



Postmodern Narrative Techniques in Michael Ondaatjee's *Coming Through Slaughter* and *In a Skin of a Lion*- An Exploration.

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The term 'Narrative' is taken from the Latin word *narrare* which suggests 'to recount' and is said to the adjective *gnarus* which means knowing or skilled. Ultimately, it is derived from the proto Indo-European root word 'gno' meaning to know. The word story could also be used as a synonymous to narrative. Rimmon Kenan in his *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, rightly says that,

“a story may be a construct created during a suitable format that describes a sequence of fictional or non-fictional events within the sort of written, spoken, poetry, prose, images, song, theatre or dance gossip, newspaper, ballet, painting etc” (55).

A narrative is within the sort of spoken, written or imagined, and whatever it is, it's more points of view to represent the participants or observers. The stories which are told verbally, have an individual telling the story named as 'a narrator' whom the audience can see or hear. He adds layers to the text. Narrative has characters, a setting, a time, a problem, and attempts at solving the matter and tries to urge an answer to the matter. The scripts written for movies and plays are further samples of narrative writing. The presence of narrative is everywhere and in every corner of the planet and is famously described in *An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives* by Roland Barthes as:

The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances – as though any material were fit to receive man's stories narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mimes cinema, comics, news item, conversation. (272)

Narrating a story is itself an art. Stanzel in his *A Theory of Narrative* says: “The narrator is that the one who evaluates, who is sensitively aware, who observes” (99). The person whose point of view is employed to relate the story is considered the narrator. He's a personality developed by the author for the precise purpose of conveying the story. He's the one who has a chance to watch the responses of the audience to the story. He can modify the way of telling to clarify the content of the story and he can enhance the listener's interest also. The story depends on how the narrator narrates. It's the narrator who can modify or change the structure of the story counting on the listener's interest and level. We discover this narrative technique in any of the sorts of literature or any work of art. Regardless of the form, the content of the story may be concern with important world people and events. From the view point of F.K.Stanzel, narratologist, this is often termed as “personal experience narrative” (99).



Narrative pictures a story, whether it appears within the written verbal forms, or in one among many visual or hybrid narrative forms like films, computer games, operas, narrative communicates. This communication works on different levels simultaneously, with several mediating figures performing different overlapping functions. The author communicates with the reader; the narrator directs its discourse to a narratee; characters interact with each other. The actions, thoughts, and speech of characters occur inside the story world, or at the extent of action. The narrator and narratee (recipient of the narrative) can also share the space of the story world with the characters, but they often occupy a definite level break away the story. This realm, which is implied by the existence of the discourse exists because the zone from which speech or writing emanates, could also be elaborately or very lightly represented.

Technique is one among the essential requisites of a literary writing. Technique also refers to the notion by which the novelist chooses to inform his/her story. The novel is sort of a living organism. It grows and leaves its impact on us and inspires the readers to think it and practice it in his life. When a novelist imagines a story and works out its plot and characters, he starts the method of composing the topic matter. Experience, discovery, use of language all close together cause the work of art. The author has got to write the story during a convincing manner. Sometimes after deliberation, and sometimes suddenly, the author finds his or her path. A pattern takes shape, it acquires a rhythm with words and therefore the story starts developing. In other words, technique may be a craftsmanship of plot within the plot to make suspense and climax. Technique is also employed as a means of showing or reporting character development, revelation of motives and relationships. Sometimes events are related from the purpose view of characters and arbitrary device for the heightening of dramatic interest through the narrowing or broadening of perspective upon the context.

Narrative technique refers to the writer's manner of organizing and manipulating his material. The writer has something to say or write about, making this the content of his narrative. The technique is his ways and means of organizing and manipulating what he wants to share. So the materials used in narrative technique are life and its complications and a knowledge of the human mind or human conduct of social relations places 'and events. The tools are language, words, sentences and rhetoric. The writer uses a technique because he has a certain purpose. This may be emotional where the writer produces emotions in the reader. He does this by emphasizing character, event, setting or the general truth. It involves how the author describes the way the plot unfolds and descriptions of the characters appear as if both physically and spiritually. The techniques include point of view, manipulation of time, dialogue, prose, multiplicity of point of view, stream of consciousness technique. Narrative techniques that includes 'Author surrogate,' a personality who acts as the author's spokesman. Sometimes the character may intentionally or unintentionally be an idealized version of the author.

