysterious. They create fictions in order to stimulate the imagination of people. To illustrate, in the chapter *Tongue*, the author tells about an animal named thalagoya, which resembles an alligator, and if a child is given a tongue of it to eat, "he will become brilliantly articulate" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 73). The author reinforces the appealing power of the myth by including the details of the eating process; one that wants the myth to come true should eat it in the right way. The tongue is needed to be sliced and eaten just after the animal is killed. It should also be swallowed in between two banana skins and should not be chewed. Even though myths are appealing and interesting, their reliability is always problematic. Ondaatje applies fantastic elements in his narration so as to blur the fact with fiction.

Each side of the country's history has a bright and dark side and the author aims to make the reader aware of that fact. By choosing among events, the author's main purpose is to make it clear that anything about the history of his country is based on multiple thoughts, gossips, myths and the traces that invaders have left behind them. Due to the multiplicity and lack of consensus about the history of the island, the author forces his readers to use their imaginations while constructing the island in their minds. As a result, accurate and satisfactory historiography becomes a subjective issue that is closely related to the interpretations of readers. Moreover, the author blends the history of the island with his emotions. His memories are triggered by the island's scents and by monsoons. The personal vision of Ondaatje affects his decisions about which detail to insert in his narration. The image of an ideal hometown in the author's mind sometimes falls into a contradiction with realities. While complaining about the invaders who plunder all the valuable possessions on the island, the author uses the term "a perfumed sea" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 81). This expression refers to the spices that probably remind him about his childhood memories. However, as the colonizers transport them to

their own countries, the writer gets disappointed when he is not able to smell the same scents. Ondaatje depicts the chaos that is caused by monsoons in the chapter *Monsoons Notebook*. He tells about monsoons, which is an unusual but also an ordinary aspect of the South Asian climate, by stating “flood the streets for an hour and suddenly evaporate” (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 69). Most significantly, he connects this image of fluidity with historical pieces of information that are enclosed in an old newspaper, whose pages “come apart in your hands like wet sand” (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 69). It can be stated that while the author tries to collect data, he is incapable of reaching or gathering the real events which vanish like water evaporates.

The author claims that “we own the country we grow up in, or we are aliens or invaders” (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 81), not only foreigners but also the islanders are not aware of the Ceylonese culture thoroughly. The invaders loot the island in all possible ways without any concern about comprehending the island’s history or even being a part of it. Similarly, the islanders do not consider the colonizers as a threat because the foreigners do not know the island wholly. Additionally, the islanders do not use the poisons against the invaders, which the author presents as “possible weapons” that only exist in Ceylon. The author implies that as there is nobody who knows the island fully, it is meaningless to expect credible data about its history.

Credibility of Intertexts

The history of Sri Lanka is dominated by invaders, visitors, writers and a privileged family. The rest of the population remain in the background during the history of the island. As the author has a Western positioning, he is also affected by the ideas of the majority. The island is presented as a multicultural nation that consists of various racial, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Hence, the author problematizes the notion of a pure and stable Sri Lankan identity. He assumes that colonizers’ shifting forces eradicate the previous ones and their cultures, traditions and history as well. The author creates the history of his hometown with a migrant view. His personal recalling and selections among the incidents are the only ways of portraying Sri Lanka. He fills in the gaps of his lost experience with imagination, feelings and myths. His exoticism of Ceylon signifies a detached migrant that tries to gather data about his mythical hometown. As he is the only person who uncovers history, the information he presents is far from being objective.

Ondaatje problematizes the history of his birthplace by including various voices and fictional elements in his narration. He undermines the authority of conventional historiographers by creating a context in which historical documents and narratives are revised. He reconstructs the records with his imagination and emotions. Within this context, he rejects the certainty of historical data and introduces alternative versions of history for his country. The novel proposes to analyze the circumstances in which the author reconstructs not only his family saga but also the history of his homeland by intertwining stories and history. Rumours, gossips, stories and the author’s personal clash influence his imagination. As the writer has left his country at a very early age and lived most of his life in the west, the double perspective of being an outsider and insider is also a significant issue in the novel as the duality or in-betweenness may make the author’s return to his country both physical and emotional. The techniques and the themes in the novel such as; memory, colonialism, cartography, photography, identity and history constitute an integral part of the narrative. The polyphonic structure of the novel, which is also contributed by many voices of people, make it hard to be treated as a reliable one. In her book *Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon states that;

Historiographic metafiction refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refutes the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity (Hutcheon, 1988, s. 93).

With those statements, Hutcheon signifies the notion of the postmodern challenge of historiography and, its consideration in literature. She highlights the inevitable existence of subjectivity due to the fact that history is a human construct. Historiographic metafiction challenges the idea of representing the past, however, it does not mean to eradicate or ignore it. In fact, Hutcheon avers that historiographic metafiction parodies it, which means “both to enshrine the past and to question it” (Hutcheon, 1988, s. 126). What Ondaatje does in the novel is to exercise the very same postmodern paradox. He questions the past and its reliability, at the same time, he tries to give voice to historical documents and myths, and by including them in his narration, he provides a basis for the emergence



of new possible historical truths. The main character and the narrator of the novel, Michael Ondaatje, travels from one place to the next, he also moves from text to text, or map to photograph. The aim of his search for roots, family or national history involves tracing a genealogy of texts that are not only literary but also historical. The novel is both a map of the journey and a map of reading; texts resemble geography and function as signposts since the protagonist reads historical and literary texts in order to learn where he comes and where he goes. The readers simultaneously travel to Sri Lanka with the author and the map with which the novel opens, help them to find their way through the complicated structure.

