

Softening of Ethnic Boundaries in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*

Manouri Jayasinghe¹

Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* published in 2000, depicts the 'dark' almost anarchic period in Sri Lanka, during which the armed forces had to combat the Sinhalese insurgents in the South, the Tamil separatist guerillas in the North and certain other disruptive elements in the country. Anil Tissera, Sri Lankan, an expatriate and a forensic specialist is forced on the government by the UNO to investigate the mysterious happenings of this period. Unable to accomplish her assignment because the proof of the case she builds up is spirited away, Anil is compelled to leave the country.

Critics (Ismail, Kanaganayagam, Mukherjee and Sugunasiri) of *Anil's Ghost*, accuse Ondaatje of being partial, apolitical and ahistorical. Even if so, this can be justified, because Ondaatje is neither a historian nor a sociologist, but a fiction writer. Hence, having no obligation to be committed to history. The author's mixed origins, his multiple experiences obtained by residing abroad, interwoven with his status of a migrant writer, enables him to look at his country's problems with a different point of view. Therefore, perhaps a mellow approach towards ethnic separations. Ondaatje seems to use doctors – those who have taken the vow of Hippoclytes – by design to present his opinion.

At present, when an uneasy peace prevails in Sri Lanka, a paper of this nature seems opportune as its objective is to interpret Ondaatje's attempt to attenuate the communal differences between the Sinhalese and the Tamils by giving priority to humanity than to ethnic identities. Reading critical works on the author and the novel, obtaining information through the Internet, and participating in discussions (study groups, literary circles) contributed to the writing of this paper. To conclude, though visibly *Anil's Ghost* is a rendering of the troubled times in Sri Lanka, it holds a theme of universal importance where humanity could transcend racial barriers.

Key Words: Ethnic Boundaries; Michael Ondaatje's; *Anil's Ghost*; Sri Lanka;

¹ National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations, University of Sorbonne III – Paris