

Los Corridos de Billy the Kid - El Bilito: Contemporary Ballads and Songs about Billy the Kid from Native New Mexicans, Rudolfo Anaya and Simón Álvarez

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ABSTRACT

Historically, the role of a playwright or storyteller creates social narratives that are rooted in a community and function as intrinsic theatrical representations of a particular community. Plays regarding historical figures offer important clues for understanding how playwrights articulate the role of history within different cultural contexts. Rudolfo Anaya's *Billy The Kid* (1994) reveals a social narrative concerning the cultural encounters on the historical figure of Billy the Kid. Anaya's dramatic text engages in what cultural anthropologist Norman K. Denzin calls interpretive ethnography and represents the historical past of native New Mexicans. Included in the production and playscript of Anaya's *Billy the Kid* are a collection of two original corridos / ballads and one canción / lyrical song written by Anaya and songwriter Simón Álvarez. The corridos and canción were a collection of songs incorporated in the world premiere production of Billy the Kid. An examination of the play, corridos, and canción as narrative illustrates that such cultural accounts of Billy the Kid or El Bilito are not just a play and songs to be performed on stage, but rather function as literary evidence of cultural encounters from *Nuevo Mexicanos'* perspectives that add to the cultural mythos and historiography of Billy the Kid as el querido — El Bilito.

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RESUMEN

Históricamente, el papel de un dramaturgo o narrador crea narrativas sociales que tienen sus raíces en una comunidad y funcionan como representaciones teatrales intrínsecas de una determinada comunidad. Las obras sobre personajes históricos ofrecen importantes pistas para comprender cómo los dramaturgos articulan el papel de la historia en diferentes contextos culturales. *Billy The Kid* la obra de Rudolfo Anaya (1994) revela una narrativa social sobre los encuentros culturales de la figura histórica de Billy the Kid. El texto dramático de Anaya se dedica a lo que el antropólogo cultural Norman K. Denzin llama etnografía interpretativa y representa el pasado histórico de los nativos de Nuevo México. En el texto dramático de Anaya *Billy the Kid* se incluye una colección de dos corridos / baladas originales y una canción lírica escrita por Anaya y el compositor Simón Álvarez. Los corridos y la canción son una colección de canciones que se incorporan en la primera producción mundial de Billy the Kid. En el presente trabajo examino el texto, corridos, y canción que sostengo que son narrativas culturales así como los documentos literarios que evidencian la relación con el Bilito / Billy the Kid.” Estos encuentros culturales desde perspectivas de las personas de Nuevo México tratan los mitos culturales y la historiografía de Billy the Kid como el consentido y el querido — el Bilito de la gente.

Palabras clave: Billy the Kid, El Bilito, Corridos, Baladas, Canción, Rudolfo Anaya, Etnografía Interpretativa, Nuevo México / *Hispano*.

According to many Western historians, Billy the Kid has become one of the most numerous legends of the lawless Wild West frontier.¹ He has captured the American imagination and in this manner was transformed into a western icon promulgated by American culture and media. He became an historical figure from the old West who stirred up controversy by incarnating many representations from cold-blooded killer, to robber, to social bandit.² Various historians have published papers and books on Billy the Kid in New Mexico territory, but only a few investigators have dealt with the social and cultural influence, as well as with the presence he has had with New

Mexican people — mainly the *Hispanos*³ — and only in a limited way.⁴ These historical accounts and narratives of Billy the Kid construct a problematic view of Billy the Kid, oftentimes dismissing artistic and literary accounts of Billy the Kid as created by *Nuevo Mexicanos*. Therefore, this essay examines the New Mexico perceptions of Billy the Kid through the analysis of the dramatic text of *Billy The Kid*⁵ by Rudolfo Anaya (1994). By examining this historical contemporary play and its *corridos* and the *canción* included, I highlight the politics of interpretation by which playwright Anaya and songwriter Álvarez transcend social structures, as well as cultural representations of Billy the Kid. Both playwright and songwriter exemplify cultural scripts / practices, as the play, *corridos*, and the *canción* construct folk narratives on the cultural and political perceptions of Billy the Kid. Building on the foundational work of cultural anthropologist Norman K. Denzin's cultural performance theory of Interpretive Ethnography (1997: 199), I argue that Anaya's play, *corridos*, and the *canción* set out to recover a cultural reality that existed in early twentieth-century New Mexico, and address the social and political relations between *El Bilito* and the *Hispanos*, an ideology that constitutes what I am calling as "mythos of *El Bilito*." The mythos of *El Bilito* is an artistic attempt to recount the historical relationship between *El Bilito* and *Hispanos / Nuevo Mexicanos*. Playwright Anaya and songwriter Álvarez inform the productive and reproductive logic of "storytelling" by writing the *Hispanos*' voice into history. Their texts as cultural scripts, ballads, and song are an effort to disrupt convention through the re-visioning of the past, offering a counter discursive critique of Billy the Kid's political and social configuration as a beloved and adorned community member.

Billy the Kid was a cultural manifestation through which critics, audiences, and readers debated important issues of the late nineteenth-century New Mexico territory,⁶ including not only the volatile issues of law and justice but also the social construction of Billy the Kid and his ever-increasing involvement with *Hispanos* of New Mexico. To Hispanic New Mexicans he was known as "*el Bilito*," "*el chivo*" (the kid), and "*el chivato*" (their little Billy)⁷. Many Hispanic New Mexican natives have a long-standing oral culture and connection with Billy the Kid-*el Bilito*. Miguel Antonio Otero⁸, first New Mexican Governor of the U.S. Territory of New Mexico, from 1897-1906, first described his relationship with Billy in the publication *The Real Billy the Kid*:

In Santa Fé we [Otero and his brother] were allowed to visit the kid in jail, taking him cigarette papers, tobacco, chewing gum, candy, pies and nuts. He was very fond of sweets and asked us to bring him all we could... I liked the kid very much, and long before we even reached Santa Fé, nothing would have pleased me more than to have witnessed his escape. (Otero 178)

