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Posted on 04 June 2018 By Michael Ondaatje

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I wish I hadn't read this because then I'd still have it to read. Just stunning. In *Warlight*, Ondaatje has crafted an ode to twentieth-century storytelling. A purposeless hero, a disdain for plot, and a lack of sensational revelations equate to a mind-numbing read in which nothing much happens. In 1945 London, fourteen-year-old Nathaniel and his older sister, Rachel, are abandoned by their parents, left in the care of a guardian selected by their mother. By following Nathaniel in his formative years, Ondaatje presumably intends to explore the aftereffects of war, to examine how a family is devastated by a pressing obligation to their country. However, Nathaniel is largely indifferent to his parents' departure. He barely knew his father, and his mother's absence is quickly overshadowed by the behavior of his strange-mannered guardian nicknamed The Moth and the peculiar social circle The Moth inhabits. *Warlight's* dust jacket proclaims this is a narrative as mysterious and luminous as memory itself, but there's nothing mysterious about this book. Who Nathaniel's parents were during the war, the seemingly questionable behavior of The Moth, and the criminal deeds of his acquaintances are either easily discernable or undisguised. And, yes, the narrative is justifiably nonchronological, mimicking how memory does not follow a linear path, but these glimpses into Nathaniel's past are lusterless because he doesn't change by the end of the book. Nathaniel lacks an arc; he faces no moral quandary, no point of growth that forces readers to question where he started or how he arrived at a significant moment in adulthood. Even the people who surround Nathaniel remain largely unchanged. And since everyone mostly gets along, there's an aching lack of conflict. One of

the redeeming qualities of Warlight are the tender moments shared between Nathaniel and Rachel, particularly when her epileptic fits strike. However, faint glimpses of their closeness prove inconsequential when, as adults, they opt to fend for themselves a separateness Nathaniel reveals with nonchalance. Had Ondaatje opted to follow Rachel, Warlight might have been salvaged. She is the only character notably affected by her mother's absence. It is Rachel, who needed a close relationship with a mother during that time, Nathaniel explains, to protect her in the way a mother could. It is Rachel who first thinks their guardian is a criminal and later becomes surprisingly fond of talking to him. Rachel whose life choices as an adult echo the instances that shattered her formative years. Antiplot, stagnant characters, and a lack of mystery make Warlight a sleepy addition to the 2018 Man Booker Prize longlist.

Read Pdf ? Warlight ? In A Narrative As Mysterious As Memory Itself At Once Both Shadowed And Luminous Warlight Is A Vivid, Thrilling Novel Of Violence And Love, Intrigue And Desire It Is , And London Is Still Reeling From The Blitz And Years Of War Year Old Nathaniel And His Sister, Rachel, Are Apparently Abandoned By Their Parents, Left In The Care Of An Enigmatic Figure Named The Moth They Suspect He Might Be A Criminal, And Grow Both Convinced And Less Concerned As They Get To Know His Eccentric Crew Of Friends Men And Women With A Shared History, All Of Whom Seem Determined Now To Protect, And Educate In Rather Unusual Ways Rachel And Nathaniel But Are They Really What And Who They Claim To Be A Dozen Years Later, Nathaniel Begins To Uncover All He Didn T Know Or Understand In That Time, And It Is This Journey Through Reality, Recollection, And Imagination That Is Told In This Magnificent Novel.

