

# MICHAEL ONDAATJE AND DOCUMENT

BY

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A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
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for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Michael Ondaatje's use of 'document' in two works: Coming Through Slaughter and The Collected Works of Billy the Kid. Within the study a 'document' is defined as any piece of writing, literary or non-literary, brought into a literary text. In Ondaatje's work this includes newspaper articles, photographs, real-life interviews, and sections altered from other other texts. Within both The Collected Works of Billy the Kid and Coming Through Slaughter Ondaatje's imported material moves in two directions at once: towards a historical or factual definition of 'document'; and also towards a fictional or created definition of 'document.' By giving us a duplicitous version of 'document,' Ondaatje blurs the line between fiction and nonfiction, between history and myth within his texts. In this respect he opens textual indeterminacy within both the sections he writes and the sections he appropriates.

Chapter one considers how Ondaatje, by transferring 'outside' 'documents' into his fictional texts, reframes the material, putting the 'documents' in an entirely new context and perspective. This leads to an interplay between Ondaatje's fictional text and the imported material. By challenging the conventions of 'truth' which documents customarily observe, and by using many different types of 'documents' within his

works, Ondaatje opens up his texts in a postmodern fashion. Chapter two focuses on The Collected Works of Billy the Kid and shows how in this work Ondaatje uses fabricated, parodic materials in order to question the 'truth' of history and 'document.' Chapter three examines Coming Through Slaughter, exploring the ways in which Ondaatje uses historical and archival 'documents.' He sets their relative intactness alongside the openness and vitality which characterize the life of his fictional protagonist Buddy Bolden. The issue of representation is important in that Ondaatje questions conventional notions of historical fact and 'truth' within both his 'documents' and his fictional text which swallows those documents. The final chapter explains the hybrid nature of this study-- how, even as it remains mainly structuralist, it draws upon a range of critical practices.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I will examine Michael Ondaatje's use of 'document' in two works: Coming Through Slaughter and The Collected Works of Billy the Kid. For my purposes a 'document' will be defined as any piece of writing, literary or non-literary, brought into a literary text. In Ondaatje's work this includes newspaper articles, photographs, real-life interviews, and sections altered from other texts.

Ondaatje transfers these various literary and sub-literary 'documents' from one place in the culture to another, from a newspaper for instance into his fictional text. Precedence for this transfer of prior, outside 'documents' into a literary work can be found in much postmodern visual art. In a series of collage works, photographer Robert Rauschenberg, for instance, imported figures and images from Velasquez and Rubens into a collage silkscreen containing twentieth-century objects such as trucks, helicopters, and coca-cola signs. According to art critic Douglas Crimp, Rauschenberg broke down the "boundaries between art and non-art" (161) by appropriating and transferring images "from one place in the culture to another--from, say, the daily newspaper to the surface of a painting" (162). This juxtaposition of images changed the viewer's perspective of the original image and also changed the perspective on the work of art that the icon entered.

In The Collected Works of Billy the Kid and Coming Through Slaughter, Michael Ondaatje seems to be carrying out a similar ex-

ercise in his appropriation of literary and non-literary 'documents.' In Douglas Crimp's theory on found art the postmodern artist re-frames the appropriated image, and thus puts it in an entirely new and different perspective. I would argue that this is what Ondaatje accomplishes in his use of 'document.' The various 'documents' in Ondaatje's books could be interpreted in two different ways. On one hand they appear to have a separate, extra-literary status both within and outside the text. When offered in an informational manner (i.e. as pieces of information), the materials seem to offer indisputable truth of the world. From this perspective Ondaatje's 'documents' represent some form of authoritative, historical fact. On the other hand Ondaatje leaves open the possibility that his entries may have been either partially or wholly fabricated. This notion of fabricated or invented 'document' brings into doubt conventional notions of authorship, originality, and 'source.' If fabricated, Ondaatje's 'documents' could be interpreted merely as fictions unto themselves.

The first interpretation of 'document,' as representative of some kind of authoritative, outside truth, correlates to a conventional definition of 'document.' For instance, the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a 'document' as "a paper that furnishes information, proof, or support of something else" (227). Ondaatje emphasizes the informational, factual side of the materials by giving them a special status within his text, specifically by setting them apart both visually and stylistically. For instance, in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, various passages are written in italics or are surrounded by brackets and quotation marks, while various photographs



and pictures are framed within black borders. All of these literary and visual markings serve to set Ondaatje's 'documents' apart from the rest of the text.

At the same time that Ondaatje emphasizes the authoritative nature of these 'documents,' however, he also emphasizes their fictionality. In the "Credits" section at the end of The Collected Works, for instance, where Ondaatje lists his source books, he invites a double awareness of his imported material. Key passages from the recollections of Paulita Maxwell and Sallie Chisum on Billy, and the description of the death of Tunstall, are credited to a 'historical' western novel entitled The Saga of Billy the Kid--the source serving as 'document' and as fiction. Ondaatje also borrows various passages from a book written by the western photographer L.A. Huffman, some from an account written by Deputy John W. Poe after the shooting of Billy the Kid, and another from a 1960's comic book entitled Billy the Kid and The Princess. In each case the information alerts us to the various sources as they serve in different linguistic ways Ondaatje's purposes.

The twofold view of 'document' which Ondaatje sets up, the true or informational 'document' versus the fabricated or fictional 'document,' affects our interpretation of Ondaatje's text in many ways. For one thing it opens up an interplay or dialogue between the various passages and the rest of the text, between different forms of 'discourse' and 'story.' When supposedly outside material such as a newspaper article is imported into a fictional work its context changes. It no longer sits outside in 'story,' it is now on the inside of the text or 'discourse.' Because the 'document' is now on the inside

of the text it becomes a point of reference to be compared against the rest of the text, testing the truth of the fictional narrative at the same time that its own truth is being tested. Ondaatje's 'documents' certainly do not form a seamless whole, instead they are juxtaposed within the text, sometimes blending in well with the rest of the text, at other times openly contradicting the narrative. Ondaatje's textual 'take-over' of outside 'documents' changes not only the context of the 'documents' themselves, it also changes our sense of his texts as a whole. By playing with the fact / fiction, inside / outside binaries, Ondaatje blurs the line between fiction and nonfiction, between myth and history.

The issues which Ondaatje raises in his use of 'document' find literary precedence in that genre of poetry known as the documentary poem. In a 1969 article entitled "The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre," Dorothy Livesay set out what she sees as the Canadian tradition of the documentary poem. The examples which Livesay cites include E.J. Pratt's The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, J.R. Colombo's use of William Lyon Mackenzie King's actual speeches in a poem, and F.R. Scott's use of "native Indian historical documents" (267) in Trouvailles. The key to Livesay's definition of the documentary poem entails "the evidence they present of a conscious attempt to create a dialectic between the objective facts and the subjective feelings of the poet" (267). The dialectic between the objective and the subjective is crucial to The Collected Works of Billy the Kid and Coming Through Slaughter, where Ondaatje's 'documents' in one way represent the objective, historical facts about which his own narrative circulates.

In The Collected Works of Billy the Kid and Coming Through Slaughter, however, Ondaatje goes beyond Livesay's definition of the documentary poem. Ondaatje blurs the line between the historical and the fabricated text to such an extent that in his work fact and fiction become virtually indistinguishable. In an essay entitled "Amelia or Who Do You Think You Are?: Documentary and Identity in Canadian Literature," Stephen Scobie amends Livesay's thesis. Using examples such as Ondaatje's The Collected Works of Billy the Kid and Margaret Atwood's The Journals of Susanna Moodie, Scobie argues that in latter-day documentary poems authoritative 'documents' and historical facts become ambiguous propositions. Scobie argues that these two poems begin in the literary area mapped out by Livesay but then go beyond her definition of the 'documentary' poem:

While the attraction of the documentary may begin with an appeal to the authoritativeness of fact, consideration of the difficulties involved in ever satisfactorily writing fact leads quickly to that borderblur area between fact and fiction, in which the categories collapse into each other. (Scobie, "Amelia" 272)

The "borderblur" which Scobie describes applies well to Ondaatje's double use of 'document.' By obscuring the area between the true 'document' and the fabricated 'document,' and between inside and outside text, Ondaatje opens up his work and questions conventional notions of authorship, originality, and 'source.' Working in other directions, scholars have explored similar matters. In a chapter entitled the "Originality of Texts in a Manuscript Culture," Gerald Bruns distinguishes between two kinds of texts, "the closed text of

a print culture and the open text of a manuscript culture" (44).

Bruns, too, interrogates 'boundaries':

Here I wish simply to reflect on some of the ways in which texts remain open in a manuscript culture--and what I wish to address are certain topics having to do with the finality of authorship: originality, imitation, translation, and plagiarism. (45)

The methods that ancient and medieval authors used to keep their texts open apply quite well to Ondaatje's techniques in his use of 'document.' In his appropriation and re-working of outside sources and 'documents,' Ondaatje opens up both his texts and the 'documents' themselves. In both The Collected Works of Billy the Kid and Coming Through Slaughter, Ondaatje, to apply Bruns's terms, "embellishes" and "invents" (Bruns, 53) his source texts, opening them up to new interpretations and possibilities.

In his works Ondaatje goes beyond the conventional definition of 'document' into an area mapped out by critics such as Douglas Crimp, Stephen Scobie, Robert Kroetsch, Manina Jones,<sup>1</sup> and Linda Hutcheon. Guided by their thoughts we can see that Ondaatje's 'documents' are not univocal, they do not solely represent the indisputable 'truth' of the world. Instead, Ondaatje's 'outside' materials--

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<sup>1</sup> In "The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Scripting the Docudrama," an article closely related to what I am doing here, Jones explores how in Ondaatje's work document participates in a play of texts to destabilize the figure of Billy the Kid. Her strategies and purposes differ from mine in that hers are primarily deconstructionist. In her reading the figure of Billy is constantly displaced and "de-scripted" by Ondaatje's brand of fiction. Her work stands therefore in close but complementary relationship to my more structuralist reading of two major Ondaatje texts and to my focus on literary contexts, structures, and 'histories.'

newspaper articles, photographs, and interviews--move in two directions at once: towards a historical or factual definition of 'document,' and also towards a fabricated or fictional definition of 'document.' Ondaatje's entries open up his texts in a very postmodern fashion, a strategy which has not gone unnoticed elsewhere. Some critics, Robert Kroetsch for instance, have commented on the open-ended nature of 'documents' in postmodern fiction. Especially important is the 'document's' relationship to history. Kroetsch argues that "document opens up the site; it is the archaeological act that resists the over-arching generalization of history" (69).

A conventional view of 'document,' in which 'document' represents the indisputable truth of the world, conflicts with a more postmodern version in which 'document' opens up the fabricated and the fictional. This interplay between competing notions of 'document' serves to open up the 'site' of Ondaatje's fictional work, which in part is located in the reader of the text. By breaking down the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, between art and non-art, and by transferring passages from one place in the culture (from, for example the pages of a newspaper), to another (the fictional text), Ondaatje forces his reader to read the text and interpret its 'documents' in a very unorthodox manner.

What I am arguing here finds some consonance in structuralist thinking. In Structuralist Poetics, in a chapter entitled "Poetics of the Lyric," Jonathan Culler discusses the notion of readers' expectations in relation to textual interpretation. Culler takes a fragment of journalistic prose and sets it up in the fashion of a lyric poem, complete with line breaks and margins. Culler then goes on to argue,

and in some detail to show, that because of this shift from newspaper prose to poetic line, the reader receives the very same words in a completely different way. In Culler's words, "to write this [the newspaper article] as a poem brings into play a new set of expectations, a set of conventions determining how the sequence is to be read and what kind of interpretations may be derived from it" (161). Thus, the exact same words are interpreted differently when placed in a different context. In respecting this shift, Culler concludes, "we are dealing less with a property of language (intrinsic irony or paradox) than with a strategy of reading" (163).

Culler's belief that the reader brings a particular set of expectations and conventions to a passage, depending on its situation, relates well to Ondaatje's strategy in using 'document.' In a similar fashion Ondaatje consciously upsets readers' expectations by giving his various 'documents' a special, extra-literary status within the text at the same time that he emphasizes the fact that the 'documents' may be purely fabricated. The readers of Ondaatje's texts are forced to alter their strategy of reading and to bring into play a new set of conventions in order to read and interpret The Collected Works of Billy the Kid and Coming Through Slaughter.

Thus, in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid the newspaper interview with Billy in The Texas Star from March of 1881 is afforded a special status within the text because it offers a supposedly real-life interview with Billy the Kid. Because the passage is set up in the fashion of a newspaper article with its short lines, columns, headline, and date, it may be read--surely asks to be read--in an informational, factual manner. Within such expectations, the

passage may be read as a form of history. On the other hand, Ondaatje emphasizes the fictional nature of this supposedly authentic interview by introducing his friend and fellow poet bp Nichol, from another time and another place, into Billy's narrative and so puts into doubt the historical 'truth' of the entire entry. Billy tells The Texas Star interviewer that he heard a great Canadian musical group when he "was up there [in Canada] trying to get hold of a man who went by the name of Captain P-----\*" (84). Ondaatje's 'documents,' because they are set up in visually conspicuous ways within the work, entice us at least initially to read them in a different fashion than the rest of the text, regardless of their authenticity. In keeping with Culler, who supposes that the differentiation of genre "alters the circuit of communication" (162), Ondaatje's readers begin to read and interpret his text and his 'documents' in a very unconventional way.

As the reader changes his or her own strategy of reading, he / she takes on a more important role in relationship to the text. It is ultimately the reader who must sift through Ondaatje's various 'documents' and try to find where the truth of history lies, if in fact it is accessible at all. According to Kroetsch, in much postmodern fiction the reader becomes part of the 'site' opened up by 'document.' The reader is left to distinguish--or at least to ponder--the collisions between history and fiction, between truth and fabrication. Kroetsch's view of history and fiction seems to be close to Ondaatje's, especially as it involves the relationship of the reader to a text: "The continuity asserted by history is beyond, lies beyond, the truth of fiction. The reader, like the writer, becomes archaeologist,

seeking the grammar of the fragments" (Kroetsch, 111-12).