This passage reveals the kindred spirit that the former Governor and his brother shared with Billy, and also represents an overall spirit of how the relationship began and continued between Billy and the *Hispanos* of New Mexico. Further, Otero provides other quotes from New Mexicans, such as this one: “Mrs. Jaramillo, at Fort Sumner, said of him: Billy was a good boy, but he was hounded by men who wanted to kill him because they feared him. He was always on the defensive” (Otero 179). Otero also mentions another native New Mexican:

Don Martin Chaves, of Santa Fé, said of him: Billy was a perfect gentleman and a man with a noble heart. He never killed a native citizen of New Mexico in all his career; the men he did kill, he had to in defense of his own life. He had plenty of courage. He was a brave man and did not know what fear meant. They had to sneak up on him in the dead of night to murder him. (Otero 179)

In their testimonies, Otero, Jaramillo, and Chaves speak of Billy the Kid as a champion of New Mexican culture. Otero and his brother befriended Billy and advocated for his escape. Jaramillo spoke favorably of Billy’s character and shared an emotive energy that validated Billy’s defensive demeanor, one, perhaps, that she would closely identify with the times. Chaves quickly reminds us that Billy was a virtuous character who demonstrated a great deal of respect for the culture of *Hispanos* by never killing a “native citizen of New Mexico” (179). These memories record the informative feelings of empathy, which have an identifiable link to the historical past and speak of the relationship and connection that Billy the Kid established with *Hispanos*.

Furthermore, during the Lincoln County War, Billy the Kid and *Hispanos* joined forces to defend the citizens and the state against the Santa Fe Ring. The Santa Fe Ring was a collection of Anglo businessman, attorneys, and storeowners. However, the Tunstall-McSween faction was primarily composed of *Nuevo Mexicano* farmers and small ranchers who had lost their land to the Santa Fe Ring (Rivera 121). Otero recalls that members of the Tunstall-McSween were McSween, Francisco Zamora, Ignacio Gonzales, Vicente Romero, Hijinio Salazar, José Chávez, and Billy the Kid or *El Bilito* as the other native New Mexican farmers and ranchers named him (Otero 66; Rivera 121). The Mexican political relationship with *El Bilito* is extensively researched in Michael Rivera’s book, *The Emergence of Mexican-Americans: Recovering Stories of Mexican Peoplehood in U.S. Culture*.

Fighting alongside *Hispanos*, Billy the Kid became a hero to the New Mexican people throughout the territory. He became a symbol of resistance and freedom fighter for this population. To the New Mexicans, *El Bilito* was on their side, fighting the Anglo

regime that had taken their lands and impoverished their lives since the end of the U.S.-Mexico War. Because of *El Bilito's* courage, he became a weapon that could help fight against the Santa Fe Ring. With the help of Billy, the Oteros hoped to win the war and regain the political and economic control that they had lost to the [Santa Fe] ring (121). This event represented one of the many miscarriages of justice and of injustices perpetrated in New Mexican history, and which profoundly affected the *Nuevo Mexicano* communities and their perceptions of *El Bilito*.

Continuing the tradition of *el querido - El Bilito*, I have been interested in New Mexico's *El Bilito* since my childhood. During most of our summer vacations, my father drove our family from West Texas to Roswell and through the Capitan Mountains, as we made our way into Albuquerque and Santa Fe to visit relatives. My father's birthplace was the Capitan Mountains in New Mexico. As we drove through the mountains, he proudly told us stories of *El Bilito* and his imprisonment at the jailhouse in Lincoln County. On other occasions during our summer vacations, we would make our way back into New Mexico taking a different route into Albuquerque. This time around on the map was Fort Sumner. Fort Sumner became a fueling-up station, a place to visit my father's cousins, and a different locale for *El Bilito* stories. We would stop at the Fort Sumner Billy The Kid Museum to visit the gravesite of *El Bilito*. As a family, including all nine children, we stood above his gravesite as if we were visiting a long-forgotten deceased member of the family. As a child, I recall looking over his gravesite, touching his gravestone gently to pay my respects. As these childhood memories reveal, *El Bilito* was someone who not only became part of my father's oral history, but my New Mexico history lesson as told by my father who grew up in the Capitan Mountains.

Years later in my adult life, I developed yet another layer of interest for *El Bilito*. In 1996, Rudolfo Anaya, my father's first cousin, my second cousin, gave to me a play he had written about Billy the Kid. As I found the script exciting, a reminder of my father's tales and a source of folk songs I had never heard before, I decided to direct and produce Anaya's *Billy the Kid* (1994). The first U.S. premiere production was held at the South Broadway Cultural Center in summer 1997. I was pleasantly surprised to find in our audiences Billy the Kid aficionados and New Mexico - *El Bilito* enthusiasts, and New Mexico natives who told me stories and commented that through the play, "Anaya has told the story of how 'we' remember *El Bilito*."⁹ Years later in my scholarly studies, I have found yet another intersection with *El Bilito* through collecting theatrical memorabilia such as play scripts, playbills, musical scores, recorded performances, and productions. Hence, I started my own personal scholarly research, particularly on Rudolfo Anaya's *Billy The Kid*, and the *corridos* and the *canción* of *El Bilito*.

1. BILLY THE KID: PLAY, *CORRIDOS*, AND *CANCIÓN*

Billy the Kid by Rudolfo Anaya is a full-length two-act play set in the historical time of 1881, the fateful night of Billy the Kid's death in Pete Maxwell's home. The voice representing the viewpoint of *Nuevo Mexicanos* in the play is "Paco Anaya," the narrator, who was a friend of *El Bilito*. Paco Anaya also serves as a commentator on the action as he witnessed it, and provides the perspective of the *Nuevo Mexicanos*. He is a constant reminder that the presence of Billy the Kid lives in the consciousness and physical reality of *Nuevo Mexicanos*. In the opening scene, *El Bilito* is in the home of Pete Maxwell. As he holds Rosa (his lover, and Paco's sister) in his arms, he speaks to her with a mixture of Spanish and English — code-switching. He articulates his plans for the future with Rosa:

Billy: Time to settle down... give up being a vagabundo.

