

RICHARD DENNER



THE GRAIL

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GWEN

I see you in profile in moonlight
at the edge of a cutbank in Ardenvoir.
Lady of My Thoughts, honor and praise,
your image empowers me.

A dead forest is a strange place
to be in evening dress—beautiful
intensities—the field vibrating with
the spirits of young trees.

Do the trees change as I touch your skin?

The poet attempts to define the air she walks in before she loses her innocence.

PERCY

O, Joker, humorous in all situations,
the center of the pack—the hero
of transformation, an innocent fool.

He has frightening brightness in the eyes.
He laughs his bright laughter, and like
Stan Laurel does something unexpected.

Entranced by a few drops of blood
on the breast of a seagull in a parking lot,
he shoots a half-court basket without looking.

Half a mind. Half a question. Three points.

The poets are eternally rearranging the furniture—pinning the tail on the dotting Old Fool. Their destination is towards the ghosts and deaths in their work.

MADDENING

Those lines
those damn lines

And all this blank space—
a place with no one in it

And nothing below the surface
and nothing above the surface

And nothing on the surface
but a white rabbit

One way to liberate the lovers from syntactic-semantic relationships is to encourage them not to sleep between the lines.

WEARY ELVES

Lovers abide their time
in uninterrupted bliss.

Gentle forms
hovering above the steep hills
grieving, grieving.

Nature molds a new day
from filmy vapors and dissolves
the confusion of joy and pain.

Stars reflect
in the lake—

Order
peace

I am always meeting disheveled elves on the path.

MAYBE A MAIDEN

Hard to know.

She lives alone in a castle on a hill
with a garden of shrubs shaped like dogs.
Poodles, beagles, pit bulls.

In the second light, she sits by the window
feeding birds. Surely, they are nightingales.
No one is ever seen in the garden,
yet the shrubs stay shapely and tasteful.

Strange, her mode of life,
desiring nothing, to be left to herself
in a topiary garden, desiring nothing.
Quite weird, really.

These peculiar settings and puzzling people, it's enough to make me cry, "That's it—let there be fire in the sea, earthquakes, hailstorms, avalanche. Let the sky open and the gods ejaculate."

FOREST PERILOUS

O, wild bubbling brook
naked to the sky and the flowers
and the animals that drink here,

Your ambrosial fluid
soothing my lips is purer
than the tilting of this
wooden-worded line.

A knight in rented armor (in dented amor) having shed tears and blood and spilt his seed in foreign hands pauses for refreshment before continuing his quest for the perfect snack.

MERLIN CREEPING ABOUT

Usually, they meet in the woods
for dark, secret conduct
in the frenzy of the moment.

I see them often, and I remain
hidden—not that I need the titillation,
but it's OK under the circumstances.

So much power in a secret—
yes, I too come to the woods
for dark, secret conduct.

I was locked up in Alameda County Jail. The ghosts thought I had come to liberate them. They wanted better shit to eat, and they believed my poetry might be the Holy Grail.

LATE KNIGHT ON THE GOLDEN GATE

for Frank

You were AWOL.
We'd been out all night
driving about, drinking stout.

You wanted to cruise the bridge,
and we said we'd pick you up
on the Marin side.

They must have thought you suspicious,
two Highway Patrolmen—you freaked
and leaped into the fog.

The hill seemed closer than it was—
200 feet down, you were agog
when you landed in the muck on your ass.

Man, you were a true stand-up,
with your last breath saying,
“It only hurts when I fart.”

R.I.P.

SECRETS OF THE OVAL ORIFACE

Yes, oh, yes, yes, yes, yes, oh
this must stop—my soul is dark,
and its flowers are nightshade and wolfbane.

We must put this behind us
and get back to work.

Damn the sun and its flowers.
Damn the glass eye of the moon.
Damn my weakness and this heavy hour.

My heart quakes.
Thank God, it's Friday.

