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In this remarkable composite of eyewitness accounts, tall tales, facts, and photographs, Michael Ondaatje conjures up Billy the Kid and the world he lived in, creating not only a powerfully moving portrait but also a more profound myth.

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MICHAEL ONDAATJE

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF BILLY THE KID

ISBN 0 14 00 7280 2



*"WONDERFUL...ONDAATJE'S LANGUAGE IS CLEAN AND ENERGETIC, WITH THE POP OF BULLETS. THIS IS LITERATURE, ART."*  
—ANNIE DILLARD, AUTHOR OF *PILGRIM AT TINKER CREEK*

MICHAEL  
ONDAATJE



THE COLLECTED  
— WORKS OF —  
BILLY THE KID

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*Credits*

The death of Tunstall and the reminiscences of Paulita Maxwell and Sallie Chisum on Billy are essentially made up of statements made to Walter Noble Burns in his book *The Saga of Billy the Kid*, published in 1926. The comment about taking photographs around 1870-1880 is by the great Western photographer L. A. Huffman and appears in his book *Huffman, Frontier Photographer*. (Some of the photographs in this book are his.) The last piece of dialogue between Garrett and Poe is taken from an account written by Deputy John W. Poe in 1919, when he was the president of the National Bank of Roswell, New Mexico. The comic book legend is real. With these basic sources I have edited, rephrased, and slightly reworked the originals. But the emotions belong to their authors.

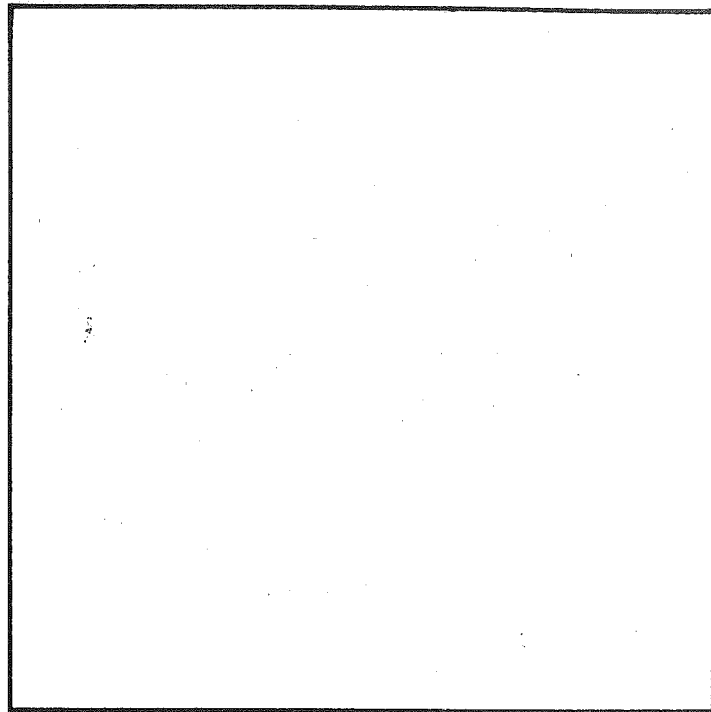
*Acknowledgments*

Some sections of this book have appeared in magazines, so I would like to thank the following magazines and their editors: *Blew Ointment*, *It*, *20 Cents Magazine*, and *Quarry*. And the following books: *The Cosmic Chef* and *The Story So Far*.

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This book is for many but especially for Kim, Stuart and  
Sally Mackinnon, Ken Livingstone, Victor Coleman and  
Barrie Nichol.



*I send you a picture of Billy made with the Perry shutter as quick as it can be worked — Pyro and soda developer. I am making daily experiments now and find I am able to take passing horses at a lively trot square across the line of fire — bits of snow in the air — spokes well defined — some blur on top of wheel but sharp in the main — men walking are no trick — I will send you proofs sometime. I shall show you what can be done from the saddle without ground glass or tripod — please notice when you get the specimens that they were made with the lens wide open and many of the best exposed when my horse was in motion.*

**T**hese are the killed.

(By me) —

Morton, Baker, early friends of mine.

Joe Bernstein. 3 Indians.

