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Building His Own Legend: Billy the Kid and the Media

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BILLY THE KID AND THE MEDIA

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William Bonney, alias Billy the Kid, had arrived accompanying his mother and one brother in New Mexico Territory by March 1873. At that time he bore the name Henry McCarty; the date and place of his birth are still unconfirmed despite heroic efforts to identify either. In his short life of twenty-one years or so—and primarily in the eight months before his death on the night of 14 July 1881—he gained notoriety and budding status as a folklore figure like no other in Western history. Newspaper reportage of his dramatic shootouts made good copy, and the telegraph assured a wide dispersal of the reporters' stories.

There were other "Kid" bandits at the time, none of whom earned anything like Billy's reputation. A careful study of the contemporary sources suggests that something more was at work for Billy the Kid than the others; he played a substantial role in creating his own legend. This idea is not entirely new but the references that show the process need to be pulled together and examined. The absence of an independently documented background allowed Billy to escape from history, as one writer put it, and become a folklore figure.[1] How did Billy create a past for himself and promote his image with the media?

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Billy's Newspaper Interviews

One part of this story lies in his easy relationship with newspaper reporters, although their accounts of him were unfavorable for much of his career. He had a well-known record of involvement in dramatic shootouts even before Dept. Sheriff Pat Garrett brought the Kid and his cohorts into Las Vegas, New Mexico, on 26 December 1880, following their capture at Stinking Springs. Scarcely three weeks earlier, W. G. Koogler of the *Las Vegas Gazette* had written a scorching article that fastened on Bonney the name he would be known by forever: Billy the Kid.[2] The Kid gave interviews, polite ones, with both the *Gazette* and the *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, although only the one with the *Gazette* was published.[3] We know that he read his press notices, as he responded at some length to the *Gazette* editorial of 3 December 1880.[4] Billy and his partners in crime sold papers.

A few months later, after his trial and conviction for murder at Mesilla, New Mexico, Billy furnished interviews to the *Mesilla News* and to a Las Cruces, New Mexico, newspaper, *Newman's Semi-Weekly*. William Keleher quoted from the interview in the 16 April 1881 *Mesilla News*, as did historians Frederick Nolan and Robert Utley.[5] No surviving copy of this issue has been located, and the latter two authors may have taken their quotations from Keleher. As for *Newman's Semi-Weekly*, just before the Kid's escort took him back to Lincoln, New Mexico, the editor handed some paper and an addressed envelope to Bonney. The editor believed that "he would write us some things he wanted to make public."[6] Sometime in early May, this paper, which printed many short items about Lincoln County and the Kid, decided that the time was right and ran "a long account of the Kid and his career, which [was] not very complimentary to the subject of the story. Some of the incidents narrated [were] thrilling enough for a dime novel."[7] Whatever the paper revealed must have derived from the interviews and from any correspondence with Bonney, but there are no known surviving issues after the 20 April number. The newspaper resumed the name, *Newman's Thirty-Four*, in mid-June 1881 and continued publication at least to the end of July.[8]

Newman's Semi-Weekly did not circulate widely, and no reprints of its post-April article(s) on the Kid and his activities are available. If they were like the interviews in other papers, his statements were probably of momentary interest only, self-serving and full of misleading claims. To anticipate a bit, Billy the Kid's newspaper interviews apparently had little to do with

establishing his legend. The same is true with the surviving letters he wrote or is alleged to have written, most of which are now in the Lew. Wallace collection at the Indiana Historical Society.[9] All the Kid's interviews and letters had the object of getting himself out of tight spots.

Garrett's Book: Perhaps Authentic, but not Confirmed

What was being written about him is another matter entirely. The most prominent example of what he is claimed to have said is Pat Garrett's biography of him. When Garrett (and Marshall Ashmun "Ash" Upson) sat down to write *The Authentic Life of Billy, the Kid* (1882), the announced purpose was to give the public "a true and concise relation" of the Kid's exploits, "unadorned of superfluous verbiage."[10] The book's addenda, however, and its responses to newspaper charges were pure Ash Upson, who grew more and more exercised as he went along. In confronting the charge that Garrett was writing and publishing a history of the Kid with the nefarious object of making money, the writer(s) used some of the most baroque language in the book to confirm this purpose as well: "What the Hades else do you suppose my object could be?"[11]

