

CROCODILE TEARS

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"Lizzie Borden took an axe
 And gave her Mother forty whacks.
 When he saw what she had done,
 She gave her Father forty-one."

Lizzie then languished in the Fall River jail -- dry-eyed as a crocodile.

I propose to hide behind Article VII, Section 3 of our by-laws which prevents discussion of a paper until it has been forgotten. The statistics supporting my statements are, I hope, a judicious blend of the factual and the factitious, as in previous papers the use of incomplete or incorrectly analyzed statistics has occasionally been deprecated -- not to say viewed with alarm. In the interest of simplicity and clarity I mix Milton and Tennyson in one aphorism: "Let Truth and Falsehood grapple" "lest one good custom should corrupt the world".

In 1959 30.4% of all females arrested were charged with murder, aggravated assault, disorderly conduct, or violation of the sex, drug, and liquor laws. Only 15.9% of male arrests fell into these categories. Since all other offenses classified involve the profit motive, we may assume that women are less mercenary than men.

Men, after weighing the risks against the rewards, and considering the obligations of honour, loyalty, and self-interest, murder for such commonplace reasons as financial or political gain, possession of desired objects (usually female), or as an unfortunate by-product of commercial enterprises such as robbery.

Their techniques tend to the orthodox, forethought is given to ensuring the silence of confederates, if any, and victims are selected on a businesslike basis without personal animus.

Women, on the other hand, murder male relatives by preference, in spite of the fact that they are more apt to die a natural death if they murder mere acquaintances (such as Lana Turner's friend, Johnny Stomponato). Disposing of their own male issue is also relatively safe. Should they rise to assassination, which is murder with good public relations, they may with justice expect a ticker-tape parade on Broadway. Women seldom murder women -- destruction of character or stealing their visible means of support, if he doesn't snore, is more sporting.

At heart all women are alchemists, unswerving in their determination to transform base males into pure gold. The frustrations attendant upon this laudable enterprise sometimes force the zealous researcher to make a fresh start with a new subject. Disposal of subjects whose further usefulness is limited by over-exposure to an imperfect philosopher's stone is called murder and its practitioners are often severely dealt with because, as Thomas deQuincy said: "Once a man indulges himself in murder, very soon he comes to think little of robbing, and from robbing he comes next to drinking and Sabbath-breaking, and from that to incivility and procrastination. Once being on this downward path, you never know where to stop."

Actuarially, assassination is preferable to assignation. Lady Macbeth died young but she died in bed. Tosca died by her own hand after applying a blunt instrument to Scarpia. Charlotte Corday, after stabbing Marat in his bath, had every right to look forward

to a respected old age, but Robespierre's Terror cut a wide swath through the intended beneficiaries of her practical politics. When Judith returned to Bethulia with the head of Holofernes she was hailed as the saviour of her people, whereas Joan of Arc, who crowned the head of Charles VII instead of removing it, was burned for witch-craft.

Longevity is the reward of the Mother who removes her son "From the world and its toils and its cares".

Mme. Butterfly killed her infant son out of concern for his future. Not for remorse did she then kill herself -- she ran out of breath on high C.

Medea cut up her brother and threw him overboard piecemeal. Retrieving the remains so delayed her pursuers that she and Jason and his argonauts were able to escape to Greece with the Golden Fleece. She then murdered Jason's uncle in an unsuccessful attempt to secure his throne. Next she murdered Jason's fiancée, as she considered that mothering his children was sufficient confirmation of her own engagement to Jason. Finally, she murdered their two sons so that grief might be Jason's punishment. No one knew better than Euripides that you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs. Medea's later life was far from restful but it ran its appointed course.

The humanity of the Empress Irene matched her piety. While creating some of the greatest works of early Christian architecture she upheld the most oriental of Byzantine traditions. She kept her regency by the simple expedient of having her son blinded.

In 1728 Margaret Dickson was brought to trial in Scotland for the murder of her infant son who had been conceived, born,

and buried during her husband's absence on naval duty. After she had been duly hanged her body was given to friends for burial. While the mourners assuaged their grief in a pub by the way, she revived and was subsequently restored to perfect health. The prohibition of double jeopardy prevented her being hung again so she remarried her sailor husband and lived happily through another quarter of a century. The moral of this episode is that "she who lives more lives than one, more deaths than one must die".

"All men kill the thing they love,
Some with a flattering word.
The coward does it with a kiss,
The brave man with a sword."