A blacksmith when I was twelve, with a knife.

5 Indians in self defence (behind a very safe rock).

One man who bit me during a robbery.

Brady, Hindman, Beckwith, Joe Clark,

Deputy Jim Carlyle, Deputy Sheriff J. W. Bell.

And Bob Ollinger. A rabid cat

birds during practice,

These are the killed.

(By them) —

Charlie, Tom O'Folliard

Angela D's split arm,

and Pat Garrett

sliced off my head.

Blood a necklace on me all my life.

**C**hristmas at Fort Sumner, 1880. There were five of us together then. Wilson, Dave Rudabaugh, Charlie Bowdre, Tom O'Folliard, and me. In November we celebrated my 21st birthday, mixing red dirt and alcohol — a public breathing throughout the night. The next day we were told that Pat Garrett had been made sheriff and had accepted it. We were bad for progress in New Mexico and cattle politicians like Chisum wanted the bad name out. They made Garrett sheriff and he sent me a letter saying move out or I will get you Billy. The government sent a Mr. Azariah F. Wild to help him out. Between November and December I killed Jim Carlyle over some mixup, he being a friend.

Tom O'Folliard decided to go east then, said he would meet up with us in Sumner for Christmas. Goodbye goodbye. A few days before Christmas we were told that Garrett was in Sumner waiting for us all. Christmas night. Garrett, Mason, Wild, with four or five others. Tom O'Folliard rides into town, leaning his rifle between the horse's ears. He would shoot from the waist now which, with a rifle, was pretty good, and he was always accurate.

Garrett had been waiting for us, playing poker with the others, guns on the floor beside them. Told that Tom was riding in alone, he went straight to the window and shot O'Folliard's horse dead. Tom collapsed with the horse still holding the gun and blew out Garrett's window. Garrett already halfway downstairs. Mr. Wild shot at Tom from the other side of the street, rather unnecessarily shooting the horse again. If Tom had used stirrups and didnt swing his legs so much he would probably have been locked under the animal. O'Folliard moved soon. When Garrett had got to ground level, only the horse was there in the open street, good and dead. He couldnt shout to ask Wild where O'Folliard was or he would've got busted. Wild started to yell to tell Garrett though and Tom killed him at once. Garrett fired at O'Folliard's flash and took his shoulder off. Tom O'Folliard screaming out onto the quiet Fort Sumner street, Christmas night, walking over to Garrett, no shoulder left, his jaws tilting up and down like mad bladders going. Too mad to even aim at Garrett. Son of a bitch son of a bitch, as Garrett took clear aim and blew him out.

Garrett picked him up, the head broken in two, took him back upstairs into the hotel room. Mason stretched out a blanket neat in the corner. Garrett placed Tom O'Folliard down, broke open Tom's rifle, took the remaining shells and placed them by him. They had to wait till morning now. They continued their poker game till six a.m. Then remembered they hadnt done anything about Wild. So the four of them went out, brought Wild into the room. At eight in the morning Garrett buried Tom O'Folliard. He had known him quite well. Then he went to the train station, put Azariah F. Wild on ice and sent him back to Washington.

**I**n Boot Hill there are over 400 graves. It takes the space of 7 acres. There is an elaborate gate but the path keeps to no main route for it tangles like branches of a tree among the gravestones.

300 of the dead in Boot Hill died violently  
200 by guns, over 50 by knives  
some were pushed under trains — a popular  
and overlooked form of murder in the west.  
Some from brain haemorrhages resulting from bar fights  
at least 10 killed in barbed wire.