Historiographic metafiction is not against the idea of historical facts. The premise accepts their validity but, on the other hand, it argues that they become facts because it is the historiographer that gives them meaning. Hutcheon enunciates that "all past 'events' are potential historical 'facts', but the ones that become facts are those that are chosen to be narrated" (Hutcheon, 1988, s. 75). Historiographer or narrator selects among past events and excludes others. Consequently, the narrator's choices determine the facts. In the novel, Ondaatje reports the ideas of some European writers and visitors by selecting among them, too. While including several authors and guests into his narrative, whose points of view are different from each other, Ondaatje implies that the utterances of important or well-known people may also be deceiving. Moreover, as he presents other voices, he gives a broader approach to the text and does not restrict it to his own version of truths.

The author divides his autobiographical novel into seven parts and within each of those parts, there are forty-two short chapters some of which are as short as a page. As Hutcheon claims that "we cannot know the past except through its text; its documents, its evidence, even its eye-witness accounts are texts", the author also uses several genres to tell his story like narratives, journals, dialogues, photographs, poetry, epigraphs and maps. (Hutcheon, 1988, s. 16) The author aims to construct the identity of his family by memory, assumptions, gossip and rumours, too. It is a story about the journey to the past and the author returns to his hometown to collect information about his family, especially about his father. The novel has a hybrid structure that all of which are indications of a multiplicity of interpretations. People's memory is the main source that the writer depends on to produce his narrative. However, the author admits the unreliability of those memories. In the acknowledgement part, the author clearly and frankly declares that "in Sri Lanka, a well-told lie is worth a thousand facts" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 206). With this confession, he describes not only the Sri Lankan aptitude for invention but his own task as a storyteller. His aim is not to reproduce reality as it appears to the objective eye, instead, he is the creator whose preferences dominate the account of his family, himself and the history of his country.

(Inter)textual (Re)construction of History

In historiographic metafictional novels, non-linear narratives, fragmentary structures with flashbacks and multiple narrators are very common techniques. Linda Hutcheon states that "historiographic metafiction appears to privilege two modes of narration, both of which problematize the entire notion of subjectivity: multiple points of view or overtly controlling narrator" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 117). In this sense, the book is certainly engaged with memory and the construction of identity, as Ondaatje searches for stories, provides them multiple voices and struggles to grasp how they are linked to his own identity. He gathers literary and historical texts and tries to decipher and decode them. Besides, since he is both the author and the protagonist of the novel, he is in charge of commenting on the actual construction processes of texts. The author embarks on a quest and moves forward and backwards in times and he attempts to restore private as well as public history. As the developments in the author's personal and family history are paralleled by national changes in Sri Lanka, he reviews colonial history as well. The third person "he" acts as a character within the narrative and participates in past events; the first person "I", apparently the same person, writes in the present about the past. Tenses also shift from present to past. He also expresses his difficulties in "trying to get it straight" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 105). "Wait a minute, wait a minute, when is this happening?" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 107). The memories of the people that he interviews do not follow a linear pattern neither does the narrator's account of the past. For instance, after he relates to the death of his grandmother, Lalla and after several chapters, she appears again. The non-linear narration problematizes the past as it becomes the reader's duty to rearrange and put them in order with his own interpretation, and further, as its ordering process requires to assign the

events a significance, the notion of subjectivity, which can be stated as the main argument of historiographic metafiction, becomes compulsory.

The inevitability of multiple voices in historiographic metafictional novels is also pointed out by Rosa Barber. In her article *the Role of Imagination in Writing and Reading Narrative*, she claims that “through fiction, we have a licence to construct alternative narratives, rethinking histories so widely assumed to be ‘true’” (Barber, 2010, s. 2). Ondaatje faces the dangers of displaying insufficient memoirs as facts and ideal collections as evidence and, as he is strong-willed to see beyond what may be merely the appearance of reality, he decides to create mythical truths that may even surpass the more intense realities of the time and of his people. The truth value of Ondaatje’s narrative is premised in oral history, perceptions and imaginary experience. Short and anecdotal stories abound in Ondaatje’s narrative and they reinforce the impression of the novel as a notebook, in which information is jotted down, both verbal and visual snapshots and individual portraits. Lalla’s impulsive and eccentric character, for instance, is depicted in various episodes, such as in the scenes of heavy drinking and partygoing woman or in the bus where another passenger harasses her. Information about Ondaatje’s father, Mervyn is equally piecemeal and dispersed, which consists of interviews and fragments of memory. Even single events like the wedding of his parents are presented by different voices in different versions. Hutcheon claims that the premise of historiographic metafiction is to question the paradox of reality and its accessibility to the present. The narrator also evades fixity and definite characterization; yet, allows and provokes multiple narrations and perspectives.

According to Hutcheon “postmodern fiction suggests that to rewrite or represent the past in fiction and in history is, in both cases, to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological” (Hutcheon, 1988, s. 110). The majority of the novel is told orally. Titles such as “Asian Rumors, Tropical Gossip, Lunch Conversation and Dialogues” signify the novel’s emphasis on oral story-telling right from the beginning. Talks and exchanges constitute a major part of the novel. The segment *Dialogues*, for instance, introduces eleven voices that report memories of Ondaatje’s parents. However, it is not an easy task to localize these voices as they are merely introduced by quotation marks. Readers cannot define which person speaks but only deduce them from their relationships to the subject that they talk to. Even though the narrator names the voices in a later fragment “Final Days / Father Tongue”, he does not connect their utterances. Likewise, “Lunchtime Conversations” comprises the extended statements and different modes of thinking of the people involved. In the same way, the narrator does not assimilate or appropriate these voices on his part. Rather, he foregrounds multiple subjectivities and presents a textual version of collectivity and community.

