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John Muir's "Stickeen" and the Lessons of Nature. by Ronald H. Limbaugh

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studies—Douglas County, Nebraska, Las Animas County, Colorado, and Gila County, Arizona—McKanna describes a social terrain of deep resentments and towering violence. In McKanna's West, men often drank themselves blind in dirt-floor saloons, insulted one another, then stumbled outdoors with cheap handguns a-blazing to avenge wounded honor.

His explanation as to why the West was violent is a little thin. If indeed the killings arose from a potent brew of industrialization, ethnic difference, and booze as pervasive as handguns, why wasn't the East as violent as the West? And his oft-repeated conclusion that minorities were treated unfairly by the courts seems obvious. This was the era of lynch law, after all.

But McKanna's quantitative data alone makes the book essential reading for any scholar of western violence. By using coroner's inquests as sources and tabulating the number of homicides in each place, McKanna is able to measure homicide in the same manner that the Federal Bureau of Investigation does today with the Uniform Crime Reporting Program. Thus, New York between 1880 and 1920 had a homicide rate that never rose as high as 5 per 100,000. In Colorado, Las Animas County had a homicide rate of 34 per 100,000 in the same period; that of Gila County, Arizona, was 70 per 100,000. To McKanna's credit, African American and American Indian subjects are not simple victims here, but as capable of violence as the majority whites (although for different reasons).

Others have used similar methodologies, but rarely to anything like this extent. Of course, just what these statistics prove has been a subject of some contention. Because most of these western counties and communities never had populations that approached 100,000 during the period, some (especially Robert Dykstra) have criticized the sampling as inadequate: one killing per year in a town or county of 1,200 will yield an enormous homicide rate of 80 per 100,000. According to these critics, the West hardly has a chance to redeem itself in the history books with such odds as that.

What is missing in the larger argument about western violence is also missing from McKanna's book: a more careful and thoughtful discussion of what constituted violence and what people thought about it back then in these

small, desperate places. In 1852, some residents of Los Angeles said it was not safe to venture out after dark. Surely such impressions, collected for the West as whole, would be meaningful. Without some sense of how violent the West was in the eyes of those who lived it, all these arguments seem a little inconclusive. But in the end, McKanna's work illuminates a good deal of new material and moves the debate about western violence toward a new level.

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John Muir's "Stickeen" and the Lessons of Nature. By Ronald H. Limbaugh. (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1996. xviii, 185 pp. \$22.95, ISBN 0-912006-84-6.)

In Alaska in the summer of 1880, John Muir made a harrowing, nerve-racking crossing of a dangerous glacial chasm, accompanied only by a small black mongrel dog named Stickeen. After a long life as an after-dinner tale, the story of their adventure took written form over the years 1893–1897. Ronald H. Limbaugh examines in meticulous detail how Muir's writing was shaped by his reading of such authors as Sir Walter Scott, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Thomas Carlyle and by his engagement with larger cultural and political currents—Darwinism, the Victorian culture of pets, and the turn toward a pastoralized nature as a source of moral truth.

Muir habitually marked and annotated his favorite books, combed through them later to get material for essays, then arranged, rewrote, and refined down to the final product. (A long appendix gives detailed commentary on the "Stickeen"-related annotations, marginalia, and borrowings found in 105 books from Muir's library.) In particular, Muir's reading of figures such as the animal rights advocate Henry Salt and the evolutionary psychologist George J. Romanes helped him formulate his own insights into the moral and emotional interconnections between humans and animals. Thus, the version of the story that Muir submitted to *Century* magazine in 1897—reconstructed here and published for the first time—stressed Stickeen's intelligence, courage, fear, and other human

characteristics, constituting a full-scale argument for humanity's "physical and spiritual kinship with the rest of creation," "a lesson in the moral equality and oneness of all animate life."

However, Muir's editor, Robert Underwood Johnson, insisted that the more philosophical radical portions of Muir's original submission be deleted, to avoid alienating the mainstream readers upon whom they both depended for support of the growing environmental movement. Despite the published story's initial success as a classic in the man-and-dog adventure genre, it has fallen into relative obscurity for contemporary scholars.

Thus, the story serves as a surprising source for new insights into a number of important questions: the tensions between Muir's private thought and his public persona, the relations between radical and conservative elements in his environmental ethics, his process of literary creation, and his immersion in the literary and intellectual texts and intertexts of his time. However, alongside his focus on Muir's portrayal of the dog, Limbaugh might have considered more fully the development of Muir's own self-presentation—his creation of a persona that would model the proper human orientation toward animals—as a complementary dimension of his environmental ethic. Moreover, Limbaugh seems to presume that literary and philosophical materials merely gave Muir the tools with which to express already-held convictions, without considering the extent to which those materials may have been influential in the actual creation of Muir's more radical ideas out of a conventional background. Despite these omissions, in tracing the inner and outer histories of a single key text, Limbaugh's admittedly modest study opens up new avenues in our understandings of Muir and of the historical embeddedness of environmental writing and thought in general.

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"King of the Wildcatters": The Life and Times of Tom Slick, 1883–1930. By Ray Miles. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996. xiv, 166 pp. \$29.95, ISBN 0-89096-715-6.)

On August 18, 1930, the day of Tom Slick's

funeral, production in the prolific new Oklahoma City oil field halted, and between 2:30 and 3:30 P.M. the derricks stood silent in tribute to one of the most successful independent oilmen in the United States. The funeral also brought an equally telling, if entirely self-serving, recognition of Slick's remarkable achievements from Oklahoma's governor, William Murray, who gleefully anticipated that the inheritance tax due on the huge Slick estate would be more than sufficient to retire the state's accumulated debt.

Acknowledged by many of his contemporaries to be the greatest of all oil finders and heralded by students of the industry as perhaps the most important figure in the discovery and development of the vast Mid-Continent field, Slick nonetheless remained without a biographer until Ray Miles accepted the challenge. Faced with the formidable disadvantage of having almost no Slick family or business papers to work with, Miles has done an impressive job of trying to reconstruct Slick's personal story and business career from family interviews and newspaper and other accounts. On the business side, the author is largely successful. The reader is rewarded with a carefully researched chronicle that for the first time allows one to follow Slick's remarkable path of discovery from Cushing, Oklahoma, in 1912 to assorted Mid-Continent fields and eventually to his huge successes in the Seminole and Oklahoma City fields in the late 1920s. In addition to filling in important detail regarding Slick's entrepreneurship, Miles's account also brings to light Slick's efforts in advancing the cause of petroleum conservation in Oklahoma. However, the author's assertion that Slick played a significant role in the Oklahoma conservation movement, like some of his other claims, is stated rather than proven. The difficulty that the reader has in getting the measure of the man in this book has much to do with the lack of outside reference points; the focus of discussion is kept very narrow, and there is no apparent analytical framework. The local and specific world of Tom Slick generally remains poorly connected to the larger and somewhat chaotic petroleum industry environment in which Slick managed so effectively.

On the personal side, Slick is presented as a very modest man who, along with an abiding distaste for publicity, eschewed the conspicu-