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When veteran writer Ron Hansen's historical novel *The Kid* appeared in 2016, it was greeted with a steady drumbeat of applause. Reviewers saluted the novel for three first-rate achievements: (1) Hansen was nearly always historically accurate, following closely the life of Billy the Kid and the history of the Lincoln County War; (2) his imagined characters, conversations, and events were usually plausible, well in line with what was known about territorial New Mexico; and (3) he told the story in polished and sometimes even elegant prose. Reviewers quickly celebrated Hansen's new work about the Kid as the best and most-important novel about Billy.[1]

In the nearly 140 years since the death of Billy the Kid in 1881, dozens of other historical novelists have struggled with how to tell his dramatic story.[2] At first, dime novelists chose hyperbole and sensationalism, giving little attention to authoritative facts. From Billy's death until the mid-1920s, most novelists, following the lead of several journalists and a handful of biographers, depicted Billy as a violent, murderous desperado. However, after the appearance of Walter Noble Burns's romantic biography *The Saga of Billy the Kid* (1926) and the first films about the Kid, novelists softened their image of Billy and some even

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painted flattering portraits of him.[3] Later, other writers such as Zane Grey, E. B. Mann, and Nelson Nye, following the familiar character triplex—hero, heroine, and villain—of the Western, adhered to patterned formula fiction. Then, beginning in the 1950s and 1960s, a more-complex Billy the Kid, neither an all-white- nor all-black-hat character, began to emerge in publications. As historians and biographers started depicting an ambiguous Billy, novelists also filled their fiction with a New Grey Billy, a bifurcated character embodying both positive and negative features.[4] In the early twenty-first century, this Janus-like Billy dominates the historical fiction about him. At first, that was not the case.

The following pages survey historical novels about Billy from a western and cultural historian's perspective. The analysis emphasizes the historical accuracy of each novel, how their authors dealt with established history, and which characters, events, and ideas they invented. Literary critics, of course, would approach the novels from a different viewpoint, placing more emphasis on plot, characterization, and literary style. This essay applies the same kind of scrutiny for accuracy given to historical and biographical accounts of the Kid to historical fiction about him.

More than a few historians and literary critics have offered a wide variety of opinions on what ought to be the rightful place of and appropriate guidelines for historical fiction. For example, one demeaning critic contemptuously dismissed historical novels as "a kind of mule-like animal begotten by the ass of fiction on the brood-mare of fact, and hence a sterile monster."[5] On the opposite side of the spectrum, writers such as Ernest E. Leisy think of historical fiction as an alternative, valuable approach to understanding the past. The most widely accepted guidelines for writing historical fiction state that novelists should adhere to the known facts about historical characters and events but have a literary license to invent figures, conversations, and happenings to fill out their historical landscapes. The following survey subscribes to this latter position in evaluating historical novels about Billy the Kid.[6]

Billy the Kid's life was, to employ biographer Robert M. Utley's words, "short and violent."[7] Most writers think he was born as Henry McCarty in New York City on 23 November 1859 but have not confirmed that place and date. Others think he was born elsewhere, perhaps in 1855 or 1861. Nearly all recent Billy biographers trace his next steps to Indiana, Kansas, and Colorado before placing him in Santa Fe, New Mexico, about 1873. The identity of his biological father remains unknown and only a few scattered facts are available about his mother, Catherine McCarty. She may have been born in Ireland or in the eastern United States, but nothing is known for certain about her first marriage and the father of her two sons, Henry (Billy the Kid) and Joseph. We know that Henry/Billy dearly loved his mother, that she married William Antrim in 1873, and that Henry and Joseph

were witnesses to the ceremony in Santa Fe. Shortly thereafter, the Antrim family moved to the booming town of Silver City, New Mexico.

For the next two years, a modicum of stability characterized young Henry's life in Silver City, where his stepfather tried his hand at odd jobs—butchering, carpentry, and mining—but not very successfully. Catherine took in boarders and won the admiration of Henry's and Joseph's friends and more than a few town parents. But tragedy soon crouched at Henry's door. His mother's worsening tuberculosis drove her to bed in the spring of 1874, and her life ended the next September. Henry, now absent his mother's guidance and his wandering stepfather's oversight, fell in with a man dubbed Sombrero Jack. The older man led Henry into petty thievery, for which he was jailed. The wily Kid escaped up the jail's chimney and, fearing more lengthy jail time, skipped out for Arizona in September 1875.

Henry's life fell into similar but also new patterns in Arizona during the next two years. A young man of small stature in his late teens, Kid Antrim could not carry out taxing cowboy work and turned to hotel jobs and card-playing instead. After falling in with the older John Mackie, a former military man, the pair began stealing horses, especially from soldiers. Arrested again, Henry broke free, this time returning to a hotel-saloon at Camp Grant, where blacksmith Francis "Windy" Cahill had frequently taunted the young Kid. On 17 August 1877, Cahill inflicted a more serious beating of the Kid, throwing him to the floor and pummeling him. Windy called Antrim a pimp, and Henry declared the blacksmith a son-of-a-bitch. Although the Kid asked Windy to stop beating him, the burly blacksmith continued. The Kid then yanked a pistol out of his belt, jabbed it into Windy's ample belly, and fired off a deadly shot. Henry the Kid Antrim stole a race horse and galloped east, escaping to an uncertain location. The blacksmith died an agonizing death the next day.

After a month or so of wandering through southern New Mexico to its southeastern corner, Antrim, now calling himself Billy Bonney, entered a new country on the verge of an armed civil war. On the House side were Lawrence G. Murphy, Jimmy Dolan, and John Riley—former military men, now merchants holding many county residents under the lion's paw of economic domination. Opposing them were Englishman rancher and investor John Tunstall, lawyer Alex McSween, and, at a distance, cattle king John Chisum. Billy, after bouncing around for a few weeks, signed on with Tunstall as a rider and gunman.

From the end of 1877 to mid-summer 1878, escalating shootouts set the Lincoln area aflame. In February 1878, House followers murdered Tunstall; on 1 April, Billy and a handful of others killed Sheriff William Brady; and from 15 to 19 July, the two sides, unleashing a blizzard of bullets, shot it out in a battle for Lincoln. When Lt. Col. Nathan Dudley, the commander of nearby Fort Stanton,

brought a contingent of buffalo soldiers into Lincoln on the morning of 19 July and leveled his cannon at McSween supporters, essentially chasing them out of town, the balance of power swung clearly toward the Murphy-Dolan shooters. Billy and a few others raced out of the burning McSween home, and under heavy fire, they escaped with their lives.

Billy Bonney's life changed decidedly in the next three years. Previously a follower of the McSween or Regulator group, the Kid now became the leader of a small group of loyal followers, rustling cattle and horses in New Mexico and selling them in Texas or, on occasion, rustling in Texas and bringing the livestock to sell or butcher in New Mexico. Billy's reputation as a bandit grew as he roamed through Lincoln County and the Texas panhandle.

His life changed again toward the end of 1880 with Pat Garrett's election as the Lincoln County sheriff with the mandate to capture or kill the Kid. In late December, Garrett caught up with Billy and his small group of followers, captured them, and took them to jail in Santa Fe. In March, the Kid's jailers took him south to Mesilla, where he was tried for, convicted of, and sentenced to hang for the murder of Sheriff Brady. Just days before his date with the gallows, Billy killed two of Garrett's deputies, J. W. Bell and Bob Olinger, in Lincoln, escaped jail, and rode away under the gaze of astonished onlookers.

For the next two and a half months, the Kid, now known as Billy the Kid, barely kept ahead of the pursuing Garrett. Instead of leaving for safer places, he was drawn to see his sweetheart, Paulita Maxwell, and perhaps other young women in Fort Sumner. On the darkened night of 14 July, serendipity failed Billy. Garrett came to Pete Maxwell's house to gather information about the Kid. Tragically for Billy, he too happened into Maxwell's bedroom, and before he could discover who was veiled in the darkness, Garrett killed him. Billy's burial took place the next day at the military cemetery in Fort Sumner. His brief life had ended in violence—and death.

Even before the Kid's death at the hands of Pat Garrett in 1881, and particularly in the months immediately after his demise, newspapermen depicted Billy as a murderous outlaw. A few days after Billy's end, the *Las Vegas (N.Mex.) Daily Optic* described him as "the terror not only of Lincoln county, but of the whole territory"; he was a "bold thief [and] a cold-blooded murderer." Less than a week later, the Silver City *New Southwest and Grant County Herald* denounced the Kid as a "low down cut-throat with not one redeeming quality."[8]

Similar censures appeared in New York newspapers. In the *New York Times*, he was "a notorious western desperado"; in the *New York Mail*, a fabricated story libeled Billy as having broken into Pete Maxwell's home in Fort Sumner, "terrorizing the family and threatening the women." Even more outrageous, the *New York Daily Graphic* tabloid described Billy escaping at Stinking Springs

(not true), "with fangs snarling and firing a revolver like a maniac." New Yorkers read that the Kid "stole, raped, and pillaged" his way across New Mexico.[9]

These sensational newspaper stories were a prologue to the dime novels just then appearing and flourishing in the next decade. The direct links between this journalistic hyperbole and the soon-to-come dime novels cannot be overlooked. More than a few facts—often false and negative—in the periodical accounts reappeared in subsequent dime novels. From the opening of the Civil War to the early twentieth century, the United States was awash in thousands of cheap, sensational, and quickly written novels, which were available for a nickel or a dime. New advances in inexpensive printing, an escalating interest in a Wild West, and the reading public's desire to escape the memory and divisive aftermath of a horrendous Civil War were major reasons for the rising fascination with this new, mass-produced form of popular literature.

Dime novels about Billy the Kid numbered many fewer than those about Buffalo Bill, Jesse James, and purely fictional characters such as Deadwood Dick and Old King Brady. In his provocative book, *The Dime Novel Western*, Daryl Jones suggests that the widespread depictions of Billy as a "fiend incarnate" or "young monster" limited the market for Kid dime novels. Rather than introduce "the persecution and revenge motif" to rationalize Billy's violent actions, as Edward L. Wheeler had done in his very popular Deadwood Dick series, the Kid dime novels overflowed with his dastardly, repugnant behavior. "The public's refusal to condone unjustified violence," Jones adds, limited the number of Kid dime novels published in the 1880s and 1890s.[10]

The first likeness of a Billy the Kid dime novel was Thomas F. Daggett's *Billy LeRoy, the Colorado Bandit: or, the King of American Highwaymen.* This most curious of the nearly dozen or so available dime novels about Billy the Kid appeared first in 1881, then with a slightly altered title in 1882, and was reprinted in 1883.[11] The unusual ingredient in Daggett's dime novel was the divergent content of his work. Said to be a "biography" of Billy LeRoy (Arthur Pond), an actual Colorado highwayman, the novel is also a fictionalized, partial portrait of the life of New Mexico's Billy the Kid. After tracing the violent and irrational exploits of LeRoy's dramatic life in Indiana and Colorado, Daggett conflates LeRoy's career with that of Billy the Kid. Even more confusing, the author gives his Colorado outlaw the name "Billy," or "the Kid."

