

Integral of Derrida's *Différance*- 'To Differ': A Postmodernist Analysis of Michael Ondaatje's Selected Poems

Shahbaz Afzal Bezar^{*}, Sajid Ali[†] & Mahmood Ahmad Azhar[‡]

Abstract

*This paper explores the presence of one of the integrals of Derrida's *différance* i.e. 'to differ' or dissolving the boundaries from the theme and textual techniques of Michael Ondaatje's selected poems. This integral has been investigated through textual analysis in the paradigm of postmodernism especially *différance*. Postmodernism is a model of rupture. The present research is qualitative in its nature which tries to figure out how Ondaatje uses this integral to dissolve the boundaries between husband and wife, man and nature, present and primitivism, east (Ceylon) and U.S (Connecticut), prose and poetry in his poetry. Boundaries are also dissolved through postmodern textual techniques i.e. parody, pastiche, intertextuality, non-linear structure and multi-voiced narrative.*

Keywords: *Différance*, Pastiche, Intertextuality, Non-linear structure, Multi-voiced Narrative

Introduction

Postmodernism has been established as an area of academic study since the mid 1980s. It is a notion that is seen in different areas of study including art, architecture, sociology, literature, music, communications, film, fashion and technology. Different theorists of postmodernism have defined it in different ways. It has been defined as a break with the transcendent beliefs of Enlightenment, "dedoxification" (Hutcheon), "decreation"/deconstruction (Derrida/ Hassan), and "denaturing" (Hayles). Hutcheon defines postmodernism as a contradictory phenomenon; it installs and then subverts or challenges the very concept. It is reflected in architecture, literature, painting, sculpture, film, video, dance, TV, music, philosophy, aesthetic theory, psychoanalysis, linguistics or historiography. (Hutcheon, 1988) Postmodernism is a shift towards pluralism and cultural eclecticism. (Jenks, 1986) Postmodernism is a field of tension that exists between tradition and innovation, conservation and renewal, mass culture and high art, in which the second terms are no longer automatically privileged over the first. (Huyssen, 1986)

Différance is a French term. Derrida coined it in order to play with the language and meaning. He deliberately makes it homophonous with the 'difference'. This graphic difference between *différance* ('a' instead of 'e') cannot be heard but written. He writes in "La Différance": "The *a* of *différance*, then, is not heard, remains silent and discreet as the grave: oīkevis" (Derrida, 1982, p. 4). Derrida's *différance* contains some integrals i.e. 'differ' or dissolving the boundaries and 'deferral' or postponement. Different critics

^{*} Government Degree College, Satiana Road, Faisalabad

[†] Government Postgraduate College, Samundri, Faisalabad

[‡] Lahore Leads University, Lahore

have defined *différance* in different ways. According to Lucy, the continuing *movement* of *différance* disturbs a fixed difference. She quotes Derrida's well-known statement, *différance* refers to "the systematic play of the differences, of traces of differences, of spacing by means of which elements are related to each other" (Lucy, 2004, p. 27). According to Desilet, Derrida uses this term (a) in order to playfully emphasize a difference between writing and speech, (b) in order to suggest a new way of understanding the relationship between opposites (c) in order to understand the ground of being from which oppositional tensions spring. *Différance* "has neither existence nor essence" (Desilet, n.d. p. 6). According to Sweetman, *différance* is a shaker of being because through it Derrida manifests Western philosophers' failure to understand the reality of *différance*.

Literature Review

Dissolving the boundaries in the perspective of *différance* has been investigated from the themes and textual techniques of Ondaatje's selected poems. In this perspective, in order to fill the lapses and gaps in the present research, a short review of the previous different researchers is given. The previous researchers analyzed Ondaatje's poetry in the perspective of the poetics of ambivalence (Solecki), kinetic literary techniques (Heighton), subjectivity and social relations (Varga), psychoanalytic reading in the panorama of Lacan's thought (Bremner) and his *Handwriting* in the frame of reference to semiotics (Festino) but the present study has explored the presence of one of the integrals of Derrida's *différance*– 'differ' or dissolving the boundaries.

Research Methodology

Type of this research is qualitative; paradigm of research is Derrida's *différance* and postmodernism; type of research method is textual analysis and critical approach is eclectic because Michael Ondaatje's poems were collected in the form of individual poems from his different poetic volumes.

Text Analysis

Derrida studies the notion of difference in the perspective of postmodern reasoning. He uses the term *différance* which combines 'to differ' in space and 'to defer' in time. 'To differ' is taken as distinction, separation, diastem, *spacing* and 'to defer' is defined as detour, delay, temporization. In this way, *différance* does not make boundaries between binaries but dissolves them. Cooper comments on Derrida's idea that *différance* is ever-active play; it cannot be located in any particular place.

