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**BILLY
THE KID**

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University of British Columbia

Frederic Wood Theatre

Presents

The Collected Works Of Billy The Kid

By
Michael Ondaatje

Directed By
Arne Zaslove

November 18 - 28
1987



The Frederic Wood Theatre Magazine
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Vol. I



A Biographical Note on Billy the Kid

Henry McCarty, alias Billy Antrim, William Bonney, Billy the Kid, was probably born about 1859, the place in dispute. His mother was known as Catherine McCarty during the time she resided in Indiana, Kansas, and Colorado before her marriage to William H. Antrim in Santa Fe, New Mexico, March 1, 1873. Her son acted as witness at the marriage ceremony and his name is recorded as Henry McCarty. It was by that name he was known when the family moved immediately after the wedding to Silver City. Later he took his stepfather's name and called himself Billy Antrim. He did not take up the name William Bonney (perhaps a family name) until he reached the Pecos Valley.

His mother died on September 16, 1874. Less than a year later he fled Silver City, having been jailed as a lesson by the sheriff for hiding a bundle of washing stolen from a Chinese laundry by an older man. Making his escape from jail, he headed west to Graham County, Arizona, in 1875. It was there he received his nickname Billy the Kid, or merely Kid.

Two years later, in August 1877, the Kid killed his first victim, Frank Cahill, an army blacksmith.

Indicted for the crime, along with three others who were to become part of his gang, the Kid fled, leaving a trail of criminal activity wherever he went.

The Kid was captured with two gang members by a posse led by Pat Garrett on the morning of December 21, 1880, at Stinking Springs, three days after the same posse had ambushed the gang, killed Tom O'Folliard and almost caught Billy at Fort Sumner. On December 27, Garrett boarded the train at Las Vegas for Santa Fe with his prisoners, reaching the capital at 2:00 p.m. The Kid remained jailed in Santa Fe until March 28, 1881, when he was taken under a long-standing change of venue (two years) to Mesilla in Doña Ana County to stand trial.

On being convicted in territorial court, Judge Warren Bristol sentenced the Kid on April 13 to be hanged at Lincoln on May 13. Robert Ollinger and Deputy Sheriff Dave Wood of Doña Ana County, with a posse of five men, escorted Bonney from Las Cruces to Lincoln, the journey lasting from April 16 to 20. The hapless condemned "was handcuffed and shackled and chained to the back seat of the ambulance" in which he was transported.

Six days after his return to Lincoln, the Kid killed his guards, Ollinger and J. W. Bell, and made good an escape on April 28. Pat Garrett once again sought the fugitive, accompanied by two deputies. The Kid was finally located at Fort Sumner, staying with his friend Pete Maxwell. There, around midnight, July 13, 1881, Pat Garrett felled him with a single shot. He was buried the next day beside two of his gang, Charlie Bowdre and Tom O'Folliard, in the former military cemetery at Fort Sumner.

I Send You a Picture of Billy

The recent Vancouver International Film Festival included a delightful film from Japan, directed by Naoto Yamakawa, entitled *The New Morning of Billy the Kid*. In it, Billy walks out of a photo-mural of John Ford's Monument Valley and into a Japanese restaurant, where he is hired as a bodyguard, along with a classical samurai, a World War II G.I., a waiter called MarxEngels, a telephone information operator, and an all-girl rock group called Zelda... Even in Japan, it seems, the legend of Billy the Kid lives on.

Billy the Kid is indeed the material that legends are made from: the legend, for example, that he lived for 21 years and killed 21 men. History may retort that he (W.H. Bonney, or William Antrim, or Henry McCarty, or whatever his "real" name was) more likely lived about 22 and killed about 7. But legend is always stronger than history (as another Canadian poet, bpNichol, has noted in rather more colourful language) and it is the legend, not the history, that Michael Ondaatje works with. Even before the book begins, or the curtain goes up, his Billy is out of history, shaking the facts like trail-dust from his shoulders.

