

A new Link:

POETRY

The True Story of Billy the Kid

James Rooks

Mario Lanza was a relative of Mine

RONALD TAVEL

THE TRUE STORY OF BILLY THE KID

(even the infectious volume of fabrications
invested in his legend) excites me into an apprehensiveness
similar to what, I must confess,

I always feel at the
announcement of a new translation of Heidegger
essays. I'm disturbed
by the old lithographs I find in collector's items nickel novels
of his life—perhaps I aver
the general

condemnation of Victorian prints in this; but
I'm especially repelled by anything that postdates authenticity.
The lithographs are to some degree
like serious cartoons
in the comic books I read when I was young: even
jokingly I can't
pretend to be still impressed by surrogate realities however
earnest or desperately driven
their artists were.

Who is Billy the Kid? Chatterton, Rimbaud, perhaps
Rupert Brooke and Keats, Keith Douglas, also Paul Newman
who gave a Method-School style human
angle to the story
in a western I saw when I was living out west—
and he's important
because the ubiquitous billboards giant with his pajamaed
physique
more than adequately divest
arguments that

deny he's becoming the popular symbol of
his defrauded, fast, and angry generation. And Billy the Kid is
certainly a feral child, so his
backdrop need not always
be narrowed to a stripped, pressed, banana and melon
Orozco fresco
desert, but can be Mowgli's tangled forest, Romulus and Remus'.
His poetry, not the felon,
is what counts then.

Is this poem's title deceiving? Especially
if you read it first in the table of contents you probably thought
this
would be some new analysis
of the legendary
outlaw, or would contain, at least, details apposite
to his history that
would jig-saw the old facts into an unusual pastiche making for
relevant reading, or that it
(since it's supposed

to be poetry) might be a light verse treatment of
the subject. . . . Well, I'd hate to have you pigeonhole me on
that shelf too high
to reach, where I'd want to torpify
those writers I discussed,
artists who excell in dispensing deputy truths,
in costuming our
century: and I'm no less culprit a dissembler if I'm to add,
as indicated, to the youth's
life's romance here.

I mean I'd rather not, now that I think about it,
marry him with metaphor to all the prodigies, enfants terribles,
Cleobis and Biton's pariah
benisons, brevity,
however unsponsored they leap to mind, his canvas
arraigns and that in
their turn canvas his image in exchange of complements' ceaseless
circle
of distraction. This looking-glass
on looking-glass,

this eternal until some transcendence corridor
simile-sourced is exactly what you don't need. Let us, then, prefer
him
in his self's bachelorhood, synonym
to the heroics he
made flower from his loneliness and the "true story"
of William Bonney
which, I exact, was and should be the anticipation.
Circumferenced by
reference books, the territory
of facts, then, thus:

They drove the two-mule wagon up into Las Vegas
at a smart pace, past the plaza, the pueblo hotel and general store.
Albescent glare; the curious pour
onto the street and his
great black mustache catches sweat under Pat Garrett's hat;
the Kid is waving
to the crowd from the wagon. He waited, hunched, in the jail at
Las Vegas.

Santa Fe: laughed throughout his chat
with reporters.

In Lincoln it was different: He loved J. W. Bell
with his eyes and with the bracelets Bell had given him split open
his head,

opened with his keys a gun box, said

"Hullo, Bob" to Marshall

Olinger running up to the jail, taciturnly
emptied a double

barrelled shotgun into him. After the Greathouse killing he
escaped to

Yerby Ranch; when Garrett sternly
saddled his vote

against him in Sumner, December, 1880,
he enlisted the aid of an amazed midnight—and the acquiescing
elements matched his prepossessing
audacity with thick
fogs. It was almost a game. So, too, his escape from
the Lincoln jailhouse—
it couldn't have been more theatrical: his orders for a horse, the
file

for his feet shackles, the aplomb
in returning

with the excuse that he had forgotten his blankets.
A pen-wielding Voltaire of the Las Vegas Daily Optic noted, on
May 4th this Byronic paragon
of the swift striking when
the iron's hot in relation to the audience
of his getaway:
"The pusillamity (sic) of such conduct by a whole town, and
that town
the county seat, is almost in-
credible. Yet

such is the fact." Think, why call his early and careful
critics out on the accountable carpet of poltroonery? They had
followed his freedoms from New York's sad

slums, stifling Mexican

hovels, and the famed inferno whose ashes fool's rush
fancied his gravemark.

They kept their continence out of studied astonishment, study of
his

rehabilitation—who'd hush
the Kid's great poem?

The Kid's first poem: he polished it over and again:
from Agua Azul, where his bronco broke, to Consios Springs,
arriving
by footsores, continuing, thriving
on these joyous blisters,
to Buffalo Arroyo where friends finally furnished
a horse. Most charming
of his stanzas: he sits, smiling, corollated in a flock of sheep, while
immunized Mason, a tarnished
lawman, shies by.