Mahler put the word schwer beside certain passages in his musical scores. Meaning difficult. Heavy. We were told this at some point by The Moth, as if it was a warning. He said we needed to prepare for such moments in order to deal with them efficiently, in case we suddenly had to take control of our wits. Those times exist for all of us, he kept saying. Just as no score relies on only one pitch or level of effort from musicians in the orchestra. Sometimes it relies on silence. It was a strange warning to be given, to accept that nothing was safe. Any schwer, he'd say, with his fingers gesturing the inverted commas, and we'd mouth the word and then the translation, or simply nod in weary recognition. My sister and I got used to parroting the word back to each other. schwer. Nothing is safe, and no one can be trusted. The war is over, but not for everyone. Those who had been working in the shadows during WW2 are now being asked to transition to a new war that would eventually be referred to as The Cold War. Some, like Rachel and Nathaniel's mother and father, want to walk away from their clandestine work, but with the powerful enemies they have made, that is proving impossible. They either know too much or they have thwarted too many insidious plans. Of course, we can only speculate because Rose Williams does not talk about her life during the war. To her children, her life is an enigma that can only be unraveled with truth serum. She is not an ideal mother. She is distant when they want her to be warm. She gives cryptic advice when they need her reassurances. Rose admits My sins are various, which is still an obscuring

statement, but about as close to a personal admission as Nathaniel will ever get from her. And then their father and mother disappear. Rachel has just turned 16, and Nathaniel is 14. They are left in the hands of a man they call The Moth and another dynamic personality called The Darter. The family makes a habit of assigning people nicknames: Rachel is Wren, and Nathaniel is Stitch. We can call them nicknames, but knowing the background of their parents, we can't help but think of them as codenames. Names to call someone that won't reveal them for who they really are. The Moth and The Darter are an odd pairing, but then these are unusual circumstances that require people who can protect them rather than be the surrogate parents they wish for. The interesting friends and associates, especially of Darter, who Stitch and Wren come into contact with, provide a view of alternative lifestyles that are sometimes disconcerting, but whether they know it or not, those brief contacts with those people are expanding their definitions of what a normal life looks like. The contact is brief indeed. Just when they start to know someone, they disappear, never to be seen again, which each time is like losing their parents all over again. One woman, in particular, proves memorable, especially for Stitch. She is Olive Lawrence, an ethnographer with way too much class to be the girlfriend of a barge rat like The Darter, but there is something about him that fascinates her. There was something in these professional women that suggested it was not a case of The Darter's selecting them but of the women's choosing him, as if Olive Lawrence, a specialist in distant cultures, had stumbled suddenly on a man who reminded her of an almost extinct medieval species, a person still unaware of any of the principal courtesies introduced in the past hundred years. School becomes a secondary concern for Stitch as he starts to help The Darter with his rather clandestine midnight activities. He might be ferrying greyhounds from other countries to be used in one of the numerous illegal betting tracks, or it might be something much more dangerous. Stitch is a natural at covert activities. [View spoiler](#) And then his mother returns. [Hide spoiler](#) This is a novel about the after shock of WWII in the lives of one family. I don't know if the rest of the Allies experienced it the same way, but in Europe, the adjustment period was in many ways as cruel and fierce and bloody as the war itself. And it went on for years. Nathaniel 14 and his sister Rachel 16 inherited much of that chaotic time. As Nathaniel narrates his recollections of this period in their lives, I felt such a deep sadness for these two. The teen years can be challenging enough without the added confusions of a father supposedly pursuing business interests in Asia, and a mother who supposedly joined him, yet left her trunk behind buried under boxes and tarps in the basement of their home. They were supposed to be in boarding school while their upstairs neighbour, nicknamed The Moth by the teenagers, held the home together. It didn't last long as neither Nathaniel nor Rachel wanted to be in their respective boarding schools. Without fuss, The Moth withdrew them and entered them as day students and thus began the strangest part of their teen years. Is this a coming of age story? Yes, and no. After experiencing much of their teen years through Nathaniel's recollections, there is a leap from the time Nathaniel is about 18 until about a decade

later. Is this a spy story? Yes, and no. There is definitely undercover work involved and many strange people and incidents that Nathaniel doesn't put together until he is a young adult. Is this a love story? Yes, and no. There is love involved between family members, between young people and older people yet again many of the relationships are a puzzle to Nathaniel and he always feels too many of the pieces are missing to see what the finished product is supposed to look like.