Daggett never identifies LeRoy as Billy Bonney, but his character meets and travels with the New Mexico Kid's friends and participates in the same events in which Bonney took part. While in southern Colorado, LeRoy encounters "Tom O'Phallier" (Tom O. Folliard), "one of the most notorious desperadoes in the West" and his fellow outlaw Dave Rudabaugh.[12] During a cave ritual, LeRoy undergoes initiation into the Phallier gang and soon after proves himself a

genuine highwayman by holding up a stagecoach and robbing a man of his considerable amount of cash. LeRoy does so well that the outlaws call for his elevation to captain of the gang.

Throughout his novel, Daggett depicts Billy LeRoy in Colorado and New Mexico, where he is a vicious, driven killer. Without much cause, Billy whips out his pistol and shoots down many opponents; he seems immune to the bullets of others and always on target with his own shots. Assertive, desperate, his soul "dead to remorse," with "no respect for law," and never "troubled" by "the consequences of his deeds," Billy "stole, murdered, [and] ravished women" after arriving in New Mexico.[13] Defiant to the end, Billy tells a gang of lynchers, as he faces their rope, "I am ready to meet the cashier. Go on with your cart."[14]

This initial Billy the Kid dime novel features familiar facets of the genre. The West is a wild place ruled by the strongest and most-desperate characters, without much law and order. Close families, farmers, and mushrooming cities are nearly nonexistent. Instead, individualistic miners, outlaws, and cowboys dominate the landscape. Sexual subjects, in the main, are also taboo. Plot tricks, including fantastic disguises, false identities, and strings of dramatic action rule the scene. In their times, dime novels were meant to entertain, titillate, and perhaps inform (often with falsehoods). Daggett's work was no exception. Excessively sensational, unbelievable, and contrived, the story of Billy LeRoy (and some of Billy Bonney) nonetheless proved sufficiently entertaining and sold well enough to warrant two reprints. It also helped launch the legendary life of New Mexico's Billy the Kid, albeit in an imagined, altered form.

Also in 1881, the *Las Vegas (N.Mex.) Daily Optic* published an eleven-part serial entitled "The Dead Desperado, Adventures of Billy, the Kid, as Narrated by Himself."[15] This brief account, more dime novel than biography (although it claimed to be the latter), both follows and deviates from the life story of Billy. The nameless author opens the tale in a Santa Fe gambling hangout where Billy threatens to kill a gambler who has tricked him in a card game. The narrator of the story, first called Charlie Fresh and then John Antrim, plays aimlessly with his names, but Billy takes a liking to him. They ride back to Billy's adobe castle to the south, where the Kid and his gang of a dozen or more outlaws hang out.

Billy then tells the history of his birth in Ireland, the poverty of his family, the death of his father, and the migration of his mother, his two sisters, and himself to Canada. Soon thereafter, his mother marries "an old reprobate named Antrim," whom the serial depicts as a drunken, dictatorial stepfather.[16] The whole family moves to Silver City, and Billy quickly gets into trouble. He defends himself by arguing that if he had "received proper treatment from others," he would not have embarked on a career of violence and murder. Billy steals two or three items, and when a Chinese man informs on him, Billy sneaks up on him and

cuts his throat.[17] Captured and jailed, Billy escapes through the chimney and runs off to Arizona, where he falls into the clutches of a bullying blacksmith. Unable to stand the blacksmith's attacks, Billy shoots him and dashes back to New Mexico, where Billy kills a sheriff and a dozen others in a "tough tussle."[18] All these stories are historically inaccurate.

The narrator portrays Billy as a violent gunman always ready to take a life while also painting him as friendly, caring, and warm. Probably, the writer's pedestrian style, his lifeless story, and the numerous vague details kept publishers from printing the series, early on, in book form. In addition, publishers in the area knew of Sheriff Pat Garrett's forthcoming book on the Kid.

Neither of these two novels attracted much attention. Nor did *The True Life of Billy the Kid*, by Don Jenardo (John Woodruff Lewis) (1881), but it was reprinted several decades later and attracted comment as one of the few available Kid dime novels.[19] Jenardo combines fact and fiction throughout his plot. Billy comes from New York to New Mexico, lives for a time in Silver City and Arizona, and then spends most of his days in Lincoln County, New Mexico. Billy sides with John Chisum and "Alex McSwain," viciously opposing the Murphy-Dolan house. He is involved in the killing of Sheriff Brady, murders Morton and Baker, and heads up a gang of thieves and gunfighters after the big fight in Lincoln. "Pat Garret" apprehends Billy, but the gunman breaks out by shooting Deputies Bell and "Ohlinger." Garret catches up with Billy in Pete Maxwell's bedroom and shoots the Kid—with Maxwell absent from the scene.

Jenardo narrates most segments of Billy's story with a unique slant. Billy is a blood-thirsty killer and John Chisum is an equally barbaric cow thief. Murphy and Dolan, Sheriff Brady, and Pat Garret are all good guys. Governments in Santa Fe and Washington, D.C., play almost no role, and New Mexico governor Lew Wallace is portrayed as a weak-kneed, changeable, and deeply flawed territorial official. The largest divergence from fact is found in the author's off-key treatment of Billy's character. As a leading man, he is a complete villain, with no positive qualities. A diminutive, pale-faced killer, Billy murders dozens of people, even dipping his finger into the blood of some victims he has gunned down. There is no sympathetic or empathetic bone in his small body.

The other Billy dime novel reprinted in the twentieth century was Edmund Fable's *The True Life of Billy the Kid; the Noted New Mexican Outlaw* (1881).[20] In his preface, Fable argues that previous writers have led eastern readers astray with their portrayals of Billy the Kid as a rich man, living in a castle, and armed with elegant, gentlemanly manners. These wrong-headed accounts, Fable tells us, were "made up of whole cloth," adding that if eastern readers believed these stories about Billy, they understood as much about him "as a burro has of the beauties of Milton."[21]

Fable states that "William Bonny" was born in New York in a "tenement house in the Fourth Ward of that city."[22] After Billy's widowed mother failed to survive or prosper on her own, she married "Thomas Antrim" and moved west. Nearly all this story is false or based on unconfirmed names and place of marriage, and the role of William Antrim, Billy's real stepfather.

After an upbringing in Colorado, Billy sets off on his own and arrives in Silver City. On his first night in town he attends a dance, gets drunk, is robbed, and, finally, is arrested and jailed on false charges. Fable relates that a tipping point occurs when Billy, while suffering in jail under the trumped-up penalty, decides that thereafter, "I'll hold my own with the best of them."[23] Escaping up the chimney, young Billy happens into a freighter's wagon and lands in Lincoln County, New Mexico. Almost overnight, he kills a malicious blacksmith and becomes embroiled in the "Tontsill" and "Chisom" side of the county's civil war. When Chisom tries to cheat him, Billy kills his riders. These killings, the author says, show Billy as a "heartless Kid" guilty of "cold-blooded murder."[24] The shootings continue. Sometimes Fable's Billy thinks about his vicious actions, but mostly he recruits followers like "Tom Phaller" to help with rustling and killing.

None of the incidents described by Fable follow the actual events in the last years of Billy's life. The details about the killing of Sheriff Brady, the Lincoln shootout at the "McSwain" house, the gunfight at the "Muscalero" reservation, and Billy's death at the hands of Pat Garrett fall wide of their historical mark. Fable's promises of authenticity fail in nearly every aspect of the novel. It is not clear whether Fable, as with other dime novelists, lacked the facts necessary to tell a true story of Billy or whether he distorted evidence to satisfy his storytelling whims. If readers expected to get the facts about Billy and the Lincoln County War, they would have been disappointed with the novelist's many distortions. Like nearly all the dime novels about the Kid, this one depicts Billy as a trigger-happy murderer. Fable's Billy lacks depth, warmth, and substance as a character; he places Billy in numerous scenes in which historically he took no part; and the author omits the Kid from other events in which he was a central figure. Those readers hungering and thirsting for a veracious literary portrait of Billy the Kid would have to look elsewhere.

The Cowboy's Career; or, the Daredevil Deeds of Billy the Kid, the Noted New Mexico Desperado (1881), authored by "One of the Kids", exists in a single copy with only three of its many chapters available to modern readers.[25] It too presents the Kid as a merciless killer, gunning down William "McClusky" (McClosky), William Morton, and Frank Baker without hesitation. Quickly thereafter, Billy murders Sheriff William Brady and George Hindman, but at a Chisum ranch rather than on Lincoln's main street. The shootout in Lincoln in July

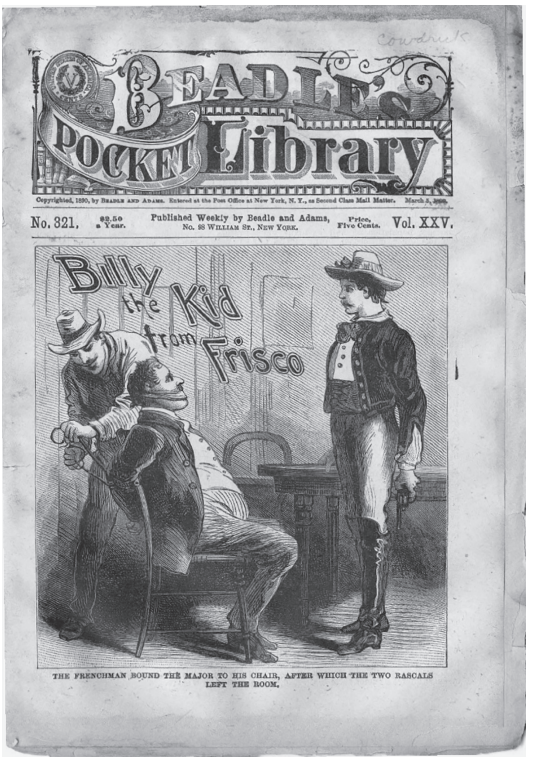

Fig. 1. Cover of J. C. Cowdrick, *Billy, the Kid from Frisco,* Beadle's Pocket Library, no. 321 (New York: Beadle and Adams, 1890). Courtesy of Special Collections and Archives, Boise State University, Idaho.