Rosa: Siempre lo prometes...

Billy: Esta vez lo voy hacer. Mira. A hundred acres, enough land to run a small herd. You should see it, Rosa. There's good grazing, plenty of water, and the beauty of the mountains. It's what I always wanted...

Rosa: Es un sueño, Billy.

Billy: Tu eres mi sueño, amor... Te vas conmigo?

Rosa: mi padre no lo permite.

Billy: yo hablo con el. Vas a ver. Voy a cambiar...

Rosa: ¿Por qué te gusta tanto ese maldado condado de Lincoln? Quédate aquí.

Billy: Me gustan las montañas, y la gente.

Rosa: Pero los tejanos no te quieren.

Billy: Qué importa. Anda, casate conmigo. Quiero hijos...

Rosa: Sería possible?

Billy: Sí, es posible. Ven. Imagina. El Bilito, con hijos. Let the papers write about that. Y después, I'll be a grandfather. (Anaya 2)

The primary gesture in this passage for Anaya is to reflect upon the intimate relationship of *El Bilito* with the *Nuevo Mexicanos*. Anaya places *El Bilito* within a specific ideological locus, as a family acquaintance, a lover within a *Nuevo Mexicano* cultural context, and one who possesses fluency in the Spanish language. As historian Michael Wallis states in his book, *Billy the Kid: The Endless Ride* (2007),¹⁰ "it helped that he [Billy the Kid] spoke Spanish as fluently as a native, a proficiency that served him well with the Hispanics for the rest of his life" (129). Billy the Kid's acquisition of bilingual language skills and the cultural acceptance of *Nuevo Mexicanos* marked him as a social member of the *Hispano* community. Billy the Kid not only formed a political agency with defending the rights of democratic citizenship for *Nuevo Mexicanos*, but also created a social bond with cultural customs and practices of the *Nuevo Mexicanos*' way of life.

Another cultural element Anaya uses in his play *Billy the Kid*, designed to highlight the sentiments of *Nuevo Mexicanos*, is the use of *corridos* (ballads).¹¹ In *Billy the Kid*, Anaya documents two *corridos* (ballads) and a *canción* (lyrical song), both of which were used in the production and serve as important elements of storytelling in the legend of *El Bilito* and his affable relations with the native *Nuevo Mexicanos*. The first *corrido* appearing in the play is written in the traditional style of the *corrido*, telling of time, place, and how Billy the Kid died. According to Chicano / *Hispano* folklorists, Enrique Lamadrid's definition of the evolution of the *corrido* tradition in the Greater Southwestern United States, "the *corrido* by definition assumes as a starting point the common knowledge and values of a community, its narration of a chronological series of historical events can often be fragmentary ("Los Corridos de Río Arriba: Two Ballads of the Land Grant Movement, New Mexico, 1965-70" 38).¹² In Anaya's play, the *corrido* is told by the voice of *Nuevo Mexicanos* as they mourn Billy the Kid's death. The *corrido*, "El Corrido de Billy the Kid," begins with a description of the fateful night of 1881 when Billy was shot by Sheriff Pat Garrett in Pedro Maxwell's house in Fort Sumner.

Fue una noche oscura y triste 1
 en el pueblo de Fort Sumner,
 cuando el sheriff Pat Garrett
 a Billy the Kid mató
 a Billy the Kid mató

It was a sad and dark night
 in the town of Fort Sumner,
 when sheriff Pat Garrett
 killed Billy the Kid,
 killed Billy the Kid.

Mil ochocientos ochenta y uno, 2
 presente lo tengo yo,
 cuando en la casa de Pedro Maxwell
 nomás dos tiros le dio,
 nomás dos tiros le dio

Eighteen hundred eighty one,
 I remember it well,
 when in the house of Pedro Maxwell
 only twice did he shoot him,
 only twice did he shoot him.

Vuela, vuela palomita, 3
 a los pueblos de Río Pecos,
 cuéntale a las morenitas
 Que ya su Billy murió,
 Que ya su Billy murió .

Fly, fly, little dove,
 to the towns of the Pecos River,
 tell the dark eyed girls
 that their Billy died,
 that their Billy died.

¡Ay, qué cobarde el Pat Garrett, 4
 ni chansa a Billy le dio!
 En los abrazos de su amada,
 ahí mismo lo mató
 ahí mismo lo mató

Oh, what a coward Pat Garrett
 not a chance did he give Billy!
 In the arms of his loved one,
 there did he kill him,
 there did he kill him.

¡Ay, qué tristeza me da ver a Rosita llorando, y el pobre Billy en sus brazos, con su sangre derramando, con su sangre derramando.	5	Oh, how sad it makes me to see Rosita crying, and poor Billy in her arms, with his blood spilling over, with his blood spilling over,
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Vuela, vuela palomita, a los pueblos de Río Pecos, cuéntale a las morenitas que ya su Billy murió, que ya su Billy murió.	6	Fly, fly, little dove to the towns of the Pecos River, tell the dark eyed girls that their Billy died, that their Billy died.
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(El Corrido de Billy the Kid¹³. Written by Rudolfo Anaya (letra) and sung by Simón Álvarez¹⁴(melodía))

The *corrido* tells of his lover Rosita witnessing Billy's death and crying as Billy fell wounded into her arms. This type of ballad falls into the category of *corridos* that is closely associated with the heroic and tragic ballads discovered in Mexico and along the U.S. Mexico borderlands (Paredes 1958b). Anaya's use of the *corrido* in his play reveals the folk evolution as Lamadrid explains it: "...the *corrido* has not so much declined as adapted itself to different modes of production, performance, and diffusion" (Lamadrid 1986: 39). Anaya, as *corridista*, uses a technique of writing that is best described by Norman Denzin, who calls the process of writing the "pedagogical performance narratives" (2003: 38). Pedagogical performance narratives are based on reflexive writing that edits an experience or draws upon multiple personal and group experiences in which often the writer criticizes social formations and writes from a social and political culture (2003: 38). This process is demonstrated in stanzas 4 and 5:

¡Ay, qué cobarde el Pat Garrett, ni chansa a Billy le dio! En los brazos de su amada, ahí mismo lo mató ahí mismo lo mató	4	Oh, what a coward Pat Garrett Not a chance did he give Billy! In the arms of his loved one, there did he kill him, there did he kill him.
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¡Ay, qué tristeza me da ver a Rosita llorando, y el pobre Billy en sus abrazos, con su sangre derramando, con su sangre derramando.	5	Oh, how sad it makes me to see Rosita crying, and poor Billy in her arms, with his blood spilling over, with his blood spilling over,
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Anaya is quick to defend Billy the Kid's position by cursing and swearing at Pat Garrett and demonstrating the strong relationships that Billy had with both men and women

in the *Hispano* community. Furthermore, Anaya's use of resentment — “*¡Ay, qué cobarde el Pat Garrett!*” — illustrates the outraged cry of *Hispanos* against the encroaching Anglo domination of the social and political systems that Pat Garrett represented. In stanza 5, “*¡Ay, qué tristeza me da ver a Rosita llorando!*” posits the internalized *Hispano* voice of how they mourned the love between Rosita and Billy, their folk hero. Frederick Nolan, perhaps the most prolific historian on Billy the Kid, states that “the Hispanic viewpoint deserves further examination... The idea of emphasizing his [Billy the Kid's] folk-hero status in Hispanic culture is attractive. I have always said we will never understand this story until someone tells it from that side of the cultural divide” (Wallis 184).

Anaya's *corrido* remains an important source and serves as a cultural divide and as a viewpoint that revisits and helps to define the image of *El Bilito* more clearly. Anaya engages in a Denzin's theory of pedagogical performance narrative — recreating the urban mythos of *El Bilito*. Anaya fosters a sense of collective engagement, provides an emotional response to a tragic scene, and works toward a goal that fits with the mission of its historical society: creating a folk narrative that preserves and shares the stories in the representation of “speaking for” the history and the people of New Mexico.

In act one of the play, Paco Anaya, as narrator of the play, recalls his first encounter with Billy the Kid. In this scene, Billy also meets Rosa for the first time:

Paco: He [Billy], his friend Tom O'Falliard, and don Manuelito rode north on the Rio Pecos. That's where I met him [Billy the Kid]. I was just a boy, herding sheep outside Fort Sumner. They showed up at my camp over by Ojo Hiendondo. I took them to my home... (Billy, Tom, and don Manuelito enter Paco's home, meet his father, mother, and Rosa.)

Paco: Mamá, papá. Estos son amigos...

Don Jesús: Pasen, pasen.

Billy: Muchas gracias, señor. (Billy looks at Rosa. They smile at each other).

Don Jesús: ¿cómo te llamas?

Billy: Bill Bonney, a sus órdenes.

Paco: Es el Billy the kid.

Don Jesús: Oh, el Bilito. Te anda buscando la ley.

Billy: Allá en el condado de Lincoln no hay ley, señor. Solo la pistola es la ley (Billy pats his pistol).

Don Jesús: Así es el tiempo, muy violento. Los Shariffes son una bola de sinvergüenzas. Yo soy hombre de paz. No quiero violencia en mi casa. (Billy looks at Rosa then unbuckles his pistol belt and hangs it on a hook on the door).

Billy: En su casa, también yo soy hombre de paz.

Don Jesús: Entonces, bienvenido. Siéntense....

Paco: [to Billy] this is my sister, Rosa

Billy: A pleasure to meet you señorita... (He holds her hand. They look at each other with deep attraction. Rosa blushes.) (Anaya 15)

This passage signifies the social confluence and mutual respect between Billy the Kid and *Hispanos*. More important, this moment in the play parallels Billy's love for Rosa and the reciprocal *Hispanos* love for Billy. During the onset of rehearsals for production of the play *Billy the Kid*, Simón Álvarez was inspired to write a *canCIÓN* / lyrical ballad for this scene. With the approval of Anaya, we included it in our production at the South Broadway Cultural Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The *canCIÓN*, "Billy and Rosita," describes the story between the lovers. The song is lighthearted, romantic, and futuristic, and displays an insightful view of the destiny of their hero. The co-existing feelings of love and *destino* / destiny are voiced in the lyrics of the song:

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|---|---|
| <p>Sus labios eran dulces como la miel,
 sus ojos, su sonrisa solo eran para él.
 Era un sueño dorado, el amor de su vida
 la esperanza qe nace de un nuevo amanecer.</p> | <p>1 Her lips were sweet as honey,
 Her eyes, her smile were only for him.
 She was a golden dream, the love of his life,
 the hope that is born of a new day.</p> |
| <p>Pero ya era muy tarde para cambiar su vida,
 las deudas del pasado no se podían borrar.
 No era su destino vivir entre sus brazos,
 la historia de su vida tenía que terminar.</p> | <p>2 But it was already too late to change his life,
 the debts of the past could not be erased.
 It was not his destiny to live in her arms,
 the story of his life had to come to an end.</p> |
| <p>Se oyeron dos balazos la noche infiel,
 las cartas se dictaron por el destino cruel. night,
 Sus brazos lo olvieron como un madre santa,
 al verse ante una triste y amarga realidad</p> | <p>3 Two gunshots were heard by the unfaithful
 the cards were dealt by a cruel destiny.
 Her arms enveloped him like those of a mother,
 on facing a sad and bitter reality.</p> |
| <p>Pero ya era muy tarde para cambiar su vida,
 las deudas del pasado no se podían borrar.
 No era su destino vivir entre sus brazos,
 la historia de su vida tenía que terminar.</p> | <p>4 But it was already too late to change his life,
 the debts of the past could not be erased.
 It was not his destiny t live in her arms,
 the story of his life had to come to an end.</p> |
| <p>Sus labios eran dulces como la miel...</p> | <p>5 Her lips were sweet as honey...</p> |

The poetic persona in the first stanza of this *canCIÓN* is optimistic and romantic, describing the features and characteristics of Billy and Rosa's first kiss. However, romance and reality run hand in hand in this *canCIÓN*, as the second stanza presents a brokenhearted and dismayed view of the ideological belief of "*destino* / destiny:"

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>Pero ya era muy tarde para cambiar su vida,
 las deudas del pasado no se podían borrar.</p> | <p>But it was already too late to change his life,
 the debts of the past could not be erased.</p> |
|--|--|

No era su destino vivir entre sus brazos,
la historia de su vida tenía que terminar.