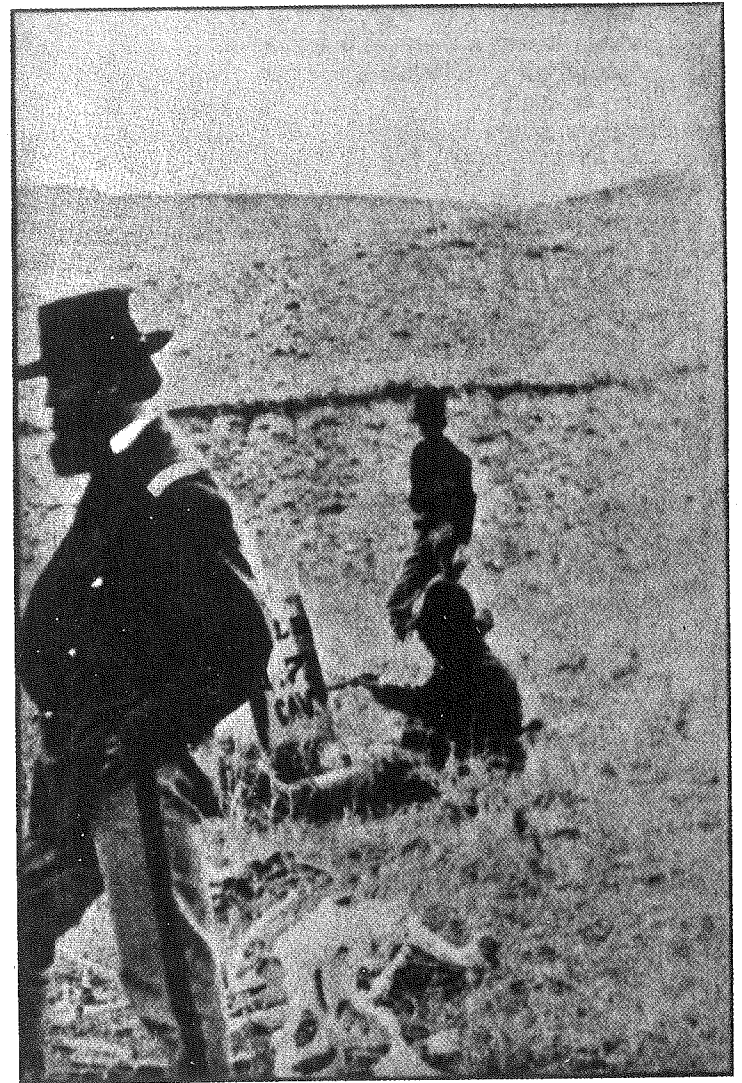
In Boot Hill there are only two graves that belong to women  
and they are the only known suicides in that graveyard

The others, I know, did not see the wounds appearing in the sky, in the air. Sometimes a normal forehead in front of me leaked brain gasses. Once a nose clogged right before me, a lock of skin formed over the nostrils, and the shocked face had to start breathing through mouth, but then the mustache bound itself in the lower teeth and he began to gasp loud the hah! hah! going strong — churned onto the floor, collapsed out, seeming in the end to be breathing out of his eye — tiny needle jets of air reaching into the throat. I told no one. If Angela D. had been with me then, not even her; not Sallie, John, Charlie, or Pat. In the end the only thing that never changed, never became deformed, were animals.

MMMMMMMM mm thinking  
moving across the world on horses  
body split at the edge of their necks  
neck sweat eating at my jeans  
moving across the world on horses  
so if I had a newsman's brain I'd say  
well some morals are physical  
must be clear and open  
like diagram of watch or star  
one must eliminate much  
that is one turns when the bullet leaves you  
walk off see none of the thrashing  
the very eyes welling up like bad drains  
believing then the moral of newspapers or gun  
where bodies are mindless as paper flowers you dont feed  
or give to drink  
that is why I can watch the stomach of clocks  
shift their wheels and pins into each other  
and emerge living, for hours

When I caught Charlie Bowdre dying  
tossed 3 feet by bang bullets giggling  
at me face tossed in a gaggle  
he pissing into his trouser legs in pain  
face changing like fast sunshine o my god  
o my god billy I'm pissing watch  
your hands  
while the eyes grew all over his body

Jesus I never knew that did you  
the nerves shot out  
the liver running around there  
like a headless hen jerking  
brown all over the yard  
seen that too at my aunt's  
never eaten hen since then



**B**lurred a waist high river  
foam against the horse  
riding naked clothes and boots  
and pistol in the air

Crossed a crooked river  
loving in my head  
ambled dry on stubble  
shot a crooked bird

Held it in my fingers  
the eyes were small and far  
it yelled out like a trumpet  
destroyed it of its fear