1878 is almost entirely inaccurate. With little truthful history, this novel was yet another portrait of Billy as an unrepentant murderer.

Dime novelists sometimes played tricks on readers by reprinting earlier works under new titles, hoping to attract additional buyers. Such was the case with J. C. Cowdrick, who first published *Silver-Mask, the Man of Mystery; or, the Cross of the Golden Keys* in 1884. Then, in 1890, the book was reprinted as *Billy, the Kid from Texas; or, Silver Mask's Clew* and again in the same year, as *Billy, the Kid from Frisco.*[26]

Most Billy the Kid dime novelists attempt to place parts of his actual biography and considerable historical context onto their pages. But Cowdrick's work breaks from the usual standard and is a decidedly imagined mystery story overflowing with action, adventure, and entertainment. The author spins a tale of drama and frenetic action with little emphasis on place, historical events, or

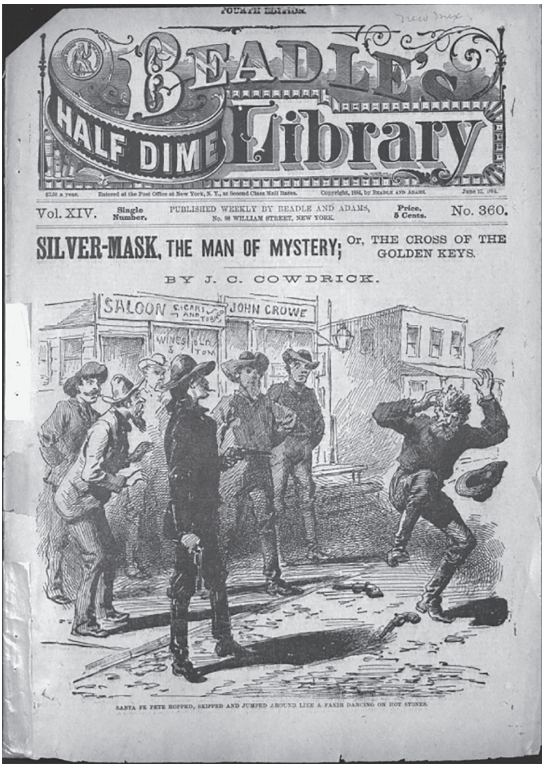

Fig. 2. Cover of J. C. Cowdrick, *Silver-Mask, the Man of Mystery; or, the Cross of the Golden Keys*, Beadle's Half Dime Library, no. 360 (New York: Beadle and Adams, 1884). Courtesy of New Mexico State University Library, Archives, and Special Collections, Las Cruces.

known characters. "Billy, the Kid," makes sporadic appearances. He is present only briefly, entering first to capture the story's heroine. In that episode and those that follow, Cowdrick describes Billy as a "mighty chief," although, as one character says, he is really "only a common cut-throat." Another adds that Billy is "a man of great nerve and daring," and a third describes Billy as having dressed like a Mexican dandy.[27]

On two different occasions, Billy escapes his jailing, even though closely guarded in a cabin. One of the desperado's opponents explains that the Kid is too strong and supported by too many followers to remain locked up for long. He "has got more friends right here in this very town than ye'd ever dream of."[28] As predicted, Billy breaks out in a few hours. Later, he again escapes a lock up. In the final sequence of events, the Kid and his riders are caught up in the search for a

Lost City and its hidden treasure. A mysterious figure, Silver-Mask, helps capture the Kid. Again, Billy escapes. The final line, after other strands of the narrative are braided, states, "How Billy, the Kid from 'Frisco ended his days, is known to all." Perhaps some readers understood this cryptic closing line. Most readers might have been puzzled because the novel never explains Billy's origins, the development of his character, his personal life, or what happened to him. Indeed, the novel's ending is but one more indication of how this Billy the Kid dime novel differs from others. Cowdrick produced a mediocre work that brought Billy the Kid into the narrative but only as a minor background figure—perhaps for interest's sake. In the end, he produced an enigmatic, mysterious, and ahistorical story.

One of the last Billy the Kid dime novels, Francis W. Doughty's *Old King Brady and "Billy the Kid,"* (1890) was published, about a decade after the Kid's death.[29] This work features a well-known New York detective, Old King Brady, pursuing Billy the Kid in a distant, lawless New Mexico. Like so many other dime novels, this one intersperses episodes of dramatic, violent conflict with scenes of adventure and travel. Dime novel authors kept readers engaged with gunfights and other horrendous clashes and then followed with depictions of the major characters traversing the picturesque and almost-placid landscapes of a mysterious, scenic West.

Most memorable in this novel is the skewed depiction of Billy the Kid. He is the worst of human beings, a brutal murderer. He leads violent attacks, viciously assaults opponents, and kills on a whim. Early on, Billy shoots down a pious minister, who does no more than try to protect his virtuous daughter from the Kid's rapacious actions. Later, Billy kills several others—again, without cause. In the opening and closing scenes of the novel, Doughty paints Billy with the darkest of hues. As one acquaintance put it, Billy "is the blood thirstiest little cowpuncher whatever straddled a horse"; he "thinks he owns the earth."[30] In the final sentences, the narrator, pontificating from his pulpit, asserts that no one in New Mexico was "so vile a specimen of mankind as this bloodthirsty boy, whose chief delight was murder."[31]

Regrettably, the East Coast author understood little about Billy or New Mexico. Although he had authored more than a thousand fictional works, including a series on Old King Brady, Doughty's distorted commentary undermines the authenticity of his fiction. Billy neither hung out in Ojo Caliente in northern New Mexico nor lived in a cabin surrounded by a lake and rushing river. After the Kid passed through the Silver City area in his flight to Lincoln County in 1877, he never returned to stay there. He and John Chisum did not collude to launch a murderous civil war in eastern New Mexico.

By the early 1890s, a satanic Billy dominated portraits in fiction and biography. Nearly all the dime novels about the Kid—at least a dozen and perhaps as many

Fig. 3. Cover of Francis Worcester Doughty, *Old King Brady and "Billy the Kid," or, the Great Detective's Chase*, New York Detective Library, no. 411 (New York: F[rank] Tousey, 1890). Courtesy of Special Collections and Archives, Boise State University, Idaho.

as seventeen—portrayed a villainous Billy. When the dime novel depictions combined with the dark views of Billy in contemporary national and New Mexican newspapers, a black-hearted Billy the Kid rode violently across fictional and biographical landscapes in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century and for much of the next quarter-century.

Three conclusions about Billy the Kid dime novels are in order. First, these works rarely revealed much correct information about Billy; most were imagined fiction rather than empirical history or biography. Second, nearly all the authors knew little about the Kid, his good or bad character, his roles in the Lincoln County turmoil, or the depth of his relationships with Hispanics and his romances with several young women. Most importantly, however, their excessively bleak portrait of Billy, alongside newspaper stories that drew similar

conclusions, launched the Kid on the legendary trail as a murderous desperado. These dime novels were the main literary vehicle for the satanic Billy who rode into history as a malevolent rascal of the worst order until the mid-1920s.

Why the dime novelists portrayed Billy in such dark terms is not entirely clear. Perhaps it was because they had so little biographical or historical information that they filled in the gaps with invented characterizations and events. Alternatively, it may have been that so many other competing dime novels overflowed with such desperate characters. Possibly the best explanation is that dime novelists headquartered on the East Coast had heard about a murderous Kid through sensational articles published in eastern newspapers and magazines such as the *National Police Gazette*. They followed what they had heard or read. Even after the Pat Garrett–Ash Upson biography, *The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid*, appeared in 1882, there is little evidence that dime novelists drew on that more-sympathetic source for their frenetic fiction.

After the flurry of a dozen or so dime novels about the Kid in the 1880s and 1890s, fiction writers between 1900 and 1930 seemed hesitant to tackle Billy the Kid. About a half-dozen such works appeared in that thirty-year period, none of which have been as influential as the sensational dime novels of the late nineteenth century or other fiction that appeared after 1950.

Ambitious writers wishing to embed Billy in a historical novel faced three large barriers in the opening decades of the twentieth century. First, negative images of the Kid in fiction still predominated, reflecting the dark pictures of Billy in dime novels. Second, popular western fiction writers, following the model of the widely popular hero in Owen Wister's bestselling novel *The Virginian* (1902), peopled their novels with heroic and romantic protagonists. Wister, Zane Grey, Max Brand, and B. M. Bower (the only woman writing well-known Westerns at the time) repeatedly depicted their leading men as law bringers, upholders of community standards, and virtuous models for a wide spectrum of American readers. Billy the Kid did not fit that pattern. Third, the popular Westerns of Grey, Brand, and others adhered to the formulaic triplex of character types in their plots: hero, villain, and heroine. If Billy failed as a hero, Pat Garrett was certainly not a villain (although L. G. Murphy or Jimmy Dolan might have been), and no obvious heroine came on scene—unless one was created and treated as a historical figure.[32] Any writer trying to create an appealing fictional portrait of Billy in the early twentieth century would have to hurdle these formidable barriers to achieve their dreams. No one did.

There were a few attempts, most of which were unremarkable. Not surprisingly, writer Emerson Hough, who had written darkly about Billy in *The Story of the Cowboy* (1897) and a bit less so in *The Story of the Outlaw* (1907), portrays a

sinister Kid in his novel *Heart's Desire* (1905). In Hough's romantic, sentimental novel about Edenic Heart's Desire (White Oaks), New Mexico, Billy plays a distant, minor role as the violent outlaw who comes into view as a threat to community stability. Rather than closely following the major contours of Billy's life, Hough devotes his story to a woman-starved passel of men. Women in the novel represent civilization (the East, the "States") and disrupt the gaggle of cowboys, errant former husbands, and men at odds with the demands of family, occupation, and responsibility. Obviously, Hough was interested much more in these themes of gender competition and humor than in telling the story of Billy the Kid in fictional form.[33]

Before the mid-1920s, novelists lacked a strong, credible biography of Billy the Kid on which to base their historical fiction, although some thought Ash Upson's and Pat Garrett's *The Authentic Life of Billy, the Kid* (1882) was a dependable source.[34] A dramatic change in direction occurred after the publication of Walter Noble Burns's romantic, somewhat-sensational life story of Billy in *The Saga of Billy the Kid*.[35] A skilled and powerful historical dramatist, Burns gave writers a biography that depicted the Kid, at least in part, as a hero, and told a new kind of life story on which to base their novels. Commentators on the historiography surrounding Billy the Kid have made much of the major impact of Burns's book on subsequent Kid biographies, but few of them recognized how much it has influenced novelists.

