

Chapter II

Historiography and Paranoia in *Coming through Slaughter*

Coming through Slaughter is the first novel of Philip Michael Ondaatje published in the year 1976. It is a fictionalized biography of a New Orleans Jazz veteran Buddy Bolden. He was an African -American who played rag-time music which is called Jazz. The novel records the insane condition of Bolden and his eccentric behaviour during his last days. Ondaatje has interviewed Coleman a great musician and read many articles related to the life of Buddy Bolden to write this novel. Ondaatje's novels render themselves into postmodern ideologies. He is the winner of the Books in Canada first novel award in 1976.

The novel establishes a relationship between art and life. The power of art is so imaginatively portrayed that it acts exactly like the legendary character in the novel. The greater pain and disparity of the protagonist who is a Jazz cornetist is so well portrayed with historical consciousness. Bolden is the romantic symbol of the first Jazz age. With this historical perspective of the legendary figure in mind Ondaatje has produced this masterpiece. Ondaatje tells about a piece of news he read in a newspaper: "Buddy Bolden, who became a legend when he went berserk in a parade" (Jaggi 7). He was attracted towards Bolden's story because of its unfinished quality so that he could fill in lots of empty spaces.

The novel is a reevaluation of history focusing upon the personal and the public spheres. The novel traces the forgotten history of Buddy Bolden and records his life thereby fusing the past and present and a mixture of fact and fiction. The novel expounds themes like alienation and infidel nature of modern culture that leads to self destruction and paranoia. Bolden is believed to be the first and a stalwart in creating the rag-time music also known as Jazz. Many events that happened in Bolden's life is recorded in the novel with a photographic representation of the musician. Ondaatje stumbled upon a newspaper article and read about the Jazz musician Buddy Bolden and this became the story for his novel *Coming through*

Slaughter. “When Ondaatje stumbled upon a newspaper article describing jazz musician Buddy Bolden and his sudden, mysterious dive into madness during the early years of the twentieth century, the story became an obsession” (Barbour 3).

The novel revolves around the life of Buddy Bolden the best cornetist who played jazz music to entertain the African- American crowd of Storyville district. He works in a shaving parlour called N Joseph’s shaving parlour though gifted with a talent to improvise Jazz music and the narrative voice shifts from first person to third person. He is married and has two children. The novel does not aim at didacticism but represents the culture of the age. People were addicted to alcohol, a new kind of rag time music and blues. Bolden was not an exception. He was addicted to alcohol and was unscrupulous in his ethics. His wife Nora was a prostitute and Bolden’s friend Tom Pickett was her pimp. His mother-in-law Isodora Duncan was a good dancer.

Bolden’s music was admired by all the people and the crowd went mad at his loud music. He was also an editor of a magazine *The Cricket* and he was a good listener to all the people who walked into his parlour. He is a barber by profession at the St Joseph’s shaving parlour during day time and plays jazz for the audience in the night at Storyville. In the back room they practised music. After some days he disappears leaving his beloved wife Nora and two children. He becomes addicted to alcohol and courts other men’s wives forgetting his home and society. This kind of a disorderly life made him strange in his behaviour and he started becoming violent by breaking the glass and assaulting Tom Pickett for having commented about his wife’s past life. Slowly he becomes silent and he was afraid that he would not be able to fulfil the expectations of the crowd which wanted variety in his notes. Suddenly he disappears and goes to Shell Beach leaving all other friends in the train.

He goes to Jaelin and Robin Brewitt’s place. Jaelin was a pianist and Bolden develops an illicit love affair with Robin who also played music. His friendship with Bellocq the

photographer collapses him to the core. Webb his friend and detective Copp trace him through Bellocq with the only available band photograph. Webb has concern for Nora. Anticipating that Bolden being away from his family would bring about his own downfall Webb reunites Bolden with his family and music. When he wore his red T- shirt and white jacket, new shoes to play band he became more excited. He became insane when he played Henry Allen's brass band by looking at a girl dance in frenzy. He goes to the mental asylum at Jackson and dies after twenty five years. This novel is the fictional remake of the historical story of Buddy Bolden who is called the precursor of Jazz music.

Jazz is the kind of music played by the African- Americans especially from New Orleans which is considered the birth place of this genre of music. Orleans was considered to be the cradle of jazz. New Orleans in the cosmopolitan south had a confluence of multi racial ethnic community. They preferred this kind of music. Bolden, Morton and Jack were the pioneers of Jazz in Storyville district. The varied mingling of different races and cultures also was one of the reasons for the development of this music. The brass band contained brass musical instruments like the Trombone, Cornett and piped Clarinet which mixed blues and ragtime music to produce Jazz. Bolden was a pioneer and an exponent in Jazz. After freedom from slavery people started migrating towards north spreading Jazz throughout the country. The particular style of New Orleans music is called ragtime music. This type of music is traced back to the native Africa and was brought to America during slave trade. Legendary Bolden is considered to be the originator of Jazz music. Storyville district had bad reputation for its prostitution played a great role in the development of Jazz. The setting of the novel is around New Orleans, Storyville district, N Joseph's shaving parlour, Shell Beach, Brewitts, Bellocq's studio, Bolden's home with Nora and children and the mental hospital.

In the district of Storyville a person can make or lose money. There were prostitutes, gamblers, drug addicts, musicians and drunkards. "Prostitution and its off shoots received a

quarter of a million of dollars of the public's money a week" (CTS 3). Tom Anderson published a blue book which records the details of prostitutes in New Orleans, the place where Bolden has his N Joseph's shaving parlour. Many people poured in for different hair cuts and gossip. These tales of gossip which are interesting find a place in *The Cricket* a magazine edited by Bolden.

The shaving parlour has one room with two sinks and few donated armchairs where customers sat and drank from the wooden coke racks with alcohol being circulated. At 4 O'clock he stopped his work and went home and slept. It was a financial tragedy that made Bolden consume alcohol. He took the children to school buying them breakfast and treated them as adults. He spent the time with children telling tales and jokes. He in turn learned the new street songs from the children. He had little sleep and too much drink. In the evenings he played music in the Masonic or the Globe.