*That there is nothing of depth, of significant accuracy,
of wealth in the image, I know. It is there for a beginning.*

The *Collected Works* of Billy the Kid: the title places him already within an imagined literary context, outlaw as artist, author of "collected works," the assumed narrator of everything we are about to read or see. An early page of the book gives a kind of Table of Contents, which appears in the prologue to the play as a kind of Dramatis Personae, under the heading "These are the killed":

*(By me) --
Morton, Baker, early friends of mine...
A blacksmith when I was twelve, with a knife.
5 Indians in self defence (behind a very safe rock)...
Deputy Jim Carlyle, Deputy Sheriff J.W. Bell.
And Bob Ollinger...*

The collected works of the outlaw, then, not just in the literary sense but also as lethal actions: this is the artist as gunman, laying them dead in the aisles. Ondaatje's list of Billy's victims hovers on the edge of the legendary world; it contains 20 names, so one is missing -- Billy's own? Or Pat Garrett's? But then the list continues: *The Collected Works*, Volume Two:

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.*

As a list of Dramatis Personae, this tells us that all the characters we are about to see are already dead, including Billy himself, the narrator. This is a tale told by a dead man, the outlaw as artist, who must perceive, imagine, narrate, and live the deaths of his friends, his own death, converting them into the "works" of his imagination, and crowning them with an image of beauty and violence intertwined and looped around his neck, like a noose.

If Billy is the author of his own life, and of the spectacle we are about to witness, then we are its readers, perusing these *Collected Works*. And as readers, to a great extent, we already know the story. This is legend: Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid, the classic confrontation of lawman and outlaw, "ideal assassin" and romantic victim, the one-time friends who betray, hunt, and kill each other. We know what the story should be, so Ondaatje can select events from it: can, for instance, omit most of Billy's killings and concentrate upon Pat's, so that Billy becomes the victim of a manhunt rather than the hired gun of the Lincoln County War. We know how the story will end, so Ondaatje is under no pressure to tell a consecutive, linear story, he can move around freely within the framework of events, juxtaposing incidents and images, playing Billy and Pat against each other like the deconstructed ends of an outmoded binary opposition.

There is Garrett with his absolute control, who learns a language and then never speaks it, who teaches himself to drink without throwing up; and there is Billy, who always seems on the nervous edge of hysteria, who sees "wounds appearing in the sky, in the air," who smells the small deaths of flowers as they become "sane." Yet the word "sane," attached to Garrett in the repeated phrase "sane assassin," becomes "insane": it is Garrett who, in the words of the poem which opens the Second Act, is "the one altered move" that turns everything maniac, that unleashes the balanced energy of the great stars going nova.

And in between Pat and Billy, that other pair of characters: Sallie Chisum "like a ghost across the room moving in white dresses, her hair knotted as always at the neck and continuing down until it splayed and withered like eternal smoke half way between the shoulder blades and the base of cobble spine..." -- and then "Miss Angela Dickinson of Tucson / tall legs like a dancer": Angie Dickinson out of a 60's movie (*Point Blank* most likely, directed by John Boorman, starring Lee Marvin), but also Angela D., the angel of death, staring

The Collected Works Of Billy The Kid

By Michael Ondaatje

Directed By Arne Zaslove

Set Design By
Robert Gardiner

Costume Design By
Mara Gottler

Lighting Design By
Don Griffiths

CAST

William Bonney Neil Gallagher
Pat Garrett. John Murphy
Charlie Bowdre/Toro. Timothy Hyland
Tom O'Folliard/Comic Guard. Thomas Conlin Jones
Dave Rudabaugh/Comic Guard. James Binkley
Wilson/Maxwell. Roland Brand
Sallie Chisum. Laura DiCicco
John Chisum. Dennis James Kuss
Angela Dickinson. Janine Payne
Deputy Bell/Comic Guard. Jason Smith
Deputy Ollinger/Photographer. Michael Cavers
Deputy Wild/Musician. Bryson Young
Deputy/Musician. Peter Shaver
Deputy/Barman. Neil Ingram
Interviewer/Narrator/Musician. Lawrence Kagan
Musician. Spencer Hutchins
Manuela/Princess. Laura K. Burke
Saloon Girl/Celsa. Allison Sanders

Music Composed by. John Engerman
Musical Director. Adam Con

There will be one intermission of twenty minutes

WARNING: There are loud gunshots during the performance.