In the 1920s and 1930s, historical novelists faced two conflicting trends in western American literature. The first trend, which had little impact on novels dealing with Billy the Kid, was the rapid rise of western regionalism. As it did in the American South, the regional movement took the West by storm. Rooted in the Local Color movement of the late nineteenth century and in the works of early twentieth-century writers such as Mary Austin and Willa Cather and then encouraged by the plethora of small magazines that sprang up in the 1920s, writers about the West were encouraged to show how western history and physical settings shaped diverse western characters.[36] This approach did not grab novelists writing about Billy the Kid.

Instead, they found a place for Billy in the stylized formula Western, a genre of fiction that arose after Wister's *The Virginian*. The Western firmly established itself in American popular culture, especially in the writings of Zane Grey and Max Brand, and before WWII in the Westerns of Ernest Haycox and Luke Short (Frederick Glidden). Before Burns's *Saga*, western writers lacked an appealing Billy-as-hero-figure; now they had a model for an attractive protagonist in Burns's Billy and a rascally villain in L. G. Murphy, Burns's "Lord of the Valley" figure. Now armed with imagined heroines, historical novelists had the triumvirate of characters they needed for formula Westerns.[37]

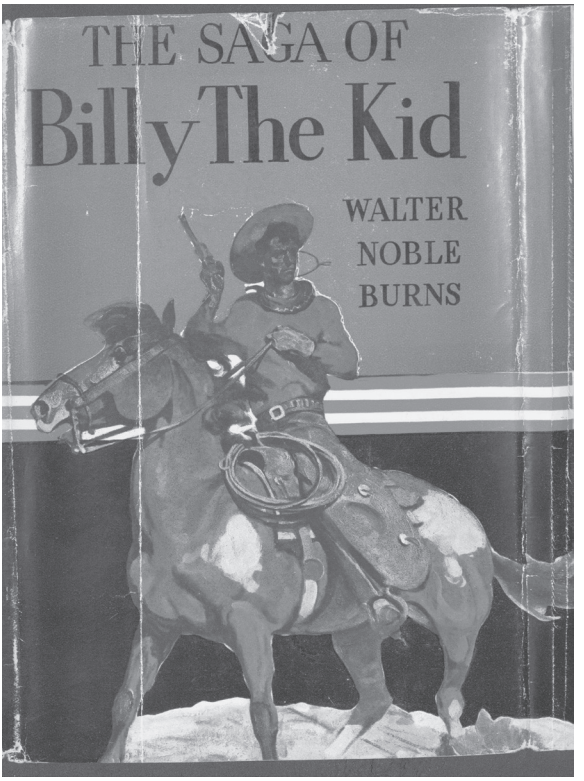

Fig. 4. Cover of Walter Noble Burns, *The Saga of Billy the Kid,* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1926). Courtesy of the Center for Southwest Research, Zimmerman Library, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

Hollywood wasted no time capitalizing on the new heroic Billy advanced in Burns's biography with the film *Billy the Kid* (1930), directed by King Vidor and starring the former football legend, Johnny Mack Brown. But immediately after the appearance of Burns's *Saga*, novelists were still reluctant to place heroic Billy characters in their western historical fiction. Most of the novels appearing in the late 1920s remained locked into the earlier demonic pictures of Billy or dealt with him as a largely inconsequential character.

Between 1926 and 1929, publishers released four novels in which Billy the Kid appears, in some cases dominating the narrative and in others turning up only as a minor character. Adhering closest to history, although quite different in their portrayals of the Kid, were Dane Coolidge's *War Paint* and William MacLeod Raine's *The Fighting Tenderfoot*, both appearing in 1929.[38] Coolidge follows the now-familiar hero, villain, and heroine format of the formula

Western but turns Billy into a devilish villain. Although the Kid is a distant figure in much of the plot, his reputation as a killer—having murdered nearly twenty people—hovers over and threatens to bedevil the good guys and their attempts at communal acts. Named Tuffy Malone here, Coolidge describes the Billy-like character as "bad medicine," and "the best pistol shot in the country," and writes "you'll hear from him [Tuffy-Billy]," for "there is one of the worst characters on the whole frontier, a city tough, gone wild in the West."[39] True events in Billy's life appear in the story, but the stereotypes of popular Western fiction abound: a speedy plot loaded with action; a stalwart hero (not Billy); deplorable villains; and a vivacious heroine. In addition, like Zane Grey, Coolidge unconvincingly handles human emotion, overblowing his characters' passions, fears, and stubbornness.

William Raine, the British-born author of more than eighty Westerns, flooded the markets of popular fiction from 1908 to 1958. In *The Fighting Tenderfoot*, Raine's plot, characterizations, and bits of setting reveal his indebtedness to the Kid story. His Billy character, named Bob Quantrell, is the fastest gun, the haughtiest killer, and the most arrogant rider in the territory of Jefferson County. A violent civil war catches him between cattle baron Wesley Steelman (John Chisum) and smaller cattlemen and merchants, the latter reminiscent of Murphy and Dolan. Other ingredients of the plot are Raine-imagined rather than history-inspired. Hispanics, although supporters of Quantrell, are referred to as "greasers" and, on one occasion, "not civilized." A romance between hero Garrett O'Hara, the lawyer "tenderfoot" of the title, and widow Barbara Steelman, allows love to win over war. Raine closely follows Wister's format in *The Virginian*; O'Hara has to go after the villain Kid Quantrell before he can marry the heroine.[40] Conventional stereotypes inherited from the formula Western keep this work from being a strong historical novel about the Kid.

Even Zane Grey, like Dane Coolidge, dealt tangentially with Billy in *Nevada* in 1928.[41] The Kid is a friend of the hero, Nevada, and Grey refers to him nearly ten times in the novel. Early on, Billy emerges as a gunman-desperado in the vicious Lincoln County War. But in the final pages, Grey dramatically changes direction in his portrayal of the fictional Kid. In *Nevada*, a central, well-respected figure argues that characters like Billy, Wild Bill Hickok, and Wess [*sic*] Hardin are not "bloody murderers." Instead, they are necessary for settling and civilizing the West. He declares: "There are bad men and bad men. The West could never have been populated without them."[42] This bit of folk-wisdom provides an almost–O. Henry-like ending to a Zane Grey novel.

The most innovative and sympathetic portrait of Billy appeared in Eugene Manlove Rhodes's classic novella, *Pasó por Aquí* (1927).[43] Rhodes speaks only once of Billy, referring to Pat Garrett as "the man who killed Billy the Kid," then

cloning the young Billy in Ross McEwen to tell a favorable, even compassionate story about the Kid.[44] McEwen has robbed a bank and is galloping south to escape when he encounters a Mexican family near death from diphtheria in their adobe. Rather than flee the very sick family, the hero announces, "I'm here to help you." He gives up escape to nurse the family. A few days later Pat Garrett, who has been pursuing McEwen, arrives at the adobe, sees what good the young robber has done, and allows the thief to escape. Rhodes provides a good-Billy story, a type that would appear with more frequency later in the century. At the same time, the author is a Garrett defender, painting an exceedingly positive portrait of a diligent but sympathetic sheriff.

Although these novels appeared soon after the publication of Burns's biography, only a handful were published in the next quarter-century. While interest in the American West was at a high point in the early thirties, novelists did not turn to Billy the Kid for their historical fiction.

Unfortunately, E. B. Mann's *Gamblin' Man* (1934) is particularly disappointing as historical fiction because his subversion of facts distorts the Billy the Kid story.[45] Although the author warns readers at the onset that his book is a novel, not a work of history, he abandons the main contours of Billy's life. Mann grafts a romance story—Billy's love for pretty, vivacious Kathie Haskel—onto his action plot. Revealingly, no Paulita Maxwell or other young Hispanic women walk through these pages. Instead, we get the author's imagined and implausible heroine.

Other changes by Mann misinterpret Billy's life. The author removes Billy from the Buckshot Roberts incident and from the killing of Morris Bernstein at the Mescalero Agency, and he makes Billy a very close friend of Pat Garrett and, for the most part, a close partner to John Chisum. Mann overemphasizes John Tunstall's love for Billy (Tunstall's long, voluminous letters to his family never mention Billy), makes Susan McSween a dear friend, and changes the details of the Five-Day Battle in Lincoln.[46] Meanwhile, Alex McSween is a stick figure reduced to a Bible-caressing caricature. Most importantly, Mann has Garrett killing a Billy-look-alike in Pete Maxwell's bedroom and allowing Billy and sweetheart Kathie to ride off and begin a new life in Mexico or elsewhere.

If the historical novelist should embrace known history, Mann fails miserably with his changes and mistakes, which lead to distortions in the Kid's biography. The author's alternations and miscues, large and small, shift the Billy the Kid story away from history and allow the transformed and imagined Billy rather than the historical Billy to ride through these troubling pages, despite the presence of Burns's biography of Billy the Kid in the marketplace.

Published a few years later, Nelson Nye's *Pistols for Hire* (1941) proved to be an anomaly, the most damning novel about Billy in the mid-twentieth century.[47]

Nye's hero and narrator, Flick Farsom, a twenty-something cowboy who begins riding with Chisum but then transfers his loyalties to the Murphy-Dolan side, views Billy as "a murderer and thief. He would drive a bullet through a fellow's heart as lustful as he'd rape a woman; and times beyond count he did both. He was a man without remorse—without regret or pity."[48] If someone tried to write something about a "good" Billy, he was lying through his whiskers. Nye's novel was a piece of partisan fiction, with faulty uses of history and a distorted viewpoint.

Zane Grey tried a second time to treat Billy in *Shadow on the Trail* (1946), with results similar to his first effort.[49] Again, the Kid is off scene and the descriptions of him are equally dark. One character describes Billy as "the chain lightin' an' poison of the frontier," and another declares him as "all that's bad on the frontier rolled into one boy of eighteen years."[50] Major errors also abound. Among them are making a character, Henderson, an actual member of the Kid's gang, stating that Billy played a central role in igniting the Lincoln County War, and reporting that "Pat Garrit" shot down Billy in the town of Lincoln. Grey's *Shadow* follows the familiar format of the popular Western with Billy playing the role of villain rather than that of hero.