**A**fter shooting Gregory  
this is what happened

I'd shot him well and careful  
made it explode under his heart  
so it wouldnt last long and  
was about to walk away  
when this chicken paddles out to him  
and as he was falling hops on his neck  
digs the beak into his throat  
straightens legs and heaves  
a red and blue vein out

Meanwhile he fell  
and the chicken walked away

still tugging at the vein  
till it was 12 yards long  
as if it held that body like a kite  
Gregory's last words being

get away from me yer stupid chicken



Pat Garrett, ideal assassin. Public figure, the mind of a doctor, his hands hairy, scarred, burned by rope, on his wrist there was a purple stain there all his life. Ideal assassin for his mind was unwarped. Had the ability to kill someone on the street walk back and finish a joke. One who had decided what was right and forgot all morals. He was genial to everyone even his enemies. He genuinely enjoyed people, some who were odd, the dopes, the thieves. Most dangerous for them, he understood them, what motivated their laughter and anger, what they liked to think about, how he had to act for them to like him. An academic murderer — only his vivacious humour and diverse interests made him the best kind of company. He would listen to people like Rudabaugh and giggle at their escapades. His language was atrocious in public, yet when alone he never swore.

At the age of 15 he taught himself French and never told anyone about it and never spoke to anyone in French for the next 40 years. He didnt even read French books.

Between the ages of 15 and 18 little was heard of Garrett. In Juan Para he bought himself a hotel room for two years with money he had saved and organised a schedule to learn how to drink. In the first three months he forced himself to disintegrate his mind. He would vomit everywhere. In a year he could drink two bottles a day and not vomit. He began to dream for the first time in his life. He would wake up in the mornings, his sheets soaked in urine 40% alcohol. He became frightened of flowers because they grew so slowly that he couldnt tell what they planned to do. His mind learned to be superior because of the excessive mistakes of those around him. Flowers watched him.

After two years he could drink anything, mix anything together and stay awake and react just as effectively as when sober. But he was now addicted, locked in his own game. His money was running out. He had planned the drunk to last only two years, now it continued into new months over which he had no control. He stole and sold himself to survive. One day he was robbing the house of Juanita Martinez, was discovered by her, and collapsed in her living room. In about six months she had un-iced his addiction. They married and two weeks later she died of a consumption she had hidden from him.

What happened in Garrett's mind no one knows. He did not drink, was never seen. A month after Juanita Garrett's death he arrived in Sumner.

PAULITA MAXWELL:

I remember the first day Pat Garrett ever set foot in Fort Sumner. I was a small girl with dresses at my shoe-tops and when he came to our house and asked for a job, I stood behind my brother Pete and stared at him in open eyed wonder; he had the longest legs I'd ever seen and he looked so comical and had such a droll way of talking that after he was gone, Pete and I had a good laugh about him.

His mind was clear, his body able to drink, his feelings, unlike those who usually work their own way out of hell, not cynical about another's incapacity to get out of problems and difficulties. He did ten years of ranching, cow punching, being a buffalo hunter. He married Apolinaria Gutterrez and had five sons. He had come to Sumner then, mind full of French he never used, everything equipped to be that rare thing — a sane assassin sane assassin sane assassin sane assassin sane

*(Miss Sallie Chisum, later Mrs. Roberts, was living in Roswell in 1924, a sweet faced, kindly old lady of a thousand memories of frontier days.)*

