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## THE COLLECTED WORKS OF BILLY THE KID

*Michael Ondaatje*

MMMmmmmmm. In the final minutes. It is Texas midnight. A large large square, well and buckets centre. The houses and sheds in rows making up the square. The long narrow porch running all around. Up to the well rides Pat Garrett and deputies Poe and Mackinnon. Scuffling slow, smoking as they dismount gentle and leave the horses and walk to the large hut which is Maxwell's room. They pass the dog.

This is a diagram then of Maxwell's, Pete Maxwell's, room. Bed here against the wall, here's the window where he put his hand through. And here, along here, is the porch. While this, about 20 yards away, is the Gutterrez home. Garrett, Poe, and Mackinnon stop near Maxwell's door. On some vague tip Garrett has come to ask Maxwell where he thinks Billy is hiding out - where in the territory is he - he's been escaped 3 months and nobody's seen him. Garrett leaves the deputies sitting smoking on the porch, flicks away his own cigar and goes into the dark room where Maxwell is asleep *Meanwhile*

Billy is just yards away drinking with Celsa Gutterrez. He came in about an hour ago, he wears only his trousers and guns, hot night. They decide she will cook him something and he offers to go cut some meat. Carrying a knife in his left hand, and barefoot, he is up and begins walking towards the ice house. Passing the Maxwell room he sees the two men outside. Quien es? They do not answer. Again the question. No answer. Billy backs off the porch into Maxwell's room and heads towards his friend's sleeping.

In the dark room Garrett has awakened and is questioning the dazed Maxwell. In fact as Billy enters he is crouching by Maxwell's bed. Quienes Bon esos hombres afuera, Pete? Garrett recognises the voice. He does the one thing that will save him. Quietly, with his long legs, he climbs over Maxwell's body and gets into bed between Maxwell and the wall. With his rifle in his hands he watches the darkness, trying to make out the shape

that is moving towards him. Billy moves over barefoot and asks Pete again. Quienes son esos hombres afuera?

Maxwell doesn't say a word. He can feel Garrett's oiled rifle barrel leaning against his cheek. Billy shakes Maxwell's shoulder and then he hears the other person's breathing. As the only other woman on the ranch, apart from Celsa Gutterrez is Paulita Maxwell - Pete's sister - he doesn't know what to think. Paulita? Pete Maxwell gives a nervous giggle full of fear which Billy mistakes for embarrassment. Paulita! Jesus Christ. He leans forward again and moves his hands down the bed and then feels a man's boots. O my pod Pete quien es?

He is beginning to move back a couple of yards in amazement. Garrett is about to burst out laughing so he fires, leaving a powder scar on Maxwell's face that stayed with him all his life.

# 1

## BILLY THE KID THE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF A LEGEND

*J.C. Dykes*

**GARRETT**, Par F. *The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid, the Noted Desperado of the Southwest*. Santa Fe: New Mexico Printing and Publishing Co., 1882. 137 p., illus., tinted pictorial wraps.

Exceedingly rare. The copyright-deposit copies of this book were received at the Library of Congress on April 17, 1882. William A. Keleher, in his excellent book *The Fabulous Frontier*, item 351, offers strong evidence that this entire volume was written by Ash Upson, pioneer New Mexico newspaper man. Of course, Garrett told Upson the story as he knew it, from the time of his arrival in New Mexico through the killing of the Kid. Upson took care of the rest, and he was probably as well qualified for the job as any other writer. It is believed that Upson boarded with the Kid's mother at both Santa Fe and Silver City prior to the beginning of the Lincoln County War.

Garrett (or Upson) states in his "Introductory": "I am incited to this labor in a measure by an impulse to correct the thousand false statements which have appeared in the newspapers and in yellow-covered cheap novels. Of the latter, no less than three have been foisted upon the public -detailing a hundred deeds of reckless crime of which he was never guilty -I would dissever the Kid's memory from that of meaner villains whose deeds have been attributed to him." Garrett goes on to say, "This verified history of the Kid's exploits, with all exaggeration removed, will exhibit him as the peer of any fabled brigand on record." Garrett's book has been accepted as fact and has been standard source material for many writers in spite of Garrett's statements to Governor Otero, item 240, and others, concerning many of the events reported in it.

This book is responsible, far more than all the dime (and nickel) novels written about the Kid, for the perpetuation of unverified tales about his early life. Perhaps the Kid did tell Garrett some of these tales while they were drinking, gambling, and hunting together-some say they were rustling cows-at Fort Sumner during the period from 1878 to 1881, but it is more likely that a good many of them arose in the mind of Upson.

Among the activities and incidents in the early life of the Kid that are included by Garrett and have been widely accepted as fact, although their accuracy is debatable, are the following:

The Kid was "adept at cards" at the age of eight or nine.

The knife-killing of the loafer who insulted the Kid's mother, when the Kid was about twelve years old.

The killing of the three Apaches near Fort Bowie, Arizona. The horse race near San Sunon which Billy lost, but won. The killing of the soldier blacksmith at Fort

Bowie.

The Mexican interlude with the Kid's partner, Melquiadez Segura, and the Monte dealers they disposed of during their stay south of the border.

The rescue of the wagon train by the Kid and Jesse Evans. In this fight, the Kid wielded a prairie ax with devastating effect and eight "good" Mescalero Apaches slept "their last sleep."

The Kid's 81-mile ride on his "trusty gray," in six hours, to deliver Segura from jail at San Elizario, Texas.

The brush of the Kid and O'Keefe with the Apaches in the Guadalupe mountains. Garrett (or Upson) reports the Kid's saying to O'Keefe, "I believe a little flare-up with twenty or thirty of the sneaking curs would make me forget I was thirsty while it lasted, and give water the flavor of wine after the brigazee was over." This quotation, of course, is apocryphal; it is dime novel talk, not the idiom of the Southwest.

The killing of Buckshot Roberts by the Kid (see Coe, item 195). As pointed out by Colonel Fulton, item 116, the chronology is also faulty with respect to the affair at Blazer's Mill.

The capture of Charlie Bowdre by Jesse Evans' party and his rescue by the Kid. The reported conversation between the Kid and his old friend, Jesse Evans, is particularly suspect.

The killing of Bernstein by the Kid (see Coe, Item 195).

In addition Garrett's conception of the origin of the Lincoln County War is faulty. This was not a war between the cattle king, John S. Chisum, and the smaller cattlemen. It would be an exaggeration to say that Chisum was an innocent bystander, but he was not an active participant. The most reasonable explanation of the causes of the War that this writer has seen is given by Colonel Fulton, item 116.

The last part of Garrett's book is a rather matter-of-fact account of a man-hunt and is set down in Garrett's plain language. If Ash Upson actually wrote the entire book, it seems certain that the description of events after Garrett personally became a participant is by Garrett, and that he allowed Upson few liberties in changing his words.

One more bit of the legend does appear in this part of the book, and that is the Kid's stay at the Berrendo settlement near Roswell, after the killing of Grant. The Kid shot the heads of a number of snowbirds and at last hit one in the breast. That ended the exhibition. This would have been marvelously accurate six-gun shooting. A number of students of the art, including J. Frank Dobie, state that the incident didn't happen because it couldn't.

On the whole, Garrett gave the Kid his due in this book and perhaps a little more. Some say that he set up a straw man in order to enhance his own reputation for knocking him down, but the part of this book for which Garrett was primarily responsible does not read that way to this writer. As for the early life of the Kid as reported in this volume, it can be charged to Ash Upson, publicist for the Southwest's most notorious outlaw, and a major architect and builder of The Legend of Billy the Kid.