With this flapdoodle of Oscar Wilde's women have no patience. They prefer George Bernard Shaw's dictum that "the fear of God may be the beginning of wisdom but the fear of man is the beginning of murder". Once having despaired of the peffectibility of man or, perhaps, having despaired of measuring up to men, imperfect as they are, direct and violent action is the obvious remedy. Generally women who live by the sword, die by the sword and it is after disposing of their spouses that they become particularly accident-prone. In the interests of purely objective scholarship let us first note some exceptions to this rule:

Florrie Maybrick, a southern belle with an ambitious Mother, was disappointed that she had married only a Liverpool cotton-broker, whereas her Mother's second husband had a title. Dissatisfaction with her husband's fortune and position pre-disposed her to adultery. Although her seducer lacked a title, he did move in sportier circles and borrowed money from more dashing friends.

To clinch her new romance (which had consisted of one night in a London hotel) she flavored her husband's coffee with arsenic which she had distilled from fly-paper. The story that this established a custom in making British coffee is apocryphal. However, the enriched coffee sent Maybrick to his reward and Florrie to hers, which was commuted to life imprisonment because Queen Victoria thought it unseemly for a gentlewoman to hang. Good behaviour got her off in fifteen years and in 1947 she expired as a recluse in South Kent, Connecticut, surrounded by cats and old newspapers.

Salome, contrary to the wishful thinking of Oscar Wilde and Richard Strauss, made two happy marriages and died of old age after demanding the head of John the Baptist.

Catherine the Great had such a multiplicity of lovers that there may have been safety in numbers. When she superintended the liquidation of her husband, the Tsar, the finger could not be pointed at a single individual, or even a manageable group.

Wagner added the extra fillip of incest to the marital and geneological tangle that is "Die Walkurie". Hunding's wife, Sieglinde, took up with her twin brother, Siegmund. In the ensuing fracas Siegmund was protected by his half-sister Brunhilde (who subsequently married Siegfried whose begetting caused all this trouble) and Hunding was protected by his father-in-law, Wotan (an uncongenial task for one who was more noted for protecting girls). Alas! the hearts of the protectors were not in their work for the combatants killed each other -- like Ivan and Abdul the bulbul Emir. The only punishment for the widowed Sieglinde, who started it all, was to be scratched from the cast of the next opera.

Having disposed of the exceptions, a cursory examination of some more typical cases will show that crime does not pay if the victim, is, or should be, a husband.

In 1897 a farmer on Long Island noticed that his ducks emerged from a pond adjoining his property dyed red. Red ducks being less marketable than the better known varieties, an investigation was instituted. The red dye turned out to be blood trickling from packages of assorted size stored in a shed on the banks of the pond. Each package contained a human limb wrapped in oil-cloth and imperfectly encased in plaster of Paris. When reassembled the relicts added up to a masseur named Guldensuppe. His misfortune was that, to avoid paying rent, he made his landlady his mistress, thus hoping to endow himself with her worldly goods. She saw no reason why adding her favors to her services should reduce the value of either. A vacancy in her boarding-house seemed more profitable than a free-loader and this she promptly set about creating with the help of another boarder who was a butcher by trade. Both paid the extreme penalty.

Holinshed, the Elizabethan historian whose accounts of English and Scottish kings were dramatized by Shakespeare, tells of a marital dispute in merrie England that was later the subject of a play, "Arden of Feversham" by either Marlowe, Thomas Kyd or, as Swinburne insisted, Shakespeare.

On the evening of February fifteenth, 1551 Arden was playing cards with the party of the third part who had replaced him in the affections of his wife, Alice, when he was murdered by Black Will and George Shakebag. These worthies had been hired by Alice

when she felt that the ardor of her lover, Mosby, was beginning to cool. Her liberation was immediately celebrated by a party where no stint of food or wine, of song or dance, marred the festivities. Before dawn, while the celebrants were still able to walk, Arden's corpse was removed from the kitchen table and carried to the fair ground where it was left in the snow in nightgown and slippers. Next morning it was found by the Mayor of Feversham, as were the footprints in the snow leading to the Arden front door. Alice was burned at the stake and her four accomplices were hung.

The more recent case of Gertrude Gibson Patterson relieves this grim recital by its message of hope and trust in divine justice which corrects the oversights of the law as well as the whimsicalities of juries.

Gertrude, a winsome blonde of nubile proportions and accommodating morals, had a lover richer than her husband but less single-minded in his devotion. Her husband, Charles Patterson, was dying of tuberculosis -- the only trouble was that he took so long about it. So, one Sunday morning after church, Gertrude called him at the sanitarium and suggested taking a walk together. She was even thoughtful enough to meet him half way. After a perfunctory greeting she took a revolver from her purse and shot him dead.

On the day of her acquittal she sold the story of her life to Hollywood and, taking the leading role herself, reenacted the entire scene exactly where it had taken place. This done, she and her protector took a long honeymoon in Europe in anticipation of their marriage. They returned on the Titanic.