Dissolving the boundaries is sought out from Michael Ondaatje's selected poems in the perspective of Derrida's *différance* especially 'to differ'. From its perspective, dissolving the boundaries between husband and wife has been investigated from "The Cinnamon Peeler". In this poem the images of the cinnamon peeler's wife's bed and leaving yellow bark dust on her pillow, her walking through the market, her taking bath under rain gutters, her smooth pasture, her keen nosed mother and rough brothers, cinnamon peeler's burying his hands in saffron, their swimming in water, his touching other women and his touching her belly, are seen. In this poem, the boundaries between husband and

wife are dissolved because here, husband is known for wife and wife for husband. From the outset, a hypothetical situation of the poem can be noted: "If I were a cinnamon peeler/ I would ride your bed / and leave the yellow bark dust / on your pillow" (Ondaatje, 1-4).

In the same poem, binary opposition of husband and wife is dissolved. Using the method of textual analysis and framework of *différance*, distortion of hierarchization is invested from the 'words and phrases' of this poem. According to Derrida, all conceptual systems are prone to falsifying, distorting hierarchization. Derrida does not make boundaries between the binaries as Saussure does but in *différance* binaries depend on one another. Butler takes Derrida's dissolving the boundaries as the conceptual oppositions i.e. speech versus writing, natural versus cultural, soul versus body, masculine versus feminine, literal versus metaphysical – wrong or at least rigidly fixed. (Butler, 2002) *Différance's* integral 'to differ' engenders binaries. Binary opposition between husband and wife is deconstructed in this poem. It questions hierarchies and blurs the boundaries between them: "You will be known among strangers/ as the cinnamon peeler's wife" (Ondaatje, 16-17).

Dissolving the boundaries does not contain the fixity of structuralism but postmodern *process* and postmodern identification. This poem is full of the postmodern identification and experience rather than modernist rationalization. Dissolving the boundaries is found in postmodern identification because it is not static but a process of identifying or the fact of being identified. The experiences of the cinnamon peeler can be noted as " I could hardly glanced at you/ before marriage/ never touch you/- your keen nosed mother, your rough brothers./ I buried my hands/ in saffron, disguised them/ over smoking tar,/ helped the honey gatherers..." (Ondaatje, 19-26).

In "The Cinnamon Peeler", Ondaatje (n.d.) dissolves the boundaries in the form of mythical identity. For postcolonial or immigrant writers, identities are indeterminate. Ondaatje being an immigrant writer is obsessed with identity. He analyzes the notions of identity through the method of myth-making. This poem deals with mythical identity because its narrator adopts the form of a daydream at the outset of this poem. The narrator wonders aloud what it would be like if he were someone else or cinnamon peeler. Ondaatje does not believe in a fixed national or ethnic identity. He is seen as a writer without borders. It is so because he believes in dissolving the boundaries.

In the poem "The Republic" Ondaatje (1967) dissolves the boundaries between the different kinds of reality: Dionysian passion and Apollonian reason. According to Solecki, an ambiguous, dynamic and chaotic external and internal reality has been presented in Ondaatje's work (Solecki, 1978).

Using the method of textual analysis, 'violent hierarchies' are identified from Ondaatje's "The Republic". The Apollonian world of reason and order and Dionysian world of energy and vitality is a binary opposition but it is dissolved in this poem. The house in the poem is an embodiment of different modes: "A different heaven here" (Ondaatje, 1967,

p. 20). There is a contrast between the movements and positions of the plants at day and night. Too much Apollonian reason in the plants is found at day time: “no dancing with the wind here” (ibid); and frenzy at night: “the plants in frenzy heave floors apart” (ibid). In this way, this poem dissolves the cut-off points between the binary oppositions as Ondaatje does in his entire work.

“The Republic” dissolves the boundaries because relativity is found in it. Like Ondaatje’s other lyrics, this poem also reflects the notion that a lyric has the capacity to rebuild any facet of reality. This poem is not devoid of relativity because reality is seen as dynamic in it. Relativism is not concerned with absolute truth or validity but with relative and subjective value. Discourses construct reality, knowledge and value in the perspective of postmodernism. Relativity of truth is seen in this poem: at day, the house has the truth contrasted with the truth of the night.

In the playfulness of the poem, Bakhtin’s concept of carnival is also seen which is multi-leveled and blurs the boundaries because it is a mixture of different things. Carnival is important for specific texts and history of genres. Hierarchies are turned on their heads in carnival. It is a jolly relativity. Everything serious, authoritative, rigid is subverted, loosened and mocked in it. In this poem, Nature which is noble in romanticism, is treated mockingly. Here, the plants with their noble bodies release fart.

