

Serial murder: a four-book review by J. Reid Meloy, Ph.D.

**Serial Murder**, by Ronald Holmes and James De Burger (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1988), 155 pp., \$27.50.

**The Lust to Kill: A Feminist Investigation of Sexual Murder**, by Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer (New York: New York University Press, 1987), 177 pp., \$35.00.

**Compulsive Killers: The Story of Modern Multiple Murder**, by Elliott Leyton (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 298 pp., \$24.95.

**Mass Murder: America's Growing Menace**, by Jack Levin and James Fox (New York: Plenum Press, 1985), 233 pp., \$16.95.

*For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak  
With most miraculous organ.*

Hamlet

The act of murder—the willful killing of one human being by another—is a major public health problem in the United States. One person in 10,000 will be murdered this year, and the probability of being murdered dramatically increases if one is young, black, male, poor, uneducated, and living in an urban area in the West or South.<sup>1</sup>

A peculiar and frightening new *form* of murder, however, is becoming apparent: the purposeful killing of strangers, usually one at a time, over an extended period of time. This phenomenon, called *serial murder* to describe its distinctive

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temporal sequence, was rarely chronicled from post-World War I until 1960, with each decade producing one or two cases. But since that time, both the number of serial murderers and the number of victims have risen dramatically. In the decade of the 1980s, one new serial murder has been identified, on average, every 1.8 months and has claimed 9.5 victims per month—100 times the frequency of victimization three decades ago.<sup>2</sup> It is estimated that there are currently 350 persons committing serial murder in the United States, slaying between 3,500 and 5,000 victims each year.<sup>3</sup>

The more notorious serial murderers' names are legion: David Berkowitz, Theodore Bundy, John Wayne Gacey, Edmund Kemper, Herbert Mullin, Albert DeSalvo, Henry Lee Lucas, and Kenneth Bianchi and Angelo Buono. In a real sense, they have achieved mythic proportions, much like Genêt's "existential rebel," Nietzsche's "superman," or Mailer's "white negro." The public studies them with horror and fascination, consummately evil, yet perhaps the quintessential modern American hero.

Who are these human beings who intentionally and purposefully stalk, usually sexually assault, and murder other human beings unknown to them? Do we have a clue to what motivates them? Is this a clinical psychiatric or psychological disorder, or is it, as Cameron and Frazer would argue in *The Lust to Kill*, the extreme socio-cultural expression of misogyny endemic in our Western European and American culture?

## I. Serial Murder

Four books published in the past three years probe this pattern of homicide from psychological, sociological, and cultural-anthropological perspectives. Each of the books is limited by the authors' formal discipline (usually sociology) and by the predominant use of secondary material gleaned

from others' case studies of serial murderers. The smallest, and most scientific, book in the group is *Serial Murder* by Holmes and De Burger. This compelling text is the first systematic, descriptive study of a sample of serial murderers now incarcerated (110 males) and the development of a typology, or classification, of serial murder based upon sound inductive, empirical reasoning.

Holmes and De Burger approach their topic with the sound assumption that human behavior is multidetermined and that one must guard against the "reductionistic fallacy": the inclination to search for a smoking gun, a single cause, for such horrible behavior that cries out for containment. They approach serial murder as a psychosocial event induced primarily by psychogenic factors in the mind of the murderer, but embedded in a socio-cultural context that "serves the homicidal propensities of the serial killer" (p. 44). They argue that contemporary American society is replete with redundant violence in its mass media, the idealization of sensation-seeking, the justification of violence as a mode of problem-solving, anonymity and depersonalization in its urban areas, and virtually unlimited spatial mobility.

This psychosocial approach is laudable, but it misses an equally important factor, biology, that must at least be ruled out as a causative agent in serial murder before limiting oneself to psychosocial domains of inquiry; and I think it is hasty to do so at present. There is compelling evidence that criminality is biologically predisposed, although psychosocial factors precipitate its expression.<sup>4</sup> There is no incontrovertible evidence that violent behavior *per se* is genetically predisposed, but there is a large amount of research that has revealed biological and, more specifically, neurological abnormalities in violent individuals. Although the research to distinguish between inherited and acquired biological defects among violent individuals has yet to be done, various forms of brain impairments have been implicated in violent behavior.<sup>5</sup>

Most germane to the study of serial murder are the biological inferences that can be drawn from the psychogenic fact, emphasized by Holmes and De Burger, that virtually all serial murderers are sociopaths, or what I would call psychopaths. This is a form of character disorder in which the individual is asocial, impulsive, narcissistic, inordinately aggressive, feels no guilt, lacks any capacity for empathy, and does not form emotional or affectional attachments.

Two Canadian psychologists, Robert Hare and Lorne Yeudall, have been investigating the psychobiological substrates of psychopathic disorder for the past several decades. Their research, although done independently of each other and quite divergent in approach, has uncovered two important findings. First, Hare determined through extensive psychophysiological experiments that criminal psychopaths, as a group, have a peripheral autonomic nervous system that is hyporeactive to negative stimuli. In other words, the outer perimeter of the psychopath's "automatic" nervous system (the so-called ANS that controls blood pressure, heart rate, breathing rate, pupillary dilation, salivation, perspiration, etc.) reacts *less* to, and recovers *more slowly* from, a variety of aversive, or negative, consequences. Other researchers have gone so far as to consider the criminal psychopath's cortex to be chronically *underaroused*. This important, and replicated, finding has formidable implications for the behavior of psychopaths, among whom we also find the serial murderer: a need for high levels of stimulation, a lack of the capacity for empathy, a failure to appreciate negative consequences, and an impairment in the capacity to form emotional bonds.

Second, Yeudall's work has focused upon electro-encephalographic (EEG) recordings of the criminal psychopath's brain and other neuropsychological testing to determine if there is localized brain dysfunction in the psychopath. His findings have also repeatedly confirmed the higher probability of abnormal EEG recordings in criminal psychopaths than in

the general population and the presence of significant neuropsychological impairment, usually in the frontal and temporal areas of their brains. These portions of the cortex are involved in the control, integration, and regulation of behavior.

These research findings underscore the importance of conceptualizing serial murder as a *biopsychosocial* phenomenon until there is substantial evidence that any one of these domains of influence is not a factor in this increasingly prevalent form of homicide.

Of course, not all psychopaths are serial murderers. Prevalent rates of psychopathy, or what the American Psychiatric Association more liberally diagnoses as "antisocial personality disorder," are estimated to be 3% for males and 1% for females in the general population.<sup>6</sup> But as Holmes and De Burger emphasize, each serial murderer has a sociopathic, or psychopathic, personality "that facilitates the individual's entry to patterns of extreme homicidal behavior" (p. 56). Serial murderers are a statistically insignificant