In addition to the purple prose in defense of Garrett's truthfulness, he also said that on many occasions he heard from Billy himself "his disconnected relations of events of his early and more recent life." These events were confirmed by interviews with other persons and correspondence with parties in other states and Mexico. In relation to the Kid's activities in Arizona, he once more cited "Billy's disconnected recitals, as given to his companions, in after years."[12]

The burden of Billy the Kid research since about 1952 has been to show that most of what Garrett wrote about events prior to November 1880 is untrue or highly unreliable. Why then did the sheriff make such claims? He could have clarified much of Billy's background prior to his arrival in Lincoln County simply by corresponding with his colleague, Sheriff Harvey Whitehill, in Silver City, New Mexico. Sheriff Whitehill's recollections of the Kid's early years eventually appeared in the *Silver City Enterprise* and were reprinted in the *Alamogordo News*. Yet Garrett did not do so, and it is possible that he confirmed none of the independent statements that he cited. One reason may be, as an item cited by Keleher states, that the book was completed in scarcely three months time—by late October 1881.[13] For Garrett alone, drafting a book manuscript in that tight window of time would have

been impossible; for a journalist like Ash Upson, it was probably an arresting challenge.

Another probable reason is that Garrett thought that the details beyond his immediate experience were not important. No one disputed him until many years later. Indeed, when the book appeared in March 1882, it was favorably reviewed in the Las Cruces newspaper. Billy Burt, whose horse carried the Kid away from the Lincoln County Courthouse after the deaths of James W. Bell and Bob Olinger, opined upon returning a borrowed copy of the new book that, "on the whole, the story was well and truthfully rendered, and decidedly interesting."[14] These critics would have been commenting on what they knew, which was the last two or three years of the Kid's life in Lincoln and Doña Ana counties.

The Authentic Life was more of an exercise in sensationalist journalism than in factual history, and if some license was taken in telling the story, then so be it. This formula did not mean that Garrett or Upson, or anyone else, was required to fabricate parts of it out of whole cloth, although the episodes in chapters five through seven suggest heavy embellishments, partly because the stories are too involved or complex to have come entirely from Garrett's or Upson's imaginations. These two had plenty of material to draw upon, and the task at hand consisted more of sorting through and deciding what to use than contriving filler, just as Garrett said. Indeed, the Watrous, New Mexico, newspaper quoted by Keleher offered a prescient insight: "We can see no pressing necessity for the work he [Garrett] is to have printed," except to make money, and the paper drove home the point by recommending that every citizen purchase at least ten copies![15] When this assessment appeared in October 1881, no one but the authors knew what the book might contain. According to Upson, the *Santa Fe New Mexican* office then took five months to publish the book.[16]

The evidence that Billy improvised the stories about gunning down Mexican gamblers, killing any number of Apaches, and rescuing companions is a parallelism between the simplified account narrated in later years by his one-time companion, John P. Meadows, and the overblown version in chapters two through seven of *The Authentic Life*.[17] In the former, he had one companion, a Mexican possibly named Secundo. In the latter, he had three companions, in sequence: Alias, Segura, and a Tom O'Keefe. There is nothing to show that any of these three men actually existed, while virtually all of the other individuals mentioned by Meadows and Garrett can be identified.

Meadows's account leading up to these events had the Kid at Camp Thomas in Arizona; Garrett's version placed him at Fort Bowie, when in reality he was around Camp Grant and a number of other places in the lower Sulphur Springs Valley in 1875–1877. The killing of the soldier blacksmith at Fort Bowie was obviously the Kid's murder of Windy Cahill at a hog ranch near Camp Grant.[18] Meadows related a self-serving version of this same incident in a manner that laid the blame on the "old blacksmith." He credited eyewitnesses and claimed "the Kid also told me this."[19]

According to Garrett, Billy and Segura then left Arizona and gambled their way across Sonora and Chihuahua, leaving behind a pair of dead Mexican bettors. Meadows, in a much simplified rendition, also had the Kid and his partner heading into Chihuahua, but he said nothing about gambling. Instead, they worked awhile for an old cowman. None of this ever happened, but the likelihood of pure coincidence between Upson inventing such an odyssey and finding a similar trip in Meadows's narrative is extremely remote. Nowhere did Meadows, who may or may not have been literate, refer to Garrett's biography. Billy simply told two (or more) versions of the story to different listeners.