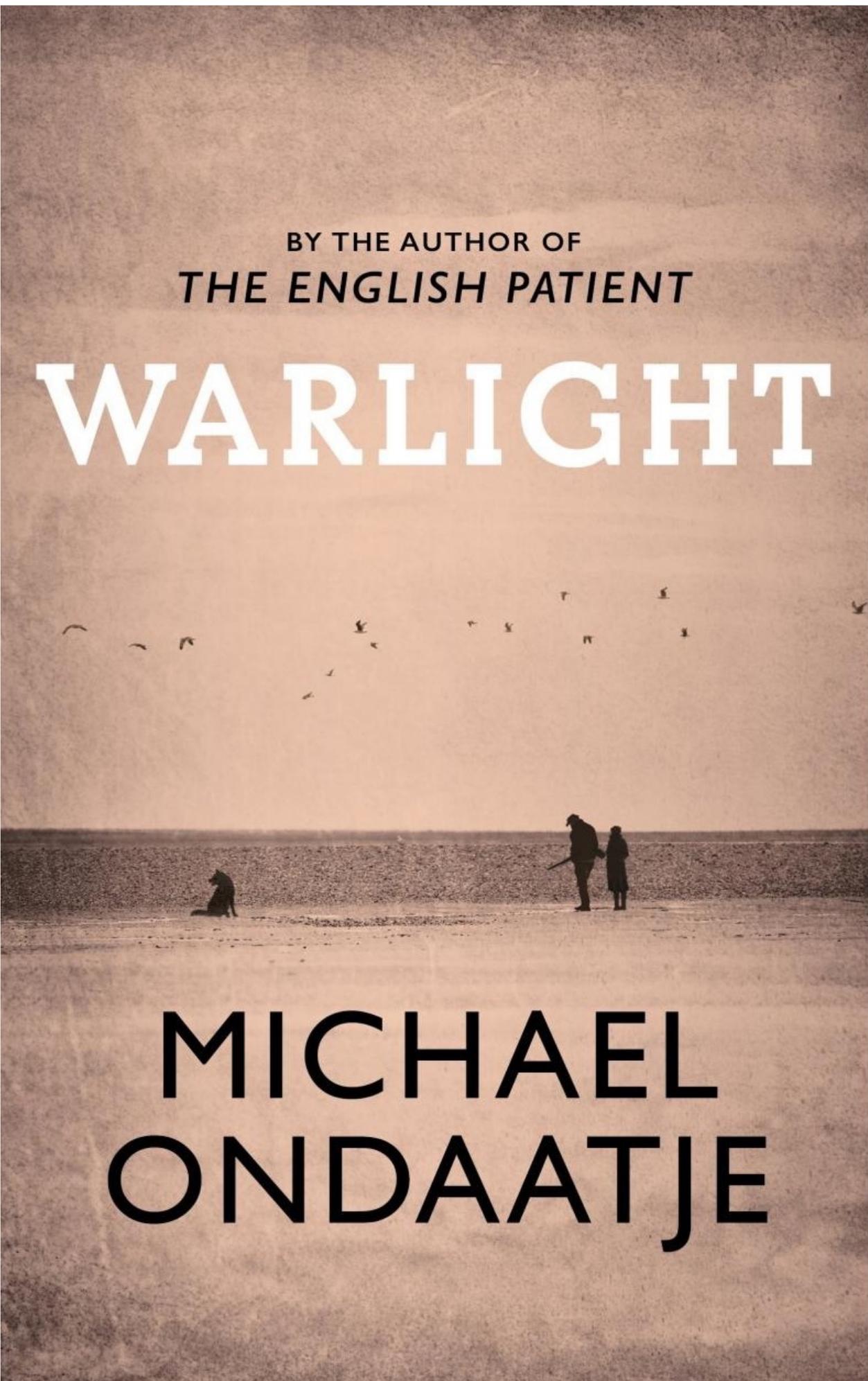
Warlight This refers to the way entire hamlets, villages, and cities were blanketed in darkness during the war. For me, Nathaniel's efforts to understand and piece together his life in a way that makes sense was the same blanketed by blackout curtains and coverings, blocking the light on the other side and preventing him from seeing what he seeks. This story is sad, poignant and completely without drama. In the end, I had a feeling that I had just listened to someone's story of their life as accurately told as possible from their point of view. Simultaneously, I felt the pathos of knowing that all the other people involved in the story would have their own perspective on the events of that time and that all of them would be as real and true to their lives as Nathaniel's story was for him. For me, this book solidified my impressions of Michael Ondaatje's status as a genius of storytelling. His brilliant writing never gets in the way of the story and I feel that is why this book touched me so deeply. I am still reeling with the realities that these people experienced and their acceptance of their lives as ones they may not have chosen, but ones that chose them. This book gave me much to ponder as I read, and I am sure that I will not forget it any time soon. I highly recommend this for readers who prefer depth and fresh perspectives in their reading. A master craftsman at the height of his powers I could have gone on reading this until kingdom come. If I had to compare Ondaatje's novels with a city it would be Venice. Venice which so eloquently visualises the poetic ordering demands of memory and the exalting aspirations of identity. Venice which is washed through with the simultaneously life affirming and melancholy tang of tidal salt water. **Warlight** is a novel about the secret underlife of identity and about how we seek to construct memory in a narrative form to sustain a structure of order. Perhaps the most mysterious people in our lives are our own parents. Behind the domestic facade how much is hidden from us. Our parents perhaps more than anyone make us realise how much is censored and even left out in talk. When interrogated they stick to their cover stories, like the best undercover agent. They have a secret life of which we generally have little inkling. Thus if you're going to write a novel about a son seeking to piece together his mother's life after her death it's a simple stroke of genius to make her a secret agent. All our parents are secret agents. They exert as much energy in hiding themselves from us as making themselves known. All the light in this novel is clandestine, evanescent, stolen or tricked from a felt pervading darkness. Narratively it follows the principles of memory. The bigger picture is always elusive. Isolated detail as if picked out by torchlight has to be padded out to provide a storyline. As the author says at the end, We order our lives with barely held stories. As you'd expect with Ondaatje, **Warlight** is beautiful, poetic, romantic, fabulously constructed but, surprisingly, it's also very exciting.