PRODUCTION

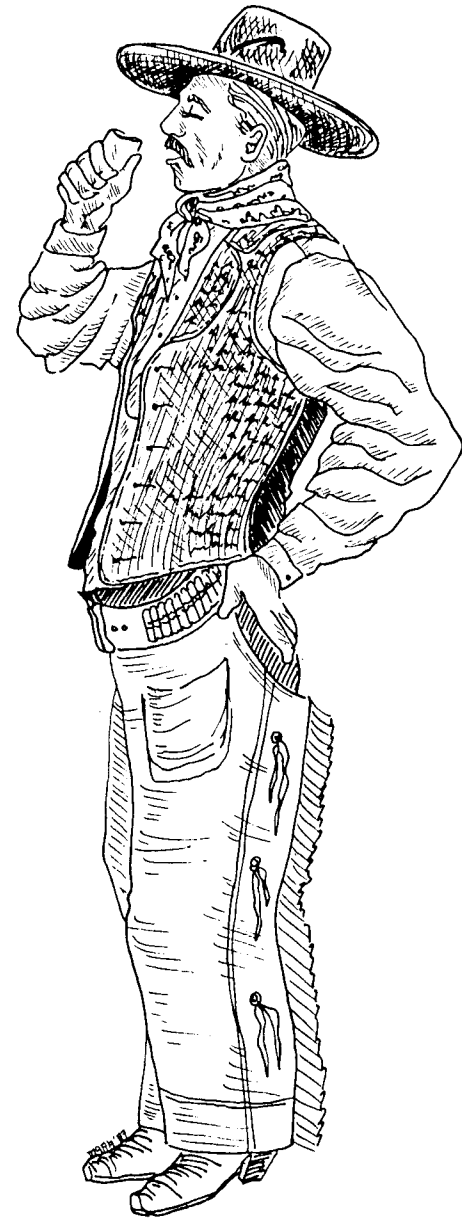
Technical Director Ian Pratt
Properties Sherry Milne
Costume Supervisor Chelsea Moore
Cutters Jean Driscoll-Bell, Leslie White
Set Construction . . . John Henrickson, Robert Moser, Buck Walker

Stage Manager Cynthia Burtinshaw
Assistant Stage Managers Mary Anne Brady, Cathy Golf
Properties Assistants Jill Buckham, Bill Rasmussen
Costume Assistants Blanka Jurenka, Heather Kent
Scene Design Assistant Cricket Jane Price
Lighting Design Assistant/Operator Alan Brodie
Sound Design/Operator Darryll Patterson
Follow Spot Operator Risha Walden
Head Scenic Painter Elana Honcharuk
Scenic Painters Kaiirin Bright, Catherine King, Gary Muir
Make-Up Cynthia Johnston
Make-Up Assistant Nick Davis
Assistant to the Director Steve Hunt
Armourer John Henrickson

House Manager Randall Plitt
Box Office Carol Fisher, Timothy Hyland, Linda Humphries
Business Manager Marjorie Fordham
Production Norman Young

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Triple J Leather Products: Roy Jeffery
Nick Davis
Bathhouse Theatre
Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company
UBC Gates Hair Fashion
Las Margaritas Restaurant
Lens and Shutter



*Costume Design
by Mara Gottler*

Ondaatje's Book as Theatre



Michael Ondaatje's award-winning book *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970) poses as autobiography--the autobiography of one William Bonney (1859-81), otherwise known as the notorious Billy the Kid. The story proper, like Ondaatje's play adaptation, which we are about to see, opens with Billy's voice announcing: "These are the killed." From this abrupt and matter-of-fact beginning, Billy continues, in an extended monologue of violently shifting tones and styles, to tell us his life.

That this telling is frequently interrupted by the voices of others--well-wishers like Sallie Chisum, friends like Paulita Maxwell, his murderer, the "sane assassin" Pat Garrett, and more--only alerts us to the simplest complexity of Billy's life: whether in legend, history, memoir, comic book or contemporary newspaper report, there are as many "Billys" as there are story-tellers and listeners. The complexity and challenge of Ondaatje's *Billy* extends, however, well beyond the multiple sources (fact and fiction) for the story.

In a recent interview, Ondaatje remarked that:

The concept of the book was very open for me; I saw the possibility of white spaces and silence, interviews or fake interviews, photographs or fictional photographs, all of which were incorporated into the book. It became a concept of the book as theatre, as a place where anything could happen.

On a first reading, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* does seem like a book in which anything could happen. To turn the page is to confront a wildly shifting text, now poetry, now prose, now photograph, followed by italicized reminiscence which gives way to a blank page, a return to poetry, or a prose story within Billy's own prose. Like the spectator of the swiftly changing tableaux on stage, the reader of Ondaatje's book is trapped in the theatre of Billy's imagination, caught up in the self-dramatizing voice, and he or she must either participate in the telling or else become lost in the maze of voices, images and words. Moreover, Billy's voice and imagination are not tidy, sequentially ordered, or always rational; his telling does not make the story easy. His voice is, by turns, mesmerizing and terrifying, gentle and brutal, violent and calm, an intensely private scream and a coolly public narration. Indeed, Ondaatje's finest achievement here is this creation of voice because it is through this medium, with its range of shifting tones, that his supremely fictive Billy comes to life for us.

