

# AN EVENING WITH MICHAEL ONDAATJE

## The Subir and Malini Chowdhury Foundation Distinguished Speaker Series

Tuesday, March 5, 2019, at 7 p.m.  
Bovard Auditorium, University of Southern California

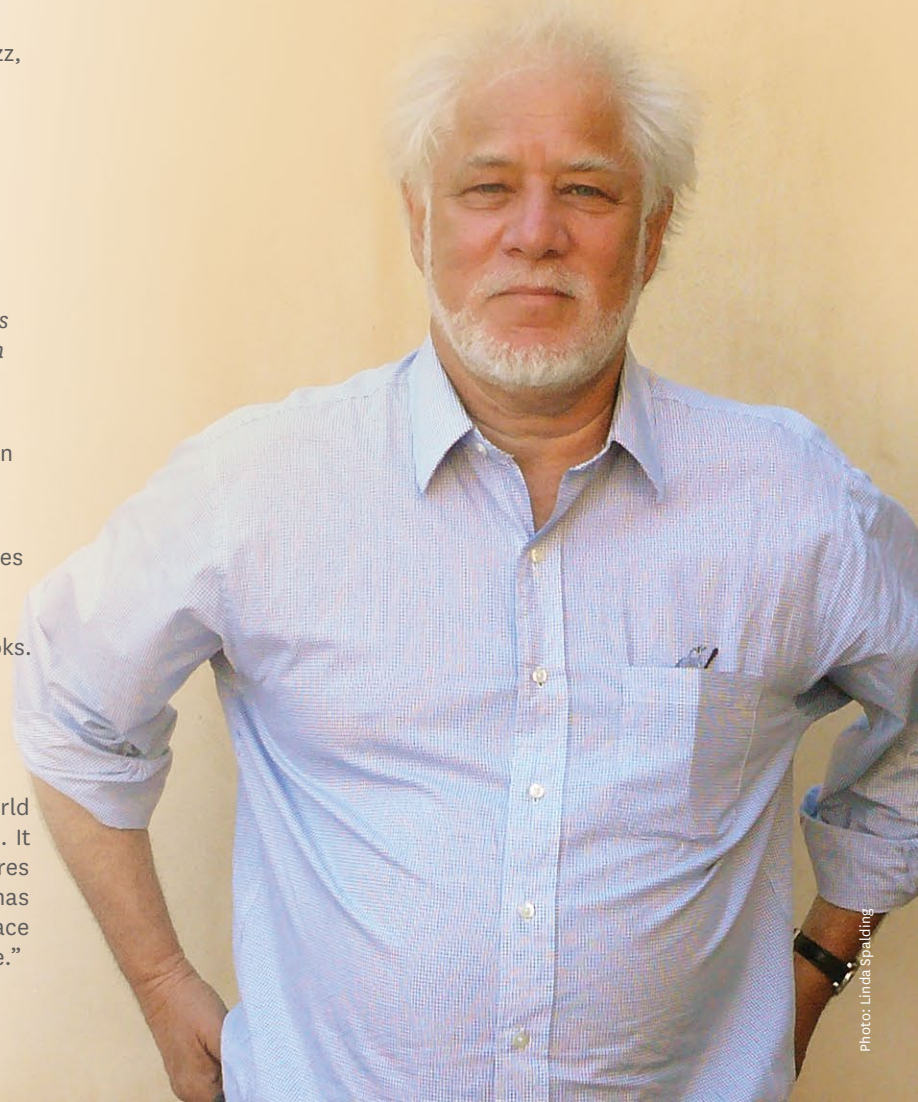
### ABOUT MICHAEL ONDAATJE

- Michael Ondaatje is one of the most renowned authors of our time. He is the recipient of top literary awards including the Man Booker Prize, The Irish Times International Prize for Fiction, the Kiriya Pacific Rim Book Prize, the Prix Médicis, the Governor General's Award, and the Giller Prize.
- He works in poetry, fiction, and autobiography, and is known for complex narrative structures and musical prose that incorporates elements of myth, history, jazz, memoir, and other forms.
- Ondaatje was born in Sri Lanka in 1943, moved to London when he was eleven, and immigrated to Montreal when he was nineteen. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in Canada, where he has lived throughout his adult life. He is of Dutch, Sinhalese, and Tamil descent.
- Ondaatje's beloved books include *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, *Running in the Family*, *Coming through Slaughter*, *In the Skin of a Lion*, and *Anil's Ghost*.
- His most famous novel is *The English Patient* (1992), which was adapted into an Oscar-winning film and won the Golden Booker Prize for readers' favorite novel of the past 50 years.
- In addition to his own writing, Ondaatje has for decades supported other Canadian authors as a teacher, longtime editor of the literary journal *Brick*, and supporter of the independent press Coach House Books.
- His newest book is *Warlight*.

