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Jesse James

Richard E. Nicholls reviews a biography on Jesse James by T.J. Stiles

A photograph of Jesse James, taken in July 1864, captures a 16-year-old boy in the process of transforming himself into a killer. His rosy cheeks and delicate features, and the rakish tie he wears, contrast oddly with the hefty Colt pistol he clutches in one hand. Two more revolvers are thrust in his belt. The portrait might seem a harmless counterfeit if it had been produced at any time other than during the American Civil War, with a boy none too convincingly imitating the look of a desperado.

In fact, as a member of a band of Confederate guerillas operating in the contested borderlands of Kansas and Missouri, James had already seen men die violently. Indeed, by the time James sat for his portrait he may already have taken a life. According to one of his acquaintances, in June 1864, James and his older brother Frank, a hardened bushwhacker (as the guerillas were often called), had shot down a suspected Unionist. His first experience of war, as T.J. Stiles points out in his provocative, heavily revisionist biographical study, was not that of a soldier fighting as part of a disciplined army, but as "a member of a death squad, picking off neighbors one by one."

The passage of time, the efforts of tireless apologists and the judgment-free creations of popular culture have simplified and sanitized the life of Jesse James. His actions as a guerilla during the Civil War have often been glossed over, with the emphasis instead on his later, hectic career as an outlaw. He has become the most folkloric of 19th-century badmen, with the fictionalized portraits of his life presenting a daring bandit who robbed arrogant railroads and banks, distributed loot to the needy and defied the powerful in the name of the powerless.

In *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, Stiles attempts to penetrate the layers of fabrications swaddling James to uncover something of the real man and his motives. Not surprisingly, the figure that emerges bears only a passing resemblance to the le-

gendary outlaw. This James is far more ruthless and manipulative. He is an impulsive killer, forged by the corrosive influence of guerilla warfare, Southern intransigence and his own appetite for notoriety. Even his depredations after the war, Stiles argues, were inspired less by proletarian anger than by the desire to play a visible part in the Southern effort to defeat the goals of Reconstruction. Had he lived a century later, Stiles asserts, "he would have been called a terrorist."

Between 1866 and his death in 1882, James would take the lead in a long series of robberies of banks and trains. The violence of the war years would carry over into the robberies, leaving bank tellers, bystanders, railroad personnel and even some of his own gang dead. Under other circumstances, these robberies would have been viewed as simple, if audacious, crimes. But in the turbulent, vitriolic atmosphere of the postwar years, James was seized upon as the perfect example of a Southern patriot harassed by radical Northern Republicans. After they were largely driven from office in the mid 1870's, James became a man without a cause. He went on robbing because, apparently, he craved thrills, was too restless to settle down and could think of no better way to attract attention.

Stiles's biography is so carefully researched, persuasive and illuminating that it is likely to reshape permanently our understanding of its subject's life and times. James has become far more human, more complex and less admirable. Still, James often seems to get lost in a narrative crowded with outsize figures and events. The book frequently seems more like a record of the times in which he lived than of the man shaped by them. James himself remains a violent enigma; the man behind the gun remains remote.

The New York Times Book Review, October 27, 2002

1 What is said about the early photo of Jesse James?

- A He already looks like a hardened criminal
- B It shows the effect of war on the face of a young man
- C He is trying to look more innocent than he really was
- D It seems to point in two opposite directions

2 In what respect does Stiles's biography provide a different perspective on Jesse James?

- A It stresses his heroism as a Confederate soldier in the Civil War
- B It gives a detailed account of his dubious activities as a guerilla fighter
- C It presents new evidence of his generosity to the poor
- D It largely ignores his life as a famous bandit after the Civil War

3 What is said about the public image traditionally associated with Jesse James?

- A It is due to his efforts to treat even his enemies with respect
- B It was increasingly questioned after his death
- C It is hardly supported by Stiles's account of his real actions
- D It was on the whole well deserved

4 What are we told about Jesse James as a person?

- A He was a violent and self-centered man
- B He lost interest in politics after the Civil War
- C He was a mixture of gentle and tough qualities
- D He never forgot his proletarian background

5 What is the reviewer's main impression of Stiles's book?

- A It is based on solid research but its focus is much too narrow
- B It is a bit too sensational to be really convincing
- C It is well written but throws no new light on James
- D It is partly out of focus in relation to its purpose

Please turn over

It's a Jungle In There

As trading vessels sailed into Amsterdam in the first half of the 18th century, an apothecary named Albertus Seba could often be seen scurrying to meet the ailing crews. Seba was strange. Most medicine men waited for the sick to come to them, but he went after the business, going aboard to deal with the scurvy and other illnesses picked up in parts unknown. When it came time for his patients to pay, he didn't ask for silver pieces, or gold, or even the cargo that had somehow snuck from the hold into a sailor's private trunk. No, he preferred that dead fly squished between the pages of a book or even the deformed human fetus that some crewmate—drunk? deranged?—had brought on board in Curaçao. The weirder, the better, it seemed. The apothecary called himself a collector of curiosities.