As Hutcheon states that the protagonists in historiographic metafictional novels are generally the ex-centric and silenced figures, it is also essential to mention characterization. The statement highlights the significance of narrators in contemporary literary texts and the notion of representation as well. Not only the history but also the one who tells it is closely related to the reliability of the information. When the protagonists take the position of a dominant one, they also acquire the power to convey history from their own perspectives. Their personal traits, backgrounds or social status affect all the data. Thus, the narrator’s truth becomes a reality or at least, he has an influence on the history.

During his life in London, Ondaatje is ashamed of his family due to their weird lifestyles. He confesses that some of his friends who take part in a tennis tournament which is held in Ceylon, and he never returns to his calls as he thinks that his friends may find out “what a disgraceful family (he) had come from” (1982, s. 177). However, when he discovers his ancestors’ names that are carved on church stones, his opinions about the members of the family shift.

To kneel on the floor of a church and see your name chiselled in large letters so that it stretches from your fingertips to your elbow in some strange way removes vanity, eliminates the personal. It makes your own story a lyric. So the sound which comes immediately out of my mouth as I half-gasped and called my sister spoke all that excitement of smallness, of being overpowered by stone (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 65-66).

The names on the stone of a church convey the traces of some ancestors and the perpetuation of Ondaatjes’ name. Coming across the names of Ondaatje in a church makes the author realize the importance of his family name. As the author further explores the documents in Colombo Church, he



uncovers "the destruction caused by silverfish, scars among the immaculate recordings of local history and formal signatures" while "lifting the ancient pages and turning over skeletal leaves" (66). The history of his family is intertwined with three hundred years of local history as they face "droughts and invasions from other countries" (Ondaatje, s. 69). As a result, history becomes a process of discovery for the author. Ondaatje transcribes the data he finds; yet, what he finds is affected by natural disasters or invaders so its reliability and accuracy are problematized.

According to Alison Lee, postmodern fictions deliberately play with classical conventions when they write history. She avers that "while they use realist conventions, they simultaneously seek to subvert them" (Lee, 1990, s. 36). Historiographic metafiction consciously questions real characters. They aim to signify the indeterminacy of the past and challenge traditional history writing. Ondaatje implements both real and unreal traits to his characters in order to show their discursive constructs. In doing so, he emphasizes the uncertain nature of history. Furthermore, the characters appear in complex or ambiguous contexts, which leads readers to question their knowledge of history. The author's self-conscious attitude is also apparent within his character choices. He includes some of the family members in his narration but omits some others. He selects what to narrate or exclude about them. When Ondaatje portrays her character in unusual contexts and blends some of them with supernatural elements, he allows different perspectives in his narration. Fantastical themes are used when the writer fails to provide accurate data about his relatives.

The author's trips to Sri Lanka aim to show the life of his relatives since his grandparents' times. They live their lives in a very eccentric way. They dress and speak like the English but they do not live among them. In the chapter *Historical Relations*, the author travels back to the twenties of his parents when they lead a prodigal life. The author's grandparents are able to afford a very expensive life as they are supported by the wealth that is provided by tea plantations. Dancing and drinking take most of their time. Besides, the author narrates the stories of his old generations that have love affairs and enjoy gambling. In the chapter *Kegalle (i)*, the author goes back to the past to find out about his grandfather who is named Bampa. He depicts him as a person who "had weakness for pretending to be English" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 56). Every two years "he would visit England, buy crystal and learn the latest dances" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 56). The hybrid state, like many other Ondaatjes, represents a lack of identity and makes the author's task harder as a data collector. The grandfather's attempts to resemble the English, conceal his real personal traits, and he may not want to be among the ones that are silenced. Therefore, Ondaatje's aim for including that kind of character into his narration is to remind the postmodern premise that advocates the existence of the marginalized people in historical texts.

Another significant character in the novel is Lalla, the author's grandmother. The author presents her as whose "bloodline was considered eccentric" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 113) and adds that there is no information about her youth. She is depicted as an unusual character who is very contrary to the accustomed woman figure of the family as "she was the first woman in Ceylon to have a mastectomy" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 123). She is also presented as an Asian version of Robin Hood. She organizes parties for the rich people and hands out presents to poor people, especially to their children. When she becomes poor, she goes on distributing gifts, but this time she steals them from the local markets. Along with generosity, her controversial behaviour is also crucial. She is also presented as a heavy drinker and after her death, she donates "her body to six different hospitals" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 123), which is considered as an excessive amount of generosity by the author. Furthermore, she "loved thunder, it spoke to her" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 125) and it tells her when "someone is going to die" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 127). The author turns his grandmother into a myth in a very ironic way. According to Rosemary Jackson "fantasy characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss" (Jackson, 1981, s. 3). By including fantastic elements while constructing the past of his grandmother, Ondaatje problematizes her grandmother's past. He depicts the ambivalent behaviour that ranges from generosity to peculiar ones and presents her as a mythical image. However, the missing information clouds the author's account as he cannot include any information about her youth, and he compensates for inadequate data by including fictions in his narrative.