Even the dramatic (and wholly imaginary) rescue of Segura from a jail at San Elizario, below El Paso, Texas, has its parallel in Meadows's reference to Billy and Segundo turning down to Isleta (del Sur) when they came back from Mexico.[20] Supposedly Segura had sent a messenger who found the Kid at a ranch about six miles north of Mesilla. So far as location goes, this was true enough, as Meadows had him in the employ of John Kinney, a local rustler and butcher shop proprietor in the Rio Grande Valley at that time.[21] There are more points of similarity but the pattern is clear for the events of 1875–1877.

When Billy arrived in Lincoln County in the fall of 1877, he had given himself a clean slate. No one knew him there except fellow gunmen Jesse Evans and John Kinney, whose own backgrounds were hardly pristine. Historian Maurice Fulton long ago suspected that the Kid had laid a false trail to conceal his own past and to protect his friends. Only in recent decades has it been possible to unravel the fantasies that the Kid composed. Upson undoubtedly improved on the basic stories (e.g., he had a thing for eyes: "those blazing, baleful orbs" and "red lightnings flashed from the Kid's eyes") but this kind of verbal excess was expected as a way of attracting readers and selling books.[22]

A Dead Man for Every Year of His Life?

As his notoriety grew, the young outlaw shifted his energies from reinventing his own past to manipulating the press. His greatest success, or at least the most enduring one, was the boast that he had killed twenty-one men, one for each year of his life. In articles published prior to his death, both his age and the body count varied somewhat, but the number settled at twenty-one. Billy bibliographer Jeff Dykes sought to trace this legend; Garrett credited the Kid with eleven victims, which is probably still too high.[23]

The earliest known report of this claim in an extant New Mexico newspaper appeared in the *Daily New Mexican* for 19 July 1881: "He [Billy the Kid] was just twenty-one years of age when he met his death, and boasted that he had killed a man for every year of his life."[24] This paper compiled a list of victims but came up short of twenty-one. The *Daily Optic* printed its account of the Kid's death in the evening edition of 18 July, but made no mention of the persons killed either then or in follow-up articles. What the *Daily Optic*'s contemporary the *Las Vegas Daily Gazette* may have said is concealed because no copies of the 18 July number or pages three and four of the 19 July *Daily Gazette* have been found. The *Daily Gazette*, however, had telegraphed the news across the country on the morning of the 18th.[25]

The *Chicago Tribune* reported the Kid's demise at length on page two of its 20 July number. The news was taken from a dispatch, dated 18 July, to the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, while the *Las Vegas Daily Optic* received credit as the actual source of the original two-paragraph story. When we compare this report with the *Daily Optic* of the 18th, the *Tribune* indeed had quoted the dispatch but added a lengthy and new final paragraph. The *Indianapolis News*, and probably newspapers elsewhere, also printed the exact same three-paragraph dispatch that appeared in the *Tribune*.[26] This new paragraph made the Kid twenty years and ten months of age and included a few inaccuracies not seen elsewhere, while it noted, "He openly boasted that he had killed twenty-one men."[27]

Despite the credit, this third paragraph was *not* from the *Daily Optic*, although the date of the original story must have been 18 July. Almost surely the source was the other Las Vegas newspaper, the *Daily Gazette*, of which we have no surviving copy for this date. The ultimate source, however, was Billy the Kid, who displayed his innate sense of press agentry in the echo of his claimed age and number of victims. For it to have gone out on the telegraph on 18 July, he presumably launched this story not long before his

death. The exaggeration in the claim was evident at the time, but only well into the twentieth century did serious examination of the statistics begin. As the *Chicago Tribune* said in its 20 July obituary, "All mankind rejoices, and the newspapers will now have something else to talk about."[28]

In his last days, Billy was really on a roll in the press, but behind his nonchalance lay his growing ego. Perhaps the continuous use of the word "notorious" in newspaper articles fueled this phenomenon in a way that was more pejorative than just calling him an outlaw or a murderer. When he arrived in Las Cruces just prior to his trial in early April 1881, one quote had him saying that at least two hundred men had been killed in Lincoln County during the past three years, "but that he did not kill all of them." The letter writer thought that twenty murders could be charged against him.[29] His conviction for the murder of Sheriff William Brady and sentence of death probably helped wipe the smirk off of his face, but left his ego intact. The day before his blazing escape from the Lincoln County Courthouse, he reportedly boasted: "People thought me bad before; but if ever I should get free, I'll let them know what bad means."[30]