Narrative techniques offer deeper sense for the one that reads and help the reader to use imagination to imagine circumstances. Narrative techniques may include metaphors, similes, personification, imagery, hyperbole, alliteration, back story, flashback, flash-forward, foretelling, and narrative perspective/point of view. Symbolic language may be a common element in narrative writing. Some other narrative techniques include metafiction which are used to problematise the so-called historical documents, which do not leave an unmediated, direct access to the facts they represent; they cry out for an interpretation of their own fundamental principles. To explore more, Hutcheon in his book, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory and Fiction* (1988), talks about the historiographic metafiction about the context as:



Historiographic metafiction is always careful to “situate” itself in its discursive context and then uses that situating to problematize the very notion of knowledge - historical, social, and ideological. Its use of history is and to a modernist look to the “authorizing past for legitimation” it is questioning of any such authority as the basis of knowledge – and power. (185)

Postmodernism adopted the narrative technique of self - referentiality from modernism. There are various ways during which a text can allude to itself, but what’s special about postmodernist self-referentiality is its concentration on the politics of representation of oneself, manifest in its constant questioning of the uses and therefore the status of a given text. While non-teleological narration has predominantly been a formalist experiment in modernism, it’s getting used in postmodernism to subvert the formerly assumed unproblematic nature of representation. The thematic level is another technique within the changing nature and understanding of art and its form. Thus art began to be seen not as separated, but a collaboration of reality and knowledge and art became closer to the general public and was often presented within the sort of show, happening or performance. The Beats, for instance, often wrote poems not for intimate reading reception, but they were often recited on public places in sport stadiums, concert halls and amid the pop, jazz, or rock bands and music. Painters and sculptors presented their artistic works outside traditional galleries directly within the urban environment or in nature, sometimes not only un-artistic objects, but also living or dead animals or citizenry became the artistic objects like photography, visual arts, dead corps, civil rights movement have enabled these authors to realize an access to education, science and publishing opportunities, but their work became postmodern due to their use of postmodern narrative techniques and their vision of the planet.

Postmodern narrative strategies are not limited to the aforementioned ones, since postmodern plurality allows the scope of endless possibilities. In fact, postmodernism cannot be limited to any number of narrative strategies. Postmodern plural self generates multiple threads of narrative strategies in various cultures of the world. Its inclusiveness and pluralism enables it to be accepted by the writers of the world. This is the reason why postmodern narrative patterns are always in multiplicity, and can never be limited to specificity and finality. Different cultural contextualization allows the writers to produce fictions with multiple different narrative strategies. For instance, Japanese, American, Indian, African, and Canadian writers narrate the problems and the questions of representation differently. Thus the postmodern techniques bring the sense of understanding for changes and challenges in contemporary age, where stereotypical images give loops of revisiting history while analyzing it with their own styles of representation.

The paper focuses on major postmodern narrative strategies that have wider influence on Michael Ondaatje’s writings *Coming Through Slaughter* and *In the Skin of a Lion*. Ondaatje’s ethnicity and immigration are never entirely absent from critical or popular interpretations of his work or from perceptions of him as an author. His writing career has been interpreted as reflecting and coinciding with a number of significant developments within the Canadian poetry and fiction of the late 1960s. In his narratives, Ondaatje’s demonstrated fascinations with multi-generic forms, with blending high art and low popular culture, his attraction to characters who are outlaws and failures, and gives significance to such important characters in the historical novels and autobiographies. In such accounts, which connect him to a national narrative, his presumed ethnic marginality is often implicitly or explicitly connected to the ex-centric position of the postmodern writer to the dominant culture. The characteristic features of Ondaatje’s narrative are slippages, ruptures, discontinuities, retelling, and retracing as the writer composes in a postmodern style and pays close attention to language and narrative structure.



