RENEE MONTAGNE, HOST:

Let's venture back to a legendary moment in the American West - the New Mexico Territory, July 14, 1881. In the dark of night, Sheriff Pat Garrett corners a man who has eluded him for months - a famous gunslinger wanted for murder. Shots ring out, and the outlaw, Billy the Kid - 21 years old, boyishly handsome - falls dead. The legend of Billy the Kid, however, would live on. Biographies were published within months of his death, some of them mostly fictional and even one by Pat Garrett himself. Later, writers spun his story for dime novels and big-screen Hollywood Westerns.

RON HANSEN: I think they latched onto his story because he died young and because he seemed to personify so much about the Wild West.

MONTAGNE: Author Ron Hansen set himself the challenge of separating the man from the myth, like how many people the Kid actually killed. Accounts from the time were notoriously unreliable and offensive by today's standards.

HANSEN: In Pat Garrett's book, it was said that he killed one man for every year of his life, not counting Mexicans and Indians, which is an extraordinary statement. But we only have evidence of him actually killing four people, but mostly they were acts of self-defense.

MONTAGNE: Ron Hansen's new novel, called "The Kid," is steeped in historical research, beginning with how the boy, born William Henry McCarty to an Irish mother - charismatic and a lover of books - became a notorious and wanted man.

HANSEN: He was basically abandoned by his stepfather, and his mother died when he was 14. He was always kind of hero-worshipping older men, and he fell in with a man named Sombrero Jack, who got him to do some of his first stealing. And, of course, he actually needed the money, needed the food that he was stealing or the clothes. And it was - then he was arrested in Silver City at the age of 14 and managed to escape from jail. And his fascination with stealing horses and stealing cattle led him into more criminal pursuits.

MONTAGNE: So one step at a time. And maybe had his mother not died - and she sounds like this loving and very attractive woman - he may have gone in a different direction.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=497350324>

**Le territoire du Nouveau Mexique le 14 juillet 18881, le sheriff Pat Garrett tue Billy le kid, jeune homme beau et hors-la-loi, recherché pour meurtre. Malgré sa mort, la legende de Billy va se perpétuer avec des livres relatant l’histoire de sa vie, les western d’Hollywood et une biographie publiée par Garrett.**

**La popularité de Billy vient du fait qu’il est mort jeune et qu’il personnifie à merveille l’esprit du far-west. L’auteur Ron Hansen a décidé de séparer le personnage du mythe contrairement au Sheriff qui soutenait que Billy avait tué autant de personne qu’il comptait d’années. La vérité est sans doute différente car on a la preuve qu’il n’a tué que 4 personnes en état de légitime défense.**

**Ron Hansen explique dans son livre « Le kid » comment William Henry Mc Carthy était devnue un homme tant recherché.**