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## Review of *Inventing Billy the Kid: Visions of the Outlaw in America, 1881-1981* By Stephen Tatum

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biography was formulated as a "romance." As a "bad" badman, a threat to the moral order, the Kid had to die so that civilization—represented by Sheriff Pat Garrett—could advance. This formula of conflict and resolution by death can be detected in dime novels and early magazine accounts, which dwell on the Kid's unheroic appearance and bloodthirsty character.

After a period of meager interest, by the mid-1920s a quite different figure was being molded by biographers and film makers. This was the prototypical "good" badman, one who personifies a kind of idealism. In Walter Noble Burns's key biography in 1926 and in a 1930 film, the Kid becomes a redeemer who helps small farmers. Tatum links this revised image to popular reactions against prohibition and to the success of gangster films. The 1940s saw paradoxical images: a cold-eyed and revenge-seeking gunman portrayed by Robert Taylor, and an erotic Billy in the controversial Howard Hughes movie. We see the role of Pat Garrett also shifting with the times. By 1955, still another metamorphosis occurs: the outlaw becomes a tragic hero, "alienated from a materialistic society." Latter-day versions of his career have also emphasized the theme of alienation, which the author believes stems from the same attitudes in the general population. And now? No clear picture exists; the image is shattered.

Tatum is generally successful in his effort to link visions of the Kid to cultural history. Only an attempt to tie experimental poets to a major change in the Kid's imagery seems unconvincing. Inevitably there is some repetitiveness in the materials, yet the organization is logical and the writing smooth and rich in vocabulary. The text is buttressed by detailed notes and a fine bibliography. Amazingly free of typos, with well-selected photographs and an interesting jacket design, this work is a good value for anyone trying to understand the appeal of outlawry in America.

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*Inventing Billy the Kid: Visions of the Outlaw in America, 1881–1981.* By Stephen Tatum. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982. Photographs, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. xi + 244 pp. \$19.95.

Here is a sophisticated study of an individual who is both a "timeless conventional outlaw and a timely invented outlaw." Tatum traces the changes in the images of Billy the Kid over one century, relating them to concurrent social and cultural circumstances. The historical William H. Bonney is accorded one chapter, but the book's main concern is the multitude of interpreters who have created their own versions of his life in works ranging from dime novels and biographies to ballets and films.

Initially, between 1881 and 1900, the Kid's