At the end of the 1950s, two novels gained and retained notoriety as pioneering, strong fictional works about Billy the Kid. In the 1950s, the diligent and path-breaking research of Philip Rasch—and, to a lesser extent, the histories of William A. Keleher, Robert Mullin, and Maurice Garland Fulton—placed at the fingertips of novelists larger amounts of historical information about the Kid. Edwin Corle's *Billy the Kid: A Novel* (1953) illustrates the new fund of historical information now available to writers.[51] Some sections of his work read more like history and biography than fiction. The major characters seem historical and quite true to form.

Still, Corle utilized mistaken facts that historians had yet to correct. Once in Silver City, Corle's Billy hangs out as a chum with badman Jessie Evans, and Billy stabs a Chinese laundryman during a robbery spree with Jessie. Billy also kills a black man in Arizona and two Mexicans while in Mexico—before riding into Lincoln County. All are wrong. Corle renders Billy an irrational killer, committing murder on several occasions because he is angry or uncomfortable and not because he is threatened with violent confrontation. These frequent killings place Billy among the earlier devilish Billys. Although it was published in the 1950s, Corle drafted the novel in the 1930s, closer in time to the stock images of a murderous Billy.

Besides the killer instinct, Billy is also a lover, in this case to Abrana García, said to be one of the young Hispanic women he coupled with in Fort Sumner. The Kid bullies his way into her heart, then her bed, even though she is already

married to an older man. Nothing in the novel suggests that it is Paulita Maxwell to whom Billy returns after escaping from the Lincoln jail in 1881.

Most intriguing about Corle's novel and about historical fiction in general is the license historical novelists take in filling the spaces between historical facts. For example, what did Billy *feel* when his mother died, when he killed Windy Cahill or Joe Grant, and when he slept with Paulita, Abrana, or Celsa? What did he *say* to his stepfather, to John Tunstall, or to Alex McSween in Lincoln, or to Governor Wallace? By combining history and imagination, Corle tries to fill the historical silences in so many of Billy's emotions and thoughts.

Charles Neider also served up large slices of history in his novel, *The Authentic Death of Hendry Jones* (1956), but he made so many changes to the historical record that his fiction is deeply flawed.[52] He shifts the setting of his story from Lincoln County to the Monterey area of California. In making this major transfer, Neider abandons the cattle culture and isolation of remote territorial New Mexico, placing the action in the more-settled seacoast of California. In the new scene, mists, gloom, abalone fishing, and a trip to Old Mexico replace sun, heat, open-range ranching, hunting, and Texas connections. The shift in setting undercuts the regionalist's strong desire to illuminate the power of place to shape events and character.

Neider's cast of characters is another major change, especially apparent in the narrator role of Doc Baker. Doc tells little about Hendry Jones's—the Kid's—background but speaks extensively about the Kid's character in the months immediately before his violent death. Doc's Kid is courageous, often cheerful, and gregarious; he is also a callous and nonchalant killer. He is secular, even antireligious, and sexual, and will dispose of a close acquaintance for no apparent reason. Despite Doc's advice, the Kid follows his own murderous ways.

Several literary scholars and other writers praise *The Authentic Death of Hendry Jones* as a breakthrough in fiction about Billy the Kid. They and film historians also make much of *One-Eyed Jacks* (1961), based on Neider's work and directed by and starring Marlon Brando.[53] Clearly, Neider's novel is an innovative, appealingly written piece of fiction even if it fails as a believable account of Billy the Kid, particularly without the Lincoln County setting. The author's new locations—physical, occupational, and socio-cultural—do not work as veracious accounts of the historical Billy the Kid and the weeks leading up to his death.

Toward the end of the 1960s, two new trends began to impact writings and films about Billy the Kid. First, several diligent scholars turned up new information about Billy, particularly dealing with his earliest years and his family life. At the same time, American society and culture underwent dramatic transitions. Spurred on by negative reactions to the Vietnam War and the activism of many

Americans, especially on college campuses, Americans became less inclined to embrace traditional historical figures as heroes and heroines. In fact, the inclination was to find warts and blemishes in politicians, cultural figures, leaders, and many others. The growing disposition toward dissent, sometimes accompanied by an expanding cynicism, threw a large wet blanket of doubt over the roles of the demigods of the Old West.[54] These cultural trends helped shape the novels written about Billy the Kid. Rather than the evil desperado of the early dime novels or the more heroic character of Burns's biography (the two contrasting views of Billy in the pre-1960s period), the Kid instead became a bifurcated Billy, a young man combining negative and positive characteristics. In short, neither a black- nor a white-hat figure, the outlaw and the cheerful comrade emerged to reveal a New Grey Billy.

From the late 1960s onward, novelists developed this emerging ambivalent figure, depicting Billy the Kid as a Janus-faced character. He might veer toward violence and cruelty, but he also warmly embraced Hispanics, women, and several male colleagues. This two-sided Billy has dominated the historical fiction about him for the past half-century.

In 1967 historical novelist Amelia Bean published her *Time for Outrage*, which, at 450 pages, was to date the most extensive work of historical fiction about the Lincoln County War.[55] Bean focused on the events of 1877–1878, providing pen portraits of the major participants in the war and dealing with the two competing factions in Lincoln, the Chisum-Tunstall-McSween and the Murphy-Dolan combines. Nor did she overlook the Santa Fe Ring members, territorial officials, and military officers who involved themselves in the horrendous violence.

Two imagined figures, Luke Pender and Magdalena Perez, dominate the plot through a torrid romance. Revealingly, Bean does not deal extensively with Billy the Kid. Following the histories by William A. Keleher, Taylor Ealy, and Frederick W. Nolan, the author concludes that Billy was "never . . . during the war a leader of any group or contingent."[56] Or again, "Bonney could not have been a leader of men fighting for McSween."[57] Prone to strong opinions and quick violence, as illustrated in the Brady killing, Bean's Luke Pender pushes Billy aside as the main male presence in the novel.

In two ways, Bean enlarges the fictional recounting of the Lincoln County War. She deals at length with the ethnic-racial mix in the region, showing how Mexican-heritage and African American people were intimately involved in the events of 1877–1878. Bean also integrates women more thoroughly into the Lincoln County story. Sue McSween is a lively, assertive, and sometimes foolish participant in several events, and Mrs. Brady, a Hispanic woman living in Lincoln, is both opinionated and outspoken. More intriguing is Tia Lupe, another

local Mexican woman, a *curandera* (healer), who plies her skills as a healer and source of folk wisdom in the village of Lincoln.

Another novel, *The Outlaws* (1984), illustrates a trend in American fiction increasingly popular from the 1960s onward. Many publishers, recognizing the expanding and persistent interest in things western, capitalized on the growing fascination with violent and sexually explicit stories, appealing to these reader demands in the Adult Western genre.[58] Featuring steamy sexual encounters and several scenes of violence, Adult Westerns were extraordinarily popular in the closing decades of the twentieth century. Like many other Adult Westerns written under a pseudonym, Jane Toombs wrote *The Outlaws* under the name Lee Davis Willoughby.[59] It appeared as the forty-ninth entry in the multivolume Making of America Series. The author of dozens of books in several fictional genres, Toombs adopts the commonly used technique of many historical novelists: the addition of invented characters to ride along with historical figures. One of the first authors to employ explicit sexual encounters in a novel about Billy the Kid, Toombs keeps Billy's sexual activities outside the narrative. But hero Mark Halloran (Mark Dempsey) and heroine Tessa Nesbit engage in electric lovemaking. In fact, sex plays a more prominent role than violence does in this novel.

Toombs's Billy illustrates the ambivalent Kid figure, who began appearing in fictional and historical accounts from the 1960s forward. He is cheerful and warm toward Tessa's younger brother Ezra and helps other needy persons. But he is also selfish and self-absorbed; Billy is a killer who takes advantage of a young Hispana hopelessly enamored with him. Toombs features the ugly side of Billy more than his virtuous actions.

For the most part, Toombs closely follows the major events of Billy's life in Lincoln County. The killings of Tunstall, Brady, and McSween are mostly accurate, as are the depictions of the important happenings at the Greathouse Ranch, Stinking Springs, and Fort Sumner. Here, the New Grey Billy is in juxtaposition with the Adult Novel. The result is not first-rate, but is a reasonably accurate, readable, and provocative novel about Billy the Kid.

Two major—and unusual—novels appeared in the late 1980s, one diverging markedly from the bifurcated Billy figure and the other following it. Larry McMurtry's *Anything for Billy* (1988) includes an atypical portrait of Billy, here named Billy Bone.[60] Uncertain, irrational, and weepy, Billy exhibits few, if any, of the characteristics of the historical Billy. Giving his youthful, diminutive protagonist a less-than-brave or -courageous demeanor allows McMurtry to depict a lead man far different from those portrayed in most of the recent Kid novels or biographies.

McMurtry's Billy must have his way. Ben Sippy, the imagined narrator, and Joe Lovelady, Billy's cowboy buddy, try to bend to the Kid's will and ways. Billy

tolerates no disagreements with his opinions and actions, bullies his acquaintances into following his erratic ideas and deeds, and falls into depression when he dreams about the mysterious Death Dog and his own demise. Sippy, a Western dime novelist wide-eyed about his dreamed-up Wild West, flees Pennsylvania and his termagant wife. He tries, and usually flubs in his attempts, to understand a West and a Billy so at variance from his preconceptions and his love for a frenetic and unbound frontier. His gradual perception of what the West is really like is a major ingredient of the novel.

Anything for Billy evolves into something of a spoof, even though McMurtry's intentions were probably more serious. This novel is reminiscent of McMurtry's *Buffalo Girls* (1990), a novel about Calamity Jane. Both works satirize western demigods, Billy and Jane, but move little beyond satire and black humor. When compared with the abundant strengths and major achievements of McMurtry's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Lonesome Dove* (1985), these two novels badly falter. They are so laced with satire that Billy and Jane become little more than western caricatures in the literary and historical landscape.

Ben Sippy tells readers that Billy "was violent all right . . . [but] in his case the reputation [as a gunslinger] just arrived before the violence."[61] Billy moves without thinking; he "was just a puppet to his instincts, jerked this way and that by strings whose pull he couldn't predict."[62] It is not clear how much of what Sippy narrates in first person represents McMurtry's thoughts about Billy the Kid. Judging from McMurtry's general comments about a mythic West, one might speculate that he tried to question the dominant legends about the region, particularly in the person of Billy the Kid. That is as far as the speculation ought to go, perhaps.