### THE ENGLISH PATIENT

*The English Patient* (1992), set in Italy at the end of World War II, is the novel that made Michael Ondaatje famous. It has been called "a poet's novel" (*Irish Times*) and features a complicated, non-linear narrative structure. Ondaatje has said that the novel represents "All people born in one place who live in another place [and who] have lost their source."

“Ondaatje is perhaps best understood not as poet or novelist, but as an artist who has drawn into question the very limits of such genres.” —The British Council on Literature



*The English Patient* tells the story of a major moment in world history (the North African/Italian Campaigns of World War II) from the margins, looking at four dissimilar people who are brought together in an Italian villa near the end of the war. A nameless protagonist immobilized by a wartime injury takes the reader on a transnational journey through his fragmented memories of intimate scenes.

*The English Patient* won the Man Booker Prize, among many other awards, and has been translated into 38 languages. In 1996, it was adapted into a film version starring Ralph Fiennes, Juliette Binoche, and Kristin Scott Thomas that won nine Academy Awards, including Best Picture.

Ondaatje says *The English Patient* was the book that gave him freedom. He had been teaching full-time while “trying to write a complicated novel,” he told *The Guardian*. Juggling full-time teaching with writing had become unmanageable. “I thought I was going to lose it – and I had quit my job. I just needed to finish the book. It was a bet,” he reflected almost 30 years later, when it was clear the bet had been a good one. In 2018, *The English Patient* was awarded the Golden Man Booker Prize, voted on by the public as readers’ favorite book of the past 50 years.

## WARLIGHT

Ondaatje’s newest novel is *Warlight* (2018). It is set in 1945 in London, a city still living in the light of the world war that ended a few years prior. Two young people are seemingly abandoned by their parents and left in the care of a man they suspect may be a war criminal. The novel explores truth, reality, memory, and imagination. Novelist Penelope Lively wrote that the core theme of *Warlight* is, “the past never remains in the past . . . the present reconstructs the past.”

*Warlight* was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize and named a *New York Times* Notable Book, a *Washington Post* Notable Book, and an NPR Best Book of the Year.

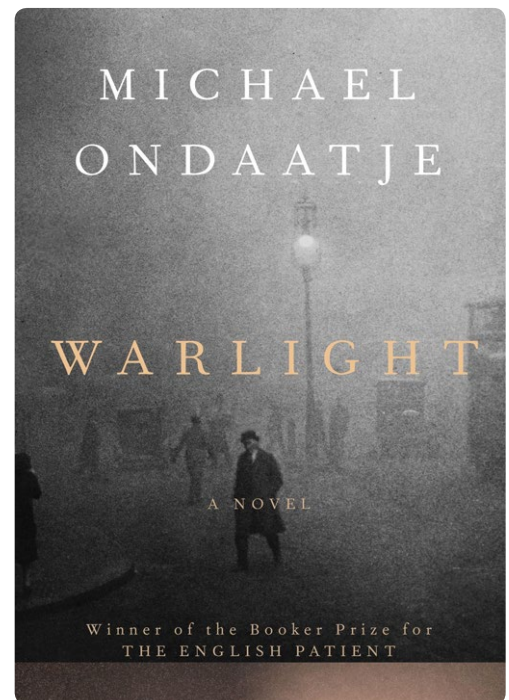
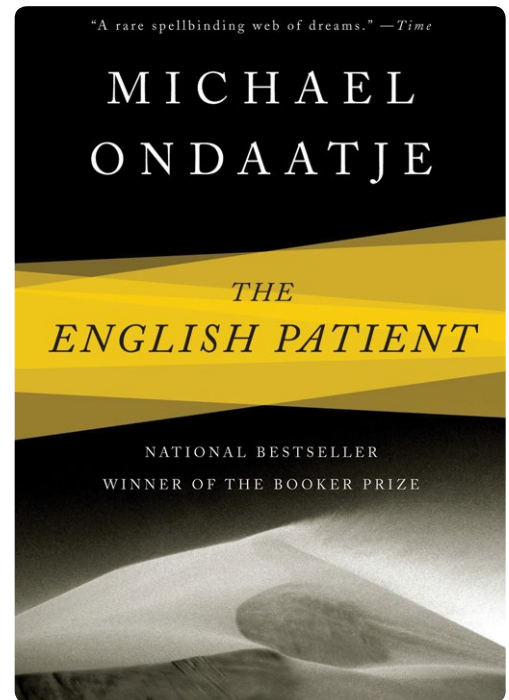
## THE SUBIR AND MALINI CHOWDHURY FOUNDATION DISTINGUISHED SPEAKER SERIES

Spearheaded by professor and poet David St. John, the Subir and Malini Chowdhury Foundation and the USC Department of English have partnered with the intent of uniting a politically divided country through literature and poetry, leading the way for literary bonding and exploration in America through a series of speaking events in the city of Los Angeles.