Ondaatje's work represents a merging or transgression of the boundaries between life and art. Originally, Ondaatje crossed the borders of conventional literary genres when he wrote *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, a narrative collage of poetry, documentary, news articles, sketches and photographs. This work inaugurates his passage from strict poetry writing to narrative fiction. In *Coming Through Slaughter*, his second long narrative or first attempt at writing a novel, Ondaatje has attempted to recreate the historical and legendary character of Buddy Bolden and can be called a historiographic metafiction. Linda Hutcheon in her *Postmodern Poetics* defines historiography as "a novel that blurs the line between fact and fiction" (111). The legendary figure Buddy Bolden is the protagonist of this fiction. Ondaatje has not only used historical characters but also real names embedded with imaginary lines. Bolden often asks himself a question, "What's wrong with me?" (68). This repetition shows the mental dementia suffered by the protagonist:

When he went mad he was the same age as I am now . . . when I read he stood in front of mirrors and attacked himself, there was the shock of memory. For I had done that. Stood, and with a razor - blade cut into cheeks and forehead, shaved hair. Defiling people we did not wish to be. (68)

The tale of Buddy Bolden's Blues or Jazz, his ascendancy into popularity, his family and love affair, his work in the barber shop, his psychosis and eventual breakdown into dementia are ingeniously and aesthetically portrayed by Ondaatje in his metafictional biography.

Ondaatje narrates Buddy Bolden's descent into his own hell, unwittingly or self-created as a story of despair, madness, loneliness, of the viciousness of life affecting high art, of art struggling to transcend life's miseries, not always successfully, but ultimately a tale of aching lyricism. Ondaatje's language is innovative and appropriate and his strong theme is rich with universal implications. Ondaatje uses the technique of repetition with regard to the title. Twice within the book, Ondaatje includes references to a town north of Baton Rouge called Slaughter, through which Buddy passes twice. Ondaatje includes an outline of "the mattress whores" who have been kicked out of Storyville for showing evidence of getting sexually transmitted diseases. By the time he has had his gratuitous fun in Storyville, he married Nora, abandoned Nora, and had an affair with another woman, Bolden has lost his passion for jazz and is hooked into sex. "I desire every woman I remember" (99), he says while he's isolated outside New Orleans. The story is told in many fragments and lots of voices with actual accounts of Bolden's life and performances, oral history, lists of songs, biographical facts, narrative, dialogue, interior monologues, psychiatric reports, bits of poetry and lyrics and the author's own voice through which Ondaatje weaves a series of brilliantly improvised sets.

Ondaatje's imagined Bolden cuts hair by day, plays jazz all night, and follows his erratic muse on various alcoholic adventures. His friend Webb, a detective and another Ondaatje proxy, frequently takes it upon himself to trace Bolden down and curtail his drinking binges and misadventures with other men's wives. Ondaatje highlights the mysterious quality of the character by making one among the central narrative voices within the text a detective or a searcher. Ondaatje uses the character of the detective to self-consciously draw attention to his own narrative act, his own improvisation of Buddy Bolden. In order to trace Bolden, Webb, solicits a photograph of him from the photographer E.J. Bellocq, another real historical personage whose work was rediscovered round the time Ondaatje was writing *Coming Through Slaughter*. Within the 1970s, Bellocq gained notoriety for his enigmatic portraits of Storyville prostitutes, and for the distinctive scratch marks on his prints. Here was an artist who did violence to his own art. The text stages a friendship between Bolden and Bellocq, which proves formative for both men, but the fictionalized



friendship ends abruptly with Bellocq's suicide. Bolden doesn't fare far better, and by the top of the novel he descends into madness, languishing within the obscurity of a positive medieval mental hospital.

Ondaatje evokes the power of the photograph to help construct an image of Bolden, Ondaatje tells his readers in *Coming Through Slaughter* that: "This is what you see" (66). What you see, however, is nothing more than a list of names attached to a list of instruments. In fact, even as a conduit of that simple and basic amount of information, the "photograph . . . is not good or precise, partly because the print was found after the fire" (66). The forces of time, here represented by the fire, are always eroding the documents of the past. Even Bellocq the photographer, who, of all people, should have the greatest faith in the power of the photograph, seems, in the words of Steven Heighen in his work, *Signature: A Journal of Theory and Canadian Literature* states: "to sense that his photographs fail in some fundamental way, that despite their merits they are too static, too lifeless, for he slashes them with a knife" (234). In fact, Heighen claims that Bellocq's suicide is the result of the inability of photography to capture the living flesh: "Unable to make the flesh word through his art Bellocq decides to kill himself" (234). Given the importance of photography and other attempts at recording the past, Ondaatje uses these shreds of the past as triggers for the imagination which invite living fiction into the inanimate documents of history in his novel *Coming Through Slaughter*:

The photographs of Bellocq . . . 89 glass plates survive . . . Look at the pictures. Imagine the misshapen man who moved round the room, his grace as he swivelled round his tripod . . . that holds the photograph of the whore's baby that she gave away, the plaster Christ on the wall. (54)

Through Bolden and via Bellocq's photograph, Ondaatje stakes a claim to the imagined aura in his text. Ondaatje figures Bellocq's portrait of Bolden as an auratic work of art. By elevating the status of the mechanically reproduced work of art more generally and more importantly, he determines the terms by which he will identify himself with Bolden. The photograph becomes both an icon of the auratic and a contact between Ondaatje and his protagonist, allowing him to explicitly poke into the text in his own voice. Ondaatje looks into a photograph of Bolden and sees an auratic reflection of himself.