A particularly unorthodox novel written about Billy the Kid is N. Scott Momaday's *The Ancient Child: A Novel* (1989).[63] This experimental work combines several ingredients in treating Billy as a supporting character: Native American myth and lore, Old West legends, and modern Indian life. It was the first novel by Momaday, a Native American author, after he won the Pulitzer Prize for *House Made of Dawn* (1968). Two characters stand at the center of the story. Set, an adopted Indian artist, is on a traumatic identity search, trying to find his biological father and true self. His journey turns him toward Grey, a young Kiowa-Navajo medicine woman. Through Grey's dreams or visions, the reader views Billy the Kid and his times.

Grey dreams of Billy, becomes his lover, and accompanies him on several of the most-written-about events of his life. She is the one who delivers the note about a hidden pistol in the privy, which he then uses to shoot down one of the deputies during his escape from the Lincoln jail. She also observes his involvement in the killing of Sheriff Brady and watches his capture at Stinking Springs. The images of the Kid in Grey's memories and dreams—and in the novel,

generally—are those of the bifurcated Billy. He readily kills (although is never labeled a murderer) but is also a jolly, clever, and loving companion.

Momaday's novel is not always easy to follow. It essentially lacks a plot. Bundled together are dreams and memories, descriptive passages, bits of poetry, strands of legends, and other experimental literary forms, often without explicit connections. Yet, in focusing on Native perspectives and using numerous dream scenes, Momaday adds fresh ingredients to Billy the Kid fiction.

In the early 1990s, a handful of novels attempted traditional as well as new approaches to historical fiction about Billy. Preston Lewis's *The Demise of Billy the Kid* (1994) adopts the most universally utilized trick in historical fiction: he invents an imagined character, H. H. Lomax, to ride alongside Billy in the Lincoln County War and until his death.[64] Lomax speaks of the befriended Billy as a grinning, warm buddy who grows increasingly negative, becoming a heartless killer seething with rage over Tunstall's murder. All of Lewis's major characters—the Murphy-Dolan gang on one side, the Chisum-McSweens (Alex and Susan) on the other—are flawed figures. Only Pat Garrett seems an upright, honest lawman. A more-than-adequate historical novel, Lewis's story is a flawed work with excessive use of metaphors and similes, and an ill-conceived romance between Billy and Rosalita, who shares beds with Lomax and the Kid.

Much more atypical is Rebecca Ore's (penname for Rebecca B. Brown) work of science fiction, *The Illegal Rebirth of Billy the Kid* (1991), which features the "rebirthing" of a "chimera" or rebooted clone of Billy the Kid in 2067.[65] The author's Billy, lost in the present, understands almost nothing after 1881. The meandering plot dramatizes the Kid's attempts to negotiate the chaos between the twenty-first century and the 1870s–1880s. Ore is a strong writer and knows a good deal about Billy's life and times, but her paranormal fiction will likely attract aficionados of science fiction much more than Old West readers.

Two other novels illustrate the extremes of recent historical fiction about the Kid. Ralph W. Cotton often introduces mistaken "facts" and distortions in his *Cost of a Killing* (1996).[66] He spins a yarn of intrigue, hidden gold, and romance, but fails to provide a credible portrait of the historical Billy. Cotton hides the facts of Billy's actual life from the reader. In contrast, Elizabeth Fackler's *Billy the Kid: The Legend of El Chivato* (1995), and at more than five hundred densely packed pages of historical material, is one of the longest historical novels about the Kid.[67] Fackler's novel offers as much biographical and historical material as nearly all nonfiction works on Billy. For the most part, she follows known facts and, along the way, adds conversations and thoughts based on the most thorough historical research.

Fackler's Billy is an appealingly complex figure. At times fun loving, genial, and loyal, he can otherwise be violent, vicious, callous, and murderous. The author achieves depth and breadth of character in showing, in one scene, that the Kid can win the hearts of any Hispanic woman but, in the next episode, that he can gun down those who stand in his way or challenge his actions.

Other additions to Fackler's novel increase its worth. Her treatment of Hispanics and women extends well beyond most fictional accounts of Billy. The depictions of Susan McSween, Billy's paramours, and his relationship with Paulita Maxwell are especially thorough. The author generally adds a great deal on the roles of women to what is usually a story about men. Indeed, sexual relationships play a large role in this story, with Billy sometimes frolicking in bed more than shooting his pistol.

Early in the twenty-first century, another cluster of historical novels about Billy appeared. Among these was Johnny D. Boggs's *Law of the Land: The Trial of Billy the Kid* (2004).[68] Much of this novel displays the author's dedication to historical accuracy. Most of what Boggs writes is sound history, following a good deal of the recently expanded information biographers and historians have turned up about Billy the Kid.[69] True, Boggs adds imagined conversations and amplifies characters' temperaments, but these additions will strike most readers as complementing or reflecting history, not distorting or ignoring it. Boggs uses flashbacks to add historical information and in doing so remains faithful to the main tracks of the Kid's known history.

Law of the Land depicts the two-sided Billy. He can be loving, friendly, and gregarious with his mother, John Tunstall, and his pals. Conversely, Boggs's Lew Wallace sees Billy as an evil rascal who becomes a turncoat. The talks between Ira Leonard, Billy's lawyer in his last few months, and Governor Wallace furnish images of the complex Billy, positive in the eyes of his lawyer and negative from the perspective of the governor.

It is surprising, considering how much Boggs had been following authentic history, to see his deviations from historical accounts in treating Billy's final weeks. For instance, Boggs has Pete Maxwell meeting with Pat Garrett in Roswell and telling the sheriff that Billy is hiding in Fort Sumner. The author also depicts Billy and Paulita making love in her Maxwell bedroom before the Kid leaves to retrieve meat, an action that leads to his death at the hands of Pat Garrett. Additionally, he departs markedly from what dependable sources say about events immediately after Billy's sudden death. Still, one comes away from this novel pleased with its generally solid history. A skilled writer, Boggs keeps his story open to general readers, remains true to the historical facts, and provides a provocative and persuasive interpretation of a complex Billy the Kid ranging from friendly to mean depending on the situation around him. On account of

these abundant strengths, this work is among a handful of the best novels about Billy the Kid.

John A. Aragon promises much in *Billy the Kid's Last Ride* (2011) and then disappoints in the second part of his novel.[70] Aragon's Billy exhibits a complex personality. He can be compassionate, passionate, and very sexy, often identifying with down-and-out Hispanics, who venerate him as El Chivato. Equally, the Kid can also be dangerously assertive and murderous, particularly, for example, in his wanting to kill Morton and Baker soon after they are involved in the murder of John Tunstall. When Aragon allows Billy to reflect on his life and his future, he offers revealing insights into the Kid's personality. Even so, Billy is, unfortunately, off scene too often.

Regrettably, the second half of Aragon's novel fails as historical fiction. He sends Billy south into Mexico after his escape from the Lincoln jail in April 1881 and involves him in a horrendous shooting war among cowboys, Indians, and Mexican *ricos*. Although Aragon tries to be innovative in his plot, in his use of Spanish-English narration, and in his imagined historical events in the closing chapters of his novel, his reach exceeds his grasp in these hoped-for innovations.[71]

The largest challenge for historical novelists writing about Billy the Kid is the same as for biographers and historians: how to tell a believable story about the Kid when so little is known about his first fourteen years and too little is known about his last seven. Part of the challenge is to fill in the spaces between the historical facts in convincing ways. Some reviewers have pointed to the best novels that have successfully risen to this large challenge in writing about Billy. Often listed as the strongest fiction about the Kid are works by Corle (*Billy the Kid*), Neider (*The Authentic Death of Hendry Jones*), Bean (*Time for Outrage*), and Fackler (*Billy the Kid: The Legend of El Chivato*). Others note McMurtry's *Anything for Billy*, Momaday's *The Ancient Child*, and Boggs's *Law of the Land* as notable works of fiction about Billy.[72]

Ron Hansen's *The Kid* (2016) surpasses all these earlier novels in merit.[73] It is a first-rate work, displaying careful, inviting combinations of historical accuracy, skillful scene-setting, and plausible interpretations of Billy. Hansen's work may be the most historically correct of any novel written about the Kid. Drawing thoroughly on important Billy books by Robert M. Utley, Frederick Nolan, and several others, the novelist sticks close to the known facts of Billy's life. Readers see the conflicting theories about the outlaw's journey from his natal New York, through brief stays in Indiana, Kansas, and Colorado, and on to New Mexico in 1873. Most of the book deals with Billy's life in Silver City (1873–1875), Arizona (1875–1877), and Lincoln County (1877–1881).

Along the way, Hansen constructs nearly always accurate scenes of Billy's presence in Silver City, Arizona, and Lincoln County. He shows Billy's love for

his mother, his alienation from his stepfather, and his tendency to fall in with older, wayward men who lead him to thievery, and even murder, in Arizona. More attention-getting are Hansen's treatments of the major events in Lincoln County: the killing of Billy's friends, John Tunstall and Alexander McSween; the Kid's part in the murder of Sheriff Brady, bad-Billy's worst offense; and his participation in thievery and other inexcusable killings.

Still, Hansen gets a few things wrong or distorts the Kid's story beyond known facts. William Antrim, Billy's stepfather, was not a mean man, although distant and sometimes disinterested. Hansen overemphasizes Billy's amorous adventures and conquests, is too critical of Susan McSween, and mistakenly writes that Celsa Gutiérrez is both sister and cousin of Pat Garrett's wife. Few have claimed Yginio Salazar as Billy's cousin, but Hansen does. Finally, Billy did not tell Judge Bristol to go to "Hell, hell, hell" at the end of his murder trial in Mesilla. That canard was scotched years ago.

Billy the Kid interpreters often pigeonhole him into opposing categories: Billy as villain or Billy as hero. Hansen provides a more provocative, appealing portrait: Billy the complex protagonist, who can be a murderer, thief, and liar while also being a carefree, joyous, and upbeat chum. In avoiding either-or and embracing both-and interpretations, the author furnishes a full-bodied picture of the controversial Billy.

Ron Hansen offers an engrossing story in an appealing, straightforward manner. No reader will have trouble following Hansen's lucid and thoughtfully presented plot, characterizations, and ideas. In short, Hansen's *The Kid* is a first-rate, top-drawer historical novel on one of the West's most written-about characters. The most recent novel about Billy the Kid is also the best, an unusual serendipity.