The Kid was avaricious, though any man would fuel
that impudent, innocent greed. He wanted to know the terminate
homes
slaveboss reality currycombs
his carriages toward, the
punctilious curriculum his mastery of would
vacation probing
forever. What satisfaction on these accounts he drew from his
being
evicted from Portales, what good
the betrayal

in the Alamoed cabin at Stinking Springs did him
shall probably never be known. Charlie Bowdre died merely
suggesting
the desertion, the others wringing
their wrists for fetters
of pardon, faded more substantial shadows into
history. The Dona
Ana change of venue, Chisum's cock-cry denial, should have
shown him time
and place as the interested two;
complicity.

It was certainly his timing at fault, his frightening
the bronco and later the bay mare that brought the itinerant hero
to the ineluctable ago
events at Fort Sumner,
that fixed time for Garrett's fidgeting trigger finger.
Billy advances
into the room, a score of chubby putti arrowing his stockinged
feet,
thrill sufficient to make linger
but not alarm.

In the two minutes it took him to die did he see
Pat Garrett as the inevitable idea, and manage elegies
of irrelevance, parentheses
of despair outowning
the independent assertions of their insertions?
Or did he accuse
his dancing out of step, joining the rhythm too late or too early,
the
not supporting his suspicions,
and regret death?

Or did he cozen our rapacious prelibation—
so enigmatic verse answers his endurance—by pirating and purge
and leave a footnote to dramaturge
a way of life for us,
a book within book but at the end of a book
whose end we never
can ever reach! It could be taken as personal effrontery. I
almost do. (You'd prefer we took
a saner course?)

These are the prolixities of my indecision
and prejudice—this backtracking, trackcovering on the original
plan
and promised exposition. I can
only ask indulgence
for (said) sterile fragments as the prolegomena
to any future
laconism; the slow scouting for the necessary new city of our
quiescence; as the antenna
of tomorrow.

BOWDRE GARRETT AT STINKING SPRINGS

But I'll rein in and knot the temptation at this point
to examine or even pollenize the spurious accounts of the
Kid's life—stay tittletrue to free
true lessons from his cache:
Sometimes no single line of an irregular poem
has to be changed; it
has only to be gotten used to: the reader's out of date. Let us look,
then, at Billy's posthumus poems.
In retrospect

it seems he seized the moment at its moment dripping
ink and stamped it into history; a personalized immortality.
The same idea of Singapore, the
potential of Tangier—
poles of imperative romanticism, or rest, or
"It"; in the past, a
priori; now, perhaps; later—our problem's rub. Ought I get rich
enough
to oyster worlds—is now before
it is too late?

He keeps caught in me with the lariat of himself:
a best friend's letter from Fort Sumner, or I teach at Sumner Jr.
High,
oddly, New York, or reratify
his exact height and weight,
ridiculous deficiency in imperious
deportment, pose, and
approach, eyes too open or vaguely blue to argue acceptance as
more
than adolescent-serious,
light hair, fair skin,

and authorships of a left hand lording it enough
to laugh off the chip on its own shoulder. The New York
Sumner may be a
celebrity achievements away
from the old general
notable for colorful liveries of Mexican
blood, and the left hand
just a tradition, but the Kid's deferment through murder and
escapes, is
what Heidegger essays, is kin
to what I teach,

the poems of uneasy transience, of wasting absence
of time, or label-fixing in efforts to conjure its existence. Here's
ages alert to their aimless spheres,
grafted to the withered
hands that sometime since have let them drop into the wide
gravities lacking
their evidence and cantering impudencies from out their most
sheepish
pretensions. But I wouldn't pride
in decadence

for all of that. There is a way, of course, though en route
to this authentic realization where even chaos makes too fulgent
a warming-hearth, the irreverent
shoots, springtime salience
incident to our ambition-illicit grafting,
coquet indulgence.
Must—or this fascination stultifies its own self. I wouldn't even
play philosopher for shrivelling
from it finally.

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BOLTON ROOM

For it is seductive when you've the dramatic gift
to Byron after acts in time, in *their* time, and wrap them up in
verses
while they balance in their weird truces
of inexplicable
possibility. . . What salubrious coyotes
are we who will take
the hollow remains of collapsing cosmoi and carry them away,
washed
with so grateful tears, the doties
of harassed hearts.

Read Billy the Kid, and he rides, your saddle sidekick,
out of cattle horn adorned desert holes and hasty adobe deaths
across your fence into Twentieth
Century's Rocky Range,
leading you through its hills symmetrically clustered, pinned
with sagebrush and seed
into the Edened valley where, equipped with every
contemporary
convenience, rests the paladined
successful ranch

of your absolute ruin. Fate and your ingenious
fiction ease your avenues there. And why not? Everything
confederates
for our happiness. The abdicates
of our conceivable
aberrance are only such illogical instincts
as children harbor,
that quiver and quake into strangling ghouls of reality the shadow
of an achievement that extincts
before our lives.