The Bolden's were citizens of African- American origin who had grown up during the civil war, an era gladly forgotten by the family. It's hard to imagine a world of challenge and opportunity among the chaos of the late new century Orleans. Bolden was exposed to a type of cultural renaissance in the city which was fired by freedom of expression and fuelled by music.

Louis Armstrong was one of the pioneers in Jazz music. The marching band performed at picnics, parades and even funerals. The band men had brass instruments. Blues is also a kind of African- American folk song sung by the workers. Later it was incorporated into Jazz. Cornetist Bolden led a band of Jazz in New Orleans. There are no recordings of Bolden's music. He became mentally deranged, and suffered from a kind of dementia called schizophrenia, which is also a type of paranoia. He remained and spent the rest of his life in a mental asylum.

Since Ondaatje has attempted to recreate the historical and legendary character of Buddy Bolden in his novel it can be called a historiographic metafiction. Linda Hutcheon in her *Postmodern Poetics* defines historiography as “a novel that blurs the line between fact and fiction” (111). The legendary figure Buddy Bolden is the protagonist of this fiction. Ondaatje has not only used historical characters but also real names embedded with imaginary lines. Bolden often asks himself a question, “What’s wrong with me?” (CTS 68). This repetition shows the mental dementia suffered by the protagonist:

When he went mad he was the same age as I am now ... when I read he stood in front of mirrors and attacked himself, there was the shock of memory. For I had done that. Stood, and with a razor-blade cut into cheeks and forehead, shaved hair. Defiling people we did not wish to be. ... What was there in that, before I knew your nation your colour your age, that made me push my arm forward and spill it through the front of your mirror and clutch myself. (CTS 68) (ellipses as per original)

The tale of Buddy Bolden’s Blues or Jazz, his ascendancy into popularity, his family and love affair, his work in the barber shop, his psychosis and eventual breakdown into dementia are ingeniously and aesthetically portrayed by Ondaatje in his metafictional biography. Bolden was born on September 6, 1877: Charles Buddy Bolden is also known as King Bolden. His origin is New Orleans, Louisiana, USA and died at the age of 54 on November 4, 1931. He was a barber by day, editor of a magazine *The Cricket* and played traditional Jazz, rag time, Blues, marching band and stranded music.

He was a Cornetist and a great entertainer. He was influenced by the age and its whims and he was an alcoholic and a womanizer. As a result of this kind of living he detaches from family and finally goes mad. He was known for the loud note and improvisation. When he died he was buried in Holt’s cemetery which was a pauper’s grave

site. The exact area of burial is not known to anyone. He also is said to have taken musical ideas from the Baptist churches. Ondaatje has adapted this legend in this novel mingling prose and poetry, fact and fiction even though the protagonist does not exactly resemble the traditional Bolden.

Bolden was nonpareil in his music composition and remained unsurpassed during his life time. He was a pioneer who influenced many younger generations. Despite his fame his personal life was filled with misery that made him feel lonely, alienated and finally drowns into madness. There is an innate wisdom, passion for music and potential within the hero. He did not have any legend or prodigy but he himself had the passion to create this kind of art that influenced many young men. The generation depicted in the novel is modern and is full of lasciviousness. "By the end of nineteenth century the storyville district of New Orleans had some 2000 prostitutes, 70 professional gamblers, and 30 piano players" (CTS 3). Buddy Bolden played Jazz in the crowded streets during night time and entertained them with variety of notes. The crowd consisted of people who are pimps, prostitutes, barbers and musicians playing in the bar. The exciting maddening music of Jazz is played and prostitutes parade the stage. There is no morality or codes of conduct that are expected of a civilized society. The prostitutes in Storyville range from young women of twenties to that of seventies.

Bolden's addiction to music is a way of freedom to liberate from the racist tendency. The African -American crowd was pulsating with vigour and vitality in this kind of new music. The novel has polyphonic voices, fragmented narratives of many episodes that are interwoven making it very interesting to the readers. In a racist society both men and women are frail vessels. But there is infidelity and suffering that affect their private lives. Buddy Bolden feels sad to learn that his friend Tom Pickett is having an affair with his wife Nora

Brass. He is a pimp in Orleans and Nora is known to him as she is involved in prostitution.

“Bolden is neither killed nor crucified but slaughtered” (Bhangu n.p).

Bolden portrayed in this novel is the imaginary remake of the legendary historical Bolden. Ondaatje uses first person narrative voice and he himself narrates most of the story. He has travelled to Storyville district to learn about the land marks of Bolden’s parlour. Bolden’s suffering is so pathetic and it brings him down slowly. One fine day when he was playing in the public parade Robin Brewitt observed that he almost fainted. He loses control of his senses. His friendship with Robin makes him to sever his relationship with his wife Nora. But Bolden had many fans courting him. Still his love for Nora is true. His relationship with Robin made him break the relationship with his wife Nora. He lost connection with his kith and kin due to heightened insanity. Bolden left his wife and two little children for the sake of Robin. In the Liberty-Iberville concert which is Bolden’s last performance, he witnesses a dancing girl who dances in frenzy to the tune he played. Bolden gets encouraged and drowns into music. As he blew his Cornett, blood gushed from his heart through the instrument and he finally collapses into madness. He was then taken to a mental asylum and he came back to Orleans only to be buried in 1931.

Ondaatje has taken a legendary character and transformed his personality to suit the novel. Bolden has created his own hell. He feels lonely and lost. The tale is full of lyricism. Involving in promiscuous and lustful life brings his downfall without any doubt. The story of a prostitute who spread diseases was chased out of Orleans by pimps is recorded in the official history. This kind of life made Bolden rot into madness. His mind deteriorated and disintegrated. Bolden left even Jazz and more than that got involved with sex. “I love every woman I remember” (CTS 99). Prostitutes who spread diseases were chased out of Storyville. They carry mattress around their back which was feasible for them to run away when they were chased. Their arms were broken by the pimps to prevent them from

prostitution and avoid them spreading diseases. The talented Bolden meets a sad end as he took the wrong road.