It was not his destiny to live in her arms,
the story of his life had to come to an end.

And, in the following third stanza, the poetic voice looks into the future to predict the night of Billy the Kid's death:

Se oyeron dos balazos la noche infiel,
las cartas se dictaron por el destino cruel.
Sus brazos lo olvidaron como un madre santa,
al verse ante una triste y amarga realidad

Two gunshots were heard by the unfaithful
night, the cards were dealt by a cruel destiny.
Her arms enveloped him like those of a mother,
on facing a sad and bitter reality.

Ending with a lovesick tone, the last stanzas are nostalgic and reminiscent of Rosa and Billy's first kiss. The *canción* included in the production presents Billy the Kid from a different angle than those of the dominant Anglo view: involved in a love relationship with *Nuevo Mexicana / Hispana* woman. Also, this *canción*, along with the scene in the play, humanizes Billy the Kid as a respectful gentleman, romantic, kind hearted, loving, and likeable. This resonates with the testimonies of Miguel Antonio Otero, Mrs. Jaramillo, don Martin Chavez, Rudolfo Anaya, and now, Simón Álvarez as songwriter, when they speak personally of their encounters and memories of *El Bilito*. These collected memories shed light on how the culture appreciates Billy the Kid as a multidimensional persona: hero, freedom fighter, and lover. Billy the Kid's relationship embedded with *Nuevo Mexicano / Hispano* culture presents a full spectrum of emotions. In both the *canción* and the play, Billy the Kid builds upon the relationship with *Hispanos* by demonstrating bi-culturalism in language proficiency and cultural understanding. Billy the Kid was modeling to the *Hispanos* the process of assimilation and acculturation, and then mirroring what would soon become of the "*destino*" of many *Nuevo Mexicanos* in nineteenth-century social and cultural conflicts. This is why Billy the Kid-*El Bilito* is considered by many of us as "*el querido*."

In the final scene, Anaya's play begins as it ends: the scene of the night that Billy the Kid was shot by Pat Garrett at Pete Maxwell's house in Fort Sumner. In the final moments, before his death, Billy and Rosa appear on stage in one of Maxwell's bedrooms:

Billy: Espera aquí

Rosa: No, voy contigo

Billy: We have plenty of time to be together, querida. Tomorrow we leave for Mexico.

Rosa: A new life...

Billy: Don Pedro wants to see me.

Rosa: Why so late?

Billy: He owes me money. Josefina said he's ready to pay.

Rosa: Josefina? No, Billy, don't go!
 Billy: Why are you trembling?
 Rosa: There's no light in his room...
 Billy: The old cheapskate doesn't like to burn his oil. Wait.
 Rosa: Billy.
 Billy: Que?
 Rosa: I love you.
 Billy: Y yo te amo a ti (they embrace warmly. Deputy Poe appears)
 Rosa: ¿Quién es? (Billy pulls out his knife. Poe backs away.)
 Billy: Just one of Don Pedro's vaqueros. Espera aquí. (He leaves Rosa and softly enters Maxwell's bedroom.)
 Billy: Don Pedro. Who is the man outside (Garrett stands. Billy faces him.)
 ¿Quién es? ¿Quién es?
 Maxwell: That's him!
 Billy: Garrett?
 Garrett: Soy Yo. (Garrett fires once, Billy grabs at his gut in pain, steps forward reaching for Garrett. The figure of death, la muerte, appears...)
 Rosa: Billy! Billy! Oh, Bilito...
 Billy: I love you, Rosa... (Billy dies in the arms of Rosa. She holds and rocks Billy in her arms.) (Anaya 37-38)

The ending passage introduces the history and perspective on *Nuevo Mexicanos* who recall this fateful incident of a beloved hero. Anaya's play challenges the popular Anglo image of Billy the Kid. However, it is a view that reflects the sentiments of many *Nuevo Mexicanos*. It is obvious that Anaya's *El Bilito* and Rivera's analysis of *El Bilito* are similar:

Billy the Kid became a hero to the Mexican people throughout the territory. He became a symbol of resistance and freedom for the Mexican population. To the Mexicans, *El Bilito* was on their side, fighting the Anglo regime that had taken their lands and impoverished their lives since the end of the U.S.-Mexico war. Because of *El Bilito's* courage, he became a weapon that could help fight against the Santa Fe Ring....For the Oteros, the death of Billy the Kid symbolized the passing of their economic power, and their ability to define the political public spheres. (Rivera 121, 123)

Anaya symbolically represents these sentiments as Billy dies in the arms of Rosita. In his play, Anaya posits the perceptions of *Nuevo Mexicanos* as counter storytelling to the folk legend of *El Bilito*, juxtaposing them with Anglo historical narratives of Billy the Kid as a criminal and an outlaw. When *El Bilito* died in the arms of Rosita, so did the dreams to defend the "political public spheres" of the passing on of the economic power for *Nuevo Mexicanos* (Rivera 110-134). Fighting alongside *Nuevo Mexicanos*, *El Bilito* became a hero to the New Mexican people throughout the territory. He became a symbol of resistance and freedom for the New Mexican population. To the *Nuevo Mexicanos*, *El*

Bilito was on their side, fighting the Anglo regime that had taken their lands and impoverished their lives since the end of the U.S.-Mexico War. Because of *El Bilito's* courage, he became a weapon that could help fight against the Santa Fe Ring. With the help of *El Bilito*, the Oteros hoped to win the war and regain the political and economic control that they had lost to the [Santa Fe] ring (Rivera 121). The death of *El Bilito* represents one of the many miscarriages of justice in New Mexican history, which profoundly affected the *Nuevo Mexicano* communities and their cultural perceptions of *El Bilito*.