Over the last two decades of his life, Seba amassed one of the best collections of oddities in Europe, as is evident in the recently published *Cabinet of Natural Curiosities*. The book reproduces, for the first time since the 18th century, the *Thesaurus*, the four-volume illustrated inventory of the creatures that filled the jars, drawers and shelves of Seba's shop.

In his day, he wasn't the only one obsessed by the glorious diversity of nature. "Nature had become fashionable," writes Krzysztof Pomian in *Collectors and Curiosities*, his study of the collecting craze. The hobby, which had begun among doctors and pharmacists in the 16th century, was taken up by European aristocrats who had lots of time and even more money. They could afford expeditions in search of an Alpine butterfly or a rare wildflower. But Seba networked. He wrote to contacts in the far reaches of the Dutch Empire, inquiring about the local animalia. He pumped patients for information and specimens. He bartered his duplicates like rare stamps: Trade a brush-footed butterfly for one ichneumon wasp?

Seba had won a reputation as a first-rate collector long before the first volume of the *Thesaurus* was published in 1735. In

fact, that inventory was based on his second collection. The first had been bought by Russia's Peter the Great in 1717 for the princely sum of 15,000 gulden, but the second collection made the first look like an amateur plaything. Seba expanded on his earlier specialties, shells and insects, building one of Europe's finest sets of conchs, the shells that became the rich man's Beanie Baby in the 18th century. He also put new emphasis on marine life and reptiles. So important were these holdings that Carolus Linnaeus, who invented modern scientific nomenclature for flora and fauna, reportedly used them as one of his sources.

Many of the copperplate prints in the *Cabinet* show Seba's sense of whimsy. Though he recruited artists to do the actual etchings, he was closely involved in their design. He liked to place predators in the same frame as their prey. He would also add a single skeleton to a page of full-bodied chameleons. His fetish for the fantastic shows most clearly in his inclusion of a few weird specimens. Some, like the Siamese-twin goats or the fetuses—elephant, sheep, pig, mouse and that Curaçaoan baby—may have been real. Others, such as a seven-headed reptile (labeled Hydra), could not have been part of his—or any other—collection.

Seba's grand agglomeration broke apart in 1752, when his heirs sold the collection to finance the publication of the last two volumes of the *Thesaurus*, which finally came out in 1758 and 1765. The publication of the *Cabinet* brings them all back together, capturing much of the optical magic that must also have dazzled Seba's eye. Who could look at the pattern of turquoise diamonds on the whipsnake's back or the marbling on a triton's trumpet shell and not marvel? To see them is to understand—maybe Albertus Seba wasn't so strange after all.

Jeff Chu, Time, December 17, 2001

6 Why was Seba eager to take care of sick sailors as quickly as possible?

- A It was his best chance to make a living out of his medical expertise
- B He was interested in discovering previously unknown diseases
- C It gave him an opportunity to get new material for his hobby
- D He was curious to hear news about exotic people and places

7 What are we told about Seba and his big interest?

- A He was the first doctor engaged in the study of rare specimens
- B His success as a collector made him give up his medical work
- C His ambitions were supported by rich people interested in nature
- D He had to work in many different ways to increase his collection

8 What is said about Seba as a collector?

- A The quality of his first collection was never truly appreciated
- B Quite famous in his own lifetime, Seba gradually widened his focus to new species
- C It was only late in life that he was given proper recognition
- D Although fascinating to amateurs, his collections were of limited value for natural scientists

9 What is implied about Seba's presentation of his collection, as seen in the *Cabinet*?

- A His attitude was characterized by a liking for the unexpected
- B He took care to distinguish clearly between the real and the unreal
- C He took little interest in how illustrations were visually arranged
- D His guiding principle was realism rather than artistic effect

10 What is suggested in the last paragraph?

- A The true value of Seba's collection was not realized by his family
- B The *Thesaurus* could hardly do justice to Seba's original plans
- C The images reproduced in the *Cabinet* look too artificial to be true
- D Nature's beauty and variety may fill any observer with wonder

Please turn over

And here are some shorter texts:

Parents and Children

A disturbing report by a social policy think-tank, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, has criticized court professionals for allowing contact with fathers to take precedence over the safety of women and children.