The epigraph of the novel records a sonograph of dolphin's squeak associated with Bolden's Cornett sound:

Three sonographs – pictures of Dolphin sounds made by a machine that is more sensitive than human ear. The top left sonograph shows a “squawk”. Squawks are common emotional expressions that have many frequencies or pitches, which are vocalized simultaneously. The top right sonograph is a whistle. Note that the number of frequencies is small and this gives a “pure” sound.- not a squawk. whistles are like personal signatures for dolphins and identify each dolphin at its location. The middle sonograph shows a dolphin making two kinds of signals simultaneously. The vertical stripes are echolocation clicks (sharp, multi-frequency sounds) and the dark, mountain like humps are the signature whistles. No frequency sounds. No one knows how a dolphin makes both whistles and echolocation clicks simultaneously. (CTS 1)
(Italics as per original)

Dolphin's sound is different than the sounds originating in the ocean. The reproduction of the sounds of ocean through music instruments is one of the advancement of technology. There is the sonograph that records the sound of the dolphins in the epigraph of the text. Bolden's music is unique and never improvised by anyone else. Bolden's music is made immortal through Ondaatje's novel. But Bolden's music was never recorded. He strived to become popular till he became insane.

His friend Webb searches him and brings him back. He tries to cut down his alcohol and his affair with other women. Bellocq is another historical figure recorded by Ondaatje.

Webb gets a photograph from Bellocq to trace Bolden's whereabouts. He is known for taking

pictures of storyville prostitutes and later scratches the pictures and destroys them. This indicates his mental delirium. Bellocq who is an artist destroys his own art. His friendship with Bolden comes to an end when Bellocq commits suicide. This had a negative impact on Bolden who becomes mentally depressed and leads to his psychic derangement making him spend the rest of his life in mental asylum. Michael Ondaatje has used the postmodern techniques and the story is told through a collection of photographs, fake interviews, jazz music, epigraphs which form a pastiche.

Bolden enjoyed each and every moment of his music. "His music was on top of his own life. Echoing" (CTS 32). His music had power and he praises his art. "When I played parades we would be going down Canal Street and at each intersection people would hear the fragment I happened to be playing and it would fade as I went down canal. They would not be there to hear the end of phrases" (CTS 59). Bolden became a metaphor for music. Bolden's art is so lively that it lacked any form or order. It is emotional, vibrant and spontaneous. "Every note he played was a new one and it was a different one. He never repeated it" (CTS 72). He combined the lord's music with that of blues. He had a unique way of playing his brass cornett in the band.

He at times expressed his frenzy to Nora by breaking the doors and windows. Bolden's life is chaotic fluctuating between love and hate, order and chaos, patience and violence. In order to get a relief from this stressful and traumatic life he escapes into the world of music which is his passion. Bolden chooses a life away from the orderly world and plunges into chaotic world where he destroys himself. His art leads him to madness. Nightmares of his children's death and fantasies of suicide in dark rooms whose windows and doors torture him is a sign of paranoia:

He lay crucified and drunk. Brought his left wrist to his teeth and bit hard and harder for several seconds then lost his nerves. Flopped it back outstretched.

Gone to sleep while his vein tingling at the near chance it had of almost going free. Ecstasy before death. It marched through him where he slept. (CTS 77)

This is a mad art so maddening that it kills the artist:

So many murders of his own body. From the slammed finger nail to the sweat draining through his hair eventually bleeding brown into the neck of his shirt... There was a strange lack of care regarding his fingers, even inspired by his ultimate nightmare of having hands cut off at the wrists. His nails chewed down and distinguishable from the callousness of his fingers... Suicide of the hands. So many varieties of murder. After his child died in his dream it was his wrist he attacked. (CTS 44)

These voluntary mutilations, the violence exerted towards oneself or towards art are recorded in the book. The violence done to one's human body comes from the heated brain which directs such mishap.

He hates the music played by Rabichaux who was a great musician of that time and thought that there was no energy in his rhythm and it was only mechanical. Belloq a deformed photographer reduces his life into insanity. Belloq's friendship brought Bolden down. Belloq commits suicide by setting fire in his studio. Bolden suffers from the Dionysian concept of self forgetfulness. Bolden comes back after six months and tries to get a relief from his paranoia by playing in the parade after two years. A young dancer dances to the tune of his music and he follows her and falls into the trap of chaotic world. His friend Willy Cornish catches him when he falls and he spilt blood while playing his trombone. He suffers from "Dementia Praecox a type of Paranoia" (CTS 79). The words he uttered before he fell were "*What I wanted*" (CTS 132).

Webb's search of Bolden and the mysterious disappearance of the Jazz cornetist triggers the curiosity of the readers. It makes them turn page after page with curiosity

regarding Bolden's disappearance and how Webb the detective friend finds him in shell beach solves the curiosity of the readers. "Webb enters the character of Bolden through every voice he speaks to" (CTS 69). "Ondaatje's poetic language tends to push scene after scene into the margins of verisimilitude, away from the realistic documentation history depends upon" (Barbour 102).

Bolden's involvement in music reveals his identity, alienation and a sense of loneliness from family and friends. He is a tragic artist and a tragic hero whose flaw is weakness for women and alcohol. This subsequently leads him to insanity. Bolden is the most talented artist who brought innovation and unfortunately does not shine well in life and there is no record to prove his popularity. Bolden remained an infamous man and suffered from depressive psychosis. The society of New Orleans in the early nineties was considered as immoral that most of the people gave importance for entertainment rather than spiritual upliftment. Ondaatje has brought out the moral degradation of the age in this novel.