The son, abandoned by his parents for the duration of the war, never quite knows the true nature of the roles played by the guardians of his adolescence nor is ever told where his mother and father are. All these guardians are exceptionally gifted and enigmatic people you might say. Onjaadte doesn't do ordinary people. Everyone has a secret life utterly unknown to our narrator, the puzzles of which he will seek to piece together retrospectively as an adult. It's a novel with a big wise heart that makes you love life. Memorable images abound, like the nighttime river journeys, the midnight scalings of Cambridge's spired buildings, the lovemaking in empty apartments. The best novel I've read this year by a long shot and for me the most exciting book of the decade so far. An extraordinarily multilayered and complex historical novel exploring the nature of memory, and a coming of age story set primarily in post-war London in 1945. Nathaniel, 14, and his older sister, Rachel, are ostensibly abandoned to the care of what they perceive as oddball, suspect and criminal characters. They are chiefly The Moth, their lodger, ex-boxer The Pimlico Darter and others that enter their lives, some fleetingly, but never to be forgotten such as Olive Lawrence, the independent woman and ethnographer, who takes them on enlightening night walks. Their father has gone to Singapore and their mother, Rose, follows him. At their tender age, Nathaniel and Rachel are concerned by their safety and whether they can trust their offbeat and mysterious carers. However, it transpires school life is insipid in comparison to what they learn informally from the motley crew that gather in their home. Key moments in their lives, such as Rachel's epileptic fits, are nonchalantly but expertly dealt with, thereby building an underlying sense that there are hidden depths, safety and protection that they can count on from The Moth and his cohorts. Nathaniel experiences the shadows of London and wartime activities, gaining insights into the corruption of greyhound racing and night river trips, entering empty homes, having sex with Agnes Street, not her real name, and so much more. Nathaniel is to learn that there is much he is unaware of. His mother's life is a closed book, whilst bringing the dangers of espionage slamming into their lives. The older Nathaniel begins to piece together the past and throw light on the clandestine characters, most notably his mother as a spy, and events, existing below the radar, perceived only in the dim warlight where much is unseen and redacted in a pivotal period of his and Rachel's life that is to mark them indelibly. This journey to find out who his mother was, and learn about the bunch of individuals who looked after him, who opened his eyes to hidden and surprising worlds, leads him to shine a light on himself and the effects of his actions and decisions on others. This is a beautiful exploration of memories, of the nature of war and espionage, of being a parent and the needs of children, of trust, of physical and metaphorical scars, and a historical period where secrecy was paramount, individually and nationally. Highly recommended. Wew, this was a tough and beautiful book at the same time. It is a coming of age story of fourteen-year-old Nathaniel, the narrator of this story, looking back and his older sister Rachel, in post-war England. Their parents have disappeared from their lives and they are surrounded by a colorful set of characters who seem there to protect them. Mysterious,

