

It is Michele (Michele Cossu), the main protagonist. With his younger brother, Peppeddu (Peppeddu Cossu), he tends a flock of sheep on which Michele has staked his family's fortunes. Success has been elusive; some sheep have died, and he is dangerously indebted to lenders from whom he has secured the money to buy them. Calamity emerges when pig rustlers invade the brothers' encampment. Michele grudgingly obeys folk custom by granting them temporary shelter. The *Carabinieri*, Italy's military police, arrive in hot pursuit, but the bandits get away and the police unjustly accuse Michele of having collaborated with the thieves. When shortly thereafter a bandit shoots a policeman and the police give chase, Michele, though entirely innocent, fears being railroaded as an accomplice, and he escapes while his brother drives the sheep to new locations. Michele's flight, however, appears to confirm his guilt and the *Carabinieri* establish a dragnet for him. Aided by his village friends, Michele evades capture for a time, but the risk of being caught and losing his flock remains too great. In a desperate effort to recoup enough funds to pay his lenders and save his mother's home from foreclosure, Michele decides to herd the sheep over the mountains to sell them. This proves to be a fatal mistake. The sheep, driven beyond their limits, all succumb to hunger, thirst, and disease. In despair—**Spoiler Alert!**—Michele acquires a gun and steals another shepherd's flock to sell.

The plot, though distinctive, is not original. As Khosbakht notes, it essentially resumes, even as it transforms, the broad outline of the story of Antonio's stolen bike in Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948). Both films feature innocent, law-abiding protagonists who wish only to better their lives, but their efforts fail because criminals dash their hopes. Both leads turn to their local community allies for help; in *Bicycle Thieves*, union members accompany Antonio in a fruitless search for the stolen bike. In *Bandits*, Michele's home villagers provide him with food, supplies, and information. Eventually, however, the aid is insufficient; both protagonists feel forced into committing a crime. Antonio is caught and ignominiously humiliated in front of his son after failing to steal a replacement for his stolen bike. Michele's fate is more dire since he becomes an outcast, homeless and permanently on the run from the authorities.

The theme *Bandits* adapts may appear orthodox, but this is misleading since De Seta's treatment made significant challenges to neorealist norms. Like many neorealist films, De Sica's masterpiece is set in the hot, crowded streets of Rome and is very much rooted in the contemporary social and economic problems of postwar Italy's urban centers. *Bandits* also takes place in a recognizably modern world (the villagers have guns; electric lighting illuminates village homes and streets; police exercise state authority), but De Seta deliberately distanced himself from current events. The

cold, dangerous, depopulated heights of Sardinia became an apt stage for the larger tragic action of *Bandits*. As the critic Robert Curti aptly comments, the director focused on a more primal story of a man's doomed destiny, conjuring echoes of the fate of a flawed hero in the quasi-mythological world of Greek tragedy. De Sica's narrative model provided only the initial impetus for De Seta who then expanded and intensifies it to fashion Michele's tragic end.

From the first sequence onward, the tone and cinematic articulation of these quasi-mythical events also pressed beyond the limits of traditional neorealism. Most neorealist films featured images of cluttered, transparently rendered urban spaces whose compositional structures are quite conventional; they are hardly visible, let alone striking. This is not true of *Bicycle Thieves*, however. De Sica subtly introduced visual tropes by framing through the doors and windows of interior spaces; the device also appeared again in a significant exterior sequence when Antonio was obliged to clumsily paste movie posters on the walls of Rome, producing the news of coming attractions with wrinkled images of movie stars.

Like De Sica, but even more calculatedly, De Seta also created strikingly composed images from the vast beauty inherent in the barren rawness of Sardinia's mountains. Changes in the elevation of the terrain itself provided possibilities for different camera placements allowing variations in the level and distance from which the camera shot, whether from high above and far away or below and closer to the subject. The compositions thereby acquired distinctive shapes verging on abstraction.