Thus, Ondaatje's incorporation of 'document' can be divided into five basic steps, all of them inter-connected. 1. Ondaatje transfers an outside 'document' into his fictional text, thus re-framing the 'document' and putting it in an entirely new context and perspective. 2. The two-way interpretation of 'document'--the representational 'document' and the created 'document'--leads to potential textual conflict and opens up an interplay between Ondaatje's text and the various 'documents.' 3. By appropriating and re-working the various 'documents' Ondaatje blurs the line between fact and fiction, between inside and outside text, and thus undermines conventional notions of originality, 'source,' and history. 4. Ondaatje's 'documents' open up his texts, leading to postmodern notions of borderblur and mixed genre. 5. Ondaatje's use of 'document' leads to a very unconventional strategy for reading, and thus the reader becomes unusually active in dealing with Ondaatje.



## 2. THE COLLECTED WORKS OF BILLY THE KID

In The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, Ondaatje imports into the text a variety of 'documents,' including real-life interviews, photographs, a newspaper article, and a section from a comic book or dime novel. What these various 'documents' have in common is that they appear to have a separate, extra-literary status both within and outside the text. Thus, the reminiscences of Sallie Chisum and Paulita Maxwell on Billy, and the passage describing the death of Tunstall, are italicized and so foregrounded. The comic book discourse of Billy the Kid and The Princess, and various photographs, are set off by being placed inside black borders, while other passages are emphasized when they are placed inside brackets or quotation marks. All of Ondaatje's 'documents' are set apart visually from the rest of the text in configurations which give them special status within the book. By giving these entries such standing, Ondaatje signals, evidently, that they have originated from somewhere 'outside' his text, making his textual 'take-over' very visible.

Ondaatje begins The Collected Works of Billy the Kid with two 'documents': there on the first page is a passage appropriated from a book by L.A. Huffman, and, surrounded by a black box, an absent photograph of--the claim is intriguing--Billy the Kid. The first visual image in the book is an empty picture frame whose picture is missing. Underneath the empty frame is what we might receive as a caption, quoted from the real-life western photographer L.A. Huffman:

I send you a picture of Billy made with the Perry shutter

as quick as it can be worked--Pyro and soda developer . . .  
I shall show you what can be done from the saddle with-  
out ground glass on tripod--please notice when you get  
the specimens that they were made with the lens wide  
open and many of the best exposed when my horse was in  
motion. (5)

In these opening lines a narrator addresses the viewer of the photograph and, by implication, the reader of the text. The narrator / photographer here states that a few of his photographs became over-exposed because of an open lens. Ondaatje gives this dialogue a special, authoritative status within the text by positioning it at the beginning of the book and, further, by italicizing the entire passage. The narrative here is offered in an informational manner, with its considered description of the techniques of early photography. At the end of The Collected Works, in the subsection entitled "Credits," Ondaatje writes that "the comment about taking photographs around 1870-80 is by the great Western photographer L.A. Huffman and appears in his book, Huffman, Frontier Photographer" (110). Ondaatje thus confirms, or seems to confirm, that this appropriated passage or 'document' is real and authentic. The opening section of The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, which Ondaatje has transferred from Huffman's book into his own, seems to offer the indisputable truth of the world and so gains a privileged standing within Ondaatje's text. The lines are spoken, or can be heard as if spoken, by someone who has historical, first-hand knowledge of the old west and of photography, a technology which so radically informs Ondaatje's work.

However, because Ondaatje does not insert Huffman's photograph of Billy the Kid into his text, he raises the possibility that both the alleged photograph and Huffman's quotation may be either partially or wholly fabricated. By leaving the picture frame empty, Ondaatje leaves it up to the reader's imagination to 'fill in the blank,' and, further, to theorize as to whether or not the photograph is real. It is intriguing in this respect to hear what the western historian Robert M. Utley has to say about Billy the Kid paraphernalia. According to him, there is only one verifiable photograph of Billy the Kid in existence, and the photo was not taken by L.A. Huffman (Utley, 110). L.A. Huffman and Billy the Kid most likely never met, and, in reality, which is to say in the source text, Huffman's lines on photography do not even refer to a picture of Billy. Instead, these lines speak about a photograph of Huffman's daughter Bessie (Brown and Felton, 43).

In The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, however, historical accuracy is not Ondaatje's main goal. Instead, in the interplay between Huffman's passage and the missing photograph, Ondaatje announces a two-way interpretation of 'document'--between the authentic 'document' and the created 'document.' In a sense, Huffman's statement becomes, in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, both 'accurate' and 'inventive.' In one way the passage quoted from Huffman is historically 'true,' as Huffman was a frontier photographer at the time of Billy the Kid's famous exploits. In another way Ondaatje raises questions as to the authoritative nature of the imported 'document' by leaving an actual photograph of Billy out of the book. Ondaatje also announces an erosion of the line between 'inside'

and 'outside' text, when he says in his "Credits" that the first lines of the book come from a source 'outside' his work, in this case L.A. Huffman's book on photography.

The first-person reminiscences of Paulita Maxwell and Sallie Chisum on Billy may also be classified as 'documents.' Both women knew Billy the Kid well, as Paulita Maxwell was the sister of Pete Maxwell, a friend of Billy's, and Sallie Chisum was the niece of John Chisum, another acquaintance of Billy's. Paulita's and Sallie's recollections are presented in italics and thus are given a visual prominence within Ondaatje's text. Sallie's and Paulita's passages are also written in a relaxed, conversational style, which further emphasizes their documentary quality. In the first reminiscence of Paulita Maxwell on Billy she refers, possibly, to the photograph of Billy missing from Huffman's passage:

In 1880 a travelling photographer came through Fort Sumner. Billy posed standing in the street near old Beaver Smith's saloon. The picture makes him rough and uncouth. The expression of his face was really boyish and pleasant. He may have worn such clothes as appear in the picture out on the range, but in Fort Sumner he was careful of his personal appearance and dressed neatly and in good taste. I never liked the picture. I don't think it does Billy justice. (19)

In these early lines Paulita defends Billy and criticizes the missing photograph, saying it is unflattering to Billy--unflattering because inaccurate or misleading. Once again Ondaatje does not insert the photograph in question into the book, instead all we are left

with is Paulita's commentary. In a way Paulita's words are a defence of Billy, as she emphasizes his neat appearance and proper grooming. Even at an early point in the The Collected Works, Ondaatje's 'document' plays off against the rest of the text, in which Billy's violent nature has already been revealed. Just four pages prior to Paulita's reminiscence, Billy describes his murder of Gregory:

I'd shot him well and careful  
made it explode under his heart  
so it wouldn't last long and  
was about to walk away . . . (15)

On the page prior to Paulita's recollection Billy also tells of how he shot scores of crazed rats in an abandoned barn. The interplay opened up between Paulita's recollection as 'document' and Billy's first-person narrative, with all the authenticity (of another kind) which that implies, reveals the contradictions present in the 'document' when read against the rest of the text. Paulita's description of the pleasant, well-dressed young man seems to contradict the picture of Billy seen in other parts of the book, where he is revealed to be a young, violent outlaw.

At this point in the book we read this statement of Paulita Maxwell's as being somehow 'true,' as her reminiscence is offered in an informational, factual manner. Paulita gives the exact date of the photograph and reveals to the 'interviewer' the location of the shooting--details whose hint of exactness we may receive as reassuring. Ondaatje further emphasizes the importance of this passage by giving it a title--"Paulita Maxwell: The Photograph." In these lines a more sympathetic side of Billy the Kid is brought to light in

the words of someone who in real life knew him. Paulita's recollection is offered to the reader as some form of historical truth. However, as we saw in the case of the Huffman quotation at the beginning of the book, there is a possibility that Paulita's words are at least partially fabricated. In the "Credits" section at the end of The Collected Works, Ondaatje raises our suspicions once again when he states that "the reminiscences by Paulita Maxwell and Sallie Chisum on Billy, are essentially made up of statements made to Walter Noble Burns in his book The Saga of Billy the Kid published in 1926" (110). Ondaatje's statement points in two directions at once here: the words "made up" seem to imply that Ondaatje has altered the passage, as does the adverb "essentially," while the words "made to Walter Noble Burns" seem to indicate that Ondaatje has transferred the 'document' intact. However we may choose to interpret these "Credit" lines, Ondaatje here emphasizes that he has appropriated and re-worked Paulita Maxwell's passage from an 'outside' text, in this case a 1920's western novel written by Walter Noble Burns.

Paulita Maxwell's reminiscence as 'document' can be interpreted in at least two ways. As historical 'truth,' the passage appears to have a separate, distinct presence both within and outside the text, a conspicuousness which Ondaatje stresses when he sets the section apart typo-graphically by italicizing it. And yet, Ondaatje emphasizes the fictional quality of this passage by revealing its 'source' in Burns's text, itself written or composed, and, further, by hinting at his own alterations of the material. If Burns's interview with Paulita is in fact pure fabrication then this 'document,' in tantalizing though unknown ways, is revealed to be a

fictionalization of a fictionalization, a re-working of another fictional text which may or may not be historically accurate.

This double view of 'document' affects our interpretation of Ondaatje's text in many ways. Key questions of appropriation, originality, and 'source' are raised by the conflicting notions of 'document.' Ondaatje begins by transferring a literary or sub-literary 'document' from one place in the culture to another, in this case from Burns's fiction into his own work. The ensuing interplay and conflict between the appropriated material and the rest of Ondaatje's text, between 'document' as it participates in 'story,' and 'document' as it acts as part of 'discourse,' affects our strategy for reading Ondaatje's work. Gerald Bruns makes what, for our purposes, is an especially illuminating point: "Imitation and translation for their part are functions of learning that replicate or appeal to the authority of a prior text or model; yet they are also acts that disturb such priorities, often without intending to" (45). In his view of 'document' Ondaatje goes beyond Bruns's argument on the topic of appropriation and imitation. When Ondaatje transfers passages from other texts he plays with the assumed authority of the prior text (in this case Burns's novel), and questions the privileged position of any source text, historical or fictional. By doing this, Ondaatje consciously disturbs the "authority" of the "prior text."

Thus, when Ondaatje appropriates a passage from Walter Noble Burns's novel, in this case a reminiscence of Paulita Maxwell's, we read the 'document' as a form of history at the same time that we think of it, given Ondaatje's emphasis, as possible fiction. We read Paulita Maxwell's recollection as a form of history because of

Ondaatje's re-framing of the passage within his own text, and because of Ondaatje's manipulation of textual context. Like the artist and photographer Robert Rauschenberg, who imports images of the masters into a collage silkscreen containing 20th-century pop art symbols, Ondaatje changes our perspective, the way we see, by appropriating and altering sections from other texts and by bringing them into play within a larger field of his making. We may read Paulita Maxwell's passage as history even though we are aware of its potential fictional nature, and thus we may also begin to question the traditional distinctions we might make between fiction and nonfiction, art and non-art, within the context of Ondaatje's work.

The recollections of Sallie Chisum which we read in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid also originate from Walter Noble Burns's novel. Sallie was a real life friend of Billy the Kid's and her reminiscences are offered as 'documents' by Ondaatje. Sallie was the niece of John Chisum, who owned the Chisum ranch, a kind of western way-station for travellers. Our first view of Sallie is as an old woman reminiscing about the frontier days: "(Miss Sallie Chisum, later Mrs. Roberts, was living in Roswell in 1924, a sweet-faced, kindly old lady of a thousand memories of frontier days)" (30). Ondaatje sets up Sallie's narrative in the manner of an eyewitness account, and Sallie becomes a living witness to the men and women of the wild west. Ondaatje seems to affirm the historical validity of this passage by giving the 'interview' an exact location and date-- Roswell in 1924. Ondaatje further reassures his reader as to the factual nature of this passage by giving Sallie a voice which sounds authentic, and by describing her in a very down-to-earth way. In her



reminiscences, the sweet-faced, kindly old lady Sallie Chisum tells us about her home:

The house was full of people all the time, the ranch was a little world in itself, I couldn't have been lonesome if I had tried. Every man worth knowing in the Southwest and many not worth knowing were guests one time or another. . . . Billy the Kid would come in often and sometimes stayed for a week or two. I remember how frightened I was the first time he came. (30)

Ondaatje presents Sallie's recollections as 'documents.' In a very folksy voice, Sallie tells us about the Chisum ranch and describes what it felt like to be a young woman working there. Sallie also recalls some of the men who stopped by the farm, including Billy the Kid, whose reputation preceded him everywhere he went. Sallie's passages are thus presented in an informational manner and seem to offer some kind of historical 'truth.' Both of her passages are italicized, and the first passage is further foregrounded as it is encased in brackets. According to Victor Li, "translation or citation make intertextuality visible" (297). Ondaatje's use of italics and brackets here clearly work in such a fashion, giving Sallie's passages unusual weight within the text. Ondaatje's 'documents' move intertextually away from themselves--inwardly towards the rest of the text, and outwardly towards the outside 'source' text, in this case Walter Noble Burns's novel.

Ondaatje announces intertextuality on another front by transferring a framed photograph into the text to complement the written 'document.' Across the page from where Sallie's recollections ap-

pear, Ondaatje imports into his text a black and white photograph of a man and woman, evidently homesteaders, staring solemnly into the camera. However we understand the picture, it is evident here that the photograph, like Sallie's reminiscence, is an outside 'document,' imported into the fictional text in order to offer some kind of 'truth' about the world. The key here is in determining how the written 'documents' play off against this visual 'document.'

Many articles have been written on Ondaatje's use of photographs and photographic techniques. Some critics argue that the photographs in Ondaatje's works represent some kind of fixity and stillness, as opposed to the openness and life of the written text. Linda Hutcheon argues that "the opposition in the book [The Collected Works of Billy the Kid] becomes one of free motion and life versus fixed stillness and death" ("Snow Storm," 117). Certainly, the black and white photograph of the man and woman in Ondaatje's text represents some kind of immobility. The photograph is lifeless, and it is also anonymous, as it could be a picture of anyone. Hutcheon further argues that "for Ondaatje, the black and white photograph becomes an analogue for the black and white printed page of poetry, and both are potentially images of stasis, of fixity, always placed in contrast with images of kinesis, or of the flow of time" ("Snow Storm," 118).

The photograph of the man and woman here, possibly in a likeness of Sallie and John Chisum, possibly in representation of Sallie and Billy, represents some kind of fixed, immutable artefact, with the "live," "kinetic" narrative of time flowing around it. I would argue, keeping with Hutcheon, that the photograph here represents a

closed 'document' set up against an open, live 'document' represented by Sallie's recollection. The photo, in a way, does not verify the historical accuracy of Sallie's written or oral passage, instead it works against the written 'document.' As Robert Kroetsch writes, "Photo: arrest. Killing. Going. The camera as weapon. With, but against, the novel" (112). Even though Sallie Chisum's reminiscences on Billy may be fabricated, they contain a life and flow which the photograph here lacks. Sallie Chisum's passage, then, may be interpreted as a more accurate version of history than the 'real' photograph because of the way Ondaatje frames and presents these 'documents.'