intriguing, I mean, what is going on all those characters and also beautiful storytelling and beautiful language But tough story to get into, for me It did take me a while, this is a book you have to pursue without hesitating, not stop, take a few pages at least and next day take another few I see I started this one beginning August In the beginning I could not get into the book because I put it aside for too long Focussed on other books However there is something about this book that made me start again and again and then read it slowly Beautiful And I have to read it again soon, to grasp the full of it Read some of Ondaatje's books and they all made me wanting Can understand not everyone likes it But for me four stars plus Nowadays, I eat at the hour the greyhound does And in the evening when he feels ready for sleep, he will drift silently to the table where I work, and lower his tired head onto my hand, in order to stop me I know this is for comfort, needing something warm and human for security, a faith in another He comes to me even with all my separateness and uncertainties But I too wait for this As if he might wish to tell me about his haphazard life, a part I do not know All the unrevealed needfulness that must be in him So I have the dog beside me, who needs my hand This might have been a coming of age novel but it's not It might have been a post WWII novel but it's not It might have been a family drama of sorts but it's not The narration is messy, the plot is pointless and the premise is unbelievable Warlight meandered about without a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. Damn this was good I purposely stayed away from reviews but now I'm dying to read what others have to say especially since I'm long winded review retired for the rest of 2018 From the title itself, Warlight, to the luring first line in the novel In 1945 our parents went away and left us in the care of two men who may have been criminals I was completely captivated to the end. Nathaniel is an adult writing about his life In childhood, Nathaniel, 14, and Rachel 16, get entangled with a slew of fascinating sinewy boisterous characters whom most seem to have nicknames The siblings and their mother also have nicknames very symbolic to this novel everyone being a substitute Smugglers and low lives replace parents From Nathaniel's childhood to his adult years he is most unsettled with his mother Her secrets lies betrayal and heroism resulted in adverse backlash for their family The questions that troubled Nathaniel about his mother things not fitting together haunting mysterious were insightful about post war life Past wars are never past The loss, destruction, and hurt still lives Michael Ondaatje is phenomenally talented His prose is powerful and luminous Extraordinary mysterious atmosphere a few violent scenes seductive to the end.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
THE ENGLISH PATIENT

WARLIGHT



MICHAEL
ONDAATJE

New Post

The Last of the Mohicans

Recent Post

Moby-Dick or, the Whale

Great Expectations

Les Misérables

War and Peace

A Tale of Two Cities

The Iliad

The Canterbury Tales

David Copperfield

Bleak House

Hard Times

Nicholas Nickleby

The Pickwick Papers

The Handmaid's Tale

Frankenstein

The Grapes of Wrath

Rebecca

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

Life of Pi

The Scarlet Letter

The Picture of Dorian Gray

Mansfield Park

The Three Musketeers

Inferno

The Wind in the Willows

Paradise Lost

Robinson Crusoe

The Last of the Mohicans

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