Finally, a few conclusions on historical fiction about Billy the Kid.[74] From the end of Billy's life to the present, historical novelists have followed interpretive paths like those that biographers and historians have trod—with a few exceptions to be kept in mind. Until the mid-1920s, most writers of fiction about Billy the Kid, like biographers and historians, viewed Billy negatively. He was a violent young man, even a murderous desperado. Burns's creative biography, *The Saga of Billy the Kid*, however, offered a less dark and less sinister view of the Kid and even suggested that in some ways Billy was heroic. After Miguel Otero, William Keleher, Philip Rasch, and Robert Mullin, from the 1930s to the 1960s, provided other information and perspectives, novelists were increasingly willing to portray a bifurcated Billy, part hero and part villain. With additional valuable information emerging from the several works by Billy specialists such as Frederick Nolan and Robert Utley, fiction writers found still more evidence to portray the Kid as a two-sided young man. Over more than a century, novelists, biographers, and historians have moved from

negative to more positive portrayals and ultimately to the recent, more-complex picture of an ambiguous Billy.

Most novelists have avoided writing fiction seen through the consciousness of Billy the Kid. Since there are only a dozen or more letters available and a mere handful or two of other firsthand sources from the Kid, it is extremely difficult to probe his mind and draw out a historical and fictional portrait of him. Instead of trying to probe Billy's mind, novelists have imagined other young men to ride with or against the Kid—not surprising, of course, since this has been a favorite technique of historical novelists across many decades.

Frequently, nonfiction writers, diligent fact-gatherers of strong opinions, think of historical novelists as lesser sort of truth-tellers, if indeed veracious writers at all. As Paul Russell Cutright, a well-known authority of Lewis and Clark, notes, "Generally speaking, historians look down their noses at historical novelists."[75] To be sure, none of the leading biographers of Billy the Kid or historians of the Lincoln County region has pointed to novels as important sources for understanding these topics.

All the same, biographers, historians, and novelists have more in common than some have thought. As Wallace Stegner, our Wise Man of the American West, pointed out in a comparison of historians and novelists, "Calliope and Clio are not identical twins, but they *are* sisters."[76] Indeed, they share much in what we call "story," all wishing to grab the attention of readers through their storytelling techniques. Like novelists, biographer Walter Noble Burns and later first-rank biographers of the Kid such as Nolan and Utley dramatize events, present sharply etched characters, and contribute intriguing descriptions of scenes, all of which incorporate the highest values of storytelling associated with novelists.

Historical novelists can perhaps build a greater confidence in the value of their fictional works by adhering closely to historical characters and events in the Kid and Lincoln County stories. They need not imagine so many figures and occurrences. Nonfiction writers have shown that the history of New Mexico and Arizona in the 1870s and 1880s is replete with dramatic events, frenetic clashes, and attractive characters to hold hordes of readers. Newspapers, published and unpublished letters, and other primary and secondary sources are rich with detail for future historical novels.

Plus, several facets of the Kid–Arizona–New Mexico story remain to be delivered up in strong historical novels. Women's roles ranging from mother Catherine McCarty to sweetheart Paulita Maxwell have yet to receive strong fictional treatment, and now with Kathleen Chamberlain's superb biography of Susan McSween, novelists have enough information to bring her fully into their stories.[77] The young Hispanic women who so attracted Billy—Celsa Gutiérrez,

Abrana García, Nasaria Yerby, and probably others—remain enigmatic, though rich, possibilities for novelists.

No historical novelist has yet to bring Hispanics satisfactorily into their fiction about Billy, even though he and others repeatedly spoke of how much the Kid socialized with people of Mexican heritage. In addition to the young Hispanas mentioned above, Billy made many contacts with Yginio Salazar, Francisco Trujillo, and José Chávez y Chávez, and the Patrón, Montaño, and other families. None of these Hispanics have played major roles in novels about the Kid.

Finally, variant voices of the Kid story should appear more often in new Kid fiction. Novelists need to work more diligently to reveal what they think Billy saw, thought, and felt—without having to move beyond known history into the tangled thickets of fully imagined, unhistorical territory. We should also get into the minds of opponents such as the Murphy-Dolan adversaries, the anti-Billy legal authorities William Rynerson and Warren Bristol, the members of the Santa Fe Ring, Governor Wallace (eventually an opponent), and government officials in Washington, D.C., all of whom ought to be parts of full historical novels about the Kid. They provide the rich panoply of voices—literary viewpoints—that fiction writers ought to consider.

Historical novelists, for nearly a century and a half, have written numerous works of fiction about Billy the Kid. They have added much to the ruminations and conclusions about Billy and his complex world. Still, rich possibilities lie before ambitious authors who want to write even stronger novels about the Kid.

Notes

1. Ron Hansen, *The Kid: A Novel* (New York: Scribner, 2016). For positive reviews of Hansen's novel, see Alyson Hagy, "Billy the Kid: the Novel," *New York Times Book Review,* 18 November 2016; Paul Andrew Hutton, "The Kid, by Ron Hansen," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 10 November 2016; and Richard W. Etulain, "The Kid," *Western American Literature* 52, no. 1 (spring 2017): 123–124. Sections of the latter review appear later in this essay.

2. This essay deals with about thirty novels, counting those mentioned in the footnotes; perhaps as many as fifty have been published with traditional publishers. Yet to be tallied are the number of self-published novels, but possibly as many as two dozen have appeared. This piece draws on research for a forthcoming two-volume study of the life and legends of Billy the Kid.

3. Walter Noble Burns, *The Saga of Billy the Kid* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1925, 1926).

4. Four books have evaluated publications about Billy the Kid. By far the best is Stephen Tatum, *Inventing Billy the Kid: Visions of the Outlaw in America, 1881–1981* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), which provides probing comments on histories, biographies, novels, movies, and other treatments of the Kid in shifting cultural contexts. Another is Jon Tuska, *Billy the Kid: His Life and Legend (*Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994), which is the revised and updated edition of Tuska, *Billy the Kid:*

A Bio-Bibliography (1983; repr., Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997); it includes a brief biography and chronology and helpful chapters about Billy, and historians, novelists, and movies, but is marred by the author's caustic reactions to historians such as Robert Utley and other writers. A Wild West bibliographer, Ramon F. Adams, *A Fitting Death for Billy the Kid* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), limits his comments to nonfiction. Jeff Dykes, *Billy the Kid: The Bibliography of a Legend* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1952), is an extensive annotated bibliography. See also the very useful chapters on Billy in Kent Ladd Steckmesser, *The Western Hero in History and Legend* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965).

5. Quoted in David E. Whisnant, *James Boyd* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972), 140.

6. Ernest E. Leisy, *The American Historical Novel* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950). Several writers treat the diverse roles of historical fiction in commenting on the writings of Wallace Stegner in Charles E. Rankin, ed., *Wallace Stegner: Man and Writer* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996). See also Richard W. Etulain, "Western Fiction and History: A Reconsideration," in *The American West: New Perspectives, New Dimensions*, ed. Jerome O. Steffen (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), 152–74.

7. Robert M. Utley. *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 1.

8. *Las Vegas* (*N.Mex.) Daily Optic,* 18 July 1881; *Silver City* (*N.Mex.*) *New Southwest and Grant County Herald,* 23 July 1881.

9. These and other quotes from New York newspapers appear, in undated form, in part 3 of Edwin Corle's novel *Billy the Kid* (1953; repr., New York: Bantam Books, 1954), 237–39.

10. Daryl Jones, *The Dime Novel Western* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Popular Press, Bowling Green State University, 1978), 97, 98. See also Albert Johannsen, *The House of Beadle and Adams and Its Dime and Nickel Novels: The Story of a Vanished Literature*, 3 vols. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950; supplement, 1962). The paragraphs that follow draw heavily on Richard W. Etulain, "Billy the Kid among the Dime Novelists," *Outlaw Gazette* 30 (2017): 3–6.

11. Thomas Daggett, *Billy LeRoy, the Colorado Bandit; or, the King of American Highwaymen* (1881; repr., New York: Richard K. Fox, 1883). A slightly revised version appeared as Daggett, *The Life and Deeds of Billy LeRoy, Alias The Kid, King of American Highwaymen* (New York: Richard K. Fox, 1881). All quotations from novels will come from the latest cited version of each novel.

12. Daggett, *Billy LeRoy*, 27.

13. Ibid., 16, 43, 56.

14. Ibid., 62.

15. "The Dead Desperado, Adventures of Billy, the Kid, as Narrated by Himself," *Las Vegas* (*N.Mex.*) *Daily Optic*, December 1881, 12–23. The series is reprinted in Bob L'Aloge, *The Code of the West* (Las Cruces, N.Mex.: B & J Publications, 1992), 1–31.

16. L' Aloge, *The Code of the West*, 19.

17. Ibid., 19.

18. Ibid., 29.

19. Don Jenardo [John Woodruff Lewis], *The True Life of Billy the Kid*, Five Cent Wide Awake Library, no. 451 (New York: F[rank] Tousey, 1881), reprinted in Frederick Nolan, ed., *The Billy the Kid Reader* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 3–49.

20. Edmund Fable Jr., *The True Life of Billy the Kid; the Noted New Mexican Outlaw*, was also published as *Billy the Kid, the New Mexican Outlaw; or, the Bold Bandit of the West!* Both novels were published in 1881 by the Denver Publishing Co. and reprinted as *The True Life of Billy the Kid; The Noted New Mexican Outlaw* (College Station, Tex.: Creative Publishing Company, 1980).

21. Fable, *The True Life*, 5.

22. Ibid., 9.

23. Ibid., 14.

24. Fable, *The True Life*, 31.

25. One of the Kids, *The Cowboy's Career; or, the Daredevil Deeds of Billy the Kid, the Noted New Mexico Desperado* (Chicago and St. Louis: Belford, Clarke & Co., 1881). Another sensational, ahistorical dime novel published the same year was *Billy the Kid, a Juvenile Outlaw*, Morrison's Sensational Series, no. 3 (New York: John W. Morrison, 1881). It has little to do with the real Billy, although Michael McCarthy [sic], "*alias* Billy the Kid" (3), is born in New York City, commits his first murder there, and eventually arrives in New Mexico. A few fleeting references from the nameless author speak of later events in Billy's life, and the writer asserts near the end that Billy's life "was brought to a close none too soon for the good of humanity" (12). Even though the publisher claimed the novel sold by the thousands, only one mutilated copy is known to exist.

26. J. C. Cowdrick, *Silver-Mask, the Man of Mystery; or, the Cross of the Golden Keys*, Beadle's Half Dime Library, no. 360 (New York: Beadle and Adams, 1884); Cowdrick, *Billy, the Kid from Texas; or, Silver Mask's Clew*, Beadle's Pocket Library, no. 321 (New York: Beadle and Adams, 1890); Cowdrick, *Billy, the Kid from Frisco*, Beadle's Pocket Library, no. 321 (New York: Beadle and Adams, 1890).