Sallie Chisum's section "On Her House" links up with her next recollection entitled "On Billy." Here, Sallie describes her first meeting with Billy the Kid and emphasizes her apprehension at meeting him. She anticipates that an evil, cold-blooded killer will walk through her door, with "the evil ugliness of a blood thirsty ogre" (52). Instead, Billy turns out to be very different, contradicting her expectations of him:

I heard John saying with a wave of his hand, Sallie, this is my friend, Billy the Kid. A good looking, clear-eyed boy stood there with his hat in his hand, smiling at me. I stretched out my hand automatically to him, and he grasped it in a hand as small as my own. (52)

Ondaatje does not 'frame' or 'centre' Billy early on in The Collected Works. He also does not offer a photograph of Billy anywhere within the text. Instead he offers supposedly 'real-life' ac-

counts of Billy's character and appearance in the words of Sallie Chisum and Paulita Maxwell. It is notable, though, that Sallie's and Paulita's reminiscences seem to contradict the rest of the text. This anomaly is produced by a deliberate strategy. Sallie's physical description of Billy, of the smiling, good-looking, clear-eyed boy with the small, lady-like hands, seems to conflict with the image of Billy in the rest of the narrative, where Billy describes in cool, graphic detail the various murders he has witnessed and committed.

Ondaatje's various 'documents' play off against the rest of the text and do not 'cohere' or 'mesh' within the book. Juxtaposition, as Manina Jones observes (34), is the key to Ondaatje's use of 'document.' As Billy states earlier in his narrative, "Not a story about me through their eyes then. Find the beginning, the slight silver key to unlock it, to dig it out. Here then is a maze to begin, be in" (20). Billy here announces the contradictory nature of the various accounts of his life, and he rejects the stories told about him through the eyes of others, including Sallie Chisum and Paulita Maxwell. In The Collected Works of Billy the Kid Ondaatje presents a maze of 'documents' which do not offer any coherent, unified picture of Billy--instead they at times contradict each other and conflict with the rest of the text.

At mid-point in the text Ondaatje introduces a few lines which at first glance seem to be rather innocuous, but which are in fact very important in Ondaatje's exploration of 'document.' Seemingly out of nowhere, Ondaatje writes: "A motive? some reasoning we can give to explain all this violence. Was there a source for all this? yup-" (54). These lines could be spoken by anyone, by Billy, by a

third-person narrator, or even by Ondaatje himself. On the surface this unknown narrator is searching for a motive, and an explanation, for Billy the Kid's violent actions. The "source" of Billy's violence, and the answer to the question of his violent nature, are then given just below on the same page:

Hill leaped from his horse and, sticking a rifle to the back of Tunstall's head blew out his brains. Half drunk with whisky and mad with the taste of blood, the savages turned the murder of the defenceless man into an orgy. . . . So murdered man and dead horse suggested they had crawled into bed and gone to sleep together. This was their devil's mockery, their joke--ghastly, meaningless. Then they rode back to Lincoln, roaring drunken songs along the way. (54)

Billy manages to avoid Tunstall's fate, as he is absent at the time of the shooting, and instead ends up witnessing his friend's death from a distant hill-side.

Ondaatje sets up a dialogue or an interplay between the two passages here. The first lines search for the "source" of Billy's violent actions and the second passage gives an answer: the reason for Billy's violent nature is due to his observing Tunstall's violent death at the hands of Hill's gang. According to the narrator the source of Billy's behaviour can be traced to this cause and effect--the witnessing of Tunstall's murder turned Billy into a killer. Billy's motives in life thus become tied in with his search for revenge on the killers of Tunstall.

These passages offer more than an explanation for Billy's wild

life. Ondaatje doubly emphasizes Tunstall's death by italicizing the passage and boxing it in quotations. Commonly, as we've seen, Ondaatje's 'documents' are 'double-voiced,' moving at once between the 'here' of Ondaatje's text and the 'there' of prior texts. The key word in the passage is "source," for beyond psychoanalyzing Billy, these lines refer also to the origin of Ondaatje's 'documents' and ultimately to the source of the text itself. In the "Credits" section at the end of The Collected Works, Ondaatje reveals that both passages, the one on the search for a "motive," and the one about Tunstall's death, "are essentially made up of statements made to Walter Noble Burns in his book The Saga of Billy the Kid" (110).

Ondaatje once again emphasizes a duplicitous view of 'document.' The passage describing Tunstall's death could be read straight, possibly as history, since it provides what seems to be factual information on Billy's violent background. However, Ondaatje also leaves open the possibility that this section of the book may be purely fictional. By revealing that the two passages are "made up" of statements credited to Walter Noble Burns, Ondaatje seems to lead us towards an invented notion of 'document.' Ondaatje's use of quotations makes a double interpretation of 'document' possible, since the inflected passages not only make intertextuality visible, they also resist a singular interpretation of text:

The act of translation or citation [or quotation], which makes intertextuality visible, also disperses meaning, first, by transgressing the protective limits of the 'univocal' or 'autonomous' text . . . and by repeating its contents in a different language or reproducing them in a

different context, destroying the univocality of the text by multiplying and scattering its single voice. (Victor Li, 297)

I would argue that Ondaatje's 'documents' here do not speak in a "single voice." Instead they point in many directions at once, towards fiction and intertextuality, and towards historical 'truth.'

In an essay entitled "Michael Ondaatje: The Mechanization of Death," Sheila Watson discusses Ondaatje's re-working of the Tunstall passage appropriated from Walter Noble Burns's novel. She observes that Ondaatje positions the appropriated passage differently. It appears at the beginning of Burns's novel, but at the middle of his own book: "From the source material which he uses, Walter Noble Burns's The Saga of Billy the Kid, Ondaatje lifts a passage which occurs early in Burns's narrative account (p.48) to place at the centre of his own work" (Watson, 164). Burns places early in his book lines describing the search for a motive to explain Billy's violent nature so that he can justify Billy's criminal behaviour. However, when Ondaatje transfers Burns's lines into The Collected Works, he not only changes the position of the 'document,' he also changes its context and meaning. Much in the same way that Robert Rauschenberg alters by importing images from other paintings into his collage silkscreens, Ondaatje transfers passages from Burns's text into his own, and thus 're-frames' these 'documents,' putting them in an entirely new perspective.

We read Ondaatje's appropriated passage first in an informational manner, as a form of historical truth. Then, we read the 'document' on the level of parody. Ondaatje is here parodying con-

ventional notions of 'source' and explanation. The source for "all this violence," and the source for Ondaatje's 'document,' are both found in Walter Noble Burns's pulp novel, which could hardly be classified as a moment of historical awareness. The style of Burns's western pulp writing does not mesh with the rest of Ondaatje's text, a discrepancy which further emphasizes the fictional, intertextual nature of the passage. Ondaatje also parodies any search for a single motive for explaining Billy's violent personality. The narrator here is convinced that he will find the one, single reason for Billy's violent behaviour--and Ondaatje uses the narrator's own voice to criticize this reductionist form of history.

Perhaps the most visible 'document' in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid appears in the passage entitled "The Kid Tells All: Exclusive Jail Interview" from The Texas Star, March 1881. Ondaatje presents this section of text as if it were a real-life interview with Billy the Kid, as if it were an actual, historical 'document.' Ondaatje foregrounds the newspaper article by granting it all the visual markings of a newspaper, with its narrow columns of print, questionnaire style, special newsletter type, and requisite date and headline. The passage is also written in a conversational style, giving it all the characteristics of an authentic interview.

Jonathan Culler argues, as we have seen, that our strategy for reading a passage is largely affected by its literary context. Thus, a poem is read in a different manner than a newspaper article, even if the words and content are exactly the same. Culler's claim that the reader brings a "new set of expectations and conventions" (161) to a literary passage, depending on how it is set up and where it is pre-



sented, relates quite well to Ondaatje's use of 'document.' When Ondaatje transfers a piece of writing from one place in the culture to another, from a newspaper, say, into his own work, he affects the way we read and interpret the 'document' and the rest of his text.

The point holds, certainly, for what we might make of the jailhouse interview. In it Billy reveals his age, 22, discusses his start as a cattle rustler, justifies his violent actions by referring to the circumstances of war, and reveals his disbelief in God and his indifference towards death. On the surface there is nothing particularly revelatory in this section of text, Ondaatje simply appears to be offering Billy's words in a journalistic form. Thus, the everyday information revealed in this passage does not seem to justify its prominence within the text. As if further to put the interview into suspicion, Ondaatje inserts textual evidence which seems to question the historical authenticity of this 'document.' Early in the interview Billy defends himself on charges of cattle rustling: "Yes, but, well let me put it this way. I could only be arrested if they had proof, definite proof, not just stories" (81). Billy apparently makes an important distinction when he speaks of "definite proof" as opposed to "stories." On one level this is merely a defence of some of Billy's criminal activities, but on a textual level--a tongue-in-cheek level--we may receive these lines as questioning conventional notions of 'story' and 'document.' In turn, once the doubt is planted in our minds, we realize the newspaper article as 'document' itself may be heard as just another 'story,' no more 'true' or historically accurate than the 'fictional' poetry of the rest of the text.

Ondaatje thus presents two distinct interpretations of

'document' here, the 'true' document, and the 'false' document. The historically factual 'document' will be read in an informational manner and will operate in the same fashion as a real newspaper, offering what we are invited to believe are objective facts and the reassuring 'truth' of the world. The fabricated 'document' on the other hand will be read in a more resistant fashion, and the reader will more likely question its historical accuracy and the truth of its contents. This two-way view of 'document' opens up an interplay between the 'document' and the rest of the text. The newspaper article at this juncture points us intertextually backwards and forwards within Ondaatje's book.

As an aside, we might note that in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, Billy critiques the morality of newspaper writing and emphasizes its potential inaccuracy:

So if I had a newsman's brain I'd say  
well some morals are physical  
must be clear and open  
like diagram of water or star  
one must eliminate much  
that is one turns when the bullet leaves you  
walk off see none of the thrashing  
the very eyes welling up like bad drains  
believing then the morals of newspaper or gun  
where bodies are mindless as paper flowers you don't  
feed or give to drink. (11)

According to Billy, journalistic writing, like that found in a newspaper, is too black and white morally--it misses much of the real

story, and omits the violence in Billy's life. The words of the newspaper are stagnant and sterile, ultimately lifeless, the newspaper is a place "where bodies are mindless as paper flowers."

In this poem, and in the newspaper interview, Billy interrogates the very form he enters. In Billy's description of newspaper writing, he emphasizes the potential violence contained within the writing process. Billy seems to compare the power of writing to the power of a gun. Just before the newspaper interview with Billy, Ondaatje likewise contemplates the potential power of a pencil:

my fingers touch  
this soft blue paper notebook  
control a pencil that shifts up and sideways  
mapping my thinking going its own way  
like light wet glasses drifting on polished wood. (72)

Then just after the newspaper interview, Billy thinks of how "a pencil / harnessing my face / goes stumbling into dots" (85). In all of the above lines Ondaatje reveals the powerful force that writing can be, especially as it relates to the capturing of 'reality.' Thus 'document,' as represented by the newspaper passage, becomes more than just a piece of factual information, it becomes a form of power, one that affirms control and fixity. As Perry Nodelman observes, "these dots [the pencil dots which 'harness' Billy's face] could be either the reporter's shorthand, or the dots that make up a photograph in a newspaper" (77). The opposition found in the newspaper 'document' becomes what Linda Hutcheon has identified as the opposition between life and death, motion and stillness. I would argue that Ondaatje gives us both versions of 'document' within the

same newspaper article, the live, open 'document' and the lifeless, closed 'document.'

In the newspaper article, when the interviewer asks Billy whether or not he worries about what will happen to him (and to his story) after his death, Billy replies: "Well I try to avoid it. Though I suppose not. I guess they'll just put you in a box and you will stay there forever. There'll be nothing else" (83). This moment represents the ultimate in closed 'document.' We begin to realize that the various stories on Billy, including this newspaper article, become potential coffins for the dead Billy the Kid. The photographic fixity which Linda Hutcheon has identified in Ondaatje's text, would hold for a conventional, monologic view of 'document.'

Thus, for Ondaatje 'document' becomes much more than a means of conveying information, it also becomes a battleground of sorts, a site of tension, where meaning sometimes conflicts with itself. One of the textual conflicts present in Ondaatje's text--between the open, live 'document' and the closed, lifeless 'document'--essentially remains unresolved. In his essay "Approaching 'That Perfect Edge': Kinetic Techniques in the Poetry and Fiction of Michael Ondaatje," Steve Heighon comments on this basic tension in Ondaatje's works. Heighon observes that Ondaatje is especially concerned with the notion of capturing life in art and writing. Thus, Audubon's drawings in Ondaatje's later novel, Coming Through Slaughter, "exemplify the urge to capture and freeze life in a static artefact" (233). The idea of stuffing dead animals also comes out in The Collected Works, in Pat Garrett's hobby of taxidermy. This notion of "static artefact" relates well to a traditional definition of

'document.' Conventionally speaking, a 'document,' whether it be a newspaper article or a photograph, attempts to capture life, freeze time, and close the story.

Against that sort of 'document' Ondaatje, again and again, presents a more unrestricted version of 'document' by emphasizing within it the possibilities of myth and parody. Whatever its limitations, myth can allow for a more open version of story than history, as it makes room for a mixture of fact and legend. At the end of the newspaper article the interviewer asks Billy, "How about you, do you think you will last in people's memories?" (84) Billy then replies that "I'll be with the world till she dies" (84). Billy assures himself a promise of immortality here, most likely within western mythology. Ondaatje also uses parody as a means of opening-up the 'document.' Ondaatje reveals that he is playing with the newspaper article by having Billy refer to b.p. Nichol and other contemporary Canadian poets. Referring to Ondaatje's comic playfulness, Dennis Cooley argues that Ondaatje's postmodern aesthetics "allow him to introduce his own contemporaries, bp Nichol and The Four Horseman, into a fabricated 1881 interview" (225-26).