The author asserts that "truth disappears with history and gossip tells us in the end that nothing of personal relationships ... nothing is said of the closeness between two people: how they grew up in the shade of each other's presence" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 53-54). As the reports of the author depend

on fragments of a fallible memory, they blur reality and truth becomes something that is not accessible. Thus, history turns into gossip that lasts and circles forever. The stories grow in the shade of each person. Hutcheon states that “storytellers can certainly silence, exclude, and absent certain past events-and people”. (Hutcheon, 1988, s. 107). In his autobiographical novel, Ondaatje features those silenced voices, too. To illustrate, Lalla’s myth is constructed after the death of Bampa. She gains her freedom and becomes a man-like image who drinks, works on a farm and gambles. She is also eager to experience the new advances of medicine as she has an unnecessary operation on her breast. The creation of a strong figure of a woman that resists the society may be seen as an attempt to challenge the idea of a colonized people and represent them as powerful. The author may convey his grandmother as a strong man-like figure in order to resist and refute the image of weak islanders towards colonizers. Thus, it can be inferred that the author makes use of history for his own benefit by selecting among the events and data.

Ondaatje also uses his own imagination to convey the past, too. In a matter of fact, when he narrates Lalla’s death, which he depicts as a “last perfect journey” (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 122), the author draws readers into his fantasy world. He gives every detail about her death and also mentions her feelings while she is carried by a flood; “alcohol still in her- serene and relaxed” (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 123), and he does so as if a witness that sees every moment. What the author actually writes, in Hutcheon’s definition, is an “imaginative reconstruction” of the data (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 92). Therefore, it is not an objective history as it is the author who uncovers it. Ondaatje’s narrations are blended with his emotions or he conveys them in a way that he wants to remember. Each possibility decreases the credibility of the story and puts the author in a position who is in charge of decoding and presenting the information.

The main focus of the novel is Mervyn Ondaatje and his eccentric character. In order to get his university education, Mervyn goes to England. However, it becomes clear that even he is not able to pass the entrance exam. When his parents come unannounced to England and face the realities about his education, Mervyn declares that he is engaged to Kate Roselap. This news makes the parents pleased and Mervyn safe for a while. After a couple of weeks, he falls in love and proposes to Dorris Gratiaen, who is an actress, a professional dancer and the mother of Michael Ondaatje. When he announces his relationship with Dorris, a heated argument erupts in the family, and Mervyn threatens them to commit suicide if they do not allow the marriage. Finally and compulsorily, the parents consent to his marriage with Dorris. Michael presents his father as a man who creates problems and solves them by creating newer ones.

Thanks to the reputation of living in England, Mervyn is able to get a job in Ceylon Light Infantry. One of the most apparent weaknesses of the father is his alcohol addiction, which leads him to bigger troubles. For instance, he disrupts train services by hijacking passengers with a pistol when he drinks an excessive amount of alcohol. Dorris, as a tired woman of his husband’s unusual acts, gets divorced and goes to London with her children. After divorcing, Mervyn becomes a more unstable man that he sells the land he owns part by part, which is inherited from Bampa, in order to afford his drinking expenses. He gets married again, and he has two daughters, named Susan and Jennifer, through the second marriage. When he becomes poorer day by day, he starts farming, however, he suffers from dipsomania every two months. His second wife Maureen attempts to prevent him from drinking, but Mervyn threatens to shoot her. Up to that point of information about Mervyn, it can be concluded that he is a problematic and addictive figure. The collected stories about him are crucial to the argument of this thesis in two points; the first one is his alcohol addiction which is highlighted by the author at every turn. It implies that the father has spent most of his life unconsciously, and what he does is mostly out of his control and far from his sober state, which makes it harder to see his real self. Secondly, the depiction of a dipsomaniac and troublemaker father figure by a son, who has lived separated for twenty-five years, is most probably blended with emotions of resentment and longing. Such emotions have the possibility of clouding the author’s judge and diminish his reliability as well. As a result, all the data about his father may probably carry the traces of the author’s self-reflexivity.

The author meets his father at the end of the novel again, in which he tells his father’s miserable state. When the author depicts the atmosphere of the room that he and his father are in, he uses the term “stained mirror” which Mervyn tries to look at his reflection. The term lays the bare fact of Mervyn’s state which is chaotic and ruined. The mirror that the author refers to shows a corrupted image of his father and it reflects his decay. “A whole battalion was carrying one page away from its source”



(Ondaatje, 1982, s. 189). The author reinforces the idea of corruption with this statement, and it defines a state that the father surrenders to death. A mirror can be interpreted as an object that the stains on it conceal something as its incapability of reflecting the whole picture. Besides, the ants that take the pages may infer the data that gets lost about his father or the information that Mervyn takes with him on the way to his last journey.

Finally, it is worth stating about Aunt Phyllis because the author defines her as "the minotaur of this long journey" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 36). She is one of the main sources of the author during his data collection process. Most of the stories about the family and Sri Lanka are based on the oral narratives of her. When Michael comes to Sri Lanka, he pays a visit to his aunt first. As a data supplier and one of the closest people to Mervyn, Aunt Phyllis is a significant family member for Michael. However, the author also questions her reliability in the very first chapters. To illustrate, he conveys the moments that he catches his aunt looking at the ceiling "as if looking at the cue cards for stories" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 36). He may imply the weakness of his aunt's memory or her possible illness of Alzheimer's. In fact, each possibility endangers the reliability of all the stories that she has narrated.