And, merely, I say, if you are like me, meeting the
hour of deception as it rounds the road tilting to and jolting atop
a Wells Fargo coach, dropping to stop
the rock-splitting wheels, grand
stamping stallions and demand hands up, the treasure thrown
down is becoming
monthly more difficult, a stealthy senescence seeing gold's
purchases
as so many sad grave-bone prone
ranches and sheep.

He returns to the rigorously absented screen
of my most romantic recall as the indelible, invisible
~~brand name~~ reliefs beneath the scribble
~~watermarks~~ on my notebook work sheets,
a cold corpse carpeting the bedroom floor, wild wet hair
pasted on the blank
open globes of his blue eyes and two great ulcerations exhuming a
thick, noxious fertilizer where
my narcissitic

garden of verses has begun to grow. And in this
paradoxical propagation of self we have found our license for
the guilty horticulture. Restore
yourself to an alter
age, though, if you'd keep pottering: here's each hour surprise
to warn his poems aren't
really there, are sketched briefly in pencil, have expiration dates,
and he's
written little since his demise
early in life.

ROUTED TO THE ARCHIVES

RONALD TAVEL

Boy Killer Of Girl, 9, Gets Life

A 16-year-old Brooklyn youth, convicted of first-degree murder by a jury on April 14, was sentenced to a mandatory term of life imprisonment today by Supreme Court Justice Barshay.

James Rooks, of 234 Sands St., showed no emotion as sentence was pronounced. He was found guilty of raping Lourdes Bass, 9, on the roof of the apartment building at 190 York St. where she lived, then hurling her 14 stories to her death. The crime occurred Dec. 4, 1962.

Justice Barshay said "the shocking manner in which this crime was committed defies understanding."

Rooks was indicted twice for the crime. The first indictment was overturned for lack of corroborating evidence to a confession the youth allegedly made. At the trial, Rooks testified police had virtually dictated the confession to him.

James Rooks

(arrest Dec. 5, 1962, re Lourdes Bass, Farragut Housing Project)

He had the urge to take her to the sky.

And "urge" is his own word: a very exact, a curiously accusing word for a boy fifteen;

To take off all her clothes in the unlikely constellation of a cut lunch period.

She, concurring the Congo he collared back of her neck
pulling her into the automatic-elevator of, yes, still

Union Minier:

For she was colored too

Our Southern newspapers to the contrary, she was colored and Our Lady of
Lourdes, for she

"complied with me when I ordered her": again, his words. Accusing
though still not read so: and very exacting of a boot
in Brooklyn, that Ceilingward
is only their hands with morningpapers neighborhood.

Yet, this sky according to James
James' sky / James' loose-leaf
clutched against photographers
and his period of free service to the school library
attended the next day
were facile affair
compared to the first: the
fourteen Farragut stories;
and, only because she post-age faltered, our age
concurrent, regretting hers
so that he panicked, "so," he continued, "I
"took her
Savior-Age truths of the descent into newspaper and neighborhood, I
"took her
"to the edge of the roof and held her half-way over
having exposed
myself on a public Omnibus, mounted
like your Mama, the identical
fifteen cents
when she
was nine. "I said, 'Are you still going to tell?' / I took her
"back. As soon as she
"got away from the edge (she
was just barely nine years old) she
"said again she
"was going to tell
"when
"I took her back. So
O Jesus' Mother Womb of Lourdes!
"I pushed her over."

Mario Lanza was a relative of mine

When you think
if I think of my inane love
of when I think of my innate love of
sentimentality and aristocracy
I think more and more of Alexis Chitty
sitting down to definitions for Grove's Dictionary
of Music and Musicians
I also think of the precisely unnumberable
who paid in all too-numberable
5 million dollars to sit to listen to
a singer of Mozart and Handel not sing
Mozart and Handel
and the percisely
unnumberable of them that had to stand
I think how Chitty sat to think
precisely of his definition
and for the Dictionary's fifth edition
wrote of Irish tenor John McCormack
for class concert-conscious 1924
"by this time he could no longer be taken altogether
seriously as a musician
since in
his later years he devoted his extraordinary
and unimpaired gifts too largely to
sentimental and popular ditties not to be listen to
with patience by critics or with enjoyment by true
music-lovers"
you must think
if I think of my inane love of Alexis Chitty
and John McCormack's sentimental ditty
when I think of my love of aristocracy
I think of how McCormack stood to sing
and think of aristocracy's
debt to the precisely unnumberable
that it think it think it understand
every word he think he's singing
which means the unnumberable must never stoop
but rise to the definition of Chitty
that if you think if you think
how when I think that
Mario Lanza was a relative of mine
you think I think I wouldn't put a dime
in a music box for him or Pinza or Peerce
I think you think I think you think
how I think about aristocracy
and the patrician
in the unnumberable plebian's definition.