The "true story" that Billy tells us is not so much a report of facts about the American West in the middle of the last century, or the background politics of the Lincoln County cattle war, or even the "real" motivation and purpose (assuming he had one) for his own life-style. Instead, he shows us this world

through his own eyes. It is a world where friends betray, where for selfish reasons Garrett hunts him down like an animal, and where the heat of the desert sun violates his body and soul, driving him mad. It is a world of death so nauseating, violent and senseless that Billy staggers under its blows, but it is also a world of friendship, love, laughter and song, of cool, shadowed rooms and rest. The bare bones of a story are there alright--the early friendship with Garrett, the warning to leave the territory, the killings of Charlie Bowdre and Tom O'Folliard, the eventual arrest, escape and final ambush on the night of July 14, 1881. But what matters most in Ondaatje's rendering is Billy's *felt* response to the world around him, that and his voice. Listen, he cries, *this* is the true story of Billy the Kid.

Michael Ondaatje's art has been variously labelled surrealistic, cinematic, avant-garde, extremist and post-modern. Perhaps it is all these things, and more. Certainly, *Billy the Kid* is both a parody of historical documentary in its use (and ironic mis-use) of sources and a rollicking "spaghetti western" that rivals Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* (a favorite Ondaatje film and film-maker). For me, *Billy the Kid* also dramatizes the role of the autobiographer in the act of creating his own life from the inside out. Ondaatje's Billy is an autobiographical artist (or an artist as autobiographer), as well as the lead actor in and the director of his own story.

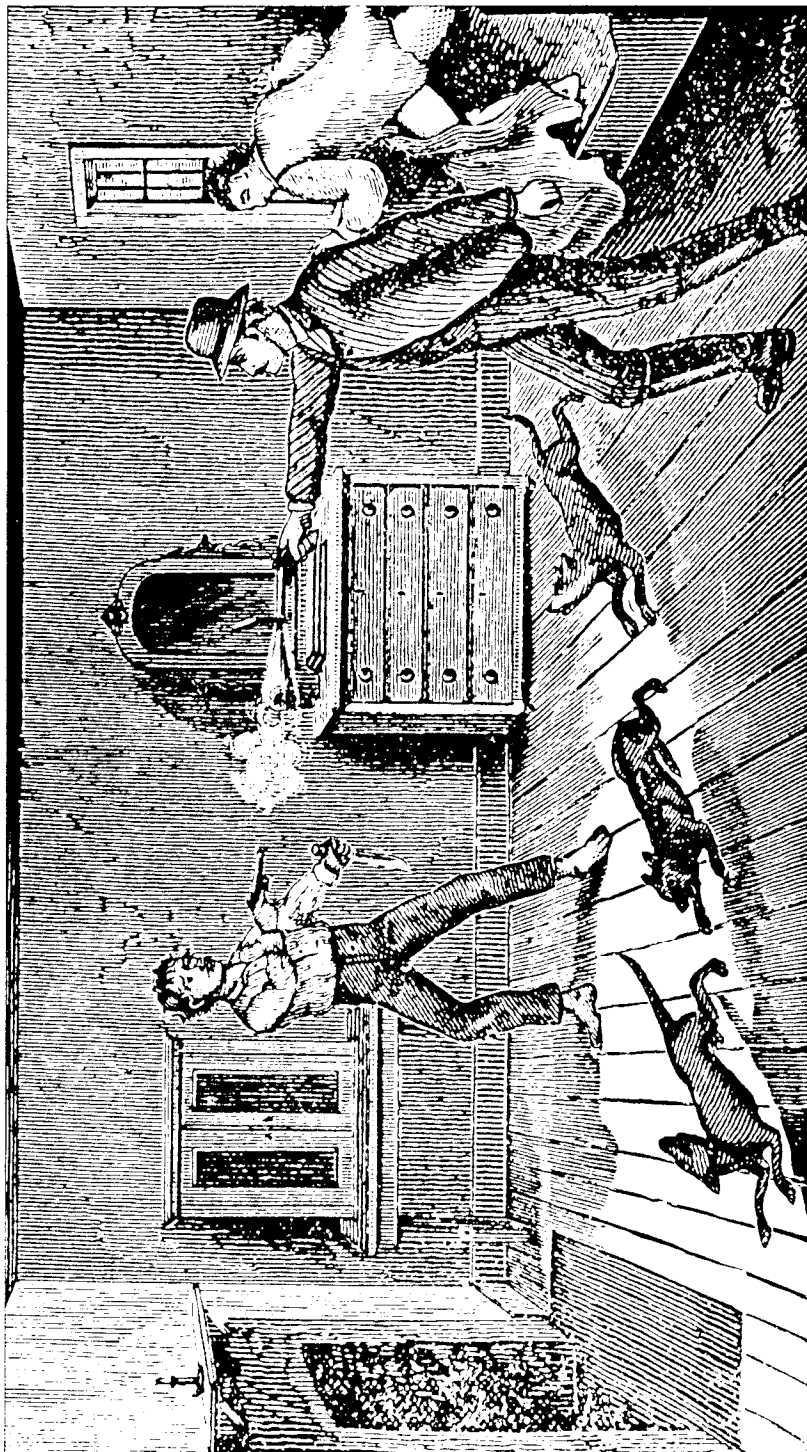
To enter the theatre of his "collected works" is to enter the darkest realm of the artistic imagination. Luckily, for us, the nightmare will end less violently than it does for Billy: in the book we turn the last page to see a small boy in a cowboy outfit smiling at us from the page and recognize, with a start, the young Michael Ondaatje: in the theatre the lights come up and the figures in Billy's story take their safe, conventional bows. But before that reassuring end, we must enter the imagined life; we must begin to listen to the voice...