The second *corrido* that Anaya incorporates in his final scene of the play, “*Corrido Del Bilito*”¹⁵, serves as a heroic message depicting how Billy the Kid was betrayed and as a cautionary *corrido* to the community in protecting their children and youth from the same violent and tragic path that Billy traveled. I use Lamadrid’s recorded translation, which is slightly different from the one that Anaya documents in his play:

Queridos paisanos, Nuevo mexicanos, escuchen este corrido... de un joven valiente que fue traicionado allá in Fort Sumner donde está enterrado.	1	Dear Countrymen, New Mexicans Listen to this corrido... Of a brave youth That was betrayed, There in Fort Sumner Where he is buried.
El era valiente Y muy arriesgado Amante del juego Y de las mujeres	2	He was brave and took many risks, lover of gaming and of women.
Con ellas bailaba Con ellas cantaba, Pero con pistola, Muy lista y muy brava	3	With them he danced, with them he sang, but with his pistol very ready and very fierce.
No piensen que fue Solo una mujer Que le puso el dedo Y lo traicionó	4	Don't think that it was only a woman who put the finger on him and betrayed him.
La vida de un hombre Es una condena, Y un día el destino Su vido cobró	5	The life of a man is a sentence, and one day destiny cost him his life.

El era valiente Y muy arriesgado Amante del juego Y de las mujeres	6	He was brave and took many risks, lover of gaming and of women
Con ellas bailaba Con ellas cantaba, Pero con pistola, Muy lista y muy brava	7	With them he danced, with them he sang, but with his pistol very ready and very fierce.
Ay, madres del mundo Que tanto nos quieren Aconsejen a sus hijos No sea que terminen Por el mal camino Como el bilito querido	8	Oh, mothers of the world who love us so much, advise your children so they won't end up on the bad road like Bilito beloved.

(*Corrido* Del Bilito by Rudolfo Anaya, and collaborators Simón Álvarez and Carlos Villegas)

The first stanza of the *corrido* immediately delineates the place of burial and posits Billy the Kid as someone who was betrayed. This reverberates with Anaya's plot in the play, when Josefina Maxwell, the daughter of Pete Maxwell, out of jealousy and revenge for Billy's love, contrives a plan with sheriff Pat Garrett:

Garrett: I'm looking for Billy
Josefina: (bitterly) He's here. Walking the streets of Fort Sumner like a free man.
Garrett: Where is he now?
Josefina: With his querida.
Garrett: I've got a warrant for his arrest. If you help me--
Josefina: Billy won't be taken alive.
Garrett: I've got two deputies with me. I aim to take him, dead or alive.
(Josefina shudders, moans softly.)
Josefina: If I can't have him...
Garrett: Do you know where he is?
Josefina: Yes. Go to my father's bedroom. Wait there. Billy will come to you...
(She goes out. Garrett moves across the stage to the bed of don Pedro Maxwell).

This passage represents how Billy the Kid was betrayed by Josefina. However, as the *corrido* states, he was also betrayed by many other people, which propels him into a violent life. The following stanzas of the *corrido*, through the voice of *Nuevo Mexicanos* commemorating his death, amplify his role as brave, valiant, a risk-taking gambler, a lover, a dancer, a singer, and a quick gun fighter. Billy the Kid's masculine prowess is

highly extolled in the *corrido*. But as the *corridistas* perceptively point out in the *corrido*, “La vida de un hombre es una condena, y un día el destino su vido cobró / The life of a man is a sentence, and one day destiny cost him his life.”

The last stanza of the *corrido* has similarities to the cautionary folk tales in Chicano folklore and is typical of the category of “exemplum” type of *corridos*. Billy the Kid’s fate can be read as a cautionary message, as the *corrido* states:

Ay, madres del mundo	8	Oh, mothers of the world
Que tanto nos quieren		who love us so much,
Aconsejen a sus hijos		advise your children
No sea que terminen		so they won’t end up
Por el mal camino		on the bad road
Como el bilito querido		like Bilito beloved.

The *corrido* therefore serves as a heroic and a cautionary ballad that can be added to the great inquiry of why the Billy the Kid figure became “*el bilito querido*” to *Nuevo Mexicanos* and *Hispanos*. Serving both as a historical figure and as a mythical legendary figure, he represents the turmoil and hostility that existed between *Hispanos* and Anglos in New Mexico during the colonization period of New Mexico. History, legend, myth, collected memories, and performance collide to create a cultural text of a New Mexico hero.

Billy the Kid by Rudolfo Anaya, the *corridos*, and the *canción* are evidence of a performance cultural script, in which the heroes are connected to personal narratives labeled by cultural studies scholar Norman K. Denzin as “Performance Ethnography,” with the writer-as-performer or writer as representative of community. As Denzin states:

[the writer] is self-consciously present, morally and politically self-aware. The writer uses his or her own experiences in culture reflexively to bend back on self and look more deeply at self-other interactions...recreating and re-writing the biographic past, a way of making the past a part of the biographic present (14-15).

Denzin argues for a cultural performance or cultural scripts that are intrinsically connected to power, cultural politics, identity, and a commitment to being the voice of the community (2003: 231). Furthermore, a strong element that Denzin applies to performance ethnography is “an emancipatory discourse that speaks to issues of racial inequality under neoliberal forms of democracy and capitalism” (2003: 24). It is a cultural script related to social conflict, which illuminates the structural relationships between opposing narratives that connect it to a genealogy composition of the past to the present.

Denzin’s model of Performance Ethnography draws on literary and aesthetic guidelines:

[These texts] emphasize community, collective action, solidarity, and group empowerment... [T]hese texts presume ethnographers, performers, and social researchers [writers] who are part of and spokespersons for local moral communities, communities with their own symbolism, mythology, and storytelling traditions. These texts draw upon the vernacular, on folk and popular culture forms of representation, including proverbs, music (work songs, spirituals, blues songs, jazz, rap, *corridos*), sermons, prayers, poems, choreopoems, folktales, paintings, plays, movies, photographs, performance art pieces, and murals. These texts are produced by artists-researchers-writers who aim to speak to and represent the needs of particular communities (122-123).

