

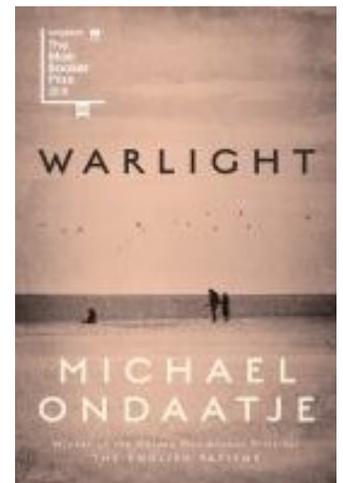


# Warlight

## Michael Ondaatje

### Discussion Questions

1. 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 do readers, and especially her (fictional) children, wrap their heads around this inconsistency? How are we to consider Rose?
2. 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."
3. Consider this passage from the novel and how it might be said to sum up one of the story's central concerns:  
*We never know more than the surface of any relationship after a certain stage, just as those layers of chalk, built from the efforts of infinitesimal creatures, work in almost limitless time.*
4. *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 be a reflection of Nathaniel's own confusion: his sense of being able to see reality only dimly—as if through "warlight"?
5. "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?
6. 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?





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### About the Author

Philip Michael Ondaatje is a Sri Lankan-born Canadian poet, novelist, editor and filmmaker. He is the recipient of multiple literary awards, including the Booker Prize. Ondaatje is also an Officer of the Order of Canada, recognizing him as one of Canada's most renowned living authors.

Ondaatje's work includes fiction, autobiography, poetry and film. His literary career began with poetry in 1967 and since then has published 13 books of poetry, two of which won Canada's Governor General's Award—*The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970) and *There's a Trick With a Knife I'm Learning to Do: Poems 1973–1978* (1979).

The author's first novel, *Coming Through the Slaughter*, debuted in 1976 and was followed over the years by seven others, including a partially fictionalized memoir (*Running in the Family*). Three of his works (Billy the Kid collection, *Coming Through the Slaughter*, and *Divisadero*) were adapted to the stage, and *The English Patient* became an internationally acclaimed film in 1996, winning the Academy Award for Best Picture, as well as for other categories.

In addition to his literary writing, Ondaatje has been an important force in helping to foster Canadian writing with two decades commitment to Coach House Press (around 1970-90), and his editorial credits on Canadian literary projects like the journal *Brick*, and the *Long Poem Anthology* (1979), among others. He has also served on the board of the Griffin Trust for Excellence in Poetry since 2000.

**This book is available for download as an eBook and an eAudiobook. For more information, please visit [lpl.overdrive.com](http://lpl.overdrive.com) or call 519-661-4600.**

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