In the poem “Dates”, Ondaatje (1973) discusses the condition of his mother when she was pregnant with him as well as the process of Stevens Wallace’s writing a poem. In the first stanza, the poet says that his birth was heralded by nothing but the anniversary of Winston Churchill’s marriage. It was a seasonal insignificance. In the first half of the second stanza, he says, while her mother sweated out her pregnancy in Ceylon, he consoled himself with her mother’s eight month. A few friends were visiting her to pacify her shape. In the second half of this stanza, Stevens sat down in Connecticut in summer, began to write “The Well Dressed Man with a Beard”. In the third stanza, he says that she slept because her significant belly was cooled by the bedroom fan. On the contrary, Stevens was putting words together to grow the sentences. He saw his hand saying: ‘the mind is never finished, no, never’. Ondaatje says, he was growing in his “mother’s stomach / as were the flowers outside the Connecticut windows” (p. 22). In this poem, the poet dissolves the boundaries between Ceylon and Connecticut.

In this poem, Ondaatje dissolves the boundaries in the form of postmodern synthesis and recombination. Synthesis, recombination and mutation are postmodern poetics expressions used to have a commitment to dialogical, social world (McCorkle, 1997). Synthesis and recombination reflect in this poem in the form of dissolving the boundaries between East (Ceylon) and U.S (Connecticut), inner (growing of fetus (Ondaatje himself) in his mother’s womb in Ceylon) and outer (Wallace Steven’s writing poetry in Connecticut). If structuralist notion of difference creates boundaries, *différance* dissolves them. This poem being a splendid piece of postmodern poetry does not contain the binaries. Here, Ondaatje yokes Ceylon with Connecticut. In the postmodernist perspective, there is no binarism because one completes the other. The identity of one

thing is because of the other. Ondaatje unites the binary opposition- Ceylon and Connecticut in “Dates”: “and I in my mother’s stomach was growing/ as were the flowers outside the Connecticut windows” (Ondaatje, 1973, p. 22).

The poem “Dates” concerns dissolving the boundaries between tradition and creativity because Ondaatje has an ambivalent attitude towards tradition. He does not confirm orthodox standards or beliefs. Solecki writes that Ondaatje does not believe in rewriting Stevens but he misquotes him in this poem. He writes: “The last line of “The Well Dressed Man with a Beard” is “It can never be satisfied, the mind, never” which is not quite synonymous with “the mind is never finished, no, never” (Solecki, 1978). He further notes that Ondaatje, being a strong or original young poet flexes his creative muscles against the major figures in tradition. Sam links Ondaatje’s attitude with ambivalence. Ambivalence encompasses dissolving the boundaries because it is the combination of fascination as well as repulsion towards the same thing, person or action. In “Dates”, heterogeneous elements are united because Ondaatje believes in dissolving the boundaries. Heterogeneity in the form of a difference between the gestation of a child and creation of a poem can be noted from this poem. The gestation of a child is a natural phenomenon: “and I in my mother’s stomach was growing/ as were the flowers outside the Connecticut windows” (Ondaatje, 1973, p. 22). On the contrary, the act of creation of a poem is a process in which the words may grow into sentences but they are initially ‘put together’ and need to be ‘shaved’ and ‘shaped’ by the “head making his hand/ move where he wanted” (ibid). In this way, dissolving the boundaries is found because in this poem two different process are united. There is found a unity between Ceylon and Connecticut: the unity of hotness: “while she sweated out her pregnancy in Ceylon/ a servant ambling over the lawn/ with a tray of iced drinks” (Ondaatje, p. 21) and in Connecticut: “Wallace Stevens sat down in Connecticut/ a glass of orange juice at his table/ so hot he wore only shorts” (ibid).

In his poem “The Diverse Causes” Ondaatje (1967) dissolves the boundaries between fact and fiction, present and past, man and animals (and other creatures). He cracks the boundaries through myth. His concept of myth is seen in his other poems i.e. “Troy Town”, “In Another Fashion”, “The Collected Works of Billy the Kid”. For Ondaatje myth is a biblical, surreal, brief and imagistic. Witten takes myth as “somebody tells a rumour and that becomes a truth” (Witten, 1977). Clarke mentions that in order to refer primal power of story, Michael Ondaatje uses myth (Clarke, 1991). He writes again: “Story arises from fiction; history arises from the fiction of fact” (Clarke, 1991, p. 2). He further notes in the same article: “myth and literature are one corpus: myth is the skeleton; literature the flesh” (ibid.).