"The gauziest fabrics of a whiskied brain"

The historical record exhibits at least one more instance in which Billy the Kid probably fed a visiting newspaperman a story that grew into a real whopper. The tale came out only after his death on the night of 14 July 1881. The story circulated widely and apparently had a major impact on public perceptions for a few months, until Garrett buried it with sarcasm in *The Authentic Life*. This fable, spun by an unnamed correspondent of the Philadelphia *Times*, claimed one Young Duncan, "now a successful trader at Alamosa, New Mexico, in the 'Black Range,'" as its source.[31]

The story goes that after wandering lost on the Llano Estacado in far eastern New Mexico in April 1880, Duncan stumbled across Billy the Kid's "castle," a round, adobe, cone-shaped affair about thirty feet across with a great spring in the center. The Kid's own garments better fit an Easterner's fantastic vision of a Mexican bandito aspiring to be a Middle Eastern potentate:

> He wore a blue dragoon's jacket of finest broadcloth, heavily loaded down with gold embroidery; buckskin pants, dyed a jet black, with small, tinkling silver bells sewed on down the sides. . . . But his hat was the most gorgeous and the crowning feature of his get-up, as it is with

> the Mexicans. It was what is known as a "chihuahua," made of costly beaver, with a flat crown and a brim ten inches wide. And this whole structure of a hat was covered with gold and jewels until it sparkled and shown in a dazzling and blinding manner, when one looked upon it.[32]

Nothing about the story is creditable. Edmund Fable Jr. repeated nearly verbatim the description of the Kid's "castle" and his fantastic clothing in his own book, issued in September 1881.[33]

Examination of a run of the Philadelphia *Times* confirmed that it favored sensationalist stories, similar to those in the *New York Sun*, and not unlike yellow journalism popular at the time. The *Daily New Mexican* occasionally reprinted articles from the Philadelphia *Times*, showing that the paper circulated in New Mexico. With minor editing, this 20 July article appeared in the *Boston Daily Globe* on 22 July, in the *Chicago Tribune* on 23 July, and doubtless in other major newspapers as well. Historian Harold L. Edwards has made the *Boston Daily Globe* version readily available.[34]

"A Noted Bandit's Career," as the story was titled, drew an emphatic rejection in New Mexico. The first such response may have been a long article by P. (Pat) Donan, datelined from Lamy, New Mexico, 29 July 1881 and published initially in the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*. The *Chicago Tribune* reprinted this retort on 7 August. Donan, "the 'fire-eater' journalist" according to the *Las Vegas Daily Gazette*, obviously had a wide acquaintance among the journalism fraternity and held major mining properties in New Mexico as of 1881.[35] In language that Upson must have admired, Donan pronounced the whole story of the Kid's gorgeous style and his castle on the plains to be "the wildest bosh" and "the gauziest fabrics of a whiskied brain." In laying out his own version of the Kid's career, Donan leaned heavily on another Lincoln County War veteran, Marion Turner, and unfortunately contributed his own share of humbug and fiction.[36]

Garrett, on the other hand, described the Kid's dress as neat and elegant; he was usually in black, not decked out like some Italian brigand or Mexican guerrilla. Garrett referred to the Donan article by describing Billy's stronghold at Los Portales as anything but a fairy castle impregnable to foes with impassable approaches. The hideout consisted instead of a small cave and a snubbing post—not even a corral.[37] Given the imagery in the *Times* article, the target of Garrett's refutation was unmistakable.

The punch line to the 20 July article was its dateline: Fort Sumner, New Mexico, 10 July. That date was four days before Billy the Kid was shot. A

companion piece, dated at Las Vegas, New Mexico, 19 July, covered the Kid's death and also ran in the *Times*, but the 10 July date on the "Noted Bandit's Career" article has been completely overlooked. This piece was written and sent back to Las Vegas for telegraphic dispatch while the Kid was still alive and potentially able to contribute to it.[38] Had he lived to see the story, he would have loved the way its fabulous content tied in to his growing sense of self-importance.