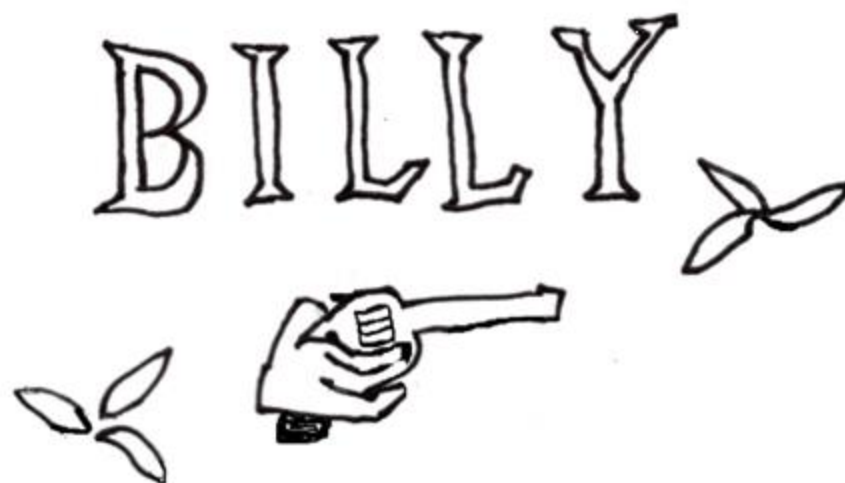
This is a transcription of a tape recorded by Linda Tripp. Nothing was ever made of it because the events in Dallas superseded this situation in importance. Camelot is now a wispy memory.



BILLY

BY
RICHARD DENNER





Apologies to Jess

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Billy the Kid (born Henry McCarty; November 23, 1859 – July 14, 1881), also known by the pseudonym William H. Bonney.

“He said he was seventeen, though he didn’t look to be fourteen. I gave him a job helping around camp. He hadn’t worked very long until he wanted some money. I asked him if he was going to quit. He said, ‘No, I want to buy some things.’ I asked him how much he wanted and tried to get him to take \$10 for I thought that was enough for him to spend, but he hesitated and asked for \$40. I gave it to him. He went down to the post trader and bought himself a whole outfit: six-shooter, belt, scabbard, and cartridges.”

—H.F. Smith (Rancher)

BILLY MEETS THE CANYON SPIRIT

Dawn of the manicured fingertips.
Billy swallows a handful of peyote
and pulls himself out of bed,
away from his warm companion.

He walks up an arroyo and into a canyon
a mile from his hut. The spirit of a bullet
ricocheting. There is the hiss of cymbals.
Billy's hand trembles in the fake landscape.

He blazes away with his *Peacemaker*.
He fires six rounds. Reloads. Fires.
He shoots bushes, rocks, holes in the ground.
He shoots bullets at bullets in the hot air.

Billy the Kid, shooting in the chaparral,
outdraws his shadow.

This is the gun silent screen actor of B-westerns, William S. Hart,
bought and proudly showed off to his friends. The gun was manufactured years after The Kid's
death.

BOOGIE KNIGHT

Billy's in the closet checking out his arsenal,
trying on different outfits—

A Colt Anaconda and *Colt Python*
to crossdraw under a frock coat

A Browning Buck Mark with scope
and a *Walther* for backup with backstrap

A Smith & Wesson Model 640
with a *Kahr* micro 9 in patent leather

The *Para-Ord* double-action 14 shot .45
The *Bland .577*—the ultimate manstopper,

Your fresh face.

Marc, I dug your article on Rebel Angels, reminding me of Blake's *Your Heaven gate might be my Hell door*. Hard to know which way the angels blow in these poetry wars. So many confused flags. Rimbaud (1854-1891) outlived The Kid, but his words were just as deadly as Billy's bullets.

FLASH FROM SILVER CITY STAR

*Billy the Kid, terror of New Mexico
Lay as a gasping and quivering corpse
While his blood dyed the dirt floor
Of Pete Maxwell's adobe hut.*

*Eleven ghosts of the Kid's victims
Stood waiting to escort him
To eternal darkness.*

“I don't blame you for writing of me as you have. You had to believe other stories, but then I don't know if anyone would believe anything good of me anyway.”

—Alias