For Ondaatje, the constituents of myth are exoticism, startling verbal collage, allusive elusiveness, violence, amorality and recursion which are found in “The Diverse Causes”. This poem cracks the boundaries between present and past because we can note from the epigraph that seems to be written in Early Modern English. The epigraph of the poem is: “lovers callyth to their mynde olde jantylness and olde servyse, and many kynde dedes that was forgotyn by neclygence” (Ondaatje, 1967, p. 8). Clarke states that “The epigraph

(of “The Diverse Causes”) is itself the “old gentleness and old service” of such previous writings and illustrates the birth of literature out of myth” (Clarke, 1991, p. 3).

Ondaatje’s blurring the boundaries between past and present is investigated from “The Diverse Causes”. In this poem, the present is presented with the primeval. The epigraph of this poem determines the tone of the poem: literature takes its birth from myth. This poem creates an awareness of pastness through language and amazing verbal collage. In the first stanza, he blurs the boundaries between present and past: “Three clouds and a tree/ reflect themselves on a toaster,/ the kitchen window hangs scarred/ shattered by winter hunters” (Clarke, 1991, p. 8).

Toaster is an electrical device for making toasts. It indicates modern civilization but there is a reflection of primeval on modern civilization as here is seen in the form of “Three clouds and a tree/ reflect themselves on a toaster” (Clarke, 1991, p. 8). In this stanza, touch of pastness is quite vivid in the phrases i.e. “window hangs”, and “winter hunters” which as Clarke notes, “plotting the unfolding drama like a Greek chorus” (Clarke p. 3). Through these phrases and a toaster, Ondaatje yokes present with past.

Clarke says that significance of pastness is conveyed through language itself. In this poem, a dog is transmigrated as a ‘May god’. The home is presented as a ‘cell of civilized magic’ (Clarke, p. 8). Verbs of this poem i.e. ‘clean’ and ‘fetch’ are rooted in old German and present the echoes of domestic life of past. These stanzas are evident to dissolve the boundaries between present and past, actual and myth: “We are in a cell of civilized magic. / Stravinsky roars at breakfast, / our milk is powdered. Outside, a May god/ moves his paws to alter wind” (Clarke, p. 8).

In the fourth stanza of “The Diverse Causes”, Ondaatje blurs the boundaries between man and animals, insects and arachnids because these creatures are seen in the company of man. Hence, binarism of structuralism is deconstructed in this poem. In the persona’s home, winter cobwebs, moths and mice are seen: “We clean buckets of their sand/ to reflect water in the morning, / reach for winter cobwebs, / sweep up moths who have forgotten to waken. / When the children sleep, angled behind their bottles, you can hear mice prowl” (Ondaatje, 1967, p. 8).

In this poem, Ondaatje besides blurring the boundaries between man and animals, present and past, deadens the border between fire and water also. At the end of this poem, he says: “or my daughter burns the lake/ by reflecting red shoes in it” (p. 9).

In the poem “The Diverse Causes” boundaries are dissolved by disjunction. It is a contrast-by-juxtaposition. It creates startling verbal collage which cracks boundaries because it encompasses exotic images. As Clarke notes in his article that ““Stravinsky” accompanies “powdered milk”; in “In Another Fashion”, “new christs” appear with “thin-boned birds” (Clarke, 1991, p. 3). In “The Diverse Causes” disjunction is seen in the lines: “Stravinsky roars at the breakfast/ our milk is powdered” (Ondaatje, p. 8).

Ondaatje's (1979) poem "Elizabeth" like his many other poems deals with dissolving the boundaries between fact and fiction, prose and poetry, 'amusement art' and 'significant art'. In the beginning of this poem, young Elizabeth is seen picking apples with her father (King Henry viii) and Uncle Jack (fictional character). In the second stanza, scene shifts from apple harvesting to a trip to the zoo. In the third stanza, scene abruptly moves from the zoo to fishing with Philip (King of Spain). In the fourth stanza, locale shifts from ice fishing to depicting Mary's (Elizabeth's stepsister's) teeth and a dancing scene with Elizabeth's confidant, Tom (Lord Thomas Seymour) which followed by the execution of Tom. Finally, a brief story of Elizabeth's writing poems on her another bosom friend, the Earl of Essex, is given.

From "Elizabeth" using the method of textual analysis, blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction is investigated. He is known for blurring the cut-off points between the genres. He is also known for re-reading history. His *Running in the Family* is a memoir that is a combination of history and myth, autobiography and fiction. The things which Ondaatje did not know about his father- Mervyn Ondaatje, wants to know by myth. No doubt in it, the portrait of parents and their families- unrequited love, the elopements and disputes of the Ondaatjes- was unreliable. He himself confesses in an interview that a well-told lie has more valuation than a thousand facts in Sri Lanka.

