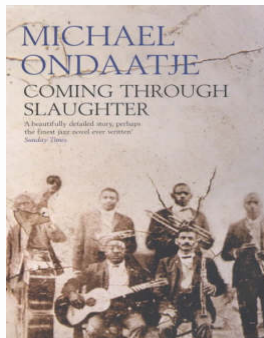


Book Club Discussion Notes



Coming Through Slaughter

By Michael Ondaatje

Author Biography

Born in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) to a Burgher family of Dutch-Tamil-Sinhalese-Portuguese origin, in 1954 he moved to England with his mother. After relocating to Canada in 1962, Ondaatje became a Canadian citizen. Ondaatje studied for a time at Bishop's University, but moved to Toronto and received his BA from the University of Toronto and his MA from Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario and began teaching at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario.

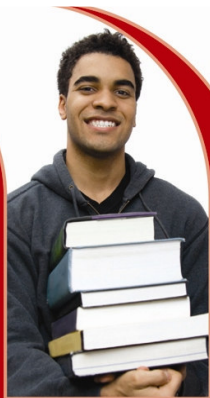
In 1970 he settled in Toronto. From 1971 to 1988 he taught English Literature at York University and Glendon College in Toronto. In 1988 Michael Ondaatje was made an Officer of the Order of Canada (OC) and two years later became a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

About the book

Building this jazz and poetry infused novel up from the barest facts of Buddy Bolden's life – cornet player, one photograph, disappeared, went mad during a street parade, never recorded – Michael Ondaatje creates a work not just about jazz, but of jazz. The rhythms, the syncopation, the timbre, the fragmentary runs of solos upon a bed of guitar and double bass. At times the novel can be obtuse and fragmentary, much in the same ways as jazz can be, but the reader who perseveres is well-rewarded by the sparkling prose and assured narrative drive.

Website:

www.athabascau.ca/writers/ondaatje.html



Book Club Discussion Notes

Other titles:

Running in the Family
The Collected Works of Billy the Kid
In the Skin of a Lion
The English Patient
Anil's Ghost

Points for Discussion:

1. What is the significance of the dolphin sonographs at the beginning of the book? Is Ondaatje being a little too clever, or do they seem like a natural part of the book?
2. Many readers have commented on the jazz-like structures of the novel, with solos and rhythms; what do you think the soundtrack for the novel would sound like? Do any particular songs or pieces of music come to mind?
3. The novel is set in New Orleans circa 1910, which is just before Louis Armstrong began to play, also on trumpet/cornet. Armstrong is often seen as a jovial jazz man, how could he be contrasted to Buddy Bolden?
4. What is the significance of Buddy Bolden's time away from New Orleans? How does Nora deal with his sudden return? Are her reactions surprising?
5. When Bolden dramatically goes insane during the street march, is Ondaatje trying to say that Bolden cannot survive in the regular world, or is it just Bolden's life of excess catching up with him?
6. In several scenes, it would seem that Ondaatje himself is a character in the novel, driving through New Orleans researching the book he is writing; what should be made of this device? Is he identifying with Bolden?