Mayhem seldom restores one's faith in human nature but there is poetry in the devotion of Alma Rattenbury and Percy Stoner

of Bournemouth, England. At their trial in 1935 for the bludgeoning of Mr. Rattenbury, no amount of questioning or legal trickery could make either implicate the other in the crime. Ultimately, when Stoner was sentenced to life imprisonment, the light of his life committed suicide rather than face another day without him at her side.

On the other hand, Ann Wells was as capricious as her two suitors. Her distaste for Brewen grew as he showered her with gifts. When he threatened arrest unless she returned his engagement ring she found it expedient to marry him. On their wedding night she pleaded a previous engagement and spent it with her first choice, Parker, who suggested and agreed to provide the poison with which Ann would lace her bridegroom's sugar-sops. During the remaining two weeks of her husband's life Ann shared his bed but insisted upon celibacy. Two years after her bereavement, in spite of her lament that her apron was riding higher, Parker still refused to marry her, claiming that he was afraid of what might happen to him in view of her proven predilection for widowhood. As they grew more vociferous, the arguments on this subject were overheard by the neighbors and resulted in complete confessions. Ann was burned at the stake facing the gibbet from which Parker was hung.

The absence of logic which makes the species so engaging provides a clue to the demise of many heads of household. A husband becomes an impediment when his existence precludes the use of marriage vows to secure the waning affections of a lover. Curiously, this reasoning does not apply to the lover's wife. It has also been mistakenly assumed that complicity in crime forges

a bond between the perpetrators. The fact is that having an accomplice is merely a guarantee that the grim reaper is licking his chops.

Mary Stuart, first widowed at eighteen, found her weeds so becoming that at twenty-five she donned them again for the funeral of her consort, Lord Darnley, whose strangling she had plotted with the Earl of Bothwell. The fact that Darnley had disembowelled her confidante, David Rizzio, in her presence may have embittered Mary but provides a less compelling reason for his early sleep in Abraham's bosom than her marriage two weeks later to Bothwell. At forty-five she lost her head completely.

Bothwell and, more recently Judd Gray, both proved that men, when associated with women, can also live without logic. Neither had instituted divorce proceedings at the time of assisting in the extinction of their partner's husbands. What is sauce for the goose appears to be gravy for the gander.

Judd Gray travelled in corsets. What could be more natural for him than to give a free sample of his wares to a chance acquaintance who had been good enough to lunch with him. His thoughtfulness, of course, included a careful fitting and such other attentions as would make the occasion memorable to any sensitive woman. This was the first infidelity for both Gray and Ruth Snyder but they showed such a natural aptitude that their assignations were soon transferred from the flesh-pots of Schraaft's and a brief stop in his company's stock room to week-ends at the Waldorf, and even a ten-day motor trip. Ruth Snyder found the whole affair as exhilarating as Gray found it debilitating.

Within a year she began dabbling in homicide with a view to solidifying a connection that threatened to become tenuous. A gas jet was inadvertantly opened while her husband took a nap. Quite by mistake he was locked in the garage with the motor running after drinking a highball containing knockout drops. He appeared to be indestructible. However, the chance call of an insurance agent opened her eyes to the possibility of striking a blow for freedom and achieving security. After making several payments on insurance policies considerably in excess of those her husband had knowingly signed, she laid her naive and inadequate plans. Gray had become more of a dupe than an accomplice and his effectiveness was not increased by the quantities of dutch courage required to nerve him up to his grisly part.

Thus it was that, on the night of March nineteenth 1927, Gray wielded the sash-weight so ineptly that it woke Snyder instead of killing him and the more assiduous and well-directed attentions of Ruth Snyder were required to dispatch her spouse. Once dead, Snyder was as busy as the dummy in a first aid class for he was then throttled with picture-wire, chloroformed, bound hand and foot with neck-ties, and suffocated with pillows. Peggy Hopkins Joyce, covering the woman's angle of the case for the New York Daily Mirror, commented: "We all do strange things at times".

The denouement followed the classic pattern with remorseless precision. The simulated burglary with no valuables missing did not even fool the corner policeman. Ruth was taken into custody at once and Gray, who had taken a taxi to Grand Central after the murder, was arrested in Albany a few hours later. The simple and

time-honored ruse of telling each that the other had confessed elicited not only full confessions but vilifications where endearments had hitherto been so fervent and so uninspired. (He had called her "Momsy" and she had called him "Buddy".)