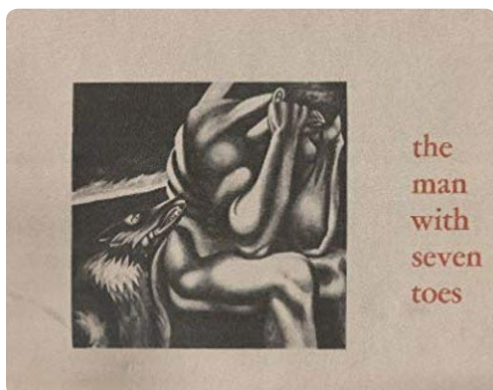
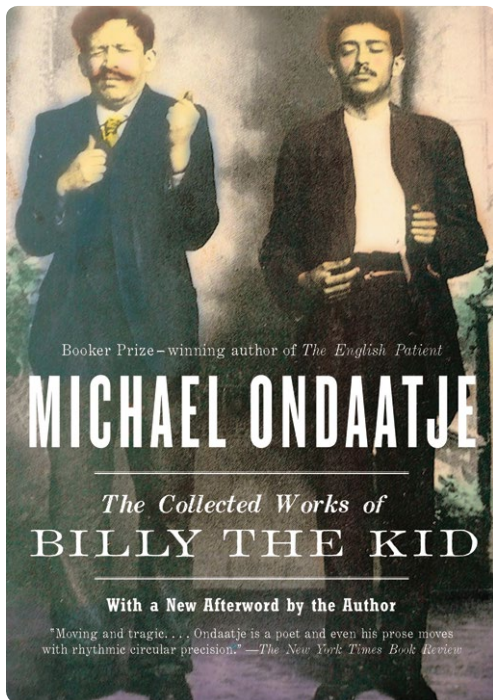
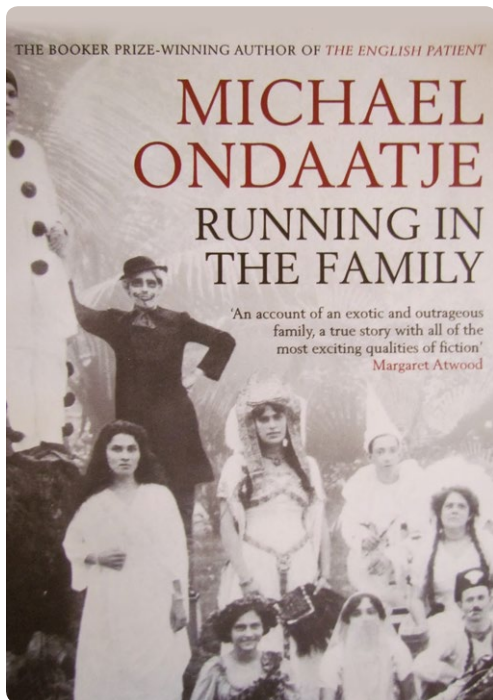
Best-selling author and foundation leader Subir Chowdhury says, “The Chowdhury Foundation and USC English Department are bringing the best of the best from around the globe, and Michael Ondaatje is one of the greatest authors of our time.”

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- A *New Yorker* critic stated, “Ondaatje is an enemy of the linear,” and Ondaatje himself has called his novels “cubist.” Why would a novelist want to challenge linear storytelling? What do you imagine when you think of a “cubist” story?
- Ondaatje has been called a “memory artist.” What about the form of the novel makes it particularly apt for exploring memory? And what are the limitations of the novel as a vehicle for exploring memory? Are there other genres or mediums you think are well suited to exploring questions of memory?
- How realistic is memory? How imaginative?







## IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- ⦿ An afternoon with Ruben Santiago-Hudson (March 26, 2019)  
visionsandvoices.usc.edu/events/listing.php?event\_id=1497085
- ⦿ Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* Re-animated (April 4, 2019)  
visionsandvoices.usc.edu/events/listing.php?event\_id=1300118
- ⦿ *Los Angeles Times* Festival of Books (April 13-14, 2019)  
events.latimes.com/festivalofbooks/

## DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

**SOPHIE LESINSKA** of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn about Michael Ondaatje and tonight's event. Those with a call number (e.g., books) are physical items that you can find in our campus libraries. Those without call number (e.g., ebooks or articles), are online resources which you can access through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at [libraries.usc.edu](http://libraries.usc.edu).

### BOOKS BY MICHAEL ONDAATJE

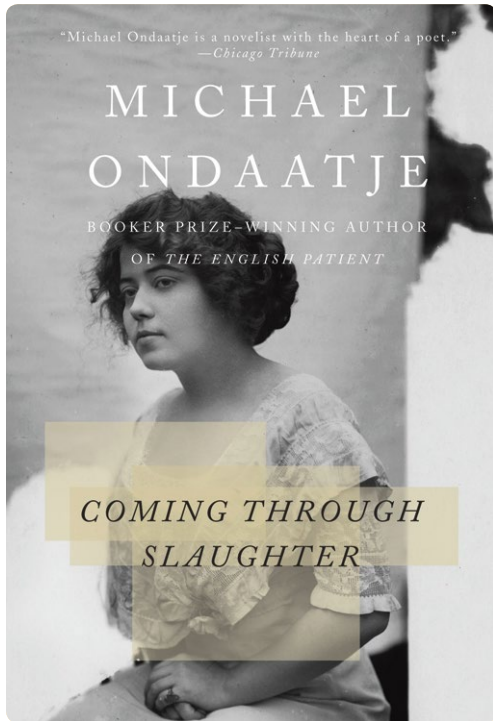
- ⦿ *The Man with Seven Toes*. Toronto: Coach House Press, (1969) 1971.  
DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: PR6065.N4 M3 1971
- ⦿ *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. New York: Vintage International, (1970) 1996.  
DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: PR9199.3.O5 C6 1996
- ⦿ *Rat Jelly*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1973.  
DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: PR9199.3.O5 R3
- ⦿ *Coming through Slaughter*. New York: Vintage International, (1976) 1996.  
DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: PR9199.3.O5 C65 1996
- ⦿ *There's a Trick with a Knife I'm Learning to Do: Poems, 1963-1978*. New York: Norton, 1979.  
DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: PR9199.3.O5 T5 1979
- ⦿ *Running in the Family*. New York: Norton, 1982.  
DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: PR9199.3.O5 Z47 1982
- ⦿ *Secular Love: Poems*. New York: Norton, (1984) 1985.  
DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: PR9199.3.O5 S4 1985
- ⦿ *In the Skin of a Lion*. New York: Knopf, 1987.  
DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: PR9199.3.O5 I5 1987.
- ⦿ *The English Patient*. New York: Knopf, 1992.  
DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: PR9199.3.O5 E54 1993

### AUDIO VISUAL MATERIALS

- ⦿ Minghella, Anthony, dir. *The English Patient*. (1996) 1998. Miramax Home Entertainment.  
LEAVEY LIBRARY: LVYDVD 286.

### SELECTED CRITICISM

- ⦿ Finkle, Derek. "From Page to Screen: Michael Ondaatje as Filmmaker." 1994. *Essays on Canadian Writing* 53, (Summer): 167-185.  
AVAILABLE ONLINE VIA PROQUEST DATABASE.
- ⦿ Hilliger, Annick. *Not Needing All the Words: Michael Ondaatje's Literature of Silence*. 2006. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press.  
DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: PR9199.3.O5 Z7 2006.



- ⦿ Kortenaar, Neil Ten. "'Touching Them into Words': Running with Michael Ondaatje among the Dead." 2015. *University of Toronto Quarterly* 84, no. 4: 15-28.  
**AVAILABLE ONLINE VIA PROJECT MUSE DATABASE**
- ⦿ McVey, Christopher. "Reclaiming the Past: Michael Ondaatje and the Body of History." 2014. *Journal of Modern Literature* 37: 141-160, 200.  
**AVAILABLE ONLINE VIA PROQUEST DATABASE**
- ⦿ Solecki, Sam. *Ragas of Longing: the Poetry of Michael Ondaatje*. 2003. Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press. Online.
- ⦿ Spinks, Lee. *Michael Ondaatje*. 2009. Manchester UK; New York: University of Manchester Press. Online.
- ⦿ Vadde, Aarthi. "National Myth, Transnational Memory: Ondaatje's Archival Method." 2002. *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 45, no. 2: 257-75.  
**AVAILABLE ONLINE VIA JSTOR DATABASE**