



## "All of our lives have been terribly shaped by what went on before us": history and (post)memory in Michael Ondaatje's "Running in the family" and "Anil's ghost" [

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text (article)

Analítica

Michael Ondaatje's fictionalized memoir *Running in the Family* (1982) and his novel *Anil's Ghost* (2000) are thematically concerned with a return to the country of birth and a confrontation with the past, both individual and collective. In both the memoir and the novel, the history of the author's native Sri Lanka is not only consciously recorded, but also inscribed on material traces and on the human body, "terribly" and insidiously shaping subsequent generations. The article argues that this unconscious, hidden past involves gradual changes and developments that occur imperceptibly over the long term, including events whose effects are transmitted unconsciously through intergenerational (epigenetic) transfer and imprinted on individuals and communities. In both works, Ondaatje adopts a long-term perspective reminiscent of Fernand Braudel's *longue durée* to rethink the Sri Lankan past in a way that dismisses a deterministic idea of historical inevitability. As argued by Walter Benjamin and contemporary interpreters of the *longue durée*, the future is not predetermined. The past holds unrealized potentialities, which may inspire and shape alternative futures. What sustains this way of thinking is a belief in the power of counterfactual thinking to subvert the inevitability of the current order or values

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