The hero's suffering is silent and he does not express it openly and he finds solace through music. The society with its cruelties of racism and lack of morality has its effect on the lives of people. One of the main causes for Bolden's drowning himself into alcohol is his friend Tom Pickett. Nora's infidelity affects Bolden. Tom Pickett confesses boldly about the love affair with Bolden's wife Nora Brass. She was actually born in a respectable family but circumstance makes her a prostitute at New Orleans. Tom Pickett was a famous pimp who hired Nora. This revelation of inconstancy in Nora is shocking and Bolden addicts himself to alcohol. "If Nora had been with Pickett. Had really been with Pickett as he said....Then the certainties he loathed and needed were liquid at the root" (CTS 75). When Bolden runs away from Orleans he is rescued by Robin Brewitt. He runs away from moral bonding into amoral free life and finds Robin as a fine compatriot who could share his motto of life.

Circumstances which lead to his dementia are described in clear poetic prose. In the end Webb brings him back to be reunited with his family and friends. He goes to the cabin of Webb in Ponchatrain and thinks of how he got married to Nora and stayed that night there. Nora Bass is a good wife to Bolden and a good mother to her children. When Bolden leaves her to Shell beach she lives with Bolden's band man Willy Cornish. Webb finds him and he reunites Bolden with his wife. After six months of addiction and immoral life, Bolden returns to normalcy. Willy Cornish was with Nora when Bolden came back. Nora and Bolden talked to each other like two lovers in the presence of Willy Cornish. Bolden takes his two children to school. Bolden becomes emotional, he kisses his son and caresses his daughter. The children are happy and tell their peers about their father accompanying them. But this is only for a short while. He is so obsessed with his music that he finally forgets his audience. In the manual hall while playing for the parade, his mind goes out of control when he watches a girl getting herself involved in his music dancing round and round. She danced in frenzy. This dance leads him to self destruction. This could be compared to the frenzied dance of peacock at the time of rain to attract its mate. This triggered his passion for jazz and goes "berserk when he plays Jazz" (CTS 134).

All my body moves to my throat and I speed again and . . . feel the blood that is real move up bringing fresh energy in its suitcase, it comes up flooding past my heart in a mad parade, it is coming through my teeth, it is into the cornet, god can't stop god can't stop it can't stop the air the red force coming up can't remove it from my mouth, no intake gasp, so deep blooming it up god I can't choke it the music still pouring in a roughness I've never hit, watch it listen it listen it, can't see I CAN'T SEE. Air floating through the blood to the girl red hitting the blind spot I can feel others turning, the silence of the crowd, can't see. (CTS 131-32)

Bolden and the instrument became one and the same and he gets immersed totally in music. His body, his soul and all his vibrant energy fuses to become one. This makes him go crazy and frenzied. Music conquers him, possesses him and takes control of him and finally makes him mad and collapses his personality.

Ondaatje's style is unique in the novel. The poetic prose makes the language musical. There are ellipses and gaps in the narrative which leaves the reader to fill the lapses and it also heightens the emotional bond between the reader and the story. The short and curt dialogue makes the reader actively involved. The technique used in the novel is polyphonic, a narrative with many voices and many episodes. The author's art of characterization is fantastic. In the process of recreating a legendary character Michael Ondaatje infuses his own imagination and events. Each and every character in the novel is uniquely caricatured. One of the themes used is promiscuity and prostitution which was rampant during Bolden's times.

The plot rambles between past and the present. The structure of the novel is divided into three parts. The first part shows the geography of Orleans, second Bolden's disappearance and the third about his reunion and death. Slaughter signifies not only slaughter of the mind but a place in Jacksonville from where the body of Bolden travelled to Orleans. Willy Cornish played trombone and continued in the band after Bolden left. The novel paints a picture of a man at the time he lived and the music he played. The pages are strangely laid out. The pages are cramped that the sentences are closer at the top and has narrow margins. Narratives are divided into segments. Some segments are written in third person and some in first person. Few segments have a title. For example the segment entitled 'Frank Lewis' or 'Train Song' is narrated in third person. There is third person narrator who in the beginning gives a vivid picture of the whereabouts of Bolden and says about the signs of owners obliterated by brand names "Drink coca cola in bottles, Bargs, or Laura Lee's

tavern, the signs speckled in the sun Tom Moore, Yellowstone, Jax, coca cola ... primary yellows and reds muted now against the white horizontal sheet wood walls” (CTS 39).

Ondaatje has included details regarding the research he undertook to write the novel:

There is so little noise that I can easily hear the click of my camera as I take fast bad photographs into the sun aiming at the barber shop he probably worked in. The street is fifteen yards wide. I walk around watched by three men farther up the street under a Coca Cola sign. They have not heard of him here ... When he went mad he was the same age as I am now. (CTS 134)

Photographs in the novel play an iconic role in tracing the identity of the characters.

Ondaatje found only one photograph of Buddy Bolden. Before beginning the novel two pages of photograph and explanations are given about Bolden. The first photograph is Bolden’s band photograph taken in 1900. The photograph in the novel is reversed or it is believed the musicians were left handed. Bolden’s Cornett is missing or is hidden behind Back Mumford. Bolden mixes hymns with funeral music. The hint is given in the middle of the story by Dude Botley says, “He’s mixing them up. He’s playing the blues and the hymns sadder than the blues and then the blues sadder than the hymn. That is the first time I ever heard hymns and blues cooked up together (CTS 78). The mixture of blues and Orleans funeral music is called ragtime music. He mixes up hymns and jazz together and people think it to be an unscrupulous act. Thus comes an end to Bolden and his famous blues.

Ondaatje uses multiple narratives of Bolden, Webb, and Nora. The novel blurs the line between fact and fiction thus making it a historiographic metafiction. The novel is in poetic prose. Semi poetical prose is adopted by Ondaatje. Bolden is a good husband and a father. He balances music, family and life so well in the beginning. The novel is a combination of history and imaginative prose and this makes the novel different one from that of the traditional biography. He hates his wife Nora for certain reasons and he is governed by fears

of uncertainty. He describes his inner mind in a magazine called *The Cricket* and this is a sign of his mind getting deranged slowly. His friend a cop and a detective is in search of him and Webb realizes that without family he would collapse.