Ondaatje consciously affects our strategy of reading by opening up the 'document' and stressing its intertextual nature. Still, we read and interpret the newspaper article as an authentic, factual 'document,' even as we come to question and resist its contents. In the newspaper interview Billy claims that there is no solid legal proof with which to prosecute him: "But the point is that there is no legal proof to all this later stuff. The evidence used was unconstitutional" (83). Just as the "proof" and "evidence" used against Billy

in the courtroom are subjective and various, so the 'documents' Ondaatje uses to describe him are double-voiced and, at times, indeterminate in meaning.

Because Ondaatje's 'documents' as he brings them into play become polyphonic, and open to various interpretations, a conventional view of 'document' as guarantee of pure historical fact is no longer adequate to our reception of them. Robert Kroetsch comments that in much postmodern fiction a version of archaeology replaces traditional versions of history because "history, in its traditional forms, insisted too strongly on a coherent narrative" (24). If history relies too heavily on a coherent narrative, then the fragmentary nature of archaeological interpretation may be more suited to the needs of postmodern fiction:

Archaeology, of necessity, involves violence--the uncovering of past lives. That uncovering, for Ondaatje and Thomas, involves as well the acceptance of the discontinuity of form. The continuity asserted by history is beyond, lies beyond, the truth of fiction. The reader, like the writer, becomes archaeologist, seeking the grammar of the fragments. (Kroetsch, 111-12)

Ondaatje's multi-voiced 'documents' "open up the sites" (Kroetsch, 69) of his fictional works, resisting conventional, monologic versions of history and 'document.' Ondaatje's 'documents' are not coherent in the traditional sense. Instead, they are, as Kroetsch argues, discontinuous in form and content. These qualities can be seen in the newspaper interview, where Ondaatje brings together history and myth, fact and parody, within one 'document.' The min-

gling can be seen in Ondaatje's references to the straight 'facts' of Billy's life, the shootings, hold-ups, and trials, as well as his emphasis on the legend of the young left-handed outlaw in terms of Billy's future immortality. The mixture of genres and conventions opens up the passages and resists the linearity and structural coherence usually associated with history. Both the open-endedness of Ondaatje's 'documents,' and the conflict between the true and the invented ones, alter our strategy of reading. The indeterminacy also gives the reader a more active role in the interpretation of the text, as Ondaatje, at times, stresses multiple meanings and interpretations. For instance, at one point, Ondaatje explains what "you" would see if "you" dug Billy's grave up and exhorts his reader to "Imagine if you dug him [Billy] up and brought him out. You'd see very little" (97). The reader in the text becomes the "archaeologist" in the text, who must decipher the multiple meanings and distinguish between fiction and nonfiction within Ondaatje's 'documents.'

Ondaatje concludes The Collected Works of Billy the Kid with a series of inter-connected 'documents' and poems. A Paulita Maxwell passage, a description of the opening of Billy's casket, a comic book story, a conversation between Garrett and Poe, a poem, and a photograph conclude the book. The interplay between the various 'documents' and the rest of the text becomes especially important at this point in The Collected Works. The last remaining 'documents' and segments of text offer a series of different endings to Billy's story, and to the book itself.

The last reminiscence on Billy in the text is given to Paulita Maxwell. According to Robert Utley and Walter Noble Burns, Paulita

Maxwell and Billy the Kid were lovers just prior to his death. In the passage which Ondaatje appropriates from Burns's novel *Paulita* emphasizes Billy's courteous nature, but denies any romantic link with him:

An old story that identifies me as Billy the Kid's sweetheart has been going the rounds for many years. . . . But I was not Billy the Kid's sweetheart. I liked him very much--oh, yes--but I did not love him. He was a nice boy, at least to me, courteous, gallant, always respectful.

(96)

Ondaatje's *Paulita* then proceeds to debunk another romantic rumour surrounding Billy the Kid and herself:

There was a story that Billy and I had laid our plans to elope to old Mexico and had fixed the date for the night just after that on which he was killed. . . . Neither story was true and the one about eloping on one horse was a joke. . . . I did not need to put my arms around any man's waist to keep from falling off a horse. Not I. I was, if you please, brought up in the saddle, and plumed myself on my horsemanship. (96)

*Paulita's* recollection, once again appropriated by Ondaatje from Walter Noble Burns's text (p.184-85), provides more gloss on the contradictory life of Billy the Kid. Because of the way Ondaatje sets up *Paulita's* dialogue within the text it resembles an actual, historic narrative, despite the fact that its origins lie in Burns's fictional novel. In her dialogue, *Paulita* remembers only the courteous, polite side of Billy's character. *Paulita's* recollection also



serves to debunk one version of the romantic western myth, the hero and his girl riding off into the sunset on one horse. In the version of her story in Ondaatje's book Paulita denies that she and Billy were lovers planning to elope--thus she invalidates one version of the romantic myth of Billy the Kid.

Across the page from Paulita's narrative, the third-person narrator, possibly Ondaatje, appeals to some listener, describing what "you" would see if "you" dug up Billy the Kid's grave:

Imagine if you dug him up and brought him out. You'd see very little. There'd be the buck teeth. Perhaps Garrett's bullet no longer in the thick wet flesh would roll in the skull like a marble. . . . The arms would be cramped on the edge of what was the box. And a pair of hand-cuffs holding ridiculously the fine ankle bones. (Even though dead they buried him in leg irons). There would be the silver from the toe of each boot. His legend a jungle sleep. (97)

There are many things going on in this passage. The romantic myth of the western hero is being deconstructed here in parodic fashion.

There is a comic tone in Ondaatje's description of Billy's buck teeth and Garrett's bullet "rolling in the skull like a marble." The humour comes out of Ondaatje's series of contrasts--between the conventional image of the western anti / hero (i.e. the handsome, rugged outlaw), and the image of Billy here, with his buck teeth and a bullet rolling around his skull. Yet there is also a strong trace of the western hero left behind amongst the digging into history. The fact that Billy was considered dangerous enough to be buried in hand-cuffs and leg-irons adds to the western outlaw myth. The lines "his

legend a jungle sleep" hint at danger and mystery, and also seem to promise some form of immortality.

This passage refers us back to Linda Hutcheon's comments on the flux and fixity found within The Collected Works of Billy the Kid. The narrative describing the digging up of Billy's grave establishes the bare-bones of history, and is probably the most factual version of Billy's story in the entire book. As Ondaatje points out, there is little left of Billy the Kid in the real world, just his skeleton, his wrists enclosed in hand-cuffs and his legs contained in leg-irons. The hand-cuffs and leg-irons represent some form of constraint, holding Billy's arms and legs even in death. Billy's remains are then 'framed' by a black box, represented by the coffin.

The graveyard passage represents one possible conclusion to the story of Billy the Kid. This version of textual ending leads to closure, as there is almost nothing left of Billy in the real world. In Manina Jones's words, "the poem uses the path metaphor . . . to mock the kind of literalist biographical 'graverobbing' that would attempt to resurrect its subject, but in fact issues in a kind of dead end" (29).

The lines "his legend a jungle sleep" at the tail end of this passage point us away from the graveyard scene, in the direction of a key 'document' in Ondaatje's work, the comic book discourse of Billy the Kid and The Princess. Ondaatje sets off this entire section of text with a black border, he 'frames' the entire 'document.' The comic book story is thus given a separate, distinct status within Ondaatje's text.

The book cover that Ondaatje imports into this section bears

the title The Five Cent Wide Awake Library: True Life of Billy the Kid. Ironically, Billy's picture on the cover of the dime novel is the only picture of Billy in the entire text; this is the only time in the book that Ondaatje 'frames' Billy in this fashion. This picture points us towards two other passages in The Collected Works: the empty picture frame on page one, and the photograph of the small boy in a cowboy outfit on the last page (which will be discussed later in this essay). The dime novel drawing replaces Huffman's absent photograph from page one, an adjustment which further serves to blur the line between fiction and non-fiction, between fabrication and history. The dime novel legend of Billy is labelled the 'true' story of Billy the Kid. Despite the fact that the picture has been appropriated from a western pulp novel, Ondaatje gives this section special attention within The Collected Works.

Ondaatje's use of this comic book passage is reminiscent of Douglas Crimp's theory on 'found' art, in which the role of the artist is to 're-frame' an image or 'document' in order to put it in an entirely new and different perspective. Ondaatje's appropriation and 're-framing' of the 'document,' in this case a comic book or dime novel, changes textual meaning. We read Billy the Kid and The Princess and The Five Cent Wide Awake Library as pulp fictions, but also as something more, perhaps as fragments of pop history, perhaps as other additions to the legend of Billy the Kid. This interaction between history and pop art brings history down to the level of popular art, or, conversely, elevates the historical status of the comic book and the dime novel within Ondaatje's work. By emphasizing the textual importance of these popular art forms, Ondaatje

breaks down the boundaries between high art and low or pop art, and also between various kinds of 'document.'

The image of Billy drawn by Ondaatje in this passage is obviously at odds with the image we see of Billy in the rest of the text. The personal, first-person poetry of Billy, and the serious western themes of violence and vigilante justice, have been replaced by a parodic, light-hearted take on the pop art of the comic book. The comic book story contains an image of Billy riding off into the sunset, in the arms of his princess. In this comic book passage Ondaatje mixes together romance, slapstick comedy, and cartoon violence, all at odds with the more serious themes and stories of the old west found in other parts of the text.

The light-hearted style and comedic plot-line which Ondaatje invites in our reading of Billy the Kid and The Princess contrast strongly with the personal, at times graphically violent, poetry found in other parts of The Collected Works. In the comic book story Billy saves the princess, the heiress of King Phillip of Spain, from the clutches of a rival suitor. In return, Billy wins the princess's love and gains access to her Edenic kingdom. When the princess introduces Billy to her ancestral home Billy says: "WHOOOEEE! The Governor's mansion up at Phoenix would fit in one end o' that wick-iup" (100). Billy's language here is very different from the language he uses in his poetry. For example, during one of his death scenes, after being shot by Garrett, Billy refers to "oranges reeling across the room AND I KNOW I KNOW / it is my brain coming out like red grass / this breaking where red things wade" (95). The poetic violence of Billy's language during this shooting scene, and in other

sections of the book, does not fit with Billy's comic voice found in Billy the Kid and The Princess. Ondaatje juxtaposes romance, comedy, tragedy, and violence within The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, opening up potential conflict between the 'documents' and the rest of the text.

The comic book passage is the last place that we see Billy alive within the text. At the end of this story, Billy saves the princess from a cougar, the princess pledges her love to Billy, and Billy becomes prince of a mythical kingdom. Ondaatje then gives Billy a dramatic exit, riding off into the horizon in the arms of his lover. This is how the passage ends: "Before Billy the Kid can defend himself, La Princesa Marguerita has taken him in her arms and . . . ." (102). Billy the Kid and The Princess thus ends in the manner of western romance, complete with a "fade-off into the sunset" (Jones, 33). This 'document' offers another version of ending to Billy the Kid's story, an idealized, happy ending, one which Stephen Scobie identifies as "the final transformation of Billy in pop culture into the upright, clean-living hero" ("Two Authors," 192).

And yet, this fade-out gives the comic book story another and an open-ended conclusion, implying that Billy's mythic life did not end after his death at the hands of Pat Garrett. Ondaatje's textual markers point to open-endedness and absence. As Manina Jones observes, "the comic book discourse ends with 'an ellipsis and a conjunction'" (33). Within the constraints of the comic book's cliches and habitual endings, and within an actual frame which he himself provides, Ondaatje opens up 'document' and resists closure.

It is ironic, surely, that the comic book discourse as

'document' should open up the story of Billy the Kid and resist a singular view of history. Here too Ondaatje blurs the line between art and non-art to such an extent that he challenges our conventional notion of 'document.' What Ondaatje seems to imply is that the tales of Billy the Kid contained in the countless dime novels and pulp fictions are in a way just as valid as the 'true' stories of Billy found in the history books. If the real-life story of Billy the Kid ended with his death, then the legend of Billy the Kid must live on in some kind of intertextual, extra-literary fashion, as Stephen Scobie comments: "Within the terms of the legend, it is an inexorable progress, and what it ends in is not Billy's death but Billy's apotheosis into legend: the creation, that is, of an aesthetic image" ("Two Authors," 204).

The uncertainty of Billy's end figures even in the last dialogue in the text, between Garrett and Poe. Ondaatje leaves some doubt as to whether or not Garrett shot the right man in an ambush. After killing a man whom he thinks is Billy, Garrett tells deputy Poe that he has shot the Kid. Poe, however, questions Garrett's statement: "Pat, I believe you have killed the wrong man" (103). Garrett then says that "I'm sure it was the Kid, for I knew his voice and could not have been mistaken" (103). Like other passages we have noted, this one is doubly emphasized by italics and quotation marks. Once again, Ondaatje draws attention to 'document' through his use of visual markings. This 'document' offers an account of Billy's death which contradicts the information found in Garrett's 'official' report.

In the "Credits" section at the end of the book, Ondaatje writes that "The last piece of dialogue between Garrett and Poe is taken from an account written by Deputy John W. Poe in 1919 when he was

the President of the National Bank of Roswell, New Mexico" (110). Ondaatje grants the 'document' a weighty position within the text by virtue of its near finality. Ondaatje provides the passage with a date, 1919, and a place, Roswell, New Mexico, and also supplies information on Poe's later occupation. These lines are credited to someone who knew both Billy the Kid and Pat Garrett. The passage is given the weight of history, but history in this case does not close off the story of Billy; instead it leaves open the possibility that Billy eluded Garrett's posse and lived to fight another day.

The last poem in the text, "Poor young William's dead," then offers another version of Billy's death. The narrator, possibly Garrett, says,

We got the eight foot garden hose  
turned it on, leaned him down flat.  
What fell away we threw away  
his head was smaller than a rat.  
I got the bullets, cleaned him up  
sold them to the Texas Star.  
They weighed them, put them in a pile  
took pictures with a camera. (104)

The narrator's irreverent account of the aftermath of Billy's death leaves no doubt that Garrett shot the right man. The Texas Star here represents the conventional, closed version of 'document,' as the people from the paper take photographs of Billy's dead body and buy the bullets which killed him. This version of 'document' ends on closure, the newspaper as 'document' fixes Billy to one final reality and in effect kills him off.

