



2004

Me and Billy

Lillian Heil

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Collier, James Lincoln. *Me and Billy*. Marshall Cavendish, 2004. ISBN 0761451740. \$15.95.
185 pp.

Reviewer: Lillian H. Heil

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Adventure; Historic Fiction;

Subject: Swindlers and Swindling--Juvenile Fiction; Orphans--Juvenile Fiction; Friendship--Juvenile Fiction; Books--Reviews;

"Me and Billy" tells of two orphans- Billy and Possum - who escape from a cruel orphanage to go it on their own. Billy is drawn to stealing and lying to other people so he persuades Possum to join a con man who sells "healing potions." They plan to earn money in order to hunt for the gold they have heard of in the mountains, but Billy likes the life of the con man - it suits his lying style. An angry relative of a child who died from taking their potions catches up with them and in the battle the two boys help attack the angry man; the latter's gun accidentally goes off and kills him. Their con man parts company with the boys and Possum finally decides he can't go along with Billy and his dishonest ways.

Collier's excellent characterizations are achieved in the dialogue between Billy and Possum. Billy maintains he can't help himself; he just has to do "something bad," but what it really amounts to is that he has convinced himself that no one has ever done anything good for him so people deserve to be cheated. Possum finally realizes that Billy is deceiving himself and that he can't live that way. He parts company with Billy to return to help a family that has treated them kindly. The story is an interesting look at how a person can convince himself that he can't help cheating others. A recent article in the paper about an identity theft expert quoted the same rationalization from the thief when he was caught. It shows that a person who chooses to give up his free agency makes a bad choice.