Thus, Denzin purports that Performance Ethnography, like Interpretive Ethnography, produces texts and performances grounded in personal experiences of the local folk and vernacular culture. They, writer and texts, “record the histories of injustices experienced by the members of the oppressed groups” to negotiate politics, identities, and meanings, and to challenge the dominant narratives (123).

This “cultural script” and “sense of local folk and vernacular culture” contribute to and are echoed in Anaya’s *Billy the Kid*, the *corridos*, and the *canción*, as they attempt to speak to the past and present histories of *Nuevo Mexicanos*.

I find it useful to think of Anaya’s *Billy the Kid* as an example of both Interpretive and Performance Ethnography, that specific sub-genre of performance writing which “privileges” the voice of *Nuevo Mexicanos* and their social, political, and cultural community. Anaya utilizes the voice of the people as necessary ground for re-writing the folk narratives of Billy the Kid and creating a space where *corridistas* can re-create the tradition of ballads. Although “emancipatory discourse” and “spokespersons for local moral communities” are certainly terms applicable to Anaya’s *Billy the Kid*, Denzin’s comments on life writing as a ritual act are, I believe, evident in the way Anaya exerts a “self-consciously present, morally and politically self-aware” in the play to expose the social and historical relations between *Nuevo Mexicanos* and Billy the Kid.

Undoubtedly, Anaya’s *Billy the Kid* is known for becoming one of the largest legends for *Nuevo Mexicanos*. Anaya’s play and songs included in the production remain as evidence for the long-standing folklore of *El Bilito*. With the use of the *corridos*, Anaya and Álvarez represented the *Nuevo Mexicanos*’ sentiments toward *El Bilito*, expressed the political and cultural struggles against the Anglo regime that had taken their lands, and revealed the social climate that the territory of New Mexico was undergoing during the nineteenth century. *El Bilito* made an enormous impression on *Nuevo Mexicanos*, as they were involved in creating legendary stories, folk songs, and plays that still exist within the communities with which he engaged.

To continue with the legend of *el Bilito*, most recently, in December 2010, an Albuquerque attorney, Randi McGinn, and her *Nuevo Mexicano* constituents submitted a formal petition to Governor Bill Richardson for a pardon for Billy the Kid (“NM Governor Considers Billy the Kid Pardon,” December 16, 2010b). Unfortunately, in January 2011, in the last 24 hours before leaving office, Governor Bill Richardson did not grant Billy the Kid a pardon. *Nuevo Mexicanos* showed their disappointment with Governor Richardson on this and other issues in representing New Mexican and Latinos. The Hispano Round Table of Albuquerque stated, “[Richardson is] ruthless, dishonest, deceptive, dishonorable, contemptuous and abusive” toward the *Hispano* and Latino community. During Richardson’s last weeks as Governor, The Hispano Round Table issued a statement to him to “immediately stop representing and speaking for or on behalf of the *Hispano* / Latino community in New Mexico, throughout the Southwest on national affairs or international affairs pertaining to any *Hispano* / Latino issue or subject today and in perpetuity” (*Albuquerque Journal*, December 30, 2010). Displeased with the outcome of Richardson’s decision on granting a pardon for Billy the Kid, Many *Nuevo Mexicanos* expressed their displeasure with the outgoing Governor as a member of the *Hispano* / Latino community, viewing him as someone aligned with historical politicians like the late Governor Lew Wallace, who had made so many promises to the *Nuevo Mexicanos*, and *el Bilito*, but never followed through with them. This is yet another current affair and one more reason to prove why *Nuevo Mexicanos* / *Hispanos* sided with Billy the Kid-*el querido*.

As a folk expression, *Nuevo Mexicanos* see *El Bilito* as folklore and legend in the history and the making of New Mexico statehood. Anaya and the *corridistas*, Simon Álvarez and Carlos Villegas, influence the process of folk narrative and Performance / Interpretive Ethnography as a political act emphasizing community, collective action, solidarity, and group empowerment; in Denzin’s words, they serve as “spokespersons for local moral communities, communities with their own symbolism, mythology, and storytelling traditions” - the mythos of *El Bilito*. (123).

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NOTES

¹ See Walter Noble Burns. *The Saga of Billy the Kid* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1926); Pat F. Garrett. *Pat F. Garrett’s Authentic Life of Billy the Kid* (New York, NY: The McMillan Company, 1927); Robert Marshall Utley. *Billy The Kid: A Short and Violent Life* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989); Micheal Wallis. *Michael Billy The Kid: The Endless Ride* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007).

² For an intense study of “social bandits” see John-Michael Rivera. *The Emergence of Mexican America: Recovering Stories of Mexican Peoplehood in U.S. Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2006: 111) and Eric Hobsbawm’s. *Bandits* (New York, NY: Pantheon, 1969). Rivera and Hobsbawm both conclude that the “social bandit protects the people from the onslaught of modernity or colonialism; he is a person who avenges the institutional wrongs the people have felt in the wake of political strife caused by colonialism.” Rivera makes connections of “social bandit” theory to Billy the Kid and his relationship to native New Mexicans (Rivera 111).

³ *Hispano* is a term used to identify the people of New Mexico that have historical traces to Spanish ancestry. As Rudolfo Acuña explains in *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (New York, NY: Longman Press, 2000), “many New Mexicans chose to call themselves *Hispanos*, or Spanish-Americans, as distinguished from Mexicans...they were descendants of the original settlers, who were Spanish *conquistadores*” (81). However, in the play of *Billy The Kid* by Rudolfo Anaya (1994) *Hispano*, *Mexicano*, and *Nuevo Mexicano* are used interchangeably and synonymously to identify the people during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century tumultuous political period of New Mexico. Therefore, my intention is to use these labels as the playwright Anaya intended.

