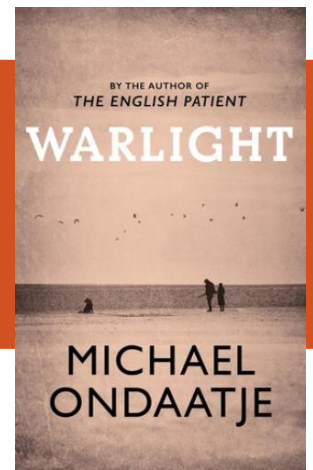




Warlight

Michael Ondaatje



Author Background

Michael Ondaatje was born in Colombo, Sri Lanka in 1943 and is of Dutch, Sinhalese, and Tamil ancestry. His parents separated when he was an infant, and he lived with relatives until 1954 when he joined his mother in England. After completing his secondary education at Dulwich College, he emigrated to Montreal, Canada in 1962.

After his formal schooling, Ondaatje began teaching English at the University of Western Ontario, followed by teaching English literature at Glendon College, York University.

Ondaatje's work includes fiction, autobiography, poetry, and film. He is the recipient of multiple literary awards including the Booker Prize for *The English Patient* (1992) which was later made into a film, which won the Academy Award for Best Picture.

Ondaatje is also an Officer of the Order of Canada, recognising him as one of Canada's most renowned authors.

Ondaatje has two children with his first wife, Canadian artist Kim Ondaatje.

Book Summary

In 1945, just after World War II, Nathaniel and his older sister, Rachel, stay behind in London when their parents move to Singapore, leaving them in the care of a mysterious figure named The Moth.

They suspect he might be a criminal, and they grow both more convinced and less concerned as they come to know his eccentric crew of friends: men and women joined by a shared history of unspecified service during the war, all of whom seem, in some way, determined now to protect, and educate (in rather unusual ways) Rachel and Nathaniel.

But are they really what and who they claim to be? And what does it mean when the siblings' mother returns after months of silence without their father, explaining nothing, excusing nothing?

A dozen years later, Nathaniel begins to uncover all that he didn't know and understand in that time, and it is this journey, through facts, recollection, and imagination, that he narrates in this masterwork from one of the great writers of our time.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ One of the quandaries at the heart of Michael Ondaatje's novel is reconciling Rose Williams's bravery, indeed her patriotic heroism, and her treatment of Nathaniel and Rachel. How are we to consider Rose?
- ❖ What do you make of Moth and Darter? As Nathaniel, in the opening lines, puts it, "our parents left us in the care of two men who may have been criminals."
- ❖ *Warlight's* structure is anything but linear as it shifts back and forth in time and point of view. Is it confusing? Might the structure reflect Nathaniel's own confusion: his sense of being able to see reality only dimly, as if through "warlight"?
- ❖ What are your thoughts on the second section of the novel with its sudden switch to the third-person perspective? Did you find it difficult to integrate this outside voice into the overall narration?
- ❖ "The lost sequence in a life, they say, is the thing we always search out," Nathaniel tells us. How has that "lost sequence" of Nathaniel's life shaped who he is? When he and Rachel discover that the reason their mother gave for leaving them was not the true reason, how did her lie make them feel? What lasting repercussions does her untruthfulness leave?
- ❖ What does Nathaniel resolve within himself by the novel's end, what understanding has he come to? Or are things left unresolved for him, and for us? Is there a satisfactory resolution at the conclusion?

References

- ❖ Litlovers: <https://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/fiction/11276-warlight-ondaatje?start=3>
- ❖ Wikipedia – Michael Ondaatje - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Ondaatje#Books