In a different way, the images of the village, mostly taken at night, are also abstract; they feature dramatic contrasts of hot spots of light against deep pools of darkness to define the environment. At times, the streetlights even cast ominous, enlarged shadows of the *Carabinieri* onto the plastered walls as they pace slowly through the cloistered alleys and piazzas of the small settlement. It is as if they have been transformed into outsized, ominous creatures who stepped incongruously out of a fantastic scene in a film noir—shot by, say, *Painting with Light* (1949) author John Alton—to threaten Michele in the quasi-mythological world he inhabits. Actual but carefully curated sound effects lend further weight to dramatic scenes with minimal dialogue.

De Seta's *Bandits of Orgosolo* is a splendid example of a late phase of neorealist filmmaking. A documentary impulse undoubtedly first animated De Seta's imagination of Michele's tragic life. But the most important source of his film's power emerged only when he moved beyond neorealist conventions and called on the full panoply of his filmmaking skills to see beyond what was immediately visible to expand, fortify, and intensify what appeared before his camera's lens.—**Stuart Liebman**

Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid

Produced by Gordon Carroll; directed by Sam Peckinpah; written by Rudolph Wurlitzer; cinematography by John Coquillon; edited by David Berlatsky, Garth Craven, Tony De Zarraga, Roger Spottiswoode, and Robert L. Wolfe; art direction by Ted Haworth; music by Bob Dylan; starring James Coburn, Kris Kristofferson, Richard Jaeckel, Chill Wills, Bob Dylan, Jason Robards, Slim Pickens, Katy Jurado, Luke Askew, and R. G. Armstrong. 4K UHD + Blu Ray Combo Edition, color, 106 min. (original theatrical release), 122 min. (final preview cut), and 117 min. (Fiftieth Anniversary Release), 1973/2024. A Criterion Collection Release, www.criterion.com.

On November 13, 1972, one week after Richard Nixon cruised to a landslide reelection victory, Sam Peckinpah, poet laureate of the Revisionist Western, started shooting *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* in Durango, Mexico. Peckinpah, an immensely gifted filmmaker, had important but controversial things to say over the course of his too-short career about violence on screen (about which he was mostly right, eager to confront audiences with their complicity in vicarious thrills), and regrettable things to say about women (about which he was often embarrassingly wrong), two dispositions that he pushed past the breaking point in the deplorable *Straw Dogs* (1971).

Peckinpah had already helmed a number of notable Westerns, but his reputation, to this day, generally rests on the achievement of *The Wild Bunch* (1969). Blood-soaked and enormously controversial in its moment, J. Hoberman would later laud it as "arguably the strongest Hollywood movie of the 1960s." *The Wild Bunch* set a new and gruesome standard for on-screen violence; more important, it established the epitome of the Revisionist Western, with its outlaw heroes, melancholia about modernization, deep cynicism regarding authority and institutions, and a reinterpretation of America's Manifest Destiny as the relentless march of rapacious capitalism.

Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid, Peckinpah's final Western, was a much more personal film for the director, and was surely intended to be something of a summary statement. Unfortunately, the production joined the ranks of the legendary *films maudits*, or cursed films, undermined by obtuse studio suits, as well as the director's tenuous relationship with sobriety, combative personality, and tendency toward self-sabotaging paranoia. A frustrated Peckinpah eventually walked away from MGM's frantic postproduction process, and *Pat Garrett* was originally released in a haphazardly edited version to tepid reviews. But the movie's reputation would grow over the years; Martin



Former friends "Billy the Kid" (Kris Kristofferson) and Pat Garrett (James Coburn) find themselves on opposite sides of the law in Sam Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*.

Scorsese insisted that an early cut he saw was a masterpiece and in the ensuing decades numerous attempts were made to restore the film to Peckinpah's original vision—at least five versions of the movie have been screened for the public.