Not only in *Running in the Family*, but also in the poem "Elizabeth" Ondaatje blurs the cut-off points between history and fiction. In the beginning of the poem, he re-reads the history of the Queen Elizabeth. His re-reading bears the tinge of fiction. At the end, the readers come to know Elizabeth in this poem is none other than Queen Elizabeth. In the first line, Uncle Jack is fictional character, Daddy is King Henry viii of England, Philip is King of Spain, and Tom- Elizabeth's confidant is Lord Thomas Seymour. Here, Ondaatje represents Elizabeth- the historical figure. In the books of history, she is presented as a strong ruler embodying sixteenth century England at its intellectual zenith. She is presented as a symbol of the power solitary woman defending herself from powerful suitors left and right and got married with the state. But in this poem, Ondaatje presents the Queen as a child who is injured by repeated blows. In the history books Elizabeth is presented as an unpardonable person but in this poem we see her like a child deserving of our sympathy. Here, the facts regarding the Queen are fictionalized. Hence, Ondaatje dissolves the border in the middle of fact and fiction.

In "Elizabeth", Ondaatje blurs the boundaries between 'art forms'- 'amusement art' and 'significant art'. Here, he combines both art forms with a great effect. Leslie writes on Ondaatje's poetry that there occurs a development from simple poetry that amuses to poetry which keeps a deeper meaning. The poetry that amuses is 'amusement art' and the poetry that contains deeper meaning is 'significant art'.

Artistic mastery of Ondaatje is found in this fact that he through a unique combination of 'art forms', obtains meaning from the feelings he evokes as well as the images he portrays. For example, in the opening stanza of the poem "Elizabeth", an apple that Elizabeth hides in her room turns into grotesque face as it rots. This image is an instance

of ‘amusement art’. Laughing of Elizabeth’s daddy at the “smart snake” (Ondaatje, 1979, p. 20) is an example of ‘amusement art’ but is also a ‘significant art’ because it keeps deeper meaning. The source of evil is arousing in this image as it arouses from an image of a snake slithering down the front of Elizabeth’s dress. In this way, Ondaatje blurs the boundaries between ‘art forms’ in a single poem.

Here, Ondaatje dissolves the boundaries between primitivism and present. He does not stick to one period but periods. It encompasses the imitation of periods. In the third stanza, image of ice fishing and eating raw, uncooked fish show a primitive and uncivilized way of living. Philip represents civilization but his eating uncooked fish indicates his dangerous and uncivilized aspect of life. In this way, Ondaatje blurs the boundaries between history and primitivism.

Ondaatje’s poem “Proust in the Waters” starts with a friend of the speaker who is a girl. She is swimming along the bar of moon. The speaker shifts from “tick of loon’s heart” to their love with the “things which disappear” (Ondaatje, 1984, p. 122) to the intricate syllables in the sentence of a loon. He shifts from language to “seeing no human in this storm” (ibid). Then he discusses river remorse. This poem ends at the moon bar.

This poem deals with dissolving the boundaries, problem of language, fragmentation and schizophrenic locale. It is a strange and dreamy poem. It traces the location of another person. The speaker finds her through a web of moonlit shards. In this poem, Ondaatje blurs the boundaries between man and nature, actual and fantasy, man and bird, high and low. Here, he dissolves the boundaries between seen and unseen. The actual event of another person’s (girl’s) swimming in the water is fantasized: “Swimming along the bar of moon/ the yellow scattered sleeping/ arm of moon/ on Balsam Lake” (Ondaatje, 1984, p.122).

Ondaatje blurs the boundaries between man and nature in the phrase “sleeping arm of moon”. Man keeps arms. Moon is natural satellite but in this poem, it has ‘arm’. In this way, Ondaatje yokes nature with man. He breaks down the cut-off points between man and bird: “A bubble caught in my beak”. Here, ‘my’ refers man (the speaker) and ‘beak’ shows bird but here man has beak. Hence, Ondaatje dissolves the boundaries between man and bird.

Ondaatje disperses the boundaries between high and low. He yokes the shore- low with air- high: “Tick/ of the loon’s heart/ in the wet night thunder/ below us/ knowing its shore in the air” (Ondaatje, p. 122).

Ondaatje dissolves the boundaries between man and nature insofar as language is concerned. If man has language as a mean of communication, in this poem nature in the form of river has Morse. Long and short light or signals of sound are used in order to represent an alphabet or code in Morse. This system is invented by an American Samuel F.B. Morse. Here, blurring the boundaries is seen in the lines: “The mouth swallows river morse/ throws a sound/ through the loom of liquid/ against sky” (Ondaatje, p. 122).