When Bolden meets Robin Brewitt, Ondaatje observes that he "nearly fainted" (27). He loses control of his senses, and perhaps in additional romantic terms, his heart. The first stages of Bolden's relationship with Robin are marked clearly by an ongoing loss of control or, more accurately, by the loss of the balance that characterized his life with Nora. Robin seems to represent an alternate 'other' for Bolden – a second chance, as it was, for his constructing a sort of truth for himself. Though it is stated repeatedly that albeit Bolden has numerous women throwing themselves at him, he truly loves Nora. However, after Bolden runs from New Orleans, he finds himself without Nora.

As Ondaatje portrays, Bolden doesn't really love Robin. Robin is his outlet. She blurs into Nora- and Nora isn't his. He is completely alienated and devastated- barren of everything- including his kith and kin. When Buddy returns from the Brewitts', his only way of re-accessing the person he was in New Orleans is to read through his "diary"(113), *The Cricket*. As Neisser writes in *Time Present and Time Past*, "we use autobiographical memory to sustain a sense of unique personal identity" (55), Buddy's lack of both a public and personal past indicates, in many senses, a lack of identity. This absence attracts Ondaatje to the character of Buddy and allows Ondaatje, as artist, to infuse the character with his own imagination.



The fictional biography of the great artist and historical legend, Jazz Cornetist, Buddy Bolden ends ironically in a mad house seeking peace from the chaotic world around him and from the traumas that lurks within him. The novel *Coming Through Slaughter* in its theme and techniques is a perfect example of Ondaatje's unique narrative art form. The theme rambles between the protagonist past and present. There is a combination of prose and poetry and also the private life of Bolden and his public life. The trauma and the psychological problem of slow mental derangement are brilliantly caricatured by Ondaatje. The novel is the realistic portrayal of the unscrupulous life led by the populace of New Orleans during Bolden's times. The novel is Pojoumena in its typical postmodern process of creation where the artist is a creator of different notes of music to satiate the hungry audience who crave for novel art forms.

In the novel *In the Skin of a Lion*, Ondaatje's characters and narrators experience the actual and figurative absence of the essence, knowledge and physical proximity of people, places and the past. These absences precipitate the efforts to combat the lack of satisfactory knowledge. By gaining access to the past through the variety of sources necessary to complete the picture, however, Ondaatje provides, once again, a fragmented text which must be ordered and controlled by the art and memories of the characters and author. Organizing the text in this manner brings the past and present into an intimate exchange which ultimately allows Ondaatje to animate the past with the imagination of fiction.

The central focus of the novel is the 1940s of Toronto, the construction of Bloor Street Viaduct commonly known as Prince Edward Viaduct, Water Filtration Plant and the mitigations encountered by the settler section. Through a few real events like the construction process, the sufferings of the builders, the daring work of Nicholas, the narration of the novel encompasses fictional plot of the life story of Patrick Lewis, his enduring talent, his succumbing adaptation of the culture and language of the settled nation. Ondaatje is proud to assert the talent of the immigrants through Patrick who is no less than David or Goliath. Moreover the quote from the epic *The Gilgamesh* "The joyful will stoop with sorrow, and when you have one to the earth I will let my hair grow long for your sake, I will wander through the wilderness in the skin of a lion" (213) given by the writer in the beginning of the novel expresses the true fate of the migrated people who acquire pain as the only token for the persistent work. The opening passage of the novel's preface promises a transposed journey into the world of the present and concrete. It reads:

This is a story a young girl gathers in a car during the early hours of the morning. She listens and asks questions as the vehicle travels through darkness. Outside, the countryside is unbetrayed. The man who is driving could say, "In that field is a castle," and it would be possible for her to believe him. (342)

Ondaatje takes the reader with the unnamed young girl, who is aligned with her radical open mind and sublime, dream-like vision of the surrounding world; in order to fully understand the text. The structure of the novel incorporates a series of interrelated stories to form concentric circles, all of which converge in Patrick's act of telling a story to Hana. He offers several stories that weave into one another, and suggests the numerous ways in which the multitude of stories can be shared. Characters *In the Skin of a Lion*, reconcile the troubled past with their present realities, re-situate themselves, and use their migrant positions to construct their histories.