Courtesy of The Criterion Collection, we now have what will stand as the definitive assembly, a beautifully restored "Fiftieth Anniversary Release"—and perhaps the curse has been lifted, as this incarnation, if not necessarily precisely the film that Peckinpah would have released, does indeed reflect the director's indelible stamp and most personal statement. Supervised by Paul Seydor and Roger Spottiswoode, the task could not have been left in better hands. Seydor, with Robert L. Wolfe, oversaw the 2005 special edition and wrote the invaluable (if at times defensive) book *The Authentic Death & Contentious Afterlife of Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid: The Untold Story of Peckinpah's Last Western Film* (Northwestern University Press, 2015); Spottiswoode, like Wolfe, both collaborated with Peckinpah on several productions and was one of *Pat Garrett's* original editors.



In *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, Garrett confesses, "It feels like times have changed."

Pat Garrett opens with a framing prologue—a flash-forward to 1908, when Garrett (James Coburn) is murdered at the behest of the same ruthless oligarch who had originally hired him to hunt down Billy the Kid (Kris Kristofferson)—interspersed with events from the "present" (1881), as Billy and his friends sow some wild oats at Fort Sumner, New Mexico. With remarkable economy, this sequence provides three essential functions: an awareness of Pat's ultimate fate informs the audience's understanding of everything that will follow; it establishes, from the start, that the film belongs more to Garrett than *The Kid* (this is also Coburn's film, in what is among his very best performances from a distinguished career); and sets up the essential equivalence of the two protagonists.

Indeed, it is possible to read the film as about one person—that is, as two versions of the same man. Pat and Billy used to ride together as outlaws, and Billy, offered an early opportunity to kill Pat, demurs, insisting, "He's my friend." And as Pat approaches Fort Sumner in that opening scene, a subjective shot emphasizes the vulnerability of the back of Billy's head as Pat draws his rifle; instead of shooting Billy, he kills one of the chickens the gang are using for target practice—action again interspersed with shots of his own future assassination.

Friends or not, Pat, now wearing a deputy U.S. Marshal's badge for the express purpose of taking on this task, has a drink with Billy and gives him five days to leave the country. Times are changing, he explains. The country is getting old, and he "plans to get old with it." Billy, in contrast, is unwilling to make such compromises, and when those days are up, he is apprehended in a bloody shoot-out. ("You're in poor company, Pat" a surrendering Billy observes, one of the many incisive lines from Rudy Wurlitzer's screenplay.)

Pat drops Billy off at the local jail to await execution, and Peckinpah frames the looming gallows repeatedly with an image of the American flag. Excitement at the anticipated hanging also allows the director to indulge another signature motif—children ebulliently playing with the instruments of violence. These enthusiasms are unrequited, as Billy escapes in another outburst of gunfire, during which he shoots, in cold blood, an unarmed man in the back. Despite Peckinpah's admirable unwillingness to shy away from the darkest aspects of the character, due to a combination of Kristofferson's radiant magnetism and charisma [sadly, the singer and songwriter died in September at the age of eighty-eight], and with the subtle (and occasionally unsubtle) narrative stacking of the deck throughout, the movie is squarely on Billy's side, and the audience follows.

With the jailbreak, the story truly begins. The movie becomes, as many have observed, a chase involving a man who is reluctant to run, hunted by a man who is ambivalent about the pursuit. The two characters will not meet again until the very end of the film, and the action toggles back and forth between their separate experiences, underscoring the parallels between them. Each comes across friends and foes. The enigmatic Alias (Bob Dylan) loosely affiliates with the gang—Dylan's line readings are not what could be called inspired, but he has a compelling screen presence, and also provided the score and songs for the movie, including "Knockin' on Heaven's Door."