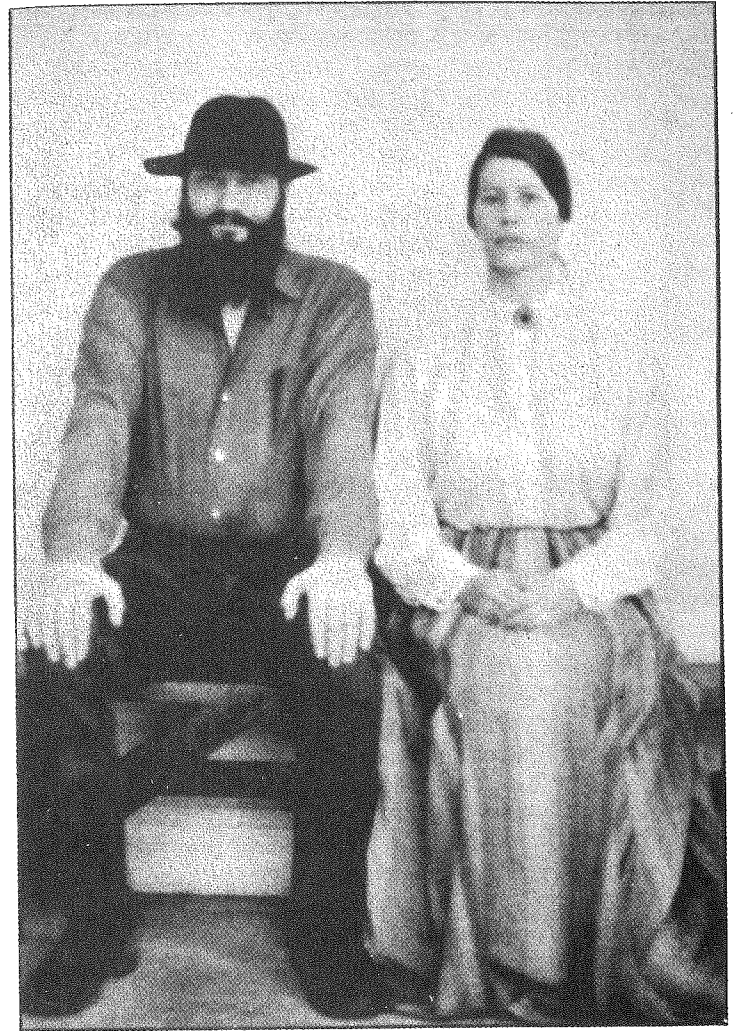
#### ON HER HOUSE

*The house was full of people all the time  
the ranch was a little world in itself  
I couldn't have been lonesome if I had tried*

*Every man worth knowing in the Southwest,  
and many not worth knowing, were guests  
one time or another.*

*What they were made no difference in their welcome.  
Sometimes a man would ride up in a hurry  
eat a meal in a hurry and depart in a hurry*

*Billy the Kid would come in often  
and sometimes stayed for a week or two.  
I remember how frightened I was the first time he came.*



**T**his is Tom O'Folliard's story, the time I met him, eating red dirt to keep the pain away, off his body, out there like a melting shape in the sun. Sitting, his legs dangling like tails off the wall. Out of his skull.

What made me notice him was his neck. Whenever he breathed the neck and cheek filled out vast as if holding a bag of trapped air. I introduced myself. Later he gave me red dirt. Said want to hear a story and he told me. I was thinking of a photograph someone had taken of me, the only one I had then. I was standing on a wall, at my feet there was this bucket and in the bucket was a pump and I was pumping water out over the wall. Only now, with the red dirt, water started dripping out of the photo. This is his story.

At fifteen he took a job with an outfit shooting wild horses. They were given a quarter a head for each one dead. These horses grazed wild, ate up good grass. The desert then had no towns every 50 miles. He sucked the clear milk out of a chopped cactus, drank piss at times. Once, blind thirsty, O'Folliard who was then 17 killed the horse he sat on and covered himself in the only liquid he could find. Blood caked on his hair, arms, shoulders, everywhere. Two days later he stumbled into a camp.

Then half a year ago he had his big accident. He was alone on the Carrizosa, north of here; the gun blew up on him. He didnt remember anything after he saw horses moving in single file and he put the gun to his shoulder. Pulling the trigger the gun blew to pieces. He was out about two days. When he woke up, he did because he was vomiting. His face was out to here. From that moment, his horse gone, he lived for four days in the desert without food or water. Because he had passed out and eaten nothing he survived, at least a doctor told him that. Finding water finally, he drank and it poured out of his ear. He felt sleepy all the time. Every two hours he stopped walking and fell asleep placing his boots into an arrow in the direction he was going. Then he would get up, put boots on and move on. He said he would have cut off his left hand with a knife to have something to eat, but he realised he had lost too much blood already.

