

Mark DUGAN and John BOESSENECKER, *The Grey Fox : the True Story of Bill Minier—Last of the Old-Time Bandits* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1992. Pp. 260 ISBN 9-780806-124353 (cloth))

Nolan Reilly

Volume 16, numéro 2, 1994

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1083386ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1083386ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (imprimé)

1708-0401 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Reilly, N. (1994). Compte rendu de [Mark DUGAN and John BOESSENECKER, *The Grey Fox : the True Story of Bill Minier—Last of the Old-Time Bandits* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1992. Pp. 260 ISBN 9-780806-124353 (cloth)]. *Ethnologies*, 16(2), 160–162. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1083386ar>

what they do to the tripe, how long foods are cooked, etc. I hope that folklorists who study food will go a bit further and, at least, include an appendix with exact directions.

### Bibliography

REDDIN, Estelle

forthcoming "The Spirit of Home Cooking," in *Northern Bounty* (Toronto, Random House).

STEWART, Hilary

1987 *The Adventures and Sufferings of John R. Jewitt, Captive of Maquinna* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre).

Jo Marie POWERS  
University of Guelph  
Guelph, Ontario

---

Mark DUGAN and John BOESSENECKER, *The Grey Fox : the True Story of Bill Miner--Last of the Old-Time Bandits* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1992. Pp. 260 ISBN 9-780806-124353 (cloth).

Bill Miner's criminal life spanned fifty years, from the 1860s to the early twentieth century. He achieved notoriety robbing stagecoaches and trains throughout the western and southern United States. He also had a Canadian connection. In 1904, Miner successfully held up a Canadian Pacific Express train at Mission, British Columbia. This was Canada's first train robbery, and the police and the CPR were determined that it be the last. After an extensive search failed to locate Miner, authorities assumed that he had crossed into the United States; however, Miner had done no such thing. He was living contentedly as a refined and cultured gentleman in Kamloops. Quickly making friends with many of the local residents, including the local RCMP officer, Miner remained in the town until his whereabouts were discovered by federal authorities. He fled the town when the local police officer warned him indirectly that his arrest was imminent. However, Miner soon was captured and imprisoned in New Westminster. After a short stint in jail he escaped under suspicious circumstances, some critics believing that he was let go in exchange for disclosing to police the location of the loot from the train robbery. Sympathy for Miner was widespread in British

Columbia. Many thought of him as a modern-day Robin Hood and were relieved when he escaped to the United States. (In the 1980s, this image of Miner as a likeable rogue was memorialized in the National Film Board of Canada production, "The Grey Fox".)

Miner's ability to win friends and public sympathy in Canada typified his life as an outlaw. He was literate and articulate and used these skills to create the numerous myths about his life that won him public recognition. For example, he embellished the fact that he never quite killed anyone and usually robbed corporations rather than individuals into an exaggerated commitment to principles of socialism. When Miner died of natural causes in a Georgia prison in 1913, he was better known than the outlaws we think of today as the most notorious bandits of the American West.

Miner's ability to create a mythology about himself fascinates Dugan and Boessenecker. As they point out, the myths about western outlaws usually were created not by the bandits but by others writing after, sometimes long after, their deaths. The authors do an admirable job of piecing together Miner's life by using a rich variety of sources. However, their objective was not to write yet another tale of the Wild West. In fact, they use Miner's life to challenge recent historical interpretations that attempt to fit the outlaws of the American West into British historian Eric Hobsbawm's well-known social bandit paradigm. As the authors observe, Miner is at first glance a likely candidate for the social bandit designation, especially if his autobiographical accounts of his motives are accepted. As the authors point out, though, social relations in the West in the late nineteenth century were not comparable to those of the pre-industrial peasant societies in which Hobsbawm located his peasant bandits. Therefore, the concept of the social bandit does not transfer easily to the West.

However, having offered some convincing arguments against the social bandit interpretation, the authors have little to offer as an alternative. They conclude Miner was simply a "folk bandit or popular bandit" (p. 210), whose appeal they explain in the most simplistic of terms: "It...(?) seems clear that modern man has a basic need for the outlaw hero. Humans by nature yearn to be free, and modern man has an innate, albeit often subconscious, scepticism of government, laws, and those controls that would bind him. The man who rebels against these controls symbolizes and acts out this subconscious distrust" (p. 211). This statement reveals more about the authors' somewhat peculiarly American interpretation of human history than it does about the social context of the western outlaws. Given the pseudo-psychology underlying the above statement and its patriarchal language, it is not surprising to read that an explanation for Miner's turn to criminal activity was the fact that "he came of age in a single-parent family" (p. 200), which lacked the restraining influences of a father. Another issue addressed in a questionable manner was Miner's bisexuality, which they attributed to his time in prison. They tend to attribute Miner's

continued interest in homosexuality outside of prison, however, as little more than conniving by Miner to lure young men into a life of crime. Consequently, a reading of *The Grey Fox* offers many details about Miner but explains little of the significance of his life and that of other outlaws in terms of the social and gender relations of their era.

Nolan REILLY  
The University of Winnipeg  
Winnipeg, MB

---

Roberto ZAPPERI (Translated by Brian WILLIAMS), *The Pregnant Man* (Revised and updated 4th ed. Social Orders v. 3, Chur, Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991, pp. ix+246 ISSN 0275-7524).

Part of the growing interest in the sociological aspects of folklore is the extent to which oral narratives, along with proverbs and riddles, reflect "such familiar topics as the economic and power relations within the society, family structures...or the ideological and value systems, whether agreed upon (?) or disputed" (Finnegan:122). Among the traditional cultures of Europe, major popular narratives such as the Finn Cycle of Gaeldom or the Kalevala have been viewed as containing such meaning(s) which were constantly reinforced and validated through the telling; but what of the shorter, humbler items such as anecdotes, fables, and proverbs? In his singular study of the theme of the pregnant man in the folklore and popular literature of Europe from medieval times, Zapperi attempts to address this and a host of other questions.

The approach is interdisciplinary in a sense that goes far beyond the well-known tale-type/folklore motif studies in its exploration of the varied aspects of the pregnant man theme. In addition to folktales the field of study encompasses church history, theology, medieval studies, law, women's studies, philology, psychiatry, and cultural and sexual politics. The text is supplied with appropriate illustrations and a well-chosen, wide-ranging select bibliography.

The opening scene is in Germany in the latter part of the eleventh century, where the Church, through the "Gregorian Reformation" moved to "impose its own rules on a society which professed Christianity, but which governed itself in family matters and sexual issues on the basis of an ethic which was not yet christianised at all" (p. 8). The new family ethic, whose object was to consolidate christianisation throughout the most humble (and numerous) levels of society, propounded a family hierarchy which came to be firmly established by the 15th