Bellocq photographs ships by day and whores at night. He was not interested in music and detested the people who are after fame. Bellocq is a hydrocephalic with a hump. It is he who prompts Bolden to insanity. Nora feels that Bellocq was the cause of Bolden's fall. She screams "*Look at you. Look what has he done to you. Look at you. Look at you. Damn it. Look at you*" (CTS 127). (*Italics as per original*). Jazz music is Bolden's chosen art form. For his friend Bellocq photography is the chosen art form. Both the art forms are metaphors of their lives. Bolden was so obsessed with music that it leads to his insanity. The events are organized in a non-linear fashion. Jazz has become a part and parcel of his life that finally leads him to insanity.

One of the most successful effects in the novel is the photograph on the cover page. This is the only source upon which Ondaatje has constructed the life of the legendary Jazz musician Bolden. This picture has been elaborated into a fiction. The readers after reading the text would go back to the cover page to identify the person as Jimmy Johnson on brass, Bolden on cornett, Willy Cornish on trombone, Willy Warner with a clarinet, Brock Mumford with a guitar and Frank Lewis on clarinet. On the cover page of the novel the only available photo of Bolden is portrayed. This photograph is sourced by Webb, the detective cop and a friend of Bolden. Photography is one of the techniques used by postmodernists. The band members are Willy Cornish and Bolden with his saxophone is in the middle of the photograph.

The men are arranged in two rows with their musical instruments. Bolden's face is not clear like his history which is blurred. Different editions have different photograph which includes Jimmy Johnson, Bolden, Willy Cornish and Willy Warner. Ondaatje

says, “There is only one photograph that exists even today. This is what you see” (CTS 66). Below the photograph is written that the photograph is not clear for it is damaged by fire and water clogged. The photograph was possibly taken between 1899 and 1904. Johnson was holding a bass and Mumford a guitar. There is confusion in identifying the band men for the photograph was printed in a reverse manner. So Webb embarks on search for Bolden and finds Bellocq to help him to identify Buddy Bolden.

Bellocq’s identity is delineated by Ondaatje in detail. Bellocq is a historical character and also an imaginary creation of the author. He has made the historical and imaginary characters as friends mingling fact and fiction to a great level. Bellocq’s studio had many photographs of Orleans prostitutes. The police suspected Bellocq whenever a prostitute is killed or molested. The police leave him when they see that he does not talk much and he is Cephalic, a kind of deformity that he suffers from. He clings to the tripod which holds the camera for his support. He has a kind of psycho neurosis that he goes to the extent of damaging and tearing the photographs of the whores. He one day burns the studio by setting fire and commits suicide. Bellocq’s suicide has a serious effect on Bolden’s dementia later. His wife Nora Brass has a great aversion for Bellocq and thinks that he is the root cause of her husband’s failure and in a way it is very true. Bolden himself tells that it was Bellocq who made him understand the danger lurking behind his rapidly growing fame and the self importance he acquires as he gains popularity which he gets through popularity.

Webb gets the only available photograph of the band from Bellocq and at last finds Bolden in Chinatown living with Jaelin and Robin Brewitt. The photograph is printed by Bellocq and is given to Webb. The grey negative is then dropped into the acid tray and is bleached. This shows the uncertainty in bringing to life the legendary character, the historical Bolden in this fictional recreation of history. Willy Cornish and

Bella Cornish loan the photograph to others. Webb finds Bolden's wife who was deserted by him. Nora very clearly says that if he wants to find his friend he should do it for his sake and not for her. But Webb is not only a detective but a mythical biographer who constructs the incomplete and chaotic gaps that was lurking in Bolden's past.

The exact cause of Bolden's insanity is due to excess addiction to alcohol that leads to mental destructive process. By 1906 he started playing erratically. His obsession with life and jazz lead to his insanity. The identity of Bolden is traced by Ondaatje.

Charles Buddy Bolden was born in New Orleans on September 6, 1877 to Westmore and Alice Bolden. He was baptized at St. John's Baptist church. He had a sister called Lottie who is two years his senior. When Buddy was born the civil rights movement came to an end and they were at liberty to do what they wished. Westmore was a Drayman, one who drove cattle with lots of goods. Bolden took a challenge in this competitive world. The reader has to construct the linear biography from the non-linear structure.

On his way to city state mental hospital, while travelling in the train across wet chicory he sings the song. The train song shows Bolden's state of mind: "Passing wet chicory that lies in the fields like the sky/ Passing wet chicory that lies in the fields like the sky/...Passing wet sky chicory lies" (CTS 82).

He is affected with dementia which is a type of paranoia that makes the patient forget everything. He is not able to recognize anybody for he is in such a sorry state. He is a barber by profession so in the hospital they allow him to shave the patients and cut their hairs. After this they take the knives from him and lock it up. Bolden is treated differently when compared to the other patients. Bolden did not respond to music in the due course. Later his memory becomes completely erased that he could not recognize anybody. When he dies his body is brought through a city named Slaughter, and handed over to his sister in New Orleans. This is the end of the great legend, the inventor of jazz. When racism was at its peak

people found entertainment through music. Ondaatje at the end of the book acknowledges that there has been some changes, some characters were brought together, some changes in facts have been made to suit the characteristics of fiction.

During slavery Africans were treated as lesser beings. They were not provided education and the teachers taught them craft and not art. Though their fore fathers were great musicians, they suffered during racism. Bolden recalls the failure of his parents in a racist society:

My fathers were those who put their bodies over barbed wire. For me. To slide over into the region of hell. Through their sacrifice they seduced me into the game. They showed me their autographed pictures and they told me about their women and they told me of the even bigger names all over the country.