He killed lizards when he got onto rock desert. Then a couple of days later the shrubs started appearing with him following them, still sleeping every two hours. First village he came to was Mexican. José Chavez y Chavez, blacksmith. The last thing O'Folliard noticed was Chavez sandbagging him in the stomach. O'Folliard going out cold. When he woke José had him in a bed, his arms trapped down.

Chavez had knocked out Tom as he had gone to throw himself in water which would have got rid of his thirst but killed him too. Chavez gave it to him drop by drop. A week later he let Tom have his first complete glass of water. Tom would have killed Chavez for water during that week. When he finally got to a doctor he found all the muscles on the left side of his face had collapsed. When he breathed, he couldnt control where the air went and it took new channels according to its fancy and formed thin balloons down the side of his cheek and neck. These fresh passages of air ricocheted pain across his face every time he breathed. The left side of his face looked as though it had melted by getting close to fire. So he chewed red dirt constantly, his pockets were full of it. But his mind was still sharp, the pain took all the drug. The rest of him was flawless, perfect. He was better than me with rifles. His feet danced with energy. On a horse he did tricks all the time, somersaulting, lying back. He was riddled with energy. He walked, both arms crooked over a rifle at the elbows. Legs always swinging extra.

**O**UTSIDE

the outline of houses  
Garrett running from a door  
— all seen sliding round  
the screen of a horse's eye

NOW dead centre in the square is Garrett with Poe  
— hands in back pockets — argues, nodding his head  
and then ALL TURNING as the naked arm, the arm from  
the body, breaks through the window. The window —  
what remains between the splits — reflecting all the  
moving too.

Gutterrez goes to hold the arm but it is manic, breaks  
her second finger. His veins that controlled triggers —  
now tearing all they touch.

**T**he end of it, lying at the wall  
the bullet itch frozen in my head

my right arm is through the window pane  
and the cut veins awake me  
so I can watch inside and through the window

Garrett's voice going Billy Billy  
and the other two dancing circles  
saying we got him we got him the little shrunk bugger

the pain at my armpit I'm glad for  
keeping me alive at the bone  
and suns coming up everywhere out of the walls and floors  
Garrett's jaw and stomach thousands

of lovely perfect sun balls  
breaking at each other click  
click click click like Saturday morning pistol cleaning  
when the bullets hop across the bed sheet and bounce and click

click and you toss them across the floor like . . . up in the air  
and see how many you can catch in one hand the left

oranges reeling across the room AND I KNOW I KNOW  
it is my brain coming out like red grass  
this breaking where red things wade