Whether the 164 proposals of marriage received by Ruth Snyder after her conviction were a consolation cannot be guessed but we do know that the warden of Sing Sing had to take a six-month vacation after pulling the switch on the electric chair. Of Judd Gray one can only say with the bard that "nothing in his life became him like the leaving of it". Ruth Snyder's last words were her ultimate profanity -- "Father forgive them for they know not what they do".

There may be skeptics among us who will raise an eyebrow at the suggestion that fraternal twins can be sired by different fathers. However, that feat is child's play -- or at least adolescent's play -- compared with the achievement of Leda who bore to her husband a daughter named Clytemestra and, before the cigars could be passed, produced the fruit of her illicit union with a swan, known to posterity as Helen of Troy. A year later Leda silenced the doubting Thomases of the medical profession by giving birth to identical twins -- Castor, born in wedlock, and Pollux, the bastard of Zeus. What she could have done with quintuplets staggers the imagination.

In later years Helen, the toast of Sparta, married Menelaus and Clem, as she must surely have been called by the younger palace set, agreed to "love, honour, and obey" his brother Agamemnon. The felicity of this family group seemed assured --

both brothers were kings and both were good providers. One sister was endowed with beauty and the other with brains. As in Eden, so in the Peloponnesus, it was an apple which shattered with idyll. However, Greek mythology being more opulent in worldly detail, it was a golden apple that started the bickering which ended with the kidnapping of Helen.

While her husband spent ten years pursuing his sister-in-law, Clem whiled away the time with his cousin Aegisthus. Aegisthus might have been merely titillated by the conquest of a middle-aged mother of four while all the other men of Greece were away at war. However, he was motivated more by a desire for revenge than for companionship since his brothers had been killed and his throne usurped by Agamemnon's father.

When the Trojan Horse had crossed the finish line the prospect of Agamemnon's return posed a problem for old Clem: If Agamemnon killed Aegisthus a second honeymoon was by no means assured as he had brought Cassandra along from Troy as a hedge against a cool welcome. If, on the other hand, Aegisthus killed Agamemnon her prospects were even less secure as she would no longer be necessary to his schemes. Since there was obviously going to be a rumble, the only solution was to plan and execute the murder herself before the center of the stage could be taken from her.

The climax is awesome. Sally Britton of Spencer, Indiana might have her daughter, Rita, pass the poisoned vitamin pills to her father. Pearl O'Laughlin of Denver might eliminate father-in-law, husband, and step-daughter, all with one sugar-bowl full of ground glass. Clytemnestra of Argos was cast in a nobler mold and her crime was conceived on a more heroic scale.

First, she demonstrated her ascendancy over an arrogant husband to him and to his subjects. Then, by causing him to offend the gods, she proved herself to be a helpless instrument of divine and righteous wrath. Finally, the simple device of making his bath-robe into a straight-jacket by sewing up the sleeves, which enabled her to dispatch him with two blows of an axe, raised the whole drama from the level of Mack Sennett to that of Aeschylus. Her own account of the obsequies is graphic:

"So falling he belched forth his life; with cough and retch
There spurted from him bloody foam in a fierce jet,
And spreading, spattered me with drops of crimson rain;
While I exulted as the sown cornfield exults
Drenched with the dew of heaven when buds burst forth in spring."

From the moment of Agamemnon's demise Clytemnestra's doom was sealed. It remained only for Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides to work out the details. The bare facts of the inevitable retribution are that Orestes, the exiled son of Clytemnestra, returned secretly to plot the destruction of his mother and her paramour with his sister Electra and then to accomplish it.

To Sophocles the whole gory train of events amounts to a Hollywood spectacular. It is obvious to him that all the participants are criminals and, therefore, cheats and liars and he treats them as such, exalting none above another. The introduction to the University of Chicago edition of Sophocles' "Electra" concludes with this statement: "Critics are left to come to the most varied conclusions, including the conclusion that there is no conclusion". A conclusion is a conclusion is a conclusion.

Thereafter, Aeschylus makes it clear, punishment was to be the sole prerogative of the Areopagus.

Women seldom seem to take such desperate measures against an erring husband as they do against an innocent one. Lest I be accused of suggesting adultery as a safeguard of old age for men, I will remind you that the debauchers of Sieglinde, of Mrs. Nack the Long Island boarding-house keeper, of Alice Arden, Ann Wells, Gertrude Patterson, Ruth Snyder and Clytemnestra all got perpetual care sooner than expected. Of the remaining examples Percy Stoner got life imprisonment and Bothwell died insane in a Danish prison.

"I am in blood

Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more,

Returning were as tedious as go o'er."

The conclusion to be drawn from this catalogue of violence I leave to occupy your lonely vigils. Before wishing you sweet dreams -- and suggesting that you look under the bed first -- I call your attention to the fact that everyone of these charmers was first led down the primrose path by a man.