My father's failing. Dead before they hit the wire. (CTS 93)

Three teachers Mutt Carey, Bud Scot, Happy Galloway taught Bolden the art of music. Galloway taught him about blues and Bolden improvised blues into jazz. Bolden became an exponent as well as innovator of Jazz. "Every note new and raw and chance. Never repeated" (CTS 99). Carey and Hall taught him the same music every time but Galloway taught him innovation. It bubbles, slips and squeals. Bolden's music was "spontaneous, anarchic and transient and was an expression of his life" (Vevaina 57). While playing Jazz Bolden felt that he did not have the power to control his body or what went around him. He never spoke of his past and especially how life would lead him towards future. He did not believe in the possibilities of life. Buddy Bolden lived a different life immersing him in music.

Bolden was the editor of *The Cricket* a magazine that was published by him. He wrote about brothels, gamblers, alcoholics, musicians and pimps. It is a gossip magazine. He recorded all that he heard from friends and police. He recorded all the thick facts of life and put them into pails of sub history. Bolden's profession is such that it gives him chance to

meet people from all walks of life. Bolden had written an article about a certain politician who took ten minutes to decide which shirt to wear and the magazine ridicules every person who suffers from indecisiveness. In the barber shop Bolden was listening to every gossip. People confided their problems and Bolden suggested solutions but he was only twenty three at that time. He loved gossips and “his mind became the street” (CTS 38). Bolden talks of mortality in his magazine. There were references of referees who were slashed to death by fighting cocks or pigs taking away the master hands or a woman who suffers heart attack by letting someone’s iguana by mistake instead of kittens. When Bolden came back from Shell Beach his wife Nora had four months issue of the *Cricket* magazine in her cup board which he read through. “*Cricket* was my diary too, and everybody else’s... Cricket noises and cricket music for that is what we are when watched by people bigger than us” (CTS 112).

The unfortunate death of Isadora Duncan under mysterious circumstances teaches him about mortality. Isodara was a great dancer and Bolden thinks that he must record her dance. “Bolden feels that popularity is the cause of a musician’s downfall and it makes his room narrower and narrower. He says “I don’t want to be a remnant in jazz history and don’t want to be a ladder” (CTS 99). He wanted to be the bottom rung of the ladder and wants others to step over him to create history just as he has done with others.

Bolden abandons music and comes to Shell Beach with the Brewitts and lives in loneliness for two years without his instrument and tells Webb that there is something other than music. Webb convinces him and brings him back to his old life of music. He first plays music in his apartment in Ponchatrain where he began his marital life with Nora. Bolden has a musical rival John Robichaux. Both their emotions burst into musical patterns and spell bound the audience. “I loathed everything he stood for. He dominated his audience. He put his emotions into patterns which a listening crowd would follow” (CTS 91). He listens to

Rabichaux's band in a different line after he left Orleans and feels there is structure in his music. It is an anachronism for radios were never invented those days and this shows Ondaatje's art of blurring the line between the past and present, fact and fiction. At the Iberville parade he has a fall after his dementia and in Louisiana city hospital he undergoes a surgery in the neck after which he is admitted in the hospital. Willy Cornish says Bolden got connected with the history of Jazz and people visited libraries and nobody knew about Bolden's wife and children or about Brewitts.

Buddy Bolden transcends the social and cultural relations and does not have a "fixed image" (Spinks 80). Buddy Bolden inaugurated the new Jazz syntax. He feels that art is a form of liberation from confinement. But unfortunately Bolden's aestheticism ends in madness. The central focus of the novel lies in intertwining aesthetic vision and historical consciousness. Bolden's commitment for music breaks his social sense and ends in psychosis. Bolden's music is so sensational that it depicts typical jazz culture of the time. People had a craze for jazz for it differed from traditional music. This is the metaphor of modern black experience. Jazz has given them power to think differently. The novel opens with Bolden's time. It traces from legendary Bolden's time to the contemporary world where the streets are filled with brand names. "This district, the homes and the stores are a mile or so from the streets made marble by Jazz" (CTS 2). Bolden's current life in Storyville is different from historical Orleans. Not much history is recorded in Storyville. The story of Bolden in the text is given to the readers in fragments.

Lee Spinks opines that "Bolden is a nomadic character and atopic" (83). He cannot adjust to social roles and conventions. Bolden could not put things in place. He feels his life is estranged from society. This is a kind of derangement but Bolden is controlled by jazz:

He was the best, the loudest and the most loved jazzmen of his time but never professional in the brain. Unconcerned with the crack of the lip he threw out

and held immense notes, could reach a force on the first note that attacked the ear. He was obsessed with the magic of air, those smells that turned neuter as they revolved in his lung then spat out in the spoken key... He could see the air, could tell where it was freshest in a room by the colour. (CTS 8)

Bolden arrives at Masonic hall and bursts into Jazz like “animals fighting in the room” (CTS 7). Bolden’s performance mixes subjectivity and objectivity. “The music was coarse and tough, immediate dated in half an hour was about bodies in the river, knives, love pains, cokiness. Up there on the stage he was showing all the possibilities in the middle of the story” (CTS 38). Jazz is singular and has power to dissolve into music. Bolden’s music made people transcend their personal sorrow. When Bolden played parades he would go down Canal Street and at each section people would just hear the fragments he would face as he went farther down canal. The musical power won the African-Americans a space in the social life of that time.

Webb and Bolden are bound through music. Webb steps into Bolden’s life when he disappears from Orleans leaving Nora. Bolden started leading a nomadic life. The role of Webb is to trace and hunt Bolden and to reconstruct his life. Webb Says to Nora “he’ll not last long Nora. He’ll fall apart. He’s not safe by himself” (CTS 14). Bolden’s abandonment of his family is a bad sign of erasure from life itself. Webb understands Bolden than anyone else. Webb brought back Bolden from his private life to public life of music. Bolden himself feels the power with which Webb has brought him back home. He had to succumb to Webb’s entreaties and cannot go back to his life of escapism:

God he spoke and sucks me out of my brain and so I was puppet and she was a landscape so alien and so newly foreign that I was ridiculous here. He could reach me thus far away, could tilt me just upside down till he was directing me like wayward traffic home. (CTS 86)

The author gives a hint of his schizophrenia when Bolden comments “my brain suicided” (CTS 117) earlier Bolden comments “my brain has walked away and is watching me” (CTS 100). Bolden though initially less popular than Webb evolves himself to popularity. Bolden has lost a particular goal in life. His visions take a different turn in life. He is influenced by the age in which he lives.