Not a story about me through their eyes. Find the beginning, the slight silver key to unlock it, to dig it out. Here then is a maze to begin, be in.

(And as the lights go out, remember--you left your gun at the door!)

Sherrill Grace

Sherrill Grace is Professor of English at The University of British Columbia. She specializes in modern Canadian literature and is the author of books on Margaret Atwood and Malcolm Lowry.



Entering a friend's darkened bedroom, Billy is surprised by Garrett and brought down with a bullet to the heart without returning fire.

Halleluyah: Billy's in Heaven

*Last night I sat a-dreamin'
Near th' fire, in my chair,
Thinkin' still of Billy,
Wishin' he wuz dere.*

*Soon my head wuz noddin',
An' first thing I know,
De gates of Heaven opened,
All wid gold aglow!*

*An' den I see de angels
Come down de golden stair,
An' I know dat Billy's
Somewhere 'round up dere.*

*An' my heart is thankful,
For he's loved, I know,
An' maybe cuttin' up,
Just like here below.*

*Oh, we will be joyful,
When we climb dat stair,
For our Billy's waitin',
Somewhere, 'round up dere.*

Text of an anonymous song,
ca. 1905.

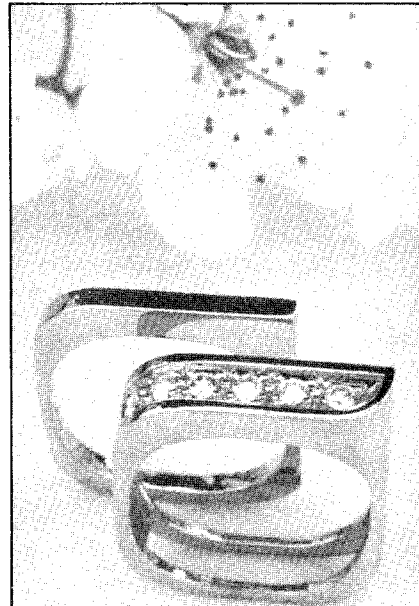
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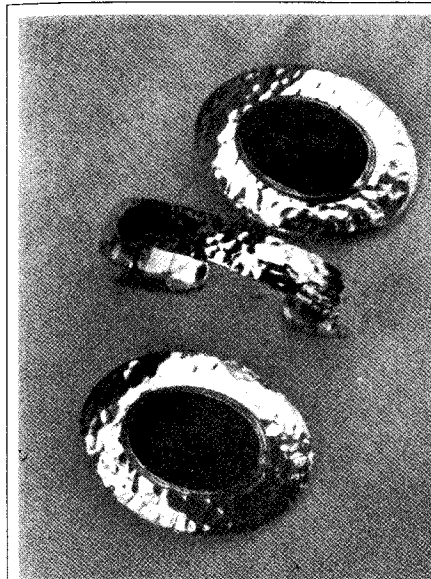
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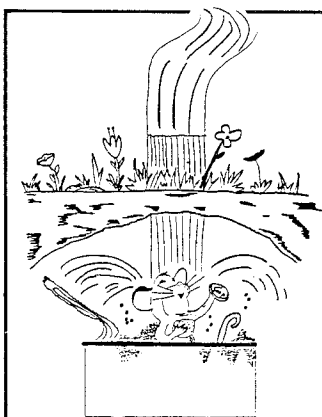
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*Jodie Foster,
Actress*

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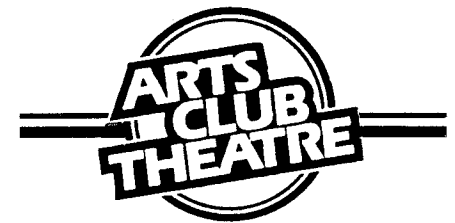


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