Across the page from "Poor young William's dead," Ondaatje inserts the final written passage of The Collected Works of Billy the Kid:

It is now early morning, was a bad night. The hotel room seems large. The morning sun has concentrated all the cigarette smoke so one can see it hanging in pillars or sliding along the roof like amoeba. In the bathroom, I wash the loose nicotine out of my mouth. I smell the smoke still in my shirt. (105)

These lines could be attributed to anyone, to Ondaatje, to an anonymous narrator, or possibly to Billy himself in a present which would imply that he survived Garrett's manhunt. Regardless of who the narrator is here, this passage in the present tense keeps the text open and resists closure. In Sam Solecki's words, it "gives the book an ending without finality or resolution, an ending struggling against the closure inevitable in every work of art" (146). By ending the book in the present tense, Ondaatje makes sure that Billy the Kid's story will carry on beyond the boundaries of the textual ending which he has imposed.

At the conclusion of The Collected Works of Billy the Kid Ondaatje inserts the final 'document' into the text--he offers a substitute picture for the Huffman photograph described on page one. Instead of presenting the empty frame filled with a real-life photo of Billy the Kid, however, Ondaatje now gives us a photograph, framed within a frame, of what some readers have claimed (how the legends circle, the facts slide away) to be himself as a young boy in a traditional cowboy outfit. Ondaatje thus ends the story of Billy the



Kid parodically, dissolving Billy's photograph into a photo of himself. The parody opens up Ondaatje's text, and forces us to read and interpret The Collected Works in a very unconventional manner. This parodic, playful photograph of the author as a young boy serves to deconstruct the traditional myth of the western outlaw Billy the Kid, even as it implies an element of reverence for the western myth as well. Like the majority of Ondaatje's 'documents,' this photograph points in many directions at once, both within and outside Ondaatje's text.

This final photograph or 'document' blurs completely any attempt to distinguish between the truth and fiction of 'document.' We come ultimately to the area of "borderblur" described by Stephen Scobie--that area where "the categories collapse into each other" (272). This may be Ondaatje's final point, that all the 'documents' and sections of text describing Billy the Kid are equally valid, equally invalid, as versions of history and fiction. The story of Billy the Kid being many-sided, Ondaatje presents 'documents' which are 'double-voiced' and open to different interpretations.

In The Dialogic Imagination, Mikhail Bakhtin discusses how the novel as genre uses parody, especially the parody of high genres. The characteristics of parody which Bakhtin describes seem to echo Ondaatje's use of parody in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid. Bakhtin writes:

What are the salient features of this novelization of other genres. . . . They become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the 'novelistic' layers of literary

language, they become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humor, elements of self-parody and finally--this is the most important thing--the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present). (6-7)

Bakhtin's lines apply well to Ondaatje's text in leading to his use of 'document.' Ondaatje transfers and imports 'outside' 'documents' into his book, opening up a dialogue between the 'documents' and the rest of the text. This interplay leads to a certain amount of indeterminacy, which in turn leads to the "open-ended present" defined by Bakhtin. Such a present can be seen in the final written passage of text (the narrator in his hotel room), and in the final photograph of the young cowboy. Ondaatje's use of 'document' in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid concludes as it has proceeded--in open-endedness and parody.

Ondaatje never gives us the authentic photograph of Billy the Kid described by Huffman at the beginning of the book. Ondaatje does not want to pin Billy down to one set reality in the text. Instead the Billy he presents in the various 'documents' and stories is contradictory, moving in many directions at once, as in real life. T.D. MacLulich states that "Ondaatje's images of Billy do not create a static portrait, but a shifting and elusive picture--like a film which contains discontinuities, flash-backs, and slow-motion segments" (108). Ondaatje resists 'framing' Billy within a real photograph, and thus the only 'pictures' of Billy within the text are represented by a

dime novel drawing and a photo of Ondaatje as a young boy dressed in a cowboy outfit. This 're-framing' of the pictures thus disrupts conventional notions of 'document' in its blurring of the difference between what is received (i.e. the photograph), and what is perceived (i.e. the pop artist's drawing).

By refusing to centre or 'frame' Billy within the text, Ondaatje leaves it up to the reader to decide Billy's fate in the story. The reader in the text must sift through the various 'documents' and stories of Billy the Kid and come to some kind of textual conclusion. Ondaatje gives the reader at least seven different versions of ending and closure in the series of 'documents' and poems at the end of The Collected Works, and the reader is given some choice among them. In Sam Solecki's words, "The reader supplies captions and connections just as he / she fills in Billy's blank / absent opening portrait--the 'white dwarf' out of which arise and on which depend text and negative" (340). Thus, Ondaatje transfers various outside 'documents,' including newspaper articles, photographs, interviews, and sections altered from other texts, into his book The Collected Works of Billy the Kid. By transferring them from one site to another, from a newspaper for instance into his fictional text, Ondaatje 'takes-over' these 'documents' and 're-frames' them, putting them in an entirely new and different perspective. The transfer then changes the meaning of both the 'document' and Ondaatje's text, putting into play what is received or 'found,' and what is invented.

The conflict serves to open up the 'site' of the text. Ondaatje's readers are forced to alter their strategy of reading. They must, as Jonathan Culler argues, bring into play a new set of conventions in

order to read and interpret The Collected Works of Billy the Kid. Because Ondaatje offers many different versions of 'document,' it is ultimately the reader who must dig through Ondaatje's text and seek the truth of 'document' and fiction. This search for reality within the text points us in the direction of Ondaatje's various 'sources'--both fictional and historical. Stressing the intertextual nature of Ondaatje's text, Manina Jones observes that "the documents in The Collected Works both conflict with each other and gesture to other intertextual 'sources'" (34). In the end, Ondaatje's 'documents' point in many directions at once, towards history, fiction, and myth.

The give and take between different 'documents,' Ondaatje's emphasis on the importance of the reader, and Ondaatje's use of parody all serve to spring open The Collected Works of Billy the Kid in a postmodern fashion. In his unconventional use of material Ondaatje resists a traditional, monologic view of history and 'document.' Instead, as Kroetsch argues, the writer and the reader become "archaeologists" within the multi-voiced text, searching out textual meaning. Ondaatje's 'documents' and text point in the direction of many different, equally valid, interpretations of the life of Billy the Kid. The Collected Works of Billy the Kid is a text comprised of what Bakhtin has elsewhere called "dialogues framed by a story" (29), where 'document' and text feed off each other, all "framed" by the story of Billy the Kid.

### 3. COMING THROUGH SLAUGHTER

In Coming Through Slaughter Michael Ondaatje transfers a variety of 'documents' into his text, including real-life interviews, tape recordings, photographs, and a biographical data sheet. As in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, Ondaatje's 'documents' in Coming Through Slaughter move in two directions at once: towards a historical or factual definition of 'document,' and also towards a fabricated or fictional definition of 'document.' By giving us a double version of 'document' Ondaatje blurs the line between fiction and non-fiction, between history and myth, within the two texts.

However, there is a key difference in Ondaatje's use of 'document' within the two books. The key source text for The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, The Saga of Billy the Kid by Walter Noble Burns, is a work of fiction, whereas the main source text for Coming Through Slaughter, Martin Williams's Jazz Masters of New Orleans, is essentially a music history. In The Collected Works, Ondaatje at times makes use of comedy and parodies his 'documents' in order to open up his own text. As we have seen, open-ended parody can be found at the conclusion of The Collected Works, where Ondaatje inserts into his text a passage from a comic book entitled Billy the Kid and the Princess and a photograph of a young boy dressed in a cowboy outfit. Coming Through Slaughter, however, ends on a darker note, with Buddy Bolden going mad in a parade and eventually ending up in an asylum. It is noteworthy that the 'documents' which Ondaatje uses in Coming Through Slaughter, especially toward

the end of the book, are primarily historical in nature and tend to be sombre in tone and content. In Coming Through Slaughter, then, Ondaatje interrogates his 'documents' more deeply than he does in The Collected Works, and questions to an even greater extent the practices of conventional history and the 'closed' versions of document upon which they depend.

In Coming Through Slaughter Ondaatje questions possibilities of representation--he interrogates his historical 'documents,' photographs, and fictional text equally as methods of representing 'reality.' Thus, in Coming Through Slaughter a key issue involves "the relation of language to the representation of reality" (Linda Hutcheon, The Canadian Postmodern, 85). The question of 'document's' ability to represent objective 'truth' is addressed in one of the first passages within Coming Through Slaughter--the dolphin sonographs at the beginning of the text. In this passage Ondaatje transfers into his book three photographs along with an accompanying explanatory paragraph. The passage explains that the waves and lines in the photographs represent the various sounds dolphins make in the water. The black lines are thus indicators of dolphin speech--visual representations of auditory sounds: "Three sonographs-pictures of dolphin sounds made by a machine that is more sensitive than the human ear" (6).

Ondaatje seems to be questioning the belief that the sounds made by dolphins can be understood in the form of wavy lines in a photograph. Ondaatje divides the dolphin sounds into two categories: "squawks," which are "common emotional expressions" (6), and "whistles," which "give a 'pure sound'" (6), and which "are like per-

sonal signatures for dolphins, identifying each dolphin as well as its location" (6). The third photograph, which shows the two different sounds being made simultaneously, apparently relates to the statement that "no one knows how a dolphin makes both whistles and echolocation clicks simultaneously" (6). As an informational, scientific 'document,' which Ondaatje has appropriated from a book entitled Mind in the Waters, the paragraph attempts to explain dolphin 'speech' and echolocation. What may emerge at the outset as a key piece of information is the claim that human science is unable fully to explain the dolphin's method of communication. More importantly, with regards to Coming Through Slaughter, Ondaatje seems to make a connection between dolphin sounds and written language. According to Peter Sims the sonograph, or the wavy lines in the pictures, represent "symbols of writing" (154). In comparing dolphin echolocation and human language, Ondaatje leaves open the possibility that the process of writing may be more complex than the conventions of fiction and history would allow for.

In Coming Through Slaughter Ondaatje puts into question other cultural formations when he uses interviews, archival materials, and photographs in order to situate his text in some kind of historical reality. At the same time, however, Ondaatje questions the veracity and reliability of his factual material. Throughout his book Ondaatje contrasts two different versions of 'document': 'document' as a discourse of 'pure truth,' and 'document' as a textual construct. Stephen Scobie for instance notes that "the whole notion of 'fact' [within documentary poems] may itself be no more than a fiction, a linguistic construct" (272). This notion of 'document' as a "linguistic

construct" comes out in the first two interview passages within Ondaatje's text.

One of the first 'documents' within the text is an interview with Dude Botley, a contemporary of Bolden's. Botley describes the Monday nights when Bolden performed and recalls fondly the groups of prostitutes who came to hear Bolden play:

Monday nights at Lincoln Park was something to see, especially when the madams and pimps brought their stables of women to hear Bolden play. Each madam had different colour girls. Ann Jackson featured mulatto, Maud Wilson featured high browns, so forth and so on. And them different stables was different colours. Just like a bouquet. (18)

This interview with Dude Botley is presented as if it were given truth. Botley reminisces about Bolden's Monday night concerts and describes the different-coloured call girls who came to hear Buddy play. Dude's voice sounds so convincing you can almost hear his New Orleans accent within the passage. Ondaatje confirms the historical veracity of this 'document' by stating at the end of Coming Through Slaughter that "Dude Botley's monologue appears in Martin Williams's Jazz Masters of New Orleans" (157). Thus, Ondaatje not only verifies the factual nature of Botley's words, he also announces that the passage originates from outside his own text, in this case from a jazz history book written by Martin Williams (17). Ondaatje's confirmation of these lines lends an air of historical legitimacy to this passage. These lines reportedly were spoken by someone who knew Buddy Bolden and who was present in Storyville at the time of



Bolden's heyday. In this particular entry Ondaatje uses actual names and places in order to locate the story of Buddy Bolden in some kind of historical context and to allow the resonance of history to echo in his own book.

The interview with Frank Lewis, the clarinetist in Bolden's band, could also be classified as a 'document.' Like the earlier interview with Dude Botley, the Frank Lewis passage is set up in the fashion of a real-life interview, and as such, offers documentary information to the reader in a conversational form. In his monologue, Lewis remembers the originality of Bolden's playing and especially emphasizes the open-endedness of Buddy's music. Lewis argues that Buddy's cornet playing was improvisational and beyond conventional control:

There was no control except the mood of his power . . . and it is for this reason it is good you never heard him play on recordings. If you never heard him play some place where the weather for instance could change the next series of notes--then you should never have heard him at all. He was never recorded. He stayed away while others moved into wax history, electronic history. . . .

(37)

In this reminiscence Lewis emphasizes the improvisational, as well as the emotional nature of Buddy Bolden's music. Bolden's cornet playing is controlled by mood and emotion, not rational thought. Lewis also says that you would have to hear Bolden live and in-person in order to fully understand his music. This statement reveals the temporary nature of the early jazz. The temporality of art is

further emphasized by Lewis's statement that Bolden's music was never recorded or brought to tape. Bolden never became part of what Lewis calls "wax and electronic history," and to Lewis this absence is a good thing. By refusing to be recorded, Bolden avoided being frozen in time by a tape recording. By emphasizing Bolden's reluctance to be recorded, Lewis reveals the conflict between the temporary nature of art (Bolden's live performance), and permanent records of art (recordings, books).

This passage gives us information on Bolden's music from the point of view of a friend and fellow musician. Lewis describes the emotional power and circumstantial flavouring of Bolden's playing, something which he argues can never be fully captured on tape. From another perspective, Lewis, and by implication Ondaatje, is criticizing the whole process of taping or recording a musician. To Lewis and Ondaatje, a tape recording (representing a 'document') cannot fully capture the essence or spirit of a musician's playing. A tape recording cannot tell us everything about a musician's art, it misses much--such things as the player's mood and emotion. Because of the improvisational, ever-changing nature of Bolden's jazz music it is impossible, Lewis argues, to fully capture or 'document' his music on record or tape.

Later in this same passage Lewis comments on the looseness of Bolden's playing and his belief that Bolden was in fact concerned with order and discipline:

But there was a discipline, it was just that we didn't understand. We thought he was formless, but I think now he was tormented by order, what was outside it. He tore

apart the plot--see his music was immediately on top of his own life. Echoing. As if, when he was playing he was lost and hunting for the right accidental notes. Listening to him was like talking to Coleman. You were both changing directions with every sentence. . . . (37)

According to Lewis, Bolden's cornet playing was unconventional and completely original. In Lewis's words Buddy "tore apart the plot," and by doing this he resisted conventional musical order. In these lines Bolden's playing is revealed to be contradictory, at once chaotic and well-thought out, which Lewis captures in his description of Buddy's technique.