Born in Sri Lanka and descending from The Dutch Burger ancestry, educated in London and becoming a citizen of Canada, Michael Ondaatje, with an irresistible sense of longing for his hometown, has a complex cultural background. Thus, different social or ideological, historical and geographical nations are allowed in the novel. High and popular culture, factual details and imaginative fictions or, in short, history and fiction fluctuate within the author's narrative. Hutcheon states that historiographic metafiction "tries to problematize and, thereby, to make us question. But it does not offer answers" (Hutcheon, 1988, s. 231). Likewise, these binary oppositions constantly reveal themselves in the novel and they are only negotiated but not resolved. The intertexts are likened to archival collections, which have to be identified and decoded by the novel's readers.

Historiographic metafiction aims to depict that "history is not the transparent record of any sure truth and that it is inevitably textual" (Hutcheon, 1988, s. 129). In this regard, historiographic metafiction not only uses but also abuses anything like newspapers, maps, photographs as intertexts. Hutcheon further claims that postmodern intertextuality is a "formal manifestation and both a desire to close the gap between past and present of the reader and a desire to rewrite the past in a new context" (Hutcheon, 1988, s. 118). According to Hutcheon, however, intertexts fail to show the truth due to their constructed or manipulated nature because they do not only add subjectivity to their authors but also provide multiple voices to the real text.

Insertion of intertexts into a novel is an effective way for the author that makes him the authority of his work. It enhances the meaning that he wants to convey and adds emotional power. It can also be useful for readers to establish a link among their personal memories and experiences with the author's. However, it does not change the fact that they are the interpretations of the narrator, as he is the one who picks and includes them in his narration. Likewise, visuals, such as photographs and maps, have the power of presenting concrete details, and they can act as a trigger that aids in remembering the past. Yet, they are incapable of conveying the whole picture, too. Their problematic nature comes from the fact that they are the product of a human and his personal experiences which are not universal and cannot be considered as ultimate truths.

Including texts in any literary work also means that the importance or the authority of an author decreases and the role of a reader increases. Intertextuality arouses curiosity and forces readers to understand the implied meaning and in the end, they may not fit with the author's own ideas. Hutcheon points out that, historiographic metafiction "does not pretend to reproduce events, but to direct us, instead, to facts, or to new directions in which to think about events" (Hutcheon, 1988, s. 154). Along with the reading routine is interrupted by intertexts, the reader has to pay attention to details and examine rather than accept them. He needs to be an explorer that has to find his way among the texts. Intertextuality also arouses a question that if a text refers to another, where the universe of it ends and reality begins.

The novel consists of photos, maps, poems, journal entries, visitor books and quotations from several authors, but they all include fictionality. The author does not follow a linear and logical sequence when he presents the images. To illustrate, he starts a chapter with a map and then tells about the same map again after a few chapters. Similarly, he uses family photographs throughout the novel with the aim of depicting their past. The novel is enriched by such visuals that are the outcomes of

both the author's preferences and emotions. In her article "Postmodern Paratextuality and History", Linda Hutcheon uses the term "docufiction" (Hutcheon, 1987, s. 308) in order to tell about their problematic nature and adds that any intertext in the novels "is deliberately awkward, as a means of directing our attention to the very process by which we understand and interpret the past through textuality- in both history and fiction" (Hutcheon, 1987, s. 306). She further claims that "historians are readers of fragmentary documents" (Hutcheon, 1987, s. 307). They need to fill in the gaps of documents that are constructed from fragmented pieces.

Rosa Barber asserts that "as soon as artefacts or documents are used to create a narrative, a fictional element intrudes" (Barber, 2010, s. 4). When the author is no longer able to create his own story, he includes documents, however, the insertion of any documents or intertexts make the literary work a fictitious and self-reflexive one because any "historians cannot strip themselves of their inherited prejudices and preconceptions" (Barber, 2010, s. 1). The author's choices of the intertexts are the outcome of his own judgements and assumptions. The first type of intertext to be analyzed in the novel is a collection of texts that are inserted in the novel. In the introduction part, the author presents two epigraphs from a friar and a journalist. They represent the historical and political images of Sri Lanka. The first epigraph of a friar from the 14th century refers to his impressions of the island that states "I saw in this island fowls as big as our country geese having two heads... and other miraculous things which I will not here mention of" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 15). With this epigraph, the author wants to convey the image of the island in the visions of Europeans that is exotic and fantastic. It also includes medieval perspectives with religious ideas about the dualities such as good and evil or human beings and monsters. The second epigraph is from a journalist that depicts the image of the island and represents how a dominant language empowers countries. Ironically, even though the journalist is a native, he accepts the misleading idea of Europeans has on his country.

In the chapter *The Babylon Stakes*, there is another epigraph. This anonymous epigraph is probably taken from the interviews that are given to the author. The epigraph mentions that "the Wall Street had a terrible effect on us. Many of the horses had to be taken over by the military" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 48). It implies the outcomes of the Wall Street crash to the lives of privileged people. It gives the idea of the decadence of the burghers and their luxury lives. Yet, there is no explanation about the consequences of the crash for the island's economy or any other important points. When the reader sees the term "terrible effect", he may expect the worst thing but at the end, he faces complaints that are related to the futile lives of privileged people. The author presents dialogues in the chapter *Tropical Gossip*. These dialogues refer to betrayals and infidelities of a relative, and infidelity is presented as a normal practice as the author states "marriage was the greater infidelity" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 53). It may be inferred that the author presents readers with his blurred vision of the past. Thanks to these inserted texts, he confronts the images of fact and fantasy that is created by others.