The question we should ask is whether Billy himself invented the story by using the ploy of a Young Duncan to lay another false trail, this time to cover his own origins and current whereabouts. It would have been entirely in character for him to have done this, and, outside New Mexico, no one would have been the wiser. This story—or ploy—would have been the capstone to his bamboozling the press, a neat follow-up to the tale of twenty-one dead men in as many years.

In an effort to identify the correspondent who filed this story, available issues of the *Daily New Mexican* from June and July 1881 and the *Las Vegas Daily Gazette* from July and August 1881 were examined in hopes of finding someone attached to the Philadelphia *Times* mentioned as passing through Santa Fe or Las Vegas. Newspapers were very good about noting visiting colleagues, and 1881 brought many editors and correspondents to New Mexico to chronicle the mining booms around the territory. Journalists from Kansas City and Leavenworth, Kansas; New York; Boston; Indianapolis; and Quincy, Illinois, among other places, found notice in the issues reviewed, but no one from Philadelphia received remarks. Perhaps it was "T. A. J.," the correspondent of the *Times*, who wrote the long description of the St. John's Day celebration at San Juan Pueblo printed in the *Philadelphia Weekly Times* on 9 July 1881.[39]

Two Billies and the *National Police Gazette*

Pat Garrett claimed that no fewer than three yellow-covered, cheap novels had been foisted upon the public. He presumably made his count by October 1881, when the newspaper at Watrous told its readers that his book had been completed.[40] Dykes, in his admirable bibliography, listed nine book-length entries of "Billy books," some about a Billy LeRoy, prior to the appearance of Garrett's *The Authentic Life*, sometime in March 1882.[41] Of these, Dykes located rare copies of, and thus confirmed the existence of, three titles: *The True Life of Billy the Kid* (1881; Dykes no. 6); *The Life of Billy the*

Kid, a Juvenile Outlaw (1881; Dykes no. 8); and *The Cowboy's Career or, the Daredevil Deeds of Billy the Kid, the Noted New Mexico Desperado* (1881; Dykes no. 9). An original of *The True Life of Billy the Kid* (1881; Dykes no. 7) has since been found and reprinted.[42]

So far as their contents are known, all of these titles relied upon newspaper dispatches and were spiced with the overwrought imaginings and literary excesses of the authors. Whether these early novels contributed anything to the Kid's mushrooming legend is doubtful and, in any case, they postdated his death, meaning that he would have been unable to contribute directly to the sensational crimes and adventures portrayed in their pages. His personal manipulations of the media had ended.

It is possible, however, that the first book to mention Billy the Kid by name and include some of the adventures of William Bonney had been published even before his career ended abruptly on that July night. This book was no. 3 in Dykes's bibliography. Entitled *Billy LeRoy, The Colorado Bandit or, The King of American Highwaymen,* it was first advertised in the *National Police Gazette* for 2 July 1881. Dykes never located a copy but one survives in Yale University's Beinecke Library and a microfilm version is accessible.[43]

Available on microfiche is Dykes's no. 15, an 1883 reprint of the Billy LeRoy book. This release has been filmed from a Library of Congress copyright-deposit copy. Since Dykes did not see copies of the 1881 editions (his nos. 3 and 4), his comparisons are not reliable. What is true is that the only differences between the 1881 and 1883 editions are the fonts and makeup of the title pages and the placements of four illustrations; the texts are identical.

The bulk of the narrative is a partly fictional version of the adventures of an actual Colorado badman, Billy LeRoy, who was lynched on 23 May 1881.[44] Mixed in with LeRoy's story is occasional use of the name Billy the Kid; garbled accounts of the fight at the Greathouse Ranch in New Mexico; a meeting with Governor Wallace; Dave Rudabaugh; Tom O'Phallier (O'Folliard); and other elements of Bonney's last year or so. Two individuals, Billy LeRoy and William Bonney, are thoroughly confused here, which is consistent with articles in the *National Police Gazette* in 1881.

