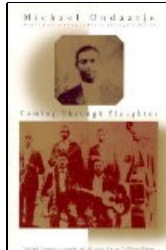


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**Book Review**  
**Coming Through Slaughter**  
by [Michael Ondaatje](#)

Reviewer: [Geoff Wisner](#), Staff Reviewer  
Posted: December 23, 2005

*Coming Through Slaughter* is a brief, impressionistic, and oddly haunting novel about a jazz cornet player in New Orleans, circa 1900.

Like its enigmatic title enigmatic even when you learn that Slaughter is a town in Louisiana this short book bristles with loose ends. A poet's novel, it is put together like a collage out of lists, scraps of dialogue, song lyrics, private thoughts, a blurry photo of the Buddy Bolden Band, and even a soundprint of the cries of dolphins.

Buddy Bolden, a real-life musician and the book's main character, lives intensely and recklessly even for a town known for those qualities. He is a drinker, a part-time barber, the publisher of a gossip rag called the *Cricket*, an impulsive lover, and a cornet player of wild talent and abandon. Whether for these or other reasons, he loses his mind one day at a parade and spends the rest of his life as a mental patient.

*Coming Through Slaughter* has none of the lush writing of *Anil's Ghost* or the romantic sweep of *The English Patient*, but it paints an unsettling picture of a city that was living on the edge long before Hurricane Katrina. It is worth reading if only for the sketches of Buddy Bolden's friend, the Storyville photographer E. J. Bellocq; a much less impulsive man than Bolden but even more self-destructive, taking his carefully composed portraits of the prostitutes of Storyville and then slashing them with a knife. The making and destroying coming from the same source, same lust, same surgery his brain was capable of.

**About the Reviewer**

[Geoff Wisner](#) is a freelance writer and staff member of Indigocafe.com. He is the author of [A Basket of Leaves: 99 Books That Capture the Spirit of Africa](#). Visit his website at [www.geoffwisner.com](http://www.geoffwisner.com).

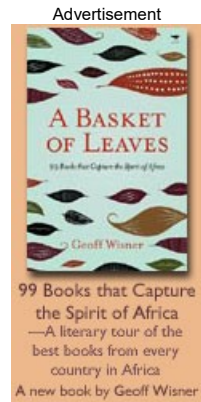


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