In “Proust in the Waters”, Ondaatje (1984) blurs the boundaries through run-on-images. He, skillfully, produces link among images. Syntagmatic link among the images produces fragmentation. If symbolic depth is found in modernism, postmodernism deals with syntagmatic link. The fragmental images i.e. swimming along the bar of moon, tick of the loon’s heart, the speaker and his friend’s loving the things which disappear, syllables in loon’s sentence, bubbles caught in the persona’s beak, are syntagmatically linked. It makes this poem aleatory.

Postmodernist text is different from structuralist text because it dissolves the boundaries in the form of intertextuality, pastiche, bricolage, parody, non-linear structure and multi-voiced narrative. If binary opposition is a beloved of structuralism, on the other hand, deconstruction makes it less authoritative. In deconstruction oppositions are seen subverting each other in the course of textual meaning. The notions of the work of art as a closed and self-sufficient have been subverted in postmodern view. Postmodernist artists and the writers do not follow pre-established rules; they do not believe in a determining judgment of the text (Lyotard, 1981).

In postmodern text, textual techniques i.e. intertextuality, pastiche, collage, poly-temporal time structure and blurring the boundaries are found. In intertextuality the text does not stick to one writer or period but it dissolves the borders and glides towards another text. The same is the case with parody and pastiche in which the reference to another text or writer is seen mockingly and respectfully respectively. Poly-temporal time structure also blurs the boundaries because in this type of time structure, time does not adhere to one temporal period but to different temporal times.

In “The Cinnamon Peeler” Ondaatje dissolves the boundaries in the structure of the poem. He blurs the boundary between hypothetical future and actual past. The three opening stanzas present a speculative future. In stanza four, he went into past. In this stanza, he examines a strong reminiscence of his longing for his wife during their courtship. In the last five stanzas, he flashes forward again. In this way, he blurs the boundaries between past and future in the same poem.

Ondaatje (1967) dissolves the boundaries in “The Republic” in the form of the presence of disjunction, recombination and aleatory in the structure of this poem. Disjunction blurs the boundaries. It makes a connection between two distinct alternatives that is found in this poem. Two distinct alternatives: too much passion at night and too much reasoning at day, are yoked with the bridge of disjunction. Disjunction can be noted even in a single line: “air even is remade in the basement” (Ondaatje, 1967, p. 20). Air (high) is yoked with the basement (low). In this way, binaries are dissolved.

Ondaatje dissolves the boundaries between narrative and descriptive devices in the structure of the poem “Elizabeth”. This poem is about re-reading of the Queen Elizabeth. It is an amalgamation of narrative device and descriptive device because it “tells” as well as “shows” respectively. Narrative style deals with the use of first person and tells a

story. While, descriptive style “shows” in the form of use of creative and sensory images. In the opening stanza, Ondaatje blurs the boundaries between narrative and descriptive style because in the first line the word “catch” (uttered by Uncle Jack) and the phrase “I caught” are role models of narrative device because they are the indication of a tale. In the same stanza, the lines “red as Mrs Kelly’s bum” (Ondaatje, 1979, p. 20), “till it shrunk like a face/ growing eyes and teeth ribs” (ibid) are specimens of descriptive style because these lines “show”.

“The Cinnamon Peeler” deals with dissolving the boundaries in the form of containing intermingling of discourse. This poem encompasses centrifugal tendencies, heteroglossia and polyphonic world of discourse. The intermingling of discourse is found not only in Ondaatje’s fictions but also in his poetry. This poem is an example of it. Postmodernist fiction contains centrifugal tendencies. Heteroglossia is utilized as an opening wedge, a method of separating the unified projected world into a polyphony universe of discourse (McHale, 1987). Centrifugal tendencies are found in this poem because here neither the husband in the centre nor the wife on the margin. Both are moving away from a centre because both are for each other. Heteroglossia can also be noted because this poem consists of the world of discourse of the narrator, the husband and the wife. Hence, it deals with polyphonic voice and intermingling of discourses.

Ondaatje in his poem “The Diverse Causes” intermingles the discourses which blur the boundaries. In this poem, run-on-images or building images makes the link of this poem with his myth-making. There is no fixity in Ondaatje’s work because he believes in repetition and building images that dissolve the boundaries. Through the echoes of the past world in the phrases of this poem i.e. ‘window hangs’ and ‘winter hunters’, Ondaatje mixes the boundaries between reality and fiction, present and past. This practice of intermingling discourses follows Ondaatje’s precept for myth-making. In an interview with Solecki he defines myth as repeating and building images and so making them more potent. Ondaatje explains myth in his article as it “is....achieved by a very careful use of echoes.... of phrases and images” (Ondaatje, 1974, p. 25).