11 What is implied in the report referred to?

- A The right of fathers to see their children is too restricted
- B Mothers should allow fathers to see their children more often
- C Fathers should sometimes be stopped from seeing their children
- D The right of mothers to protect their children has been strengthened

Time

The Alcherringa or Dreamtime of Aboriginal Australians is perhaps the most extraordinary of all ideas of time. To Western eyes, the Dreamtime looks at first sight like ‘the past’ but it isn’t. Subtle, ambiguous and diffuse, the Dreamtime is past, present and future merged, the Aboriginal ‘now’ porous to the Dreamtime ‘forever’—the past and the future are like permeable membranes surrounding the present. To a Westerner, the past is behind your back. The Maori view is diametrically opposed; Maori writer Witi Ihimaera comments that to Maori people, you face the past (because you can see it) and you walk backwards into the future (which you can’t see).

12 What is implied here?

- A Time is to a large degree a culturally determined concept
- B Aboriginal Australians are unaware of the difference between ‘now’ and ‘then’
- C The Dreamtime is a more logical concept than Western ideas of time
- D The Maoris make a sharper distinction than Westerners between the past and the future

Future Cars

A new vehicle developed jointly by Japan’s Toyota Motor Corp. and electronics giant Sony Corp. will display emotions using changing coloured lights and can monitor the driver’s vital signs. The car, called “Pod”, has a face-like front end, and even responds to a driver’s behaviour, playing calming music to discourage erratic driving.

13 What is said here about tomorrow’s cars?

- A They can be designed to react to different colours
- B They will take over most of the actual driving
- C They will show feelings in the same manner as human beings
- D They can be made to react to careless driving

A Controversial Writer

Gitta Sereny has never been afraid of controversy. In her long career as a writer and journalist, she has provoked criticism for her philosophy (people are born good and corrupted by society), her methods (helping her subjects “discover” their propensity for evil through interviews that most closely resemble psychotherapy) and her refusal to demonize people who have done great wrongs. Sereny is fascinated not only by the fact of evil but also by the possibility of redemption. Each is equally mystifying. In the last analysis, it is this deep belief in the possibility of redemption that gets critics’ teeth grinding and sends the tabloid press into a fury.

14 What is the writer’s attitude to Sereny’s work?

- A The writer is critical of Sereny’s general approach
- B The writer sympathizes with Sereny’s beliefs about evil
- C The writer does not take a stand on Sereny’s ideas
- D The writer disagrees with criticism of Sereny’s views

15 Which of the following statements is most in line with Sereny’s opinions, according to the text?

- A People should be given a chance to be forgiven for their evil deeds
- B Some people are destined to remain evil throughout their lives
- C True evil must be severely punished by society
- D There is no such thing as a thoroughly evil deed

Doctors

In six years, complaints against doctors have tripled and caused an 18-month backlog of disciplinary hearings, which, it is argued, is further eroding the public’s faith in the medical profession. The delay—denounced by medics as “unacceptable”—has forced the General Medical Council to double the number of days on which it holds hearings of its professional conduct committee.

16 What does this news item tell us?

- A An increasing number of doctors have been found guilty of unprofessional behaviour
- B Possible mistakes made by doctors will be more quickly investigated than before
- C Attempts are being made by the authorities to shorten queues for medical treatment
- D Many patients feel that doctors are too pressed for time to provide adequate treatment

Please turn over

In the following text there are gaps which indicate that something has been left out. Study the four alternatives that correspond to each gap and decide which one best fits the gap. Then mark your choice on your answer sheet.

Xenotransplantation

In the days of old, propagandists for science would make a mantra of the philosopher David Hume's principle that there is no relation between statements of fact and of value. But nowadays, you can't tell where the science stops and the17..... begin. On the slippery slope are risks: scientific uncertainty and potential harm. When these are extreme, science becomes too important to be left to the scientists (and their sponsors). The latest example of this is xenotransplantation, the use of animal organs and tissues as spare parts for humans.

Up until quite recently, the formidable problems of cross-species rejection made xenotransplants generally impractical. But that is being18....., and many scientists believe that we are on the verge of an explosion of xenotransplants. The benefits will be enormous. Patients will not have to wait endlessly for suitable donors. And19..... solid organs—heart, liver and kidney—implants of animal cells and tissues will also bring benefits to great numbers of patients. Xeno cells and tissues could be used to cure diabetes and treat Parkinson's and Huntingdon's disease, multiple sclerosis and the effects of stroke.

But the other side of the equation is equally awesome. There is a small but real risk of xenozoonosis, the transmission of animal diseases to humans via organ transplants or blood.20..... the advantages of xenotransplants have to be weighed against the possibility that animal viruses might jump to humans and cause disease or even pandemics.

Ziauddin Sardar, *New Statesman*, 27 November, 1998.

- 17 A problems
B ethics
C benefits
D statistics

- 18 A understood
B exaggerated
C disregarded
D overcome

- 19 A as in
B apart from
C out of
D contrary to

- 20 A For
B Further
C So
D Likewise

That is the end of the English test. If you have time left, go back and check your answers.