Billy's travels, in various encounters, accentuate the arbitrary fluidity of the law ("The law's a funny thing," as he observes at one point). Indeed, in one memorable scene Billy stumbles across another one-time affiliate-outlaw, who has been involuntarily deputized. Deconstructing the myths of the Old West, both men are honor bound to play their assigned roles; yet both cheat after reluctantly agreeing to settle the matter with pistols at ten paces. With that exception, Pat's interactions are generally more compelling, featuring sharper dialogue and



Alias (Bob Dylan) is an enigmatic hanger-on in Billy the Kid's entourage.

fewer shoot-outs. These include a series of scenes with outstanding cameo players, among them Slim Pickens, never better, Chill Wills, irresistible, and Jason Robards, as the respectable Governor Wallace who summons his new sheriff to a meeting with some less than respectable local potentates, who press the point that Billy, the anachronistic outlaw, is bad for business.

Garrett, having signed up for the task, needs little added encouragement (or additional clumsy bribes) to finish the job. Tracking The Kid to his last hideout, after a snippet of a scene in which Peckinpah appears, appropriately, as a coffin maker (and in what must have been an inside joke, waves off the offer of a drink), Pat waits patiently for Billy to consummate one final romantic encounter, and then makes his move. Easing into the premises (and in contrast to the timidity displayed by the trash-talking fellow travelers tasked with keeping him "honest"), he makes eye contact with his prey, and coolly takes Billy out with one (atypically bloodless) shot to the chest. Pat then turns and shoots the mirror which had been strategically positioned throughout the sequence. As he regards his image, the reflection reveals a hole in his chest exactly where he had shot his old comrade. Shooting Billy was shooting himself.

The Fiftieth Anniversary Edition of *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* is an outstanding film, and one that, despite the enormous strengths and historical significance of *The Wild Bunch*, will also stand as the director's representative statement. It is worth contemplating, however, the extent to which it is the closest possible expression of Peckinpah's intentions. The anniversary edition can be compared with the final preview cut—the last version of the movie that Peckinpah worked on (both the preview cut and the lamentable original studio release are included in the Criterion set).

Care must be taken in drawing definitive conclusions from the preview version; although it surely reflected his work and preferences, had Peckinpah stayed with the production he surely would have supervised several rounds of subsequent editing. Nevertheless, some notable distinctions can be observed. The final preview version has, in an early scene, the pay-off of a crude, misogynist joke that is curiously truncated in the anniversary edition. There is also a tiny trim to a brief, gratuitous rape-and-torture scene (which is actually shot with restraint by the director's typical standards). And Peckinpah has Garrett cavorting with four nude prostitutes for two elaborate minutes in his version, which was reduced to a few relatively chaste seconds in the anniversary edition.

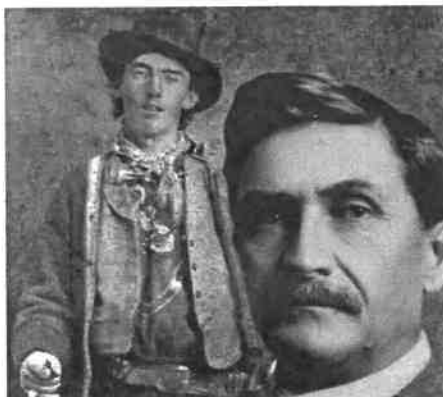
With one exception, all of these cuts are for the better. The brothel sequence is much stronger in the anniversary edition, and the division of the movie's main titles into two segments is clearly superior to the more labored opening of the preview version. It is somewhat

baffling however, that Peckinpah's own scene—which originally ran for a full minute, and was quite good, and could easily be interpreted as the director speaking in his own voice—is cut down to twenty terse seconds that withholds almost all of Sam's dialogue.