In the poem “Elizabeth”, Ondaatje dissolves the boundaries in the form of intermingling of discourses. In this poem, the discourses of Uncle Jack, Daddy, Philip, Mary and Tom are mingled with the discourses of Elizabeth. This poem is known for intermingling of discourses. The intermingling is seen in Ashbery’s poem “The Instruction Manual”. In Ondaatje’s this poem, amalgamation of discourses is seen in the form of fragments of narrative and descriptive lines. This poem does not move systematically and coherently from point A to point B. Chronological or factual order is not seen in the names and incidents that occurred in the Queen Elizabeth’s life.

Parody is a particular genre of comedy. It is used to satirize or mock at a particular piece of work. Parody falls into the character of dissolving the boundaries. Postmodern parody is found in Michael Ondaatje’s poems i.e. “Dates”. According to Hutcheon, parody is perfect postmodern form and it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies (Hutcheon, 1988). Parody is a mode of ‘ex-centric’ for her. She further says

that parody is a favourite literary form of the Irish and Canadian writers. Korkut defines parody in the perspective of poststructuralist tenet: it “rejects the notion of a single, autonomous work defined by well-drawn boundaries. It proposes instead each work is a ‘text’ that ‘overflows’ into other texts and enter into endless intertextual relations with them. Such a theory also plays a significant role in blurring the boundaries” (Korkut, 2009, p. 128).

Ondaatje being a contemporary Canadian writer, combats the supremacy of modernists with the weapon of parody. In “Dates” Ondaatje (1973) parodies Wallace Stevens because he misquotes his line “It can never be satisfied, the mind, never” as “the mind is never finished, no, never” (Ondaatje, p.22) for describing past in his own way rather than taking as it is. Boundaries are blurred through parody in this poem.

In the poem “The Cinnamon Peeler” Ondaatje parodies himself in a hypothetical but in a positive way. He wants to become a part of the community of the cinnamon peelers. He has a desire to imitate their activities and experience of life which have been missed on the part of Ondaatje’s colonial white parents. Parody has been employed in a positive way. Here Ondaatje is not parodying a piece of work or earlier writers but imitating an eastern class of labourers who collect an aromatic spice from the dried and rolled bark of south-eastern Asian trees.

Pastiche is a literary genre in which the imitation of another popular literary oeuvre is found. It is dissimilar to parody because its aim is not to mock but honour the literary piece it imitates. It imitates a piece of writing in light-hearted and respectful manner. It imitates the style and content of the other writers for showing that their work is accepted by a majority of readers and is landmark of their age. It is an example of eclecticism in art because it borrows a variation of styles from dissimilar sources.

The use of pastiche which is another postmodern technique, is seen in the poem “Dates”. There is no fixity in pastiche but it dissolves the boundaries in the form of intertextuality. Oxford English dictionary defines it as a medley of various ingredients; a hotchpotch, farrago, jumble. A pastiche is a work of art, literature, film, music or architecture that closely intimates the work of a previous artist, unusually distinguished from parody in the sense that it celebrates rather than mocks the work it imitates. Jameson argues that parody (which has a moral comparison) was replaced by pastiche.

Pastiche reflects in “Dates”. Jewinski notes the presence of pastiche in this poem. He notes that there is an influence of Auden on Ondaatje. Jewinski mentions his interview with Solecki in which he is not ready to accept Auden’s influence on him. He confesses: “everybody talks about Auden’s influence on me but I’ve never read much of his work” (Jewinski, 1996, p.36). Jewinski writes that in the same interview Ondaatje meekly admits that the line “no instruments/ agreed on a specific weather” (from the poem “Dates”) is his “most conscious borrowing from anyone” (ibid.).

Ondaatje’s poem “The Diverse Causes” is not free from pastiche. Here, the poet imitates the chorus of the Greek classical drama. The phrases like “winter hunters” remind us

Sophocles and Aeschylus. Ondaatje does so for two reasons: (a) he gives respect to classical Greek dramatists (b) he wants to present the role of myth in our day-to-day life.

Intertextuality leads towards dissolving the boundaries because it does not keep fixity. It acknowledges previous literary works. Intertextuality as a term was first used by Kristeva in her essays “Words, Dialogue and Novel” (1966) and “The Bounded Text” (1966-67). In the former essay, she writes: “a permutation of texts, an intertextuality in the space of a given text,” in which “several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and naturalize one another” (Kristeva, 1980, p. 36). In the latter essay, she takes any text constructed in the form of mosaic of quotations and it is the integration and transformation of another text. Intertextuality is studying a text in the shadow of another text. It is shaping of the meaning of the text by other texts. It has itself been borrowed and transformed many times.

