



## Anil's Ghost

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*Anil's Ghost* takes place during a gruesome civil war during the 1980's in Sri Lanka. It explores the legacy left by colonialism, represented through the actions of Anil Tissera, a forensic pathologist revisiting the country after a fifteen-year absence as part of a U.N. commission investigating human rights abuses. Alienated from Sri Lankan culture, Tissera blinds herself to the mortal danger in which her investigations place her fellow archaeologist, Sarath Diyasena, affiliated with the government.

Although the delicacy of language describing mental and physical wounds becomes “balm” to war's brutality, in *Anil's Ghost* Ondaatje most often reflects brutality directly, replacing the lushness of his earlier work with spare, straight narrative. Indeed, as seventy thousand citizens are quietly spirited away and murdered, silence replaces words as a reaction to repression. Characters find release in extreme acts: For example, Sarath's brother, Dr. Gamini Diyasena, lives like a beggar, snatching sleep at the hospital and taking drugs to continue performing round-the-clock surgery on civil war victims. When Anil discovers scientific evidence implicating the government in war crimes, Sarath tells her to abandon her notes and equipment and to leave the country. Her departure means that she is also abandoning those she has tried to help. Indeed, Ondaatje shows that Tissera, with her Western need to uncover “Truth,” causes the suppression of the very truth she seeks.

Soon, Gamini discovers Sarath's dead body on a gurney. The novel concludes with Gamini pondering his surrender of his emotional and material existence to others. For both Anil and Sarath, science and politics intersect disastrously; for Gamini, deeply attuned to his community, they work together to offer a protective camouflage enabling him to live to feel the “sweet touch of the world.”

## Sources for Further Study

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