Bolden’s experience in Shell Beach has a different perspective of life. His wanderings and music gives him rejuvenation and rebirth like Dionysius. The novel has ambivalence between Bolden’s unfolding story and Webb’s fixation. Webb’s narrative and Bolden’s quest for self is the underlying theme of the novel. Bolden blames Webb and tells “he came here and placed my past and future on this table like a road” (CTS 88). Webb is not able to understand Bolden’s definition of his different world.

Bolden is unconsciously driven by visions of death. Still he also has a zeal for living. So he tries to possess a special role as the editor of the magazine in his locality and his megalomaniac nature which is latent in him terrifies and exhilarates him. Whenever a sensational murder occurred Bolden was there at the end of the scene “drawing amateur maps” (CTS 19). He wanted to escape life. So he watches all his other friends disappear in the train. All hid behind the wagon. He was frozen. He wanted to join the Brewitts and stay with them for the rest of his life. He did not want to meet anybody he knew during his life time.

The revelation of Nora’s past intimacy with Tom Pickett upsets Bolden. Once Tom Pickett drops into his parlour to shave and they begin a casual conversation. When Tom Pickett boasted of his pimping career earlier and mentioned Nora as one of his clients the rage was maddening that he attacked Tom with the shaving knife wounding him brutally.

The first part of the novel focuses on Bolden’s art. This reveals the identity of Bolden. The second part of the novel narrates the story of Bolden’s life that leads to dementia

praecox, a type of paranoia. The contempt of slogging for hours at then N Josephs shaving parlor makes him feel “The layers of soap all day long have made a skin over me” (CTS 47). Consequently he rebels against the slavery of his socially defined image. Bolden thinks that his talent gives him power to manipulate his customer’s looks.

His obsession to sex upsets him and his affair with Robin Brewitt disorganizes him. His first night under her roof “made him lose the order of time” (CTS 29). It is Webb who finds him and tries to bring a change in him. Webb tilts him and drives him back home like correcting a wayward traffic home. The moment Webb finds Bolden he shouts “You want to go back Buddy. You want to go back” (CTS 80). The narrative shifts from first person to third person focusing on the agonized state of mind of the musician. But Bolden who was in the swimming pool wanted to go down the waters instead of coming up to the surface in order to escape reality. But Webb was able to convince and take him back to Storyville. Before returning to Storyville he describes that he sleeps with the idea of suicide in his mind. Robin drained him of his body and he felt he was so suffocated with the magic air of fame that he felt he was breathing his own recycled air. He was unhappy to come back and when he played in Henry Allen’s brass band he went mad. He is sure of his popularity and what popularity had done to him. He had to pay for being popular and lacking confidence which leads to claustrophobic moments. “I am the famous barber. I am the famous Cornett player. Read the labels. The labels are coming home” (CTS 104).

Bolden takes a respite from public life after befriending Bellocq. He is an imaginary creation of Michael Ondaatje and his friendship with Bolden is also imaginary. It is a mere mingling of fact and fiction. Until Bolden’s confrontation with Bellocq he did not alienate himself from social life. Bellocq’s personal life and its pain with his deformity made him into a kind of recluse. The painful and lonely life of Bellocq makes him commit suicide. Bolden’s

life also becomes one of death-in- life. Bolden's movement from social world to that of Bellocq's world causes schizophrenia.

He is so lonely and anonymous in a white room with no history and no memory. Bolden enters into a world of day dreams. "I wanted to be the reservoir where engines and people drank blood sperm music pouring out and getting hooked in someone's ears he reflects on the eve of his parade. The way flowers were still and fed bees" (CTS 110). Bolden struts before the crowd indulging himself in a parade of ego that sets him apart from the watching crowd. Bolden's tone and perspective shifts once the cornet is played. Immediately a man and a woman set apart to dance to the rhythm of music. His eyes black out which is one of the symptoms of getting collapsed, "eyes gong dark in the hot bleached street" (CTS 129).

The shattering of mirror into pieces is a sign of derangement or destruction. Bolden tries to blow a new note as the parade comes to a close and the woman dances in frenzy. He felt the woman was making him mad with her lovely tired dance. Bolden like the "Dionysius becomes the dancer and the dance" (Spinks 100). Willy Cornish witnesses Bolden spitting blood. Ondaatje has recorded this in his biographical notes. "Buddy Bolden (1907) went mad while playing with Henry Allen's brass band" (CTS 133). Ondaatje has taken initial steps to go to Orleans to study Bolden's history. He has collected many photographs of the barbershop where Bolden would have walked in Storyville. Ondaatje interviewed Frank Amacker in 1965 to learn Jazz culture. People pay homage to jazz age by repeatedly performing Frank Amacker's music.

This is recorded through Bolden's performance and journey to Louisiana hospital. Ondaatje has some selections of the hospital records from 'A Brief History of East Louisiana State Hospital' By Lionel Gremillion. The hospital was opened in the year 1848 with 87 patients from the charity hospital in New Orleans. A minority report states that the food was

normal and the cells had no heat. In the year 1857 the hospital came under the control of a medical man. In 1861 the hospital had a record of 36 girls and dysentery swept away patients like grass before scythe in the year 1855. Some of the causes of insanity were recorded as ill health, loss of property, tobacco, dissipation, domestic affliction, home sickness and injury of the head. In the year 1882 occupational therapy was introduced. 1910-12 around 1496 patients were admitted. From 1912-14 hospital band played from 2 pm till 4 pm. Bolden was given washer man test and was proved negative. Bolden died in 1931.