27. Cowdrick, *Billy, the Kid from Texas*, 11.

28. Ibid., 16.

29. Francis Worcester Doughty, *Old King Brady and "Billy the Kid," or, the Great Detective's Chase*, New York Detective Library, no. 411 (New York: F[rank] Tousey, 1890). An even later work promised to add to the total of Kid dime novels but turned out to deal with the Apache Kid, not the New Mexico Billy: "Buffalo Bill and Billy, the Kid; or, the Desperadoes of Apache Land," *New Buffalo Bill Weekly* 67 (30 December 1913): 1–20.

30. Doughty, *Old King Brady*, 4.

31. Ibid., 29.

32. These contextual comments draw on Richard W. Etulain, *Re-imagining the Modern American West: A Century of Fiction, History, and Art* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996); and Etulain, *Telling Western Stories: From Buffalo Bill to Larry McMurtry* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999).

33. Emerson Hough, *Heart's Desire: The Story of a Contented Town, Peculiar Citizens, and Two Fortunate Lovers; a Novel* (New York: Macmillian, 1905). Four years after *Heart's Desire* appeared, P. S. McGeeney's *Down at Stein's Pass* (Boston: Angel Guardian Press, 1909) was published. Like Hough's novel, McGeeney's work featured a "Billie" the Kid as a minor, violent character. Billie was the leader of a desperado band, the narrator viewing him as "the most daring of the outlaws" (23). Set in western New Mexico near the Arizona border, the novel was ahistorical, with Billie as primarily an imagined character whose life differed markedly from that of the real Billy in Lincoln County.

34. 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* (Santa Fe: New Mexican Printing and Publishing Co., 1882). Although Garrett is listed as author on the title page of this early biography, his journalist friend, Ash Upson, likely did most of the writing, particularly the first chapters of the brief book. For an illuminating discussion of the making and impact of the book, see the valuable essay by Durwood Ball, "The Tale of the University of New Mexico Libraries' Three Millionth Volume," in Steven R. Harris, *Three Million and Counting: The Authentic Story of a Rare Book, Library Donors, Famous Authors, University Faculty, Staff and Students, and How They Built a Research Library Collection at the University of New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, University Libraries, 2013), 55–80.

35. Walter Noble Burns, *The Saga of Billy the Kid* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1925, 1926). *The Saga* was reprinted in 1999 by the University of New Mexico Press with an introduction by Richard W. Etulain. For an illuminating account of Burns's writings on the American West, see Mark J. Dworkin, *American Mythmaker: Walter Noble Burns and the Legends of Billy the Kid, Wyatt Earp, and Joaquín Murrieta* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015).

36. The best studies of western regionalism are Robert L. Dorman, *Revolt of the Provinces: The Regionalist Movement in America, 1920–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), and Dorman, *Hell of a Vision: Regionalism and the Modern American West* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012).

37. The rise of the formula or popular Western novel is traced in Christine Bold, *Selling the Wild West: Popular Western Fiction, 1860–1960* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), and Richard W. Etulain, *Ernest Haycox and the Western* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017).

38. Dane Coolidge, *War Paint* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1929); William MacLeod Raine, *The Fighting Tenderfoot* (New York: Doubleday; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1929).

39. Coolidge, *War Paint*, 35, 36.

40. Raine, *The Fighting Tenderfoot*, 158, 159.

41. Zane Grey, *Nevada* (1928; repr., New York: Bantam, 1986).

42. Ibid., 279.

43. Eugene Manlove Rhodes, *Pasó por Aquí* (1927; repr., Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973).

44. Ibid., 118.

45. E. B. Mann, *Gamblin' Man* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1934).

46. Frederick W. Nolan, *The Life and Death of John Henry Tunstall* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1965). Nolan turned up no references to Billy in the voluminous correspondence between John Tunstall and his family in England.

47. Nelson Nye, *Pistols for Hire: A Tale of the Lincoln County War and the West's Most Desperate Outlaw, William (Billy the Kid) Bonney* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1941).

48. Ibid., 62.

49. Zane Grey, *Shadow on the Trail* (1946; repr., New York: Pocket Books, 1970). Although published seven years later, Paul Evan Lehman's *Pistols on the Pecos* (1953; repr., London: Chivers Press, 1992) offers a perspective similar to that of Grey's: his Billy is an unmistakable rascal—if not murderous. Through the life of an opponent, Cole Claiborne,

we see the Kid as a killer without any kindness, generosity, or congeniality. Sometimes historically accurate, Lehman's novel is also often off the beam. Negativity abounds.

50. Grey, *Shadow*, 68.

51. Edwin Corle, *Billy the Kid: A Novel* (1953; repr., Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979). The author defends his use of history in Edwin Corle to Robert Mullin, 16 May 1954, Letters to R. Mullin, Mullin Collection, J. Evetts Hailey Library, Midland, Texas; and in Edwin Corle to Maurice Garland Fulton, 26 July 1953, folder 5, box 1, Fulton Papers, Special Collections, University of Arizona Library, Tucson. In *Mi Amigo: A Novel of the Southwest* (New York: Knopf, 1959), author W. R. Burnett creates a central figure of John Desportes, the "Soldier" or "Sergeant." Desportes tries to befriend Bud Smith/Jamie Wiggan, the Kid character, but he cannot. The "amigo" relationship explodes because the young villain lies, cheats, and murders. Burnett knows his history, but his Kid figure is mostly a sideshow to the main hero, Desportes.

52. Charles Neider, *The Authentic Death of Hendry Jones* (1956; repr., Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1993). Maurice Garland Fulton corresponded with Neider about Billy the Kid, 13 October 1953, and Neider responded to explain his research in letters to Maurice Garland Fulton, 4 November 1953 and 4 December 1953, Fulton Papers, folder 4/1, box 4, correspondence, n–2, 1904–1955, Maurice G. Fulton Papers, MS 057, special collection, University of Arizona Library, Tucson.

53. See, for example, Stephen Tatum, commentary in Corle, *Billy the Kid*, 206–11; Phil Hardy, *The Western* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1983); and Johnny D. Boggs, *Billy the Kid on Film, 1911–2012* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 2013), 205.

54. Richard W. Etulain, *Re-imagining the Modern American West*, refers to these shifts in novels, histories, and artworks about the American West as works of "postregionalism." On changes in Billy films, see Boggs, *Billy the Kid on Film*.

55. Amelia Bean, *Time for Outrage* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1967).

56. Ibid., 442.

57. Ibid., 443.

58. Richard W. Etulain, *The Life and Times of Calamity Jane* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 281–85, 324–26; and Etulain, *Calamity Jane: A Reader's Guide* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 176*ff*. Both books describe and evaluate the form and content of fictional Adult Westerns.

59. Lee Davis Willoughby [Jane Toombs], *The Outlaws* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1984). Although Matt Braun avoids the format and content of the Adult Western, his depiction of the Billy the Kid character is equally negative in *Jury of Six* (New York: Pocket Books, 1980). Braun, a veteran novelist, produces a mixed bag of history and contrived characters and events in this treatment of the final months of the Kid's life. The dark portrait of Billy describes him as a "mad dog terrorizing the countryside," having "similarity to a rabid animal" (60). *Jury of Six* is a disappointing work from a well-known writer of Westerns.

60. Larry McMurtry, *Anything for Billy: A Novel* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988).

61. Ibid., 7.

62. Ibid., 168.

63. N. Scott Momaday, *The Ancient Child: A Novel* (New York: Doubleday, 1989).

64. Preston Lewis, *The Demise of Billy the Kid* (New York: Bantam Books, 1994).

65. Rebecca Ore [Rebecca B. Brown], *The Illegal Rebirth of Billy the Kid* (New York: Tor Book, 1991).

66. Ralph W. Cotton, *Cost of a Killing: The Life and Times of Jeston Nash* (New York: Pocket Books, 1996).

67. Elizabeth Fackler, *Billy the Kid: The Legend of El Chivato* (New York: Forge, 1995).

68. Johnny D. Boggs, *The Lay of the Land: The Trial of Billy the Kid* (New York: Signet, 2004).

69. Frederick Nolan, *The Lincoln County War: A Documentary History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992); Nolan, *The West of Billy the Kid* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998); Robert M. Utley, *High Noon in Lincoln: Violence on the Western Frontier* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987); and Utley, *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989) are the premier works on Billy the Kid and the Lincoln County War. I am much indebted to these writers for these books, as well as their other writings.

70. John A. Aragon, *Billy the Kid's Last Ride: A Novel* (Santa Fe, N.Mex.: Sunstone Press, 2011).

71. John Vernon, *Lucky Billy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008), is another recent Kid novel that promises to treat history "as [accurate] as [he] could make" it, but is guilty of several factual mistakes, and his portraits of the leading characters in the Lincoln County story are decidedly ahistorical. He is also guilty of presentism, superimposing present-day attitudes on the late nineteenth century. An obviously talented writer, Vernon has squandered his abilities on a historically inaccurate novel.

72. The longest novel about Billy to date first appeared in 2008 and later in several revised editions. Gale Cooper, a virtual Billy the Kid book factory in recent years, self-published the novel initially titled *Joy of Birds* (2008, 2009, 2012), which was later retitled *Billy and Paulita: A Novel* (Albuquerque, N.Mex.: Gelcour Books, 2012). The mammoth volume of fiction has 585 pages of oversized text and nearly sixty pages of "Resources." Within it are truckloads of historical facts about Billy the Kid and Lincoln County—and even more imagined conversations, interior thoughts, and created deeds. Cooper knows a great deal about Billy the Kid and his times, but a determined, demanding copyeditor would have pushed the author to trim her prolix style, deflate her overblown action scenes, and rein in her created character-speak. Cooper's clear, abundant strengths are historical more than literary.

73. Ron Hansen, *The Kid: A Novel* (New York: Scribner, 2016).

74. The closing paragraphs draw tangentially on Richard W. Etulain, "Farmers in Southwestern Fiction," in *Southwestern Agriculture: Pre-Columbian to Modern*, eds. Henry C. Detloff and Irvin M. May Jr. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1982), 28–46, and, more specifically, on Etulain, "Telling Lewis and Clark Stories: Historical Novelists as Storytellers," in *Finding Lewis and Clark: Old Trails, New Directions*, ed. James P. Ronda and Nancy Tystad Koupal (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2004), 114–33.

75. Paul Russell Cutright, *A History of the Lewis and Clark Journals* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), 210.

76. Wallace Stegner, *The Sound of Mountain Water* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1969), 202.

77. Kathleen Chamberlain, *In the Shadow of Billy the Kid: Susan McSween and the Lincoln County War* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013).