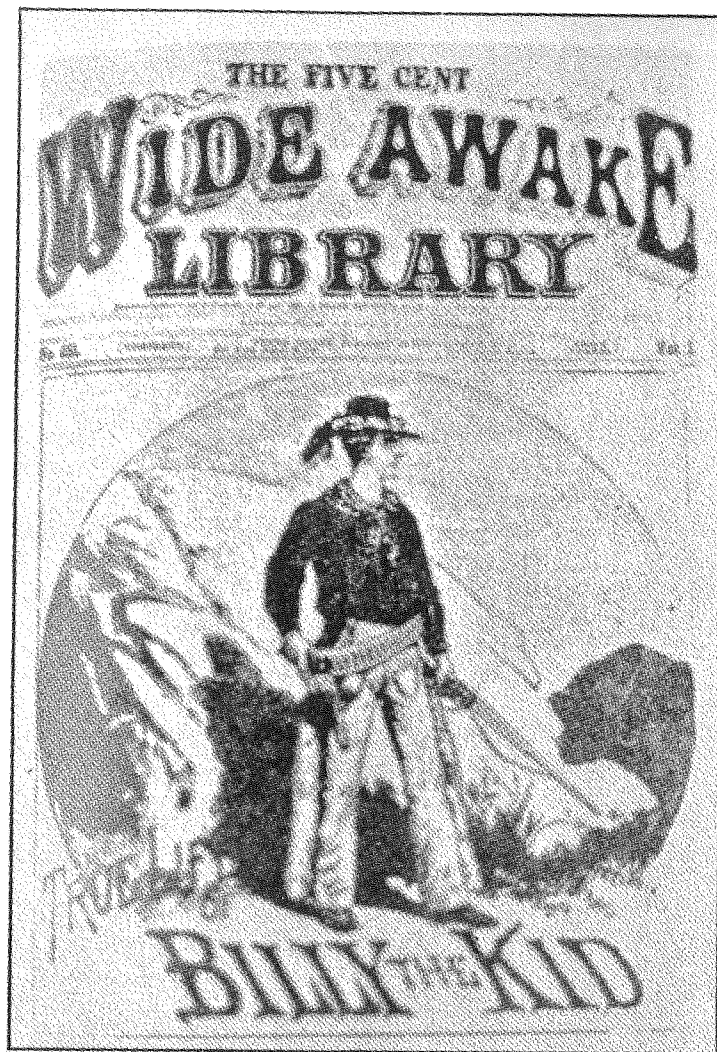
**PAULITA MAXWELL**

*An old story that identifies me as Billy the Kid's sweetheart has been going the rounds for many years. Perhaps it honours me; perhaps not; it depends on how you feel about it. But I was not Billy the Kid's sweetheart I liked him very much — oh, yes — but I did not love him. He was a nice boy, at least to me, courteous, gallant, always respectful. I used to meet him at dances; he was of course often at our home. But he and I had not thought of marriage.*

*There was a story that Billy and I had laid our plans to elope to old Mexico and had fixed the date for the night just after that on which he was killed. There was another tale that we proposed to elope riding double on one horse. Neither story was true and the one about eloping on one horse was a joke. Pete Maxwell, my brother, had more horses than he knew what to do with, and if Billy and I had wanted to set off for the Rio Grande by the light of the moon, you may depend upon it we would at least have had separate mounts. I did not need to put my arms around any man's waist to keep from falling off a horse. Not I. I was, if you please, brought up in the saddle, and plumed myself on my horsemanship.*

**I**magine if you dug him up and brought him out. You'd see very little. There'd be the buck teeth. Perhaps Garrett's bullet no longer in thick wet flesh would roll in the skull like a marble. From the head there'd be a trail of vertebrae like a row of pearl buttons off a rich coat down to the pelvis. The arms would be cramped on the edge of what was the box. And a pair of handcuffs holding ridiculously the fine ankle bones. (Even though dead they buried him in leg irons). There would be the silver from the toe of each boot.

His legend a jungle sleep



### *Billy the Kid and the Princess*

The Castle of the Spanish girl called 'La Princesa' towered above the broad fertile valley . . . in the looming hills there were gold and silver mines . . . Truly, the man chosen to rule beside the loveliest woman in Mexico would be a king. The girl had chosen William H. Bonney to reign with her . . . but a massive brute named Toro Cuneo craved that honor . . .

There'd been a cattle war in Jackson County . . . He'd settled a beef with three gunquick brothers near Tucson . . . and he was weary of gunthunder and sudden death! Billy the Kid turned his cayuse south . . . splashed across the drought dried Rio Grande . . . and let the sun bake the tension out of his mind and body.

"See them sawtooth peaks, Caballo? There's a little town yonder with a real cold cerveza and a fat lady who can cook Mexican food better'n anybody in the world! This lady also got a daughter . . . una muchacho . . . who's got shinin' black hair and a gleam in her brown eyes I want to see again."

And on a distant hill . . .  
"He comes, be ready Soto."

"Gunshots . . . a 45 pistol! Runaway! It's a girl! She's goin' to take a spill! Faster Chico!"

"AAAAHHH!"

"Hang on . . . I got yuh! . . . You're okay now Señorita."

"Gracias, Señor. You are so strong and brave . . . and very gallant!"

"Thanks, I heard shots . . . Did they scare your cayuse into runnin' away?"

"I think I can stand now, Señor . . . if you will put me down."

"Huh? Oh sorry, Señorita. I'm Billy Bonney, Señorita. I'm from up around Tucson."

"I am Marguerita Juliana de Guelva y Solanza, la Princesa de Guelva."

"La Princesa? A *real* princess?"