The protagonist of the novel is an improvisation of the legendary Bolden by Ondaatje. The aesthetic view of life is a sort of burden and also a release. Belocq is a destructive character who took pains to defile the beauty of the photographs. Bellocq's suicide was so influential on Bolden that it becomes a psychological suicide for him. Bolden comments that Bellocq was the first friend "who had absolutely no interest in music" (CTS 59). Scofie de Smyter in his article 'Grasping Ondaatje' opines that "Fame contributed to his vanity and alienated him from the inspiring chaos. He started to meet the expectations of the audience instead of trespassing them and discharging their drives and emotions."

There are analepses and prolepses in the novel. Bolden become Schizophrenic. He imagines his death from the beginning. He gets hallucinations and suffers amnesia. The suppressed emotions outbreak sometimes into a quarrel like the one with Tom Pickett. There is forceful row between Bolden and Pickett in the parlour when he slashed him with the shaving blade and broke mirror and wounded him very badly for continuing his relationship with Nora. Ondaatje compares his music to Victor Coleman who is a poet and the rhythms being the same. "Listening to Bolden was like talking to Coleman" (CTS 32).

The novel can be called as a mythical metafiction. The legendary Bolden was born in 1868 but when the novel was written in 1906 Ondaatje attempts to recreate the past. Ondaatje acknowledges the sources he reflected to reconstruct the past decade and the legendary

character. The main source to Bolden's story was *Jazzmen* by Frederick Ramsey Jr and Stephany Smith written in the year 1939. Donald Marquis research on new Orleans artist for more than a decade is recorded in the book *In Search of Buddy Bolden* (1978). History is brought out in the novel through restructuring Jazz age. One of the main techniques which Ondaatje focuses is intertextuality. *Coming through Slaughter* makes use of abundant memories, interviews, letters, archive material and pictures. "All these are edited and manipulated to form a rock proof basic for the novel" (Verhoeven 291). Ondaatje has done extensive research in the libraries searching the archives for the material related to Bolden's life. Photographs form the solid proof based on which the structure of the story is formed and narrated.

Death is one of the prominent themes explored in the novel. Isodora Duncan is found dead in her car under mysterious circumstances. Webb the detective friend finds out the cause for her death. She is a dancer and an artist whom Bolden admires. She has a pet snake whose tail is crushed by the car wheels and the snake in order to find protection coils around her neck and crushes her down to eternal death. This affects Bolden's mind. The novel ends with a collage of various forms of texts like Jazz music, interviews, photographs, biographies and songs. The novel is typically postmodern as it has an ambiguous ending. Bolden's music does not record his experience it transcends and takes a different dimension directing his own life.

The novel is a record of collective memory. Ondaatje's characters are obsessed with memories of the past and are not able to cope up with the expectations of the society. The characters would like to give up their past and invent a new world where they could frame their identity. Bolden wants to forget the past and is shocked when Webb forces him back to the past. When he reverts to the past he is unable to cope up and is afraid that he will not be able to satisfy the hungry crowd which burns with the fever for innovation in Jazz every day. It is not out of love he lives with Robin but as a means of escape from past memory. To

involve in the present Bolden needs forgetfulness of the past or a sort of amnesia is needed to save him.

When Bolden arrived in town he was wearing the red collarless T- shirt and a shiny white over coat and new shoes. He was ready for Henry Allen's brass band. He felt like a bird in the air. He played different notes every fifteen minutes and Henry Allen eyeing him to continue the play. He became so vibrant and violent and the frenzied dance of the girl makes him loose his mind.

The novel is a parody of the legendary Buddy Bolden adapted by the author with a few fabrications. The protagonist of the story is of the same age thirty one years like the historical character. Ondaatje has focused the Labour Day parade as the highlight of success for Bolden's career. But in reality he became insane only after five days. His dementia was at its peak and he became violent. So he was arrested by the police. He hit his mother-in-law Isodora Duncan with a water pitcher and was arrested for the second time. Third time in June 1907 he was taken to Jacksonville mental asylum under the vigil of the doctors and remained there for twenty five years and nothing was heard about Nora or Robin or Jaelin. Ondaatje is fond of unfinished stories and ellipses so that gaps could be filled. He mingles fact with fiction for he has retold the life of Bolden the legendary musician and Bellocq the author's invention. Ondaatje has created many characters who involve both in the private and public life of Bolden.

The magnetic pull of the characters Webb and Bellocq on Buddy and their intrusion into his private life dramatizes the image of magnates pulling in opposite direction; they disrupt the fine and precise balance between the contradictory forces within Buddy. (Wart 2)

The slow convolution of the brain mentioned in the novel shows the altered state of mind of Bolden. The stories in Bolden's life are "like spokes in a rimless wheel" (CTS 63)

At the end of the novel the history of Jazz is clearly presented. No one knows about Bolden either his wife or Robin. Willy Cornish just has the photograph given by Webb and does not wish to talk about him. Bolden could not recognize anybody and did not respond to anybody for many years. Cornish marries Bella Davenport. Cornish had his arms paralyzed when he played Rampart and Julien. Tom Pickett was shot dead. Ondaatje has interviewed many people to gather the life of Buddy Bolden. When his throat was operated and passed through Sunshine, Vacherie and Slaughter he was very quiet and when he died at the age of thirty one his body passed through the same route. The fictional biography of the great artist and historical legend, Jazz Cornetist, Buddy Bolden ends ironically in a mad house seeking peace from the chaotic world around him and from the traumas that lurks within him.

The novel *Coming through Slaughter* in its theme and techniques is a perfect example of Ondaatje's unique narrative art form. The theme rambles between the protagonist past and present. There is a combination of prose and poetry and also the private life of Bolden and his public life. The trauma and the psychological problem of slow mental derangement are brilliantly caricatured by Ondaatje. The novel is an experimentation of the new Jazz culture and also the realistic portrayal of the unscrupulous life led by the populace of New Orleans during Bolden's times. The novel is Proustian in its typical postmodern process of creation where the artist is a creator of different notes of music to satiate the hungry audience who crave for novel art forms. The contradictory impulse of an artist who is a creator is also the destroyer of his own self is brought out. The novel *Coming through Slaughter* is a new landmark in Canadian Literature.