Dykes's concern that the first edition was rewritten following the death of Billy the Kid is invalid because the book ends with the lynchings of Billy LeRoy and his brother. This book could have been completed any time after May 1881. Undoubtedly, copies of it circulated in New Mexico, although no comments about it, editorial or otherwise, are known. The time frame is too tight for Bonney to have seen a copy, but had he done so, we

might expect initial puzzlement followed by a raucous outburst from seeing even a badly distorted version of several episodes in his life included in a book. Christopher "Kit" Carson had an experience like this once and found it humbling; Billy the Kid would have laughed out loud.[45]

Pat Garrett and the *Las Vegas Daily Optic*

Garrett's book was more than just a biography of Billy the Kid; the sheriff used it to try and settle some scores with various newspapers. His denouncement of the Philadelphia *Times*' glorification of the Kid has already been noted. He also had a problem with the *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, first after that paper claimed it had the Kid's trigger finger in a jar on display in its office, and then when it reported that a Las Vegas "sawbones" had the body dug up and Billy's skull "dressed," as they said in those days, for public presentation.[46] These claims incensed the sheriff, who launched a thinly veiled attack on "one of these weekly emanations . . . called 'The Optician,' or some similar name." He assured readers that every hair of the Kid's head and every bone of his body lay undisturbed in the old Fort Sumner military cemetery, saying, "I speak of what I know."[47]

Any rebuttal made by the *Daily Optic* has vanished, but the paper was not through with the Kid yet. Garrett's reference to no fewer than three yellow-covered, cheap novels about the Kid's career by October 1881 is probably about right. In December, however, the *Daily Optic* published its own account of the Kid's career: "The Dead Desperado, Adventures of Billy, the Kid, as Narrated by Himself." This version appeared as eleven chapters in issues of the paper between 12 December and 23 December 1881.[48] Only chapter two, which would have been in the 13 December number, is missing now.

The series listed no author. The scribe may have been the editor of the *Daily Optic*, Russell Kistler. At one point, the writer told the Kid that he was known as Charley Fresh, clearly a pseudonym. The structure of the story resembled the Philadelphia *Times* odyssey, only this time the narrator and Billy departed together from Santa Fe and rode to the Kid's castle somewhere near the Cerrillos Hills, where a dozen gunmen greeted them. Billy did admit to the proper name of William Antrim. However, almost nothing about his life and activities as purportedly narrated by Billy himself in the "Dead Desperado" was factual, and the language impresses one as considerably more temperate and even somewhat stilted compared with the other novels already in circulation. Newspaper articles, many of which—augmented

by a generous dose of imagination—the *Daily Optic* itself must have supplied, provided the basis for this series.

Although most of the text was cast as a dialogue between Billy and the author, the Kid had died five months earlier and could hardly have provided any of the story. This fact must have been obvious to readers at the time. Further, apart from his stay in the Santa Fe jail from January through March 1881, his activities kept him out of northern New Mexico. If there had been any thought of reprinting the eleven chapters as a paperback novel, the idea died. The venture would have probably failed anyway because the *Daily Optic* story did not have the dramatic flair, and therefore the salability, of novels already in print. As a journalist, the *Optic*'s editor would already have known about plans for an early printing of Garrett's own history of the Kid.

A Dime-Novel Failure Becomes a Popular Hero

Dime novel westerns first appeared before the Civil War, and the late nineteenth century witnessed a blossoming of this literary form. Billy the Kid's entry into this circle may have just predated his death. His first appearance was in *Billy LeRoy, The Colorado Bandit or, The King of American Highwaymen*, the paperback described earlier. Dykes and Daryl Jones provide us with the known titles of dime novels about Billy the Kid.[49] The list is a short one, considering the immense and still growing bibliography for this badman. Why, given his dramatic exit at the very peak of his notoriety, did he not become a dime-novel hero like Jesse James?

Jones believes that the Kid's failure lies in the refusal of the reading public at the time to condone unjustified violence.[50] With one exception, the dime novels that did exploit the Kid's misadventures could not explain his lawlessness as a justifiable response to persecution and revenge. Writers cast him as a man all bad with nothing to vindicate his rebellion against established social and legal codes.[51] Any social and legal injustice that might have encouraged his violent actions, such as the murder of his one-time employer John Henry Tunstall, receded deep into the background.

He killed people without acceptable reasons, which was not necessarily grounds for prosecution, but he found that he liked doing it. This, as he learned, could get you into trouble; murders for no cause compounded by allegations of cattle rustling and horse thefts did not lead to portrayal as a social bandit. When Billy exited the scene, the relief was almost universal.