The author is aware of the problematic nature of historical documents and he realizes the gaps in records of the past and even those traces which have survived can be very fragile and misleading. Hutcheon highlights this fact by stating that, historiographic metafiction "plays upon the truth and lies of the historical record" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 114). When Mervyn Ondaatje and Sammy Dias Bandaranaike, who is a close relative of the eventual Prime Minister of Ceylon, antagonize each other by their comments in a visitors' book, they cause the destruction of historical records; "pages continued to be torn out, ruining a good archival history of two semi-prominent Ceylon families" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 152). Blended with emotions and subjective manners, their comments about each other are probably an outcome of resent and exaggerations, and their act of tearing some pages make it impossible to learn the whole story.

There are five poems in the novel. Two of them belongs to a native poet and the others are the author's poems and there is a stanza of another poem in the novel, too. The stanza of the poem "Don't Talk to me about Matisse" is written by a Ceylonese poet Lakdasa Wikksamasinha. The Ceylonese poet is resentful of the image of women and resists against the European style of depicting them. Another poem *Sweet Like a Crow* welcomes readers in a separate chapter and before it, there is an epigraph that introduces the poem by Paul Bowles. It refers to the incapability of the Sinhalese people of singing. Paul asserts that "the Sinhalese are beyond a doubt one of the least musical people in the world" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 76). The poem is a kind of reply to Bowles and seems that it reinforces the idea. The term "sweet like a crow" implies irony, and it creates an image of the sounds of Ceylon and Ceylonese people. It also refers to a personal vision of the author towards his hometown.



The next poem *High Flowers* may be interpreted as a response to the one written by Wikkramasinha. It suggests that two poets Wikkramasinha and Michael talk to each other via their texts, and their utterances link the past with the present. Michael's poem gives a political and cultural message. He depicts the laborious women and their image of inferiority. They are the women that "my ancestors ignored" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 87), which can be interpreted as the males' superiority over females in the very idea of the author. Even though Michael conveys women, as mentioned in the previous chapters, as strong figures, their strength is appeared only after their husbands die, in other words, after they gain their freedom, they are able to flourish.

Another poem *To Colombo* describes the views that the author sees on the way to visit Sirigya Hills. During his experiences of beautiful views, however, he comes across the realities when he states "on a bench behind sunlight/ the woman the coconut the knife" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 91). It seems that the author goes back to realities that hide behind the beautiful scenery. Elisabeth Wesseling clarifies the issue as postmodern historical novels "turn to the past in order to look for unrealized possibilities that inhered in historical situations" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 13). What the author and the reader expect is not confronted. The woman with a knife clouds the beauty of the landscape, and it is implied in the poem that realities may conceal other probabilities behind them.

The author surprises readers in the chapter *Honeymoon*, too. He refers to daily news instead of telling about newly-married parents. He narrates a French president that is killed by a Russian and about a strike. He also tells about some movies that his parents like. He mixes national or international history with his private one, which supports the idea that "historiographic metafiction does not tell us how to think about a certain event; rather, it says: that is one way of looking at things, now here is another, and another, and another" (Marshall, 1992, s. 156). He may try to give the idea that behind any events there is another one. It becomes evident that some incidents are more important than others as the author selects among them, and it implies that priorities differ from one to another. It also signifies that expectations may mislead humans thus, it is not possible to talk about universal truths. What is important for someone may not be the same for another.

The writer uses maps as intertexts in his book as well. He starts the novel with a map of the island which shows the possible routes, and the places he intends to visit in Sri Lanka. In advance, the reader may suppose that the narrative is a personal one but later, after a few chapters, the author presents the real map of his hometown. The map, which is hung on the wall of his brother's house, is just a "rumour of topography" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 64). The term "rumour" implies that his narration mixes fact with fiction. Instead of showing the real map in his novel, the author presents it verbally. He uses the term "translations" of another when he compares the maps, which questions their reliability. He also implies that the map of the island is the outcome of the past of his country which is invaded by many colonizers and the traces they have left behind them. Each of the invaders changes its shape and as a result, each map depicts or shows the ideal land but not the real one. The map of the author shows his ideal Ceylon and the real one presents combinations and interpretations of each colonizer, and the author problematizes both of the maps as historical documents.

It can be stated that photographs are one of the most credible historical documents. They present and keep the memory of any moment in the past. They can be treated as evidence of any past incident, too. However, in her article "Postmodern Paratextuality and History", Linda Hutcheon claims that "photographs are still presences of absences: they both verify and void the past of its historicity" (Hutcheon, 1987, s. 312). Similarly, Roland Barthes asserts in his book 'Camera Lucida' that "a photograph is always invisible" (Barthes, 1982, s. 6). They both put the reliability of photographs into question. Each theorist claims that behind every photo, there is more than one can see. Any picture is unable to represent the whole memory as it is the outcome of a photographer, which is blended with his perspective, and it is not clear what has happened before and after the shooting, too.

The author presents six photos from his family album. He chooses several photographs out of many possible ones. Either he may attempt to remember the past or make his readers see what he wants, is not clear but no matter what his aim is, the author takes the power into his hands in both possibilities. It is a power that controls the way how his parents should look, and the way how his readers should see them. The photographs also give him an opportunity to reconstruct the past by presenting evidence but with his own interpretations. On the other hand, as readers, we need to be aware of the fact that, the author's narration of his own history with those documents "might lead us

to conclude that we have a responsibility to investigate possible alternative histories” (Barber, 2010, s. 2). The author’s self-reflexive narration makes it feasible or, at least, gives readers a chance to interpret the meaning that the author intends to convey.