Patrick and his father Hazen appear as if simply to awake from sleep when they witness the passage of the migrant workers, "this collection of strangers" (7). In Canada, it seems that beginning always assumes a more aboriginal precedent, which forever defers the moment of initiation as a reading of the past. Again, with all that has been written, how does one speak of beginnings? The boy and his father, who are initially unnamed and unfixed for the reader,



appear as strangers even to this "strange community" (7). They are forced to "sleep in the shacks behind the Bellrock Hotel and have little connection with the town" (8). Implied, however, is a life lived by these characters outside of the text, before this abrupt beginning. Patrick and his father appear out of the darkness to join with a community of readers, as if illuminated by their relationship with the other men. Indeed, "[t]he only connection the loggers have with the town is when they emerge to skate along the line of river, on homemade skates, the blades made of old knives" (8). These "strangers of another language" (22), to whom Patrick and his father are also strangers, are only manifest in the community of Bellrock as movement. These skating men glide "past boundaries, speed! romance! one man waltzing with his fire . . . " (22). The act of being borne along on a knife's edge emphasizes the tenuousness of movement; neither here nor there, living on the line of river enacts the unhoped movement of estrangement. These men do not live in any place, neither outside the town nor on the margins. They live on the line between, which is illuminated by their own torches.

Patrick comes to understand his own self and the country only after he meets Alice who teaches him about the lives of the workers: "And all of his life Patrick had been oblivious to it, a searcher gazing into the darkness of his own country" (157). Later part of the narrative segment shows Alice to be the name of the nun who has been saved by Nicholas who is at present a victim of the creation of Toronto, a city in Canada that has swallowed her husband Cato. With his will power and inspiration of political activism of Alice, he fights for the recognition of the marginalized people. The inter-textual reference to the epic of Gilgamesh indicates that he must hide in a 'different skin' in order to be able to blend into their surroundings. To become a part of society, the immigrants need to adopt the skin of Toronto. Hutcheon in his work *Beginning to Theorize the Postmodern* succinctly explains in another context:

The intertextual parody of historiographic metafiction enacts, in a way, the views of certain contemporary historiographies: it offers a sense of the presence of the past, but a past that can be known only from its texts, its traces be they literary or historical. (125)

The intertextual references reveal a blending of the mythical, historical and fictional in the invention of identity. Patrick is shown as Ondaatje's other and parallels the character of Gilgamesh. Patrick, like Gilgamesh, is on a quest. Within the epic, Gilgamesh roams with the wilderness "in the skin of a lion", mourning the death of his friend Enkidu. On his quest to seek out why his friend Enkidu has died, Gilgamesh visits the garden of the gods and tells a lady, Siduri, of his grief and his quest. Similarly, Patrick hides on an Huntsville island during his quest to avenge the death of Alice and thinks of telling a blind woman he meets during a garden there of his love and grief. He burns down a resort hotel of the rich, he adopts the pose of a violent anarchist, both to require revenge on those whom Alice has taught him to oppose, and to transcend the bounds of his former life. After his return from prison, Patrick aims more precisely at the limit between the anonymous dead of history, and people who are granted immortality by its monuments. He enters the waterworks through its intake pipe, after having made himself invisible with the assistance of Caravaggio, a thief who routinely transgresses the boundaries of buildings, and has eluded the confinement of Kingston Prison by letting himself be painted.