That attitude began to change in the early twentieth century with Emerson Hough's writings and eventually Walter Noble Burns's *The Saga of Billy the Kid,* works that fit Jones's classification of hardbound fictionalized pseudobiographies.[52] Here we begin to find the Kid's antisocial activities rationalized, and readers responded by granting him the status of a popular hero. By the late twentieth century, Billy had become to some writers a latter-day Robin Hood or a bad man with a good side, while to others he remained a cold-blooded killer with a many-sided personality.

Always interesting, the Kid himself created deceptions that still serve as blind trails for historians. These footprints ensure that whatever we make of him, Billy the Kid will remain an evergreen subject in the field of Western history. As such, the Kid will ride forever.

Notes

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3. William A. Keleher, *Violence in Lincoln County, 1869–1881* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1957), 293–95; W. M. Morrison, *Billy the Kid: Las Vegas Newspaper Accounts of His Career, 1880–1881* (Waco, Tex.: W. M. Morrison Books, 1958); and James H. Earle, *The Capture of Billy the Kid,* The Early West series (College Station, Tex.: Creative Publishing, 1988).
4. Keleher, *Violence,* 288–89.
5. Keleher, *Violence,* 318–19; Utley, *Billy the Kid,* 174; and Frederick W. Nolan, *The West of Billy the Kid* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 266.
6. *Newman's (Las Cruces, N. Mex.) Semi-Weekly,* 16 April 1881, p. 2 and 20 April 1881, p. 2.
7. *Santa Fe Daily New Mexican,* 11 May 1881, p. 4.
8. *Santa Fe Daily New Mexican,* 18 June 1881, p. 3; 29 July 1881, p. 3; and *Las Vegas (N. Mex.) Daily Gazette,* 16 September 1881, p. 4.
9. Utley, *Billy the Kid,* 259n13.
10. Pat F. Garrett, *The Authentic Life of Billy, the Kid: The Noted Desperado of the Southwest, Whose Deeds of Daring and Blood Made His Name a Terror in New Mexico, Arizona and Northern Mexico,* intro. by J[eff]. C. Dykes, The Western Frontier Library series (1882; reprint, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), 4–5.
11. Ibid., 153–55, 154.
12. Ibid., 4, 13.
13. *Silver City (N. Mex.) Enterprise,* 3 January 1902; *Alamogordo (N. Mex.) News,* 9 December 1948, p. 7; and Keleher, *Violence,* 74–75.

14. *Rio Grande (N. Mex.) Republican*, 8 April 1882, p. 2.
15. Keleher, *Violence*, 75. The *Mora County Pioneer* newspaper cited by Keleher was published at Watrous, New Mexico, from 1881 to 1885.
16. Nolan, *West of Billy the Kid*, 295.
17. John P. Wilson, ed., *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid as I Knew Them: Reminiscences of John P. Meadows* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004), 34–35, 142–44.
18. Garrett, *Authentic Life*, 17; Jerry Weddle, *Antrim is My Stepfather's Name: The Boyhood of Billy the Kid*, Arizona Historical Society Historical Monograph, no. 9 (Tucson: Arizona Historical Society, 1993), 42–43; and Philip J. Rasch, *Trailing Billy the Kid* (Laramie, Wyo.: National Association for Outlaw and Lawman History in affiliation with the University of Wyoming, 1995), 25.
19. Wilson, *Pat Garrett*, 34.
20. Garrett, *Authentic Life*, 31–34; Wilson, *Pat Garrett*, 35.
21. Garrett, *Authentic Life*, 31; Keleher, *Violence*, 155–56; Frederick W. Nolan, "Boss Rustler: The Life and Crimes of John Kinney," pt. 1, *True West* 43, September 1996, 14–21, and pt. 2, *True West* 43, October 1996, 12–19; and Nolan, *West of Billy the Kid*, 63.
22. Garrett, *Authentic Life*, 23, 51.
23. *Chicago Tribune*, 7 August 1881, p. 7; and Garrett, *Authentic Life*, xxiii–xxiv.
24. *Santa Fe Daily New Mexican*, "Billy the Kid," 19 July 1881.
25. *Las Vegas (N. Mex.) Daily Gazette*, "We Wish to Remark," 21 July 1881.
26. Harold L. Edwards, *Goodbye Billy the Kid* (College Station, Tex.: Creative Publishing, 1995), 138–39.
27. *Chicago Tribune*, "The Kid Killed," 20 July 1881, p. 2.
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