Michael Ondaatje inserts a picture in the section *Asia Rumors* which shows an old photo of his hometown. In the photo, there is a cart and houses that are by the beach. The following chapter is *Asia*, in which the author gives details about the circumstances that lead him to go back to his hometown, and also he tells about the natural disasters in Sri Lanka. The old photograph which interacts with the image of hometown that the author keeps in his mind is replaced with a picture he presents. The tranquillity of the picture does not match with the chapter that gives details about floods and droughts.

The photos of the author’s parents are included in the section *A Fine Romance*. The photographs present them individually but not together. The author probably presents them as he remembers; separated. In the photo of his father, the author presents him as a well-dressed and handsome man. It does not evoke a chaotic, troublemaker father image. On the contrary, his mother’s photo depicts a woman who is happy and extroverted which does not match the image that the author presents in the novel. *Running in the Family* does not include much information about the author’s mother, but it is clear from the behaviour of his father that she is an introverted woman who cannot prevent her husband from drinking and acting shamefully. Another significance of the photos is the irony between the title of the chapter and the parents’ separated pictures. Readers’ expectations are not confronted again as romanticism is supposed to be within two lovers and side by side.

In the chapter *What We Think of Married Life*, there is another picture of parents and they are not separated this time. The picture shows them quite differently. They make funny faces like monkeys in the picture. However, the author depicts the picture on the previous page, in chapter *Photograph*. He presents a verbal narrative with the aim of making his readers set an expectation. He states that it is the photograph that he has “been waiting for all his life” (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 161) as it is the only one that his parents are together. Yet, the parents in the photo are far from being serious, and it raises the question that do they pretend to be funny or is it their real state. Besides, as the author sets an expectation on the previous page by stating that it is the perfect photo for him, he misleads his readers because instead of a funny picture, a more romantic one may be expected.

At the beginning of the chapter *The Ceylon and Succulent Society*, there is a photo of the author’s family, in which he, his mother, and siblings are young, and they seem happy in their swimsuits. The picture conveys a joyful family that is contrary to the aforementioned one, however, his father is missing in the photograph. Whether he is the one who shoots the photograph or not, is not clear but on a happy day of a family, the father is absent or he may not want to take part in their joyful moments. It becomes the interpretation of the author as he is the one that chooses the photo and presents it as a happy family memory. Its fictionality and irony come from the fact that the whole family does not exist in it. An old photo of Ceylon appears in the introduction of the section *Don’t Talk to me about Matisse*. The photo shows people that are surrounded by a flood, a typical monsoon day. However, the people in the picture do not seem sad or scared or even surprised. It is probably bewildering for readers to see them in the middle of a flood who do not show any sign of surprise or fear.

Any text, document or visuals that are used in the novel, undoubtedly, enrich the narrative. They enable new perspectives for both the author and the reader. Furthermore, it makes the author’s task easier to present the intended meaning and for the reader that they may find them interesting. On the other hand, new perspectives that the intertexts present mean different interpretations for both the narrator and the reader. They create multiplicity, and the author’s personal experiences and his memories along with the verbal explanations about the intertexts restrict readers, and they may not fit their expectations. Thus, they become the personal and subjective way of presenting and questioning realities and history. The author emphasizes the processes of the past and indicates the textuality and physicality of all past events, which can only be known if they are recorded or survive. Ondaatje marks himself as a historian who, in a scientific manner, bases his accounts on facts and on documents, but also he juxtaposes them with myths. He chooses some intertexts to support his ideas. Hutcheon states that “we name and constitute those events as historical facts by selection and



narrative positioning" (Hutcheon, 1988, s. 97). Thus, it can be inferred that to select among the texts also means to ignore others. As a result, what the author tells becomes a self-reflexive story.

Conclusion

In conclusion, twenty-five year is a big gap that separates the author from the past. The accuracy of memory cannot be expected and the novel also includes the author's imagination of personal and national history. As the writer searches for the individuals that form the part of his family history with a diasporic state as well as his country's by including larger historical context which are mixed with fictions and myths and as there is a great distance in space and time, he makes the novel a historiographic metafiction. By juxtaposing written documents and oral stories, the author himself presents the accounts of the past which are emotional, empathetic and communal. Since "the island hid its knowledge" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 81), the author has to trace unconventional documents in order to restore his family's and Sri Lanka's past. His sensuous imagery is another factor that decreases the believability of the data he provides. By emphasizing native story-telling, the author further denotes possible gaps in records of the past. It cannot be known whether what is told orally really happened and what is written down is accurate. As Michael Ondaatje claims at the initial part of his novel by stating "truth disappears with history" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 53) he questions the concept of factual, objective truth not only by refracting and multiplying the narrative of history but also by integrating mythical stories in his novel. He conveys a general sense of vagueness and uncertainty by including various intertexts throughout the book. Despite all his struggles, however, the issue of finding his family's roots and hometown's history is not resolved. He confesses that "the book again is incomplete" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 193). Readers are left with unanswered questions or forced to find their own answers. To the author, historiography is an ongoing process and he asserts that any story is retold "with additions and this time a few judgements thrown in" (Ondaatje, 1982, s. 21). He highlights the circularity that any historian contributes to history with his background knowledge, which is blended with the data he gathers and, it becomes inevitable that there is a novelty in each historian's narration. The fact that any historical narration includes the narrator's interpretation makes historiography a vicious cycle. Any intertext such as photos or maps, do not go beyond to enrich the literary text, and they are just the outcome of the author's interpretation.

Author Contributions

1. Author: 50% 2. Author: 50% contributed to the study.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no financial conflict of interest with any institution, organization, person related to our article titled " Postmodern Historiography in Michael Ondaatje's Running in The Family" and there is no conflict of interest between the authors.