Intertextuality is found in Ondaatje’s poem “The Republic” in the form of the presence of Apollonian reason and Dionysian passion that is a hallmark of Greek tragedy. Intertextuality is found in Ondaatje’s poetry and novels. This poem is a synthesis of Apollonian reason and Dionysian passion.

In the poem “The Diverse Causes” intertextuality is found in the form of pastiche. Pastiche is a collage. It is other shapes of juxtaposition with a normative grounding. Intertextuality makes links among texts. The relationship between the Greek chorus and this poem is seen. In the phrases of this poem i.e. ‘winter hunters’, ‘window hangs’ etc. glimpses of classical drama can be noted.

To conclude, using one of the integrals of Derrida’s *différance*- ‘to differ’, dissolving the boundaries on thematic and on the level of textual techniques has been investigated from Michael Ondaatje’s selected poems.

References

- Bremner, E. S. (2004). Reading Ondaatje's poetry. *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, 6(3).
- Butler, C. (2002). *Postmodernism: A very short introduction*. UK: Oxford University Press.
- Clarke, G. E. (1991). Michael Ondaatje and the production of myth. *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 16(1): 1-21.
- Cooper, R. (1990). "Organisation and dis-organisation", In Hassard J. & Pym. D. (ed.) *The theory and philosophy of organisation*. London: Rutledge.
- Derrida, J. (1972). *La Différance. Margins of philosophy*. (A. Bass Trans.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Desilet, G. (n.d.). Derrida and nonduality. Retrieved December 25, 2013 from www.integralworld.net/desilet2html
- Festino, C. G. (2006). Writing before the letter: Reading Michael Ondaatje's Handwriting. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 6(2), 136-47.
- Heighton, S. (1988). Approaching that perfect edge: Techniques in the poetry and fiction of Michael Ondaatje. *SCL/ÉLC*, 13(2).
- Hutcheon, L. (1988). *A poetics of postmodernism: History, theory, fiction*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Huyssen, A. (1986). *After the great divide: Modernism, mass culture, postmodernism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Jenks, C. (1986). *What is post-modernism?* London: Academy Editions.
- Jewinski, Ed. (1996). *Michael Ondaatje express yourself beautifully*. Toronto: ECW Press.
- Korkut, N. (2009). *Kinds of parody from the medieval to the postmodern*. n.p. Peter Lang.
- Kristeva, J. (1980). *Desire in language: A semiotic approach to literature and Art*. Leon S. Roniez (ed.) and (T. Gora et al. Trans.). New York: Colambia University Press.
- Leslie, M. (1985). *Michael Ondaatje: Word, image, imagination*. Vancouver: Talon books.
- Lucy, N. (2004). *A Derrida dictionary*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Lyotard, J. (1984). *The postmodernist condition: A report on knowledge*. USA: Minnesota Press.
- McHale, B. (1987). *Postmodernist fiction*. London: Routledge.
- McCorkle, J. (1997). The inscription of postmodernism in poetry. *International postmodernism: theory and literary practice*. J. W. Bertens & Douwe F. (eds.). Netherlands: John Benjamins.
- Ondaatje, M. (1973). *Dates. Rat jelly*. Toronto: Coach House Press.
- (1979). Elizabeth. *There's a trick with a knife I'm learning to do: Poems 1963-78*. Toronto: Canadian.
- (1974). Howard O' Hagan's Rough- edged chronicle. *Canadian Literature*, 61, 25-31.

- (1984). Proust in the waters. *Secular Love*. Toronto: Coach House Press.
- (n.d). *The cinnamon peeler*. Retrieved from <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-cinnamon-peeler>
- (1967). *The diverse causes. The dainty monsters*. Toronto: Coach House Press.
- (1967). *The Republic. The dainty monsters*. Toronto: Coach House Press.
- Sweetman, B. (1999). Postmodernism, Derrida and différance: A critique. *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 39, 1-23.
- Solecki, Z. S. (2000). Michael Ondaatje's *Rat Jelly* and the poetics of ambivalence. *Journal of English Studies*, 2, 125-157.
- (1978). Nets and chaos: The poetry of Michael Ondaatje. *Brave New Wave*, ed. Jack David, pp. 24-50.
- Varga, D. (1995). *Subjectivity, social relations, history: Doing philosophy with Michael Ondaatje*. M.A Thesis. Retrieved from <http://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/6193/1/MM05089.pdf> .
- Witten, M. (1977). Billy, Buddy and Michael. *Books in Canada*, 9, 9-13.