Patrick, after having crossed the dark Lake Ontario as Gilgamesh had traversed darkness and therefore the waters of death. His meeting with the town commissioner Harris in the dark inside the water works, takes on rich signification with the intertextual references to the epos. Gamlin in his work *In the Skin of a Lion and the Oral Narrative* states: "By entering the water works, Patrick has most never "successfully overcome the danger of being obliterated by official



histories" (69). His encounter and dialogue with Harris pose the question of death and survival, practically at this decisive moment of the novel, and symbolically with reference to historically recorded reality. Threatening to destroy the building which still immortalizes Harris' name, Patrick demands to understand what percentage suffered death within the construction of the building. "No record was kept" (236), Harris answers. Patrick now asks Harris, to show off the sunshine, and face him in his Patrick's world of darkness. But Harris reveals himself as a visionary dreamer who can see potential worlds beyond the visible realities of daylight. During a surprising turn of events, Patrick falls asleep while telling the story of Alice's death and we hear its end as a part of a dream. While this solution hardly corresponds to the final expectations connected with the realistic novel, it's clearly motivated by the mythic theme of vanquishing sleep and death. Within the early light of day, Harris wins over Patrick, and with him the written history we all know. Like Gilgamesh, Patrick doesn't pass the test of conquering sleep to acquire the skin of a lion, and accede to the language of historically recorded reality but remains a story between possibility and dream. This status between an uncertain power and prophecy distinguishes also the narrative of an earlier stage in Gilgamesh's journey, which Ondaatje quotes in his text *In the Skin of a Lion*:

[Harris] stood over Patrick. 'He lay down to sleep, until he was woken from out of a dream. He saw lions around him glorying in life; then he took his axe in his hand, he drew his sword from his belt, and he fell upon them like an arrow from the string. (242)

As Harris accepts his role in the death of Alice, Patrick too acknowledges his complicity in the accident that killed Alice. He thus lays down the mantle of a victim and recognizes that he has also become a part of aggressive community. With this realization he finally finds release from the burden of the past. He finds anchor in Clara who, he knows, shall free him from the solitude, enable him to reconcile with the human urge to forge bonds, family ties and embrace the world. Since Patrick decides not to magnify the waterworks, Harris doesn't hand him over to the police. Gilgamesh's fight with the lions within the night is both an act of self-preservation and anger that the beasts still enjoy life while Enkidu is dead. Similarly, Patrick Lewis's attempt on Commissioner Harris' life and therefore the Waterworks grows out of his anger at Harris' continued success and power while Patrick's love, Alice Gull, is dead. Harris retains his power, as he orders the explosives removed. But, in recognising Patrick as Gilgamesh, he recognises the facility and importance of the workers, the marginalised. Patrick, the unknown man fails in his subversive mission, and Harris who previously designates him as "among the dwarfs of enterprise who never get accepted or acknowledged" (238), now recognises Patrick as a hero. The closing pages of the book find Patrick embarking on another journey. A call from Ambrose Small's wife, Clara with whom he had a love affair, sparks a trip with Hana, Alice daughter. Patrick now acknowledges Hana as his daughter and rescue Clara from the same isolation he suffered. Ondaatje ends and begins the novel in the twilight mood of a car with father and daughter. The car ride is the results of Ondaatje's ability to transcend time and space- the story ends at the start of the novel and begins at the top, as if Patrick has told his story not only to the young Hana, but ultimately, to readers. Ondaatje encompasses the nightmare in a narrative which does not end the novel in darkness, but with lights, "ready to be revealed" (120).

Gaps and room for omission are plenty in the novel. It is evident, for instance, by the obscurity in which Alice's past is shrouded; the absence of explanation as to how her friendship with Nicholas Temelcoff after their initial and anonymous encounter on the bridge progresses, the darkness that shrouds the mysterious disappearance of Ambrose Small, "the jackal of Toronto's business world" (57), and the lack of clear explanation surrounding the release of Patrick by



Commissioner Harris towards the end of the novel. Such omissions point out the proliferation of narratives surrounding each characters and events.

Thus the narrative strategy adopted by Ondaatje is complex in mingling the past and the present of the characters, profusely adding the postmodern concept of historiographical metafiction connecting the factual realities of 1940's and the imaginative fictitious interpretation. Not only the fragmented narrative adds variety to the characters and the novel but also the mixing of facts and fiction necessitates the importance of the history of a nation and the people who partake in its growth. Paradoxically, however, and typically in a postmodern manner, what we learn is that it is precisely through art that we may come closer to a truthful retrieval of the past.

To put it in a nutshell, Ondaatje's narrative style is sophisticated. He uses a scaffolding fragmented narrative. His narrative style pays special attention to subtle transitions in the text, and weave an intricate web of story. That story will lead us into a world filled with much sorrow, perseverance, identity crisis, migrations, cultural assimilation, transgressing borders going transnational and becoming transcultural. Thus Ondaatje through his narrative style has created great literature by examining the ways in which people particularly the immigrants cope with a new world.

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