References

- Barber, R. (2010). *The Role of Imagination in Writing and Reading Narrative*. Retrieved 5 January 2021, from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233152431>
- Barthes, R. (1981). *The Discourse of History*. Retrieved 5 April 2021 From http://seas3.elte.hu/coursematerial/LojkoMiklos/Roland_Barthes_The_Discourse_of_History.pdf
- Barthes, R. and Howard, R. (1982). *Camera Lucida*. 2nd ed. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Carr, E. H. (1990). *What is History?* London: Penguin.
- Himmelfarb, G. (2002). *Telling It As You Like It: Postmodernist History and the Flight From Fact. The Postmodern History Reader*. Ed. Keith Jenkins. London: Routledge.
- Hume, K. (1984). *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature*. New York and London: Methuen.
- Hutcheon, L. (1987). *Postmodern Paratextuality and History*. Retrieved 3 March 2021, from <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/9477/1/TSpace0031.pdf>

- Hutcheon, L. (1988). *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge.
- Jackson, R. (1981). *Fantasy: The literature of Subversion*. New York and London: Methuen.
- Jenkins, K. (2003). *Rethinking History*. London: Routledge.
- Lee, A. (1990). *Realism and Power. Postmodern British Fiction*. London: Routledge.
- Lyotard, J. F. (1989). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester UP Print.
- Marshall, B. K. (1992). *Teaching the Postmodern: Theory and Fiction*. New York: Routledge.
- Nietzsche, F. (2007). *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*. 1873. Trans. Ian Johnson. South Dakota: NuVision.
- Ondaatje, M. (1982). *Running in the Family*. New York: Vintage Intl..
- Southgate, B. C. (2005). *What is History For?* London: Routledge.
- Wesseling, E. (1991). *Writing History As a Prophet. Postmodernist Innovations of the Historical Novel*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company

Genişletilmiş Özet

Postmodernizmin tarih yazımına bakış açısının temelinde mutlak doğruya ulaşmanın mümkün olmadığı yatmaktadır. Bu şüpheli tutum, varolan bütün tarihsel gerçekliklerin sorgulanmasına yol açmaktadır. Tarihin öz düşününsel anlatımının yanı sıra nesnel, ideolojik ve duygusal farklılıkların, yazarın ortaya koyduğu çalışmaya etki etmelerini kaçınılmaz hale getirmektedir. Tarih yazımı aynı edebiyatta olduğu gibi bir insan ürünü olarak görülmesi sebebiyle aynı olaylar üzerine farklı yorumların olabileceği savunulmaktadır. Tarihin evrensel ya da nesnel bir kavram olamayacağı düşüncesi postmodern yazarların geri planda kalmış tarihsel olayları da çalışmalarına katarak, yeniden yorumlamaya sevk etmektedir. Bununla birlikte, eksik bilgi ve belgelerin de varolabileceği ya da tarihinin bu noksanlıkları ortaya çıkarabilme yetisi de çalışmaların güvenilirliklerini tehlikeye sokmaktadır. Postmodernizmin düşünce çeşitliliğini benimsemesi tarihsel romanları da farklı görüşleri ya da geleneksel tarih yazımında önemsiz görülen noktaları bünyelerine dahil etmesine sebebiyet vermektedir. Sonuç olarak, bu tür romanlar okuyucularını, yazarın anlatmak istediği tarihin üzerine yorum yapmaya ve yapılan bu yorumlar neticesinde de kesin bilgiye ulaşmanın mümkün olamayacağı savını desteklemektedir.

İncelenen romanda, yazarın tarihsel olaylar üzerine kendi yorumlarına rastlanmaktadır. Yazar gerek ülkesinin gerekse de aile bireylerinin geçmişlerini aktarırken hayal gücünden ve seçtiği belgelerden faydalanarak okuyucularına kendi süzgecinden geçmiş olan bir tarih sunmaktadır. Yazarın okuyucularına sunduğu her belge öncesinde tanımlamalara ya da bilgilendirmelere başvurması okuyucularda bir beklenti oluşturmaktadır ancak belgelerin bu beklentilerle uyumaması onları yorum yapmaya yöneltmektedir. Bu durum ise tarihi kısır bir döngü haline getirerek öznel bir anlatım olmasına sebep olmaktadır. Ayrıca yazarın memleketinden ve akrabalarından uzun süre ayrı kalması, anlatılmak istenilen olayların hatırlanmasını güçleştirmekle beraber mevcut olan eksikliklerin de yazarın kendi arzusu doğrultusunda giderilmeside yine güvenilirliği etkileyen önemli unsurlardan biri olarak belirtilebilir.

Özetle, yazarın ortaya koyduğu eser duygusal ve kurmaca öğeleri içinde barındırması sebebiyle, her ne kadar tarihsel gerçekliklerle birlikte sunulsa dahi, okuyucuların romana şüpheli bir tutumla yaklaşmalarının önünü açmaktadır. Tarihsel belgelerin arasında yapılan seçimler ve yazarın bu dökümanlara öznel yaklaşımı neticesinde ortaya çıkan duygusal ve ideolojik anlatımı tarihsel olayların gerçekte yaşanıp yaşanmadığı konusunda da yine okuyucularda şüphe uyandırma ihtimalini güçlendirmektedir. Bu duruma benzer olarak yazar sözel anlatılan olayları da romanına ekleyip ve kaynaklarının yaşlarına ve unutkanlıklarına atıfta bulunarak çalışmasının özneliğini ve yoruma açık olduğunu tekrar vurgulamaktadır.