"I am direct descendent of King Phillip of Spain. By virtue of Royal land grants, I own this land west for 200 leagues, south for 180 leagues. It is as large as some European kingdoms . . . larger than two of your American states . . . I am still a little weak. Ride with me to the castle, Señor Bonney."

"*There* Señor Bonney . . . my ancestral home. The castle and the valley farther than you can see . . . I have 20,000 cattle, almost as many horses and herds of goats, pigs, chickens. Everything my people need to live."

"WHOOOEEE! The Governor's mansion up at Phoenix would fit in one end o' that wickiup."

"Come on, Yanqui! It is late . . . you must have dinner with me."

"ATTENTION! HER EXCELLENCY RETURNS!"

Thinks: "She's got a regular army!"

The man called Billy the Kid is not impressed by the magnificent richness of his surroundings. The golden cutlery means nothing . . . The priceless china and crystal matter not, and the food cooked by a French chef? — PFAAGGH!

Thinks: "I'd sooner be in Mama Rosa's kitchen eatin' tortillas an' chile with Rosita battin' them dark eyes at me!"

"This table needs a man like you, Señor Bonney. Others have occupied that chair but none so well as you."

"Gracias, Princesa . . . but I'd never feel right in it . . . if you

know what I mean."

"I propose a toast, my gringo friend . . . to our meeting . . . to your gallant rescue of me!"

"I reckon I can't let a lady drink alone, Princesa."

CRASH! !!

"He could have sunk it in my neck just as easy . . . Start talkin' hombre 'fore I say *my* piece about that knife throwing act!"

"I am a man of action, not words, gringo! I weel crack your ribs . . . break your wrists . . . then send you back where you belong!"

"Come on, animal, I want to finish dinner!"

SOCK! !

Thinks: "If I can nail him quick I'll take the fight out of him . . . PERFECT!"

That was his Sunday punch . . . and Toro laughed at it! Now, Billy the Kid knows he's in for a struggle!

"He's got a granite jaw which means . . . I'll have to weaken him with powerful hooks to the stomach! OOOOWWW!" THUD!

"Now it's my turn!"

"If he lays a hand on me . . ."

SWISS!

SOCK!

"I keel you gringo!"

Thinks: "My head . . . he busted my jaw!"

TOCK!

Thinks: "He's a stomper . . ."

"I keel your pet gringo Excellencia!"

"Yuh'll take me tuh death maybe, hombre!"

"You no escape Toro now!"

"I didn't figure on escapin' Toro!"

CRACK!

"Over you go, Toro!" "Olé! Olé!"

CRASH!

"Sorry I busted the place up some, Princesa."

"You are mucho hombre, Yanqui, very much man! A man like you could help me rule this wild kingdom! Will you remain as my guest for a time?"

"I come down here to rest up some. I reckon I can do that here as well as in Mama Rosa's cantina."

(Kiss)

"That was to thank you for protecting me from Toro Cueno. I must not go on being formal with you . . ."

In the next few days, Billy the Kid was with La Princesa often.

Long rides through wild country . . .

"Wait princess . . . don't get ahead of me!"

"EEEEEEii! !"

"Duck, princess!"

BANG! BANG!

"Once more Chivoto, you have saved my life, this time from that cougar. You have won my love!"

"Hold on, ma'am . . ."

Before Billy the Kid can defend himself, La Princesa Marguerita has taken him in her arms and . . .

*"It was the Kid who came in there on to me," Garrett told Poe, "and I think I got him."*

*"Pat," replied Poe, "I believe you have killed the wrong man."*

*"I'm sure it was the Kid," responded Garrett, "for I knew his voice and could not have been mistaken."*



Poor young William's dead  
with a fish stare, with a giggle  
with blood planets in his head.

The blood came down like river ride  
long as Texas down his side.  
We cleaned him up when blood was drier  
his eyes looked up like turf on fire.

We got the eight foot garden hose  
turned it on, leaned him down flat.  
What fell away we threw away  
his head was smaller than a rat.

I got the bullets, cleaned him up  
sold them to the Texas Star.  
They weighed them, put them in a pile  
took pictures with a camera.

Poor young William's dead  
with blood planets in his head  
with a fish stare, with a giggle  
like he said.

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