Two more controversial choices, one suspects, diverge from Peckinpah's preferences. Dylan's music is ubiquitous in the anniversary edition. But although the legendary singer-songwriter has spoken with appreciation of his experience on the film (which not only yielded "Heaven's Door" but would subsequently inspire "Romance in Durango"), Peckinpah, in contrast, was wary of this late addition to the production, suspecting Dylan as a studio plant, and in any event seemed to prefer a more restrained approach with the songs. Finally, it is hard to imagine that the director would not have retained his closing coda: a reprise of the original Garrett murder, followed by a crawl drawing parallels between government corruption then, and now (1973), which concludes with the initials SP as a signature to that statement. Peckinpah, an ex-Marine who was never much of an admirer of President Nixon, to put it mildly, was apoplectic about the president's commutation of William Calley's life sentence for his role in the Mai Li massacre. In 1971 he sent telegrams to Nixon from location on *Straw Dogs* in England begging him "to consider the moral issues involved." Nixon did not.

The Fiftieth Anniversary Edition may be a better and more enduring film than what might have been Peckinpah's final version. But at some moments, if reflecting wise choices, it does seem to be cut with one eye on the sensibilities of contemporary viewers.

In addition to the three versions of the film, Criterion's special edition includes an affable and anecdotal commentary track by Seydor, Spottiswoode, and critic Michael Sragow, an excellent new program about the making of the film, a very fine vintage interview with Coburn, a new informative-if-hyperbolic interview with Dylan biographer Clinton Heylin about the film's soundtrack, and an essay by the novelist Steve Erickson.—Jonathan Kirshner



The real-life William H. Bonney aka "Billy the Kid" and sheriff Pat Garrett.

Io Capitano

Produced by Matteo Garrone and Paolo Del Brocco; directed by Matteo Garrone; screenplay by Matteo Garrone, Massimo Ceccherini, Massimo Gaudioso, and Andrea Tagliaferri; cinematography by Paolo Carnera; edited by Marco Spoletini; music by Andrea Farri; starring Seydou Sarr, Moustapha Fall, Issaka Sawagodo, Hichem Yacoubi, Cheick Oumar Diaw, and Khady Sy. Blu-ray, color, Wolof and French dialogue with English subtitles, 121 min., 2023. A Cohen Media Group release, www.cohenmedia.net.

In the first of the two postscreening Q&As included as extras on the Cohen Media Group's Blu-ray of the Academy Award-nominated *Io Capitano*, Italy's entry last year in the International Feature category, writer-director Matteo Garrone refers to the film as a "contemporary *Odyssey*" and its African migrant-protagonists as "contemporary heroes." Indeed, the film translates into a Homeric epic one of the world's most pressing migrant crises today—as Africans flee conflict, economic insecurity and environmental disaster in their countries of origin to embark on perilous journeys across desert and sea. As many as 100,000 of them attempt the Mediterranean crossing to Europe every year.

Representative of them, *Io Capitano*'s heroes are two brave Senegalese teenagers whose physical and psychological mettle is tested mightily, as they overcome seemingly insuperable odds and a terrible death toll. Their quest is organized into episodic tribulations marked by inter-titled geographic progress, from "Dakar, Senegal" to "Agadez, Niger," "The Saharan Desert," "Tripoli, Libya," and, finally, that same mythic "Mediterranean Sea," traversing Odysseus's storied path somewhere in the 260 nautical miles between Libya and Sicily. By telling their story in a way that humanizes and heroicizes, Garrone hopes to garner greater sympathy for "illegal" migrants among European audiences inured by news footage of overloaded boats, an electorally significant portion of them open to xenophobic politics as surviving migrants strain European economies and societies.

It's hard to imagine a more effective appeal to our sympathies than that solicited by the story of Senegalese cousins Seydou and Moussa, played astoundingly well by first-time seventeen-year-old actors Seydou Sarr and Moustapha Fall, respectively—who also grace the stage with Garrone in this Blu-ray's Q&A sessions held in Los Angeles theaters. Garrone and his co-writers based the cousins' harrowing story on the real experiences of African migrants generally, and two of them specifically—Guinea-born Fofana Amara and Ivory Coast-born Mamadou Kouassi, the latter of whom consulted on the script and completes the foursome on stage at both Q&As. Kouassi's three-year-ordeal provided the plot and nar-

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