⁴ See Marta Weigle and Peter White. *The Lore of New Mexico* in “Billy the Kid” (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988: 352-362); Michael Wallis. *Billy the Kid* in chapter “El Chivato” (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007: 233-249); Rudolfo Anaya. *Billy the Kid* (Albuquerque: Rudolfo Anaya, 1994). The play was reprinted in the *Anaya Reader* by Rudolfo Anaya (Grand Central Publishing, 1995: 495-554); Robert F. Kadlec. (ed.) *They “Knew” Billy the Kid: Interviews with Old-Time New Mexicans* (Santa Fe, NM: Ancient City Press, 1987); John-Michael Rivera, *The Emergence of Mexican America: Recovering Stories of Mexican Peoplehood in U.S. Culture* in chapter “Claiming los Bilitos” (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Miguel Antonio Otero. *The Real Billy The Kid: With New Light on the Lincoln county War* (New York, NY: Rufus Rockwell Wilson, Inc., 1936); Helen Airy. *Whatever Happened to Billy The Kid?* (Santa Fe, NM: Sunstone Press, 1993); Stephen Tatum. *Inventing Billy the Kid: Visions of the Outlaw in America, 1881-1981* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1982; Gary D. Keller and Francis M. Nevins. *The Cisco Kid: American Hero, Hispanic Roots* (Tempe, AZ: Bilingual Press, 2008).

⁵ Rudolfo Anaya. *Billy the Kid* (Albuquerque: Rudolfo Anaya, 1994). The play was reprinted in the *Anaya Reader* by Rudolfo Anaya (Grand Central Publishing, 1995: 495-554). *Billy the Kid* play can also be found in the upcoming publication *Billy the Kid and Other Plays* by Rudolfo Anaya, afterword by Cecilia J. Aragón and Robert Con Davis - Undiano. University of Oklahoma Press, December 2011.

⁶ New Mexico had become a territory in 1850 and obtained statehood status in 1912.

⁷ See Marta Weigle and Peter White. *The Lore of New Mexico* in “Billy the Kid” (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988: 352-362); Michael Wallis. *Billy the Kid* in chapter “El Chivato” (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007: 233-249); Rudolfo Anaya. *Billy the Kid* (Albuquerque: Rudolfo Anaya, 1994). The play was reprinted in the *Anaya Reader* by Rudolfo Anaya (Grand Central Publishing, 1995: 495-554); Robert F. Kadlec. (ed.) *They “Knew” Billy the Kid: Interviews with Old-Time New Mexicans* (Santa Fe, NM: Ancient City Press, 1987); John-Michael Rivera, *The Emergence of Mexican America: Recovering Stories of Mexican Peoplehood in U.S. Culture* in chapter “Claiming los Bilitos” (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Miguel Antonio Otero. *The Real Billy The Kid: With New Light on the Lincoln county War* (New York, NY: Rufus Rockwell Wilson, Inc., 1936); Helen Airy, *Whatever Happened to Billy The Kid?* (Santa Fe, NM: Sunstone Press, 1993); Stephen Tatum. *Inventing Billy the Kid: Visions of the Outlaw in America, 1881-1981* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1982; Gary D. Keller and Francis M. Nevins. *The Cisco Kid: American Hero, Hispanic Roots* (Tempe, AZ: Bilingual Press, 2008).

⁸ Former Governor of New Mexico Miguel Antonio Otero first published his legendary book, *The Real Billy the Kid: With New Light on the Lincoln County War*. New York: Rufus Rockwell Wilson, Inc., 1936.

⁹ My own collected memories, as the director, of what New Mexican natives said about the production of *Billy the Kid*, as they shared their comments with me after the productions.

¹⁰ See Michael Wallis. *Billy the Kid: The Endless Ride* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company Ltd., 2007).

¹¹ See Américo Paredez. “The Mexican Corrido: Its Rise and Fall.” In *Madstones and Twisters*. Mody Boatright et al. (ed.) Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1958a and “The Ancestry of Mexico’s Corridos: A Matter of Definition.” *Journal of American Folklore* 76 (1963): 231-235; John McDowell, “The Corrido of Greater Mexico as Discourse, Music, and Event.” In *And Other Neighboring*

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¹² For more information on Enrique Lamadrid's definition of traditional style *corrido* read his article "Los Corridos de Río Arriba: Two Ballads of the Land Grant Movement, New Mexico, 1965-70." In *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 17: 2 (Fall 1986): 31-62.

¹³ In 2000, Enrique Lamadrid, Chicano/Hispano Folklorist, asked some of the original actors/singers, Simón Álvarez and Carlos Villegas, of the production of *Billy the Kid* to come into his studio to record the *corridos* used for the production. Hence, I am using the translation of the *El Corrido de Billy the Kid* which Enrique Lamadrid recorded and copyrighted in 10/30/2000 UNM. For this particular article, I am using the *corridos* and *canción* that was translated by Enrique Lamadrid for recording. There are some minor differences in Enrique's translation compared to that of Anaya's original *corrido*, which is cited on page 3 of the original playscript used for the production (1994). However, with Anaya's permission, the translated and recorded *corrido* has been approved for this article 10/13/2010.

¹⁴ For the world premiere production of *Billy the Kid* at the South Broadway Cultural Center, Simón Álvarez, played guitar and was the lead vocal singer for the *corrido* accompanied by the actors. Álvarez was instrumental in guiding the cast of actors and director in the traditional sense of singing the *corridos*.

¹⁵ After much discussion about the evolution of this particular *corrido*, it has taken on the collective voices of many *corridistas* including the primary songwriter, Rudolfo Anaya, and the other collaborators, Simón Álvarez, and Carlos Villegas. Anaya first composed the original lyrics to this *corrido* in his play and with subsequent rehearsals both Simón Álvarez and Carlos Villegas were inspired, out of expediency, to add more stanzas to the *corrido*. This particular *corrido* reflects the improvisational techniques that were used by Luis Valdez and the actors of El Teatro Campesino to create the *acto*. It was a collective effort through improvisation based on the experiences of its participants. This is the process of how *Corrido Del Bilito* came about. For this essay, I use the translated version, which is the same one that was used in the production of *Billy the Kid*, that Enrique Lamadrid recorded in 10/30/2000, UNM.

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