The Frank Lewis interview is a good example of Ondaatje's double-voicing of 'documents.' Ondaatje first of all presents this passage in an informational manner. The interview is offered as a fragment of oral history, as genuine 'truth.' It looks, however, as if this passage is fabricated. There is no mention of an interview with Frank Lewis in the "Credits" section at the end of Coming Through Slaughter. Another clue that this 'document' may be invented is contained in Lewis's statement that "listening to him [Bolden] was like talking to Coleman." The Coleman referred to here could be Ornette Coleman, a latter-day jazz saxophonist. The Coleman could also be Victor Coleman, a poet and personal acquaintance of Ondaatje's. Ondaatje could here be playfully mixing a reference to late twentieth-century Canadian poetry and poets into a supposedly genuine interview. Such a comic insertion, reminiscent of Ondaatje's references to bp Nichol and The Four Horsemen in The Texas Star interview in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, would then indicate

that this passage has been invented, or at least fictionally enhanced by Ondaatje.

The fact that the Frank Lewis interview may be fabricated is not Ondaatje's main point however. When the Frank Lewis interview is compared with the Dude Botley monologue it is impossible to distinguish between the actual 'document,' which has been appropriated from a jazz history book, and the false 'document' which Ondaatje has composed himself. Both the factual and the fictional interviews offer information on Bolden's playing techniques, and they also give us a flavour of early twentieth-century New Orleans. Both interviews are spoken in convincing voices and both appear to be historically accurate. Given the way that Ondaatje sets up these two interviews, we find that the true 'document' becomes virtually indistinguishable from the fabricated 'document.' Both sections of text can be seen as being 'accurate' and 'inventive' at the same time. Therefore each interview can be read as being equally valid within the context of Coming Through Slaughter. Ondaatje blurs the line between fact and fiction here because it is precisely in the grey area between created and authentic material that the 'truth' of history and fiction ultimately resides. The Dude Botley interview, despite its historical authenticity, therefore may be interpreted as a linguistic construct, no more authoritative than the 'fictional' interview with Frank Lewis.

Another key 'document' in Coming Through Slaughter is the black and white photograph of the Buddy Bolden band found at the beginning of the book. The way Ondaatje uses this photograph within the text reveals his strong emphasis on the interplay between fic-

tional text and 'document.' Ondaatje describes the Bolden photograph twice in the book: in a scene involving the photographer Bellocq and the detective Web; and later in a narrator's monologue. In The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, as we have seen, Ondaatje does not bring an actual photograph of Billy into the text, evidently not wanting to pin Billy the Kid down to one set visual reality. In Coming Through Slaughter Ondaatje risks committing his version of Buddy Bolden to a set image represented by a photograph. And yet, the band photograph, which Ondaatje uses as epitaph to the text, is blurry and grainy. As a result the photograph allows for open-ended interpretations.

The first description within the text of the band photograph occurs in a scene between Web and Bellocq. The detective Web, who is searching for his friend Bolden after Bolden's mysterious disappearance, breaks into Bellocq's home looking for a photograph. Bellocq agrees to give Web a copy of the band photo and together they watch the negative slowly develop in Bellocq's acid tray:

The two of them watching the pink rectangle as it slowly began to grow black shapes, coming fast now. . . . Then the faces. Frank Lewis looking slightly to the left. All serious except for the smile on Bolden. Watching their friend float into the page smiling at them, the friend who in reality had reversed the process and gone back into white, who in this bad film seemed to have already half-receded with that smile which may not have been a smile at all, which may have been his mad dignity. (52-53)

Ondaatje presents the actual photograph of The Buddy Bolden

Jazz Band at the beginning of his text. The photograph is very indistinct, the faces barely recognizable. Ondaatje uses this imprecise photograph to his advantage within the book. Ondaatje would not want a clear, precise photograph of Bolden in his text. Instead, Ondaatje fuzzes the quality of the picture in keeping with his style of fiction.

The same photograph is described a second time by the book's narrator. In the later passage the narrator communicates directly with the reader and gives more historical background on the photograph:

There is only one photograph that exists today of Bolden and his band. This is what you see: Jimmy Johnson on bass; Bolden; Willy Cornish on valve trombone; Willy Warner on clarinet; Brock Mumford on guitar; and Frank Lewis on clarinet. As a photograph it is not good or precise, partly because the print was found after the fire.

The picture, waterlogged by climbing hoses, stayed in the possession of Willy Cornish for several years. (66)

In this passage, the narrator reveals that the particular photograph of Bolden is the only photo of him that exists today. This 'document' takes on even greater historical significance within Coming Through Slaughter when it is revealed that Willy Cornish, Bolden's real-life bandmate, once possessed the picture. The photo also seems to have been rescued from a fire at some point, a fact which would explain its poor physical condition. In this light the photo represents an invaluable historical artefact. It is presented in an informational manner, perhaps offering us a glimpse into the 'reality' of Buddy

Bolden. From a different, postmodern perspective, however, this photograph may be perceived in a much different way. In an article entitled "Photography 'In Camera,'" Peter Sims explains that a post-modern notion of photography sees the medium not so much as an objective representation of 'reality' and 'truth,' but instead as a subjective, individually constructed art-form. Sims writes that a "photograph, rather than representing an object directly, can be seen as a representation of the retinal image appearing on the back of a single eye" (166). In Sims's view a photograph is as subjective as the individual eye which takes the picture.

A photograph, when used in a conventional documentary, is meant to clarify a point and to give us a better picture of the subject. In a historical biography a photograph generally fits perfectly with the written text. In both these respects Ondaatje writes against the conventions in his use of the band picture. Ondaatje questions the representational 'reality' of this photograph by revealing that what seems to be straightforward may not always be so. As Ondaatje points out, the smile on Bolden's face in the picture may not be a smile at all, instead it "may have been [an indication of] his mad dignity" (53). Ondaatje also questions the 'truth' of the photo by stating that "in reality [Buddy] had reversed the process [of photography] and gone back into white" (52-53). From one perspective the fictional subject Buddy Bolden cannot be truly represented by an old, fading photograph, no matter how genuine it is.

Ondaatje is putting into suspicion the closed nature of conventional photography, while at the same time using this grainy black and white photograph to his advantage. Ondaatje gives us an

example of both an 'open' and a 'closed' 'document' by the ways in which he promotes the very same photograph. In one respect the photograph is 'closed': it pins Bolden to one set visual reality within the text. From another perspective the photo is 'open': it evades certainty in its very graininess and imprecision. Commenting on the double-sidedness of this photograph, Robert Kroetsch argues that the picture both creates and destroys, gives and takes away: "Here is the 'real thing,' anticipating, refusing, creating, destroying the fiction that is to come. Photo: arrest. Killing. Going. The camera as weapon. With, but against, the novel" (112).

Ondaatje prevents this photograph from becoming what Linda Hutcheon calls an "image of stasis, of fixity" (118). Ondaatje resists this one-sidedness by emphasizing the ephemeral nature of the photo's image. Ondaatje sets up the photograph so that it resembles a remnant or after-thought from somebody's picture album. In the same way that the photograph "works both with and against the novel," the picture also works with and against history and our conventional notion of its documents. On one hand the photograph is an important historical artefact, representing the truth of the world, unalterable and immutable. On the other hand Ondaatje leaves the photo open to interpretation, allowing us to see its ambiguity, and in a sense, the imprecision contained in all photography. The treatment provides a good example of Ondaatje's blurring the line between the received or 'found' 'document,' and the perceived or inventive 'document.'

According to Ondaatje's sources the Buddy Bolden Band eventually broke up. Frankie Dusen, a rival of Bolden's, enlisted a few of



Bolden's band-mates in his Eagle Band, and hired a seventeen-year-old cornetist to take Buddy's place. Ondaatje, picking up this real-life occurrence in Coming Through Slaughter, sets up a scene in which Buddy sees the Eagle Band onstage, Bunk Johnson playing in his place. Bolden quickly leaves the concert, Dude Botley following him. Botley then describes in some detail the following scene, with Bolden sitting all alone in the barbershop, playing his cornet to himself:

Then I hear Bolden's cornet, very quiet, and I move across the street closer. . . . Thought I knew his blues before, and the hymns at funerals, but what he is playing now is real strange and I listen careful for he's playing something that sounds like both. I cannot make out the tune and then I catch on. He's mixing them up. He's playing the blues and the hymn 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. (80-81)

The key to Botley's monologue here is the fact that Bolden is mixing the sexual charge of the blues together with the gospel fervor of the spirituals. By doing this Bolden is creating an entirely new form of music--jazz. To Botley's ears, however, Bolden is bringing together the sacred and the profane, and is creating music which is forbidden and sacrilegious. According to Botley, Bolden's music becomes a battleground between the Lord and the Devil, between good and evil:

There's about three of us at the window now and a strange feeling comes over me. I'm sort of scared be-

cause I know the Lord don't like that mixing the Devil's music with His music. But I still listen because the music sounds so strange and I guess I'm hypnotized. When he blows the blues I can see Lincoln Park with all the sinners and whores shaking and belly rubbing and the chicks getting way down and slapping themselves on the cheeks of their behind. Then when he blows the hymn I'm in my mother's church with everybody humming. The picture kept changing with the music. It sounded like a battle between the Good Lord and the Devil. Something tells me to listen and see who wins. If Bolden stops on the hymn, the Good Lord wins. If he stops on the blues, the Devil wins. (81)

Within his music, Bolden is fighting his personal demons and battles. The key to Dude Botley's passages within Coming Through Slaughter relates to the newness, and strangeness, of Bolden's music. The entries in which Botley describes Bolden's hymns and blues have been appropriated, nearly verbatim, from Martin Williams's Jazz Masters of New Orleans (13-14). It is not hard to see why Ondaatje uses these two 'documents' in his text. Within the context of musical history, Botley's lines focus on the roots of the early jazz in spirituals and blues. At the same time, despite the fact that they are historically authentic entries, both of Botley's monologues here exhibit a strong mythic or fictional quality. The conflict within Bolden's music between the spirituals and the blues, the Good Lord and the Devil, sounds like something invented by Ondaatje, as opposed to being an anecdote found in a history book. The Dude Botley

interviews, in both Martin Williams's book, and in Coming Through Slaughter, communicate the unresolvable tensions found within Bolden's music. Finally, in Bolden's form of jazz, there is something inexplicable and tabooed, a characteristic which Dude Botley says that he does not want to explore too deeply.

Dude Botley's monologues serve many purposes as an example of 'document' within Coming Through Slaughter. In a plainspoken manner, Botley tells us a little more about Bolden's playing and about the possible origins of the early jazz. Botley's voice carries an air of authenticity--Botley speaks in a conversational manner, describing a particularly memorable night in his, and Bolden's, life. In this passage there is also an oral quality which is emphasized by Botley's distinct New Orleans dialect and occasional bad grammar. Botley's superstitious attitude towards Bolden's music, and his belief that Bolden is committing a nearly sacrilegious act, lends an air of everyday historical reality to Ondaatje's text. Ondaatje blends fiction and 'document' so perfectly within this scene that we do not receive Botley's recollections merely as authentic 'documents' appropriated from a history book. Instead, the materials begin to take on a mythic quality. As fiction becomes indistinguishable from history, Ondaatje is able to stress the legendary qualities of Buddy Bolden's music, captured perfectly in Dude Botley's words.

The unexplainable quality of Buddy Bolden's music, which Dude Botley attempts to communicate in his recollection, could be related to Ondaatje's own amalgam of fiction, history, and 'document' within Coming Through Slaughter. There is an elusive, mysterious quality to Bolden's playing which cannot ever be fully 'documented,' whether by

a tape recording or by a fictional composition. In entering the life of Buddy Bolden Ondaatje seems to be aware of the limitations of pure fiction, and pure documentary. In his attempt to translate Bolden's life and music into words, Ondaatje must overcome limitations of genre and convention. Ondaatje accomplishes this by blending together fiction, history, and myth, and also by using historical 'facts' in a very unconventional manner. Ondaatje's 'documents' move in many directions at once, towards a strictly historic interpretation, and also towards a meta / fictional understanding. The Dude Botley monologues, for example, are authentic statements culled from interviews conducted by jazz historians. However, within the context of Coming Through Slaughter, Dude Botley's words work on two different levels, within their historic context, and within the carefully structured context of Ondaatje's work.

The Dude Botley interviews point us backwards in Ondaatje's text, toward the dolphin sonograph passage. This is a good example of the textual interplay that takes place in Coming Through Slaughter among Ondaatje's various 'documents.' Ondaatje seems to imply that there is a connection between dolphin communication and the music of Buddy Bolden. Just as dolphin echolocation is inexplicable in scientific terms, so Bolden's music is likewise difficult to define or comprehend in literary terms. In both instances Ondaatje seems to be questioning possibilities of representation. In the same way that the lines in the dolphin sonograph cannot fully reveal the secrets of dolphin communication, written language cannot fully elucidate the nature of Bolden's jazz playing.

By incorporating the dolphin sonograph passage and the Dude

Botley reminiscences as he does, Ondaatje calls into question conventional definitions of 'document.' When materials such as photographs and interviews are used in history books or biographies they usually attempt to explain or define a reality, and in effect close out the story. However, the dolphin sonograph passage admits in effect that human science is unable to solve dolphin 'speech' and echolocation. Likewise, Dude Botley's monologue leaves Bolden's music open to interpretation--the tensions contained within Buddy's jazz, between the blues and the spirituals, between the sacred and the profane, remain essentially unresolved. Dude Botley represents the conventional audience or 'biographer'--primarily concerned with who wins the "war" in Bolden's music between God and the Devil, between order and chaos. By using Botley's lines, Ondaatje seems to imply that the tensions and conflicts found in music and literature will not, and should not, ever be fully resolved. The conflicts and tensions found within art are, fortunately or unfortunately, sometimes beyond human explanation and communication.

Ondaatje concludes Coming Through Slaughter with a fictional parade and then a series of 'documents,' among them Buddy Bolden's biographical data sheet, excerpts from East Louisiana State Hospital records, and tape-reel interviews with Frank Amacker. The archival 'documents' which Ondaatje imports into Coming Through Slaughter at this point act as epilogue or postscript to his text. The interplay between Ondaatje's fictional passages and his historical entries is especially important at this point in the book.

The pool of 'facts' which Ondaatje uses toward the end of Coming Through Slaughter give an account of Bolden's life in the

asylum after his breakdown. The passages close off Buddy's story with finality. Ondaatje uses these 'documents' in order to take advantage of the traces of historical fact found within them. At the same time, he questions their authority within his own text by revealing their limitations in truly embodying the life and music of Bolden. In so doing, he interrogates conventional notions of history, and ultimately, of writing. By using the archival 'facts' as he does, Ondaatje emphasizes that 'documents' themselves are written or composed. Ondaatje's doubling of 'document' allows him to take advantage of the historicity of his material, at the same time revealing the textual nature of his facts: "The document [in the documentary poem] 'proves' the historicity of the subject: but the document itself is no more than another instance of writing, and is not exempt from its own context of equivocation" (Scobie, "Amelia," 273). Ondaatje thus seems to question the belief that 'found' material embodies a 'pure,' objective representation of reality.

Just before the concluding set of 'documents' Ondaatje describes in dramatically inventive language Buddy's last public performance. In the climactic parade scene Buddy Bolden suffers a breakdown, both physically and mentally, but not before creating and playing a completely new form of music. Bolden is aware of the newness of his music even as he follows the parade: "March is slowing to a stop and as it floats down slow to a thump I take off and nail long notes jerking the squawk into the end of them to form a new beat" (130). The reference to "squawks" of course points us back to the dolphin sonograph passage. As the parade progresses Bolden revels in his public display of virtuosity: "This is what I wanted, al-

ways, loss of privacy in the playing, leaving the stage, the rectangle of band on the street, this hearer who can throw me in the direction and the speed she wishes like an angry shadow" (130). Imagining a female muse in front of him, Bolden plays to her, exalted and victorious. Just before his breakdown and collapse, he thinks to himself, "for my heart is at my throat hitting slow pure notes into the shimmy dance of victory, hair toss victory, a local strut" (131). Bolden then collapses and Cornish catches him as he falls. Ondaatje concludes the passage with the lines, "What I wanted" (131).

The lines "what I wanted" could be spoken by anyone, by Bolden, Ondaatje, Webb, or even the audience. If these words can be taken to be Bolden's, they would imply that he got what he wanted--an escape from Webb, audience, fame, and ultimately his life. Bolden plays his climactic music, a combination of the blues and the spirituals, and then is silenced, by physical and mental exhaustion, and finally by madness. The audience also satisfies its needs, witnessing the self-sacrifice of a great artist. Webb, likewise, receives what he has wanted because he has succeeded in bringing Bolden back into the real world, and ultimately back into the trap of fame. The ambiguity of these final lines leaves the passage amenable to several readings.

Immediately after the climactic parade scene, rich with imaginative language, Ondaatje introduces the first of his closing 'documents' into the text--Buddy Bolden's biographical data sheet. In this chronological entry Ondaatje gives us general information pertaining to Bolden's life. Ondaatje sets out Bolden's birth-date, his marital status, and the names of his wives, children, and musical mentors. Ondaatje also writes in Bolden's mother's address, the

names of Buddy's main haunts and hang-outs, the bars he played at, the asylum he was admitted to after his breakdown, and then, at the end, the date of his death. The 'document' is set up in the fashion of an entry in an encyclopedia, giving us the bare facts of Bolden's life, but telling us in effect little about the man or his music. Ondaatje puts into suspicion the empty, skeletal nature of the material by placing it, in contrast, immediately after the parade passage, which is perhaps the most personal, revelatory, and the most obviously fictive, scene in the entire book.

At first glance the formal language and real names and dates on the factual list would seem to locate the passage historically in time and place. From this perspective the information contained in this 'document' represents assured knowledge. Therefore, the archival material here should occupy a special, authoritative position within Ondaatje's text. In Coming Through Slaughter, however, history--or at least the 'plain facts,' the 'unvarnished truth'--by itself is inadequate in telling Buddy Bolden's life story. The biographical data sheet, "the thin sheaf of information" (134), represents a closed 'document' which is unable to capture the 'reality' of Buddy Bolden or fully encompass his life. Similarly, the archives and the jazz history books are unable to give us a whole or unified picture of Bolden and his music. Even the place of Bolden's musical triumphs, Storyville, New Orleans, will not reveal its hidden stories. The data sheet is not only constrictive and 'lifeless,' then, it in effect kills off Bolden, both literally and figuratively.

Conventional history and 'documents' are obviously insufficient in explaining the life of Buddy Bolden. The reason for this is at-



tributable not only to the failure of 'document'; part of the failure has to do with the elusive nature of Bolden's character. At the conclusion of Coming Through Slaughter the narrator, possibly Ondaatje himself, describes present-day Storyville. Even when the narrator is physically in Storyville, taking photographs of the sites, he cannot locate the elusive presence of Bolden. Ondaatje writes that "the place of his music is totally silent. There is so little noise that I 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" (133). These lines seem to indicate that latter-day Storyville has very little to offer the modern writer or sleuth in search of Buddy Bolden. Bolden himself is "absent" (133), leaving few traces for historians or novelist / poets such as Ondaatje to follow. All that is left of Bolden today, as far as personal records go, is one photograph and a collection of stories and historic facts. Even Bolden's remains are untraceable for the modern historian or writer: "There is the complete absence of him--even his skeleton has softened, disintegrated, and been lost in the water under the earth of Holtz cemetery" (133).

Ondaatje the writer / biographer / historian at this point seems to have lost the connection with his fictional subject Buddy Bolden. Fiction and history, poetry and 'document,' seem unable to account for Bolden's life story. The interviews, photographs, songs, and stories add up to a very fragmented personal picture--in a melee whose flurry could be Ondaatje's point. Ondaatje thus attempts to make the connection between the past and the present, between history and fiction, by relating to Bolden on a personal level, as a fellow artist. Ondaatje examines the only remaining visual

'document' of Bolden and writes that "the photograph moves and becomes a mirror. When I read he stood in front of mirrors and attacked himself, there was the shock of memory. For I had done that" (133).

Ondaatje mixes fact and fiction here, imagines the troubled artist Bolden violently looking into himself. Ondaatje brings Buddy Bolden's story into the present by looking inward, toward himself. Ondaatje then admits what his intentions were in writing Coming Through Slaughter. There is a feeling of unease in Ondaatje's lines here. Ondaatje concedes the impossibility of ever knowing or telling the whole story of someone's life, whether by fiction or by fact:

Did not want to pose in your accent but think in your brain and body, and you like a weatherbird arcing round in the middle of your life to exact opposites. . . . Some saying you went mad trying to play the devil's music and hymns at the same time, and Armstrong telling historians that you went mad by playing too hard and too often drunk too wild too crazy. The excesses cloud up the page. There was the climax of the parade and then you removed yourself from the 20th century game of fame, the rest of your life a desert of facts. Cut them open and spread them out like garbage. (134)

Ondaatje reveals one of his motives here for writing the book, saying that he did not want to "pose" in Bolden's "accent," did not want to pretend or write a superficial account of the cornetist's life. Instead, Ondaatje desires personal identification with his fictional protagonist. Through identification, Ondaatje wants in a sense

to become Buddy Bolden, and "think in Bolden's brain and body," but seems to concede the impossibility of the writer's task, as "the excesses cloud up the page." Ondaatje argues that Bolden consciously left his life behind, and by doing so, made it very difficult for latter-day authors such as Ondaatje to follow his trail and to tell his story.

The lines "the excesses cloud up the page" could point in a few textual directions within Ondaatje's book. From a historical perspective the 'facts' seem to trail away from the narrator and fall from his grasp. Ondaatje seems to say that the "excesses" of Bolden's life, the rumored heavy drinking, sexual wildness, and "craziness," obscure the real 'truths' of Buddy's music. Ondaatje thus concedes that fact and fiction, history and myth, are in their own ways valid, and invalid, in chronicling the life of Buddy Bolden. The "excesses" on the page could also represent language printed on the page. The way that Ondaatje sets up his final sections of text seems to point towards some kind of indeterminacy in language, or at least to multiplicity in textual meaning. Ajay Heble argues that because historical entries are themselves verbal constructs, they sometimes allow for multiple interpretations: "For Ondaatje, history, like fiction, is a form of discourse, a reservoir of potential meanings" (98). Thus, within the historical and fictional world which Buddy Bolden traverses, many different realities and truths compete for space.

At the end of Coming Through Slaughter Ondaatje inserts the final 'documents' into his text: an interview he conducted with Lionel Gremillion of the East Louisiana State Hospital and a tape-reel discussion someone has conducted with Frank Amacker. In both

entries an implied sense of orality adds to the supposed authenticity of the material. From one perspective the passages represent "the myth of Buddy Bolden delivered to Ondaatje as recorded oral history" (Smaro Kamboureli, 115). In the Lionel Gremillion interview, for instance, Ondaatje reveals some fragmentary pieces of information about the last days of Buddy Bolden. Gremillion wrote a history of East Louisiana State Hospital, the hospital into which Bolden was admitted after his breakdown. In the interview Gremillion reveals that Bolden was a barber in the hospital, that he had a bit of a following, and that he suffered violent swings in mood. Ondaatje then quotes from a few of the doctors who worked in the hospital. Reverend Sede Bradham states that Bolden continued to play his cornet in the hospital, while Dr. Robard remembers Bolden as being a "patient barber" (137), who "did not publicly proclaim himself as a jazz originator" (137).

In the same passage Ondaatje states that Bolden was "Buried in [an] unmarked grave at Holtz Cemetery after being brought from the asylum through Slaughter, Vachery, Sunshine, back to New Orleans" (137). Like Billy the Kid, Buddy Bolden, we discover, is buried in an unmarked grave--put away into an odd anonymity. We learn too in the lines describing Buddy's return to New Orleans about the title of the book, as Bolden makes one last journey through Slaughter, Vachery, Sunshine, and New Orleans. All this comes to us within the provenance of recorded speech.

In the passage Ondaatje offers information--information guaranteed evidently by the informants' knowledge of the everyday routine of the asylum. On the basis of what he has heard Ondaatje

sketches a "typical day" in the life of a patient and describes the early morning wake-up calls, the meals, the recreational activities, and the 'dances.' The hospital contained isolation blocks, which were divided into three main categories: "'Untidy Wards' for old patients who couldn't control bowels. 'Closed' Wards for escapees, deteriorated psychopaths. 'Violent Wards' for un-manageables" (138).

According to Ondaatje, Bolden was most likely placed in both open and closed wards. This official 'document,' with its description of the hospital and its itinerary, is dark and depressing. As for the interview with Lionel Gremillion, it provides a good example of a static, lifeless 'document.' The hospital passage closes off Bolden's story, and ends with reports of him trapped in the asylum. The death found in this material contrasts strongly with the 'life' found in other parts of the novel, where Ondaatje emphasizes the vitality of Bolden's music and jolts 'facts' to life.

Ondaatje also uses a passage from a book by Lionel Gremillion entitled A Brief History of East Louisiana State Hospital. This entry reveals when the hospital was founded and describes the harsh, unlivable conditions of the early days. It provides information that the Wasserman Test was introduced in 1924 and that Bolden's test came up negative. The hospital record ends on a dark, chilling note with a comment on "The Medcraft Shock Machine" (144) which was purchased in 1948 "and is still in use today" (144). This 'document' gives us authentic facts, but in the end tells us next to nothing about Bolden's music. The medical reports, the Gremillion interview, and the excerpts from Gremillion's book should represent revelatory, outside 'documents' but instead they merely catalogue the horrors of

mental institutions. These entries represent a form of textual exhaustion. They are resistant to interpretation, ending Bolden's story on a pessimistic note.

In the hospital passages Ondaatje questions the notion of 'document' as a testimony of 'truth.' The arbitrary nature of these medical facts seems to undercut their supposed authoritative position within Ondaatje's text. The 'real' Buddy Bolden, along with the "roar," "parade of ego, cakewalk, strut" (129) of his music, is nowhere to be found in the medical reports. In his article on the modern documentary poem, Stephen Scobie comments on the sombre nature of the concluding 'documents' in Coming Through Slaughter:

Ondaatje reduces the years in the asylum to flat, prosaic statements, lists of dates and interview transcripts in which Bolden is scarcely mentioned--a far cry from 'Billy the Kid and The Princess' [the comic book entry found at the end of The Collected Works]. ("Fictional Magnets," 20)

The parody and humour found at the end of The Collected Works Of Billy the Kid are indeed nowhere to be found at the conclusion of Coming Through Slaughter. Instead, the medical 'documents' represent a "desert of facts" (134) which attempt to close the story of Buddy Bolden with finality.

Throughout Coming Through Slaughter Ondaatje questions the connection between conventional written history and the live jazz of early New Orleans. Within the text, Bolden himself reacts against history in his music. Earlier in the novel, after Webb comes to take him back to New Orleans, Bolden says specifically that he does not

want to be a footnote or remnant left behind in a history book: "I said I didn't want to be a remnant, a ladder for others" (102). Bolden returns to Storyville and goes mad in the parade in order to escape the constraints of his audience and the later writers and historians who will attempt to chronicle his life. One of Ondaatje's main arguments in the book is that Bolden's form of art is temporary, fleeting and fragmentary, capturing mood and emotion at a certain moment or period. As Ondaatje states earlier in Coming Through Slaughter, Bolden's music was "coarse and rough, immediate, dated in half an hour" (43).

Buddy Bolden's jazz, therefore, is not conducive to any form of documentation, whether by sound recordings or by books. Just as Frank Lewis argues earlier in the text that if you could not hear Bolden live "then you should never have heard him at all" (37), so Ondaatje supposes that tape recordings, records, interviews, and books cannot fully 'capture' or explain Buddy Bolden and his music. In keeping with our doubts Ondaatje criticizes Willie Cornish's complaints about Bolden's failure to leave some part of his music behind after his breakdown (145). In effect Bolden represents Ondaatje's quintessential artist, his music open and improvisatory. Ondaatje's version of literature is open, too, at times resisting history, leaving some things unexplained and uncommunicated.

Ondaatje concludes Coming Through Slaughter with a taped Frank Amacker interview and a short fictional prose section. Ondaatje tells us in the "Credits" section at the end of the text that the interviews with Frank Amacker originate from tape-reels at the William Ransom Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University Library.

These official interviews with a contemporary of Bolden's should tell us much about Bolden's life and music. The tape recording as 'document' becomes the detective / writer's evidence in tracking down Buddy Bolden.

Ondaatje sets up these passages so that it appears we are watching the films with him. Frank Amacker was a jazz musician in Storyville during Bolden's heyday. On the movie reels Amacker plays a few songs on the piano, describes hanging out with Jelly Roll Morton, and discusses his musical technique. Amacker also tells the interviewer that he was present the night of the infamous Billy Phillips murder, says that he once owned a bar and restaurant, and discusses various 'rags' and waltzes. These tape-reels, representing authentic 'documents,' should tell us much about the turn-of-the-century New Orleans music scene and the people who lived there. Amacker then gets on the subject of Buddy Bolden, saying that Bolden was not the best cornet player he ever heard, but he certainly was the loudest:

FA [Amacker] answers questions about good trumpet players by saying that Buddy Bolden was the loudest. Freddy Keppard was a master, and so was Manuel Perez, but the most masterful of all was James McNeil who was college trained. In contrast Bolden played this 'old lowdown music.' FA says he remembers 'Funky Butt' (also known as 'Buddy Bolden's Blues'). (154)

It is obvious that Ondaatje has found some worthwhile information on Bolden from these tapes. (The loudness of Buddy's playing and the lowdown nature of his music are of course emphasized by



Ondaatje throughout Coming Through Slaughter.) However, as a replacement for actual recordings of Bolden's music, the Amacker interviews are evidently inadequate. The reels, representing authoritative historical passages, are unable to fully bring alive the musical spirit of Buddy Bolden. Ondaatje's main implication would seem to be that these 'documents' should not be expected to bring Bolden's musical legacy 'back from the dead.' By inserting the Amacker material Ondaatje is questioning our conventional understanding of historical material. In this interview, Amacker remembers only the loud, lowdown nature of Buddy's playing--all perhaps that he should be expected to recall. In Ondaatje's reckoning, authentic 'documents' should not be expected to be one hundred percent accurate or complete, representing the 'word of God.' As I've noted earlier, Ondaatje emphasizes the historicity of his 'documents' at the same time he reveals their textual nature. Thus, even a tape recorded interview could be seen as a construction of reality, just as subjective as a fictional passage, as Ajay Heble so eloquently points out: "Ondaatje wants us to realize that history [or document] remains a verbal construct whose meaning changes as persons and events are recontextualized and rewritten" (100). Thus, the interview as 'document,' like the tape-recording of a musician's playing, has the potential to miss much of the 'true' story.

The last place that we see Bolden alive in Coming Through Slaughter actually occurs more towards the midpoint of the text. Here, Ondaatje describes Bolden sitting alone in the asylum after the parade scene. Bolden speaks here, and it is evident that he has left everything behind, including his family, friends, and music, in order

to escape the trap of fame and audience:

Here. Where I am anonymous and alone in a white room with no history and no parading. So I can make something unknown in the shape of this room. Where I am King of Corners. And Robin who drained my body of its fame when I wanted to find the fear of certainties I had when I first began to play, back when I was unaware that reputation made the room narrower and narrower, till you were crawling on your own back full of your own echoes, till you were drinking in only your own recycled air. (86)

Although this passage is not a 'document,' it relates strongly to Ondaatje's use of factual material in Coming Through Slaughter. The white room in the asylum which Bolden sits in has no "history"--it represents silence, space, absence. Thus, by breaking down and avoiding the trap of recordings, Bolden has escaped history and the tracking of latter-day music historians. Ondaatje also allows Bolden to evade the trappings of fame and audience by having him go mad during a public parade. Fiction and history intertwine and conflict with each other, as they do throughout Coming Through Slaughter. Ondaatje embellishes the parade scene in order to add dramatic and intertextual weight to the passage, and in order to "suit the truth of fiction" (158). Within Coming Through Slaughter Ondaatje's 'documents' move in many intertextual directions, towards both historical "truth" and invented "fiction."

This brings us to the conclusion of Coming Through Slaughter, where the last fictional passage, though not a 'document,' may be associated with Ondaatje's use of such material in the book. All the fi-

nal historical entries in the text, the biographical data sheet, the East Louisiana State Hospital passages, and the Frank Amacker interviews, are examples of hermetic 'documents.' These passages attempt to seal off the story of Buddy Bolden and summarize his life. We might expect Ondaatje at this point to use parody and comedy in order to open up his text as he did at the end of The Collected Works of Billy the Kid. Instead, Ondaatje finds some other textual method to more fittingly complement the dark, serious tone of Coming Through Slaughter. Ondaatje ends the book introspectively, almost in a confessional fashion:

I sit with this room. With the grey walls that darken into corner. And one window with teeth in it. Sit so still you can hear your hair rustle in your shirt. Look away from the window when clouds and other things go by. Thirty-one years old. There are no prizes. (156)

Ondaatje's book ends with Bolden alone in an asylum, Ondaatje identifying strongly with his tormented, artistic protagonist. Regardless of who speaks the final lines in the text, "Thirty one years old. There are no prizes" (156), they seem to indicate that nobody has won, nothing is solved.

These lines are so ambiguous and unenclosed they could be spoken by almost anyone: Bolden, Ondaatje himself, or perhaps some anonymous narrator. If this passage represents Bolden, speaking from the hospital after his breakdown, then the text concludes in a set, confined fashion. Buddy Bolden is trapped by the walls of the asylum, only thirty-one years old. The walls then would be not only figurative, they would also be metaphoric, in that they could repre-

sent Bolden and his music being trapped by history, 'document,' and fiction. However, if Ondaatje is in fact speaking these lines, or leaving the identity of the speaker unknown, then he allows the passage a less certain interpretation. Thus, he would be following a strategy analogous to the one he observed at the end of The Collected Works. In that text, Ondaatje replaced an authentic photo of Billy the Kid with a photograph of himself as a young boy dressed in a cowboy outfit. Likewise, in Coming Through Slaughter, Ondaatje identifies so strongly with his main character that author and subject seem to merge together. In a sense, Ondaatje dissolves Buddy Bolden, and Billy the Kid, into himself, bringing both books into the realm of Bakhtin's "open-ended present" (Bakhtin, 6-7). By leaving the identity of the final narrator unknown, and by bringing the textual conclusion into the "open-ended present," Ondaatje resists the closure found in the final 'documents' of Coming Through Slaughter.

Ondaatje's postmodern use of 'document' and fiction allows for a slightly more optimistic, open-ended interpretation of the book's ending. Coming Through Slaughter ends as it has begun, in "silence" and "absence." At the beginning of Coming Through Slaughter Ondaatje says that "here [in Storyville] there is little recorded history" (8). After the climactic parade scene Ondaatje writes at the end of the book that "there is the complete absence of him [Bolden]" (133). Ondaatje also adds that "The place of his music is totally silent" (133). Like the majority of Ondaatje's early 'documents' in Coming Through Slaughter, "silence" and "absence" could be interpreted in at least two different ways. From one perspective Bolden's "silence" and "absence" could be interpreted as being negative at-

tributes. In this understanding the ending of Coming Through Slaughter could represent the silencing and descent into madness of a once great artist. From another more postmodern view, "silence" and "absence" could be interpreted as being positive qualities as they allow for a certain amount of textual indeterminacy. Bolden's textual "absence" at the end of the novel could indicate that he has managed to resist being defined by others, including his audience, Webb, music historians, and perhaps even the reader of Ondaatje's text. This would leave Buddy's story somewhat open, resisting the textual closure of a more conventional work.

Whatever the case, the unease which Ondaatje exhibits in his chronicle of Buddy Bolden is emphasized quite strongly at end of Coming Through Slaughter. By writing about the great jazz musician Buddy Bolden, Ondaatje is writing about the 'unwritable,' he is writing about something that 'isn't there.' The "excesses" (134) of Bolden's life "cloud up the page" (134),--in extension of the metalin-gual words--preventing the author Ondaatje from reading or writing an all-encompassing portrait of the artist on the already clouded page. Reminiscent of related entries in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, Ondaatje's 'documents' and fictional passages in Coming Through Slaughter are fragmentary, and do not attempt to give us a whole, unified picture of Buddy Bolden. Instead, Ondaatje's appropriations and inventions contain all the contradictions and uncertainties that were most likely present in Bolden's real life. In Coming Through Slaughter Ondaatje gives the reader many different versions of 'document,' open and closed, historical and invented, and the reader is given some choice to choose among them. It is my be-

lief, however, that at the end of the book Ondaatje uses 'document' as a litmus test, as a comparison, as a version of writing which is closed and unchanging, standing in contrast to the improvisatory nature of Buddy Bolden's jazz and Ondaatje's own fiction.

At the end of Coming Through Slaughter Ondaatje has exhausted fiction, history, and 'document' in chronicling the life of Buddy Bolden. By going mad in the parade Bolden removes himself "from the 20th century game of fame" (134), the rest of his life a "desert of facts" (134). At the conclusion of the book both the author Ondaatje and the fictional / biographical subject Buddy Bolden have 'come through slaughter.' The fact that there are "no prizes" (156) indicates that no one has won, but these lines also imply that neither Ondaatje the author nor Bolden the musician have succumbed to the "20th century game of fame" (134). Bolden succeeds in his quest as he helps to create a new form of music, jazz, and then manages to escape the set reality possibly which both fiction and 'document' would impose upon him.

The various 'documents' and sections of fictional text found in Coming Through Slaughter present many different versions of the life of Buddy Bolden. Ondaatje's unorthodox use of fiction, history, and 'document' in Coming Through Slaughter results in a multi-voiced, postmodern, at times troubling interpretation of jazz cornetist Buddy Bolden. Unlike The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, where Ondaatje concludes his text confidently in parody and humour, Coming Through Slaughter is permeated with a feeling of tension and introspection. Ondaatje's deliberately difficult combination of discourses mirrors the troubled life of his gifted main character, and

yet, it also allows the reader to understand and help interpret the fragmented, uncertain, yet glorious music of the legendary jazz cornetist Buddy Bolden.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have examined Michael Ondaatje's use of 'document' in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid and Coming Through Slaughter in order to reveal how Ondaatje's material moves in two directions at once: towards a historical or factual definition of 'document'; and also towards a created or fictional definition of 'document.' By giving us a duplicitous version of 'document,' Ondaatje blurs the line between fiction and non-fiction, between history and myth within his texts. In this respect he leaves a certain amount of textual indeterminacy within both his fictional passages and his historical material.

This thesis therefore has studied Ondaatje's The Collected Works of Billy the Kid and Coming Through Slaughter from a structuralist, and in some ways postmodern, perspective. Thus, my investigation follows the theories and critical areas mapped out by critics such as Jonathan Culler, Gerald Bruns, Douglas Crimp, Stephen Scobie, Robert Kroetsch, Manina Jones, and Linda Hutcheon. There is a great range of theories among these critics; for example, Culler stresses the context of language and meaning, Bruns examines texts from the perspective of 'open' and 'closed' manuscripts, while Crimp looks at the collage and juxtaposition effects of postmodern visual art. All these theorists owe a strong debt to structuralism and postmodernism in their writings.

Some of the key issues which arise include: the essential openness of the postmodern work; in some instances, the indetermi-



nacy or multiplicity of meaning found in language; a questioning of conventional history; and the importance of the reader in the text. In my thesis I have examined Ondaatje's works from similar perspectives. However, by studying Ondaatje's source texts closely, and by investigating the interplay between Ondaatje's fictional text, his written 'documents,' and his visual material, I believe that I have opened up some new ground with regards to Ondaatje criticism.

Other schools of criticism regarding Ondaatje's work have also been cited in my thesis. This would include more conventional genre works such as Naomi Jacobs's study of Ondaatje's texts as "new fiction biographies," and Ann Wilson's historical / fictional study of Coming Through Slaughter. Other areas of Ondaatje criticism which are very important include studies on his use of photography and photographic techniques within his works. Critics cited here include Peter Sims, T.D. MacLulich, Perry Nodelman, and Lorraine York. Although I found these theorists very helpful in studying Ondaatje's photographs, their essays focused more on Ondaatje's visual and filmic techniques. My thesis on the other hand is more of a textual investigation of Ondaatje's written 'documents' and photographs.

I would therefore classify this thesis, in a sense, as a hybrid, rooted in structuralism and postmodernism, but also taking into account Ondaatje's concern and / or play with historical accuracy and factuality. Because Ondaatje's 'documents' are, at times, duplicitous in meaning, I have examined Ondaatje's borrowed material not only from a historical perspective, examining his key source texts such as The Saga of Billy the Kid and Jazz Masters of New Orleans, but also from a meta/fictional point of view, studying Ondaatje's use of

intertextuality both within and outside his own texts. The hybrid or 'mix' found within this thesis, of structuralist, postmodern, historical, and textual theory influences, is necessary because it enables us to see the wide-ranging scope of Ondaatje's use of 'documents.' There is a very complex relationship between fiction and history within Ondaatje's works. In an interview with Catherine Bush, Ondaatje says that "Ideally, I want that mental landscape and the personal story to wrestle against the documentary" (92). Thus, there are conflicts, and mutual meeting-points, between fact and fiction, history and myth, within Coming Through Slaughter and The Collected Works of Billy the Kid. In my opinion, by bringing together theoretical and literary criticism with straight historical or archival studies, we are better able to interpret Ondaatje's works and investigate the interplay between Ondaatje's 'documents' and his own fictional text.

Ondaatje criticism could go in many directions in the future. One area of fruitful investigation might be an indepth look at Ondaatje's juxtaposition of personal, imagistic language with the language of 'outside' history and chronicles. Criticism in this vein includes Steve Heighon's examination of the "kinetic techniques" of language in Ondaatje's works. Another possible area of research would be a study of Ondaatje's texts from a more conventional biographical and / or autobiographical perspective. One more potentially productive area of investigation would be to examine Ondaatje's historical and archival sources in an even more indepth fashion than this thesis. For instance, this might involve a close study of the records at the William Ransom Hogan Jazz Archive at

Tulane University in New Orleans relating to Coming through Slaughter. Whichever direction Ondaatje criticism takes, Ondaatje's questioning of his own works as fiction / history / biography will most likely result in much productive criticism. In an essay entitled "For Play and Entrance: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem," Robert Kroetsch writes of the new textual possibilities in the Canadian long poem: "The gap between language and narrative, for our best poets, generates new possibilities, new long poems" (133). Thus, the "possibilities" in fiction, history, and language within Ondaatje's works I feel will ensure in the future sustained, innovative criticism with regards to The Collected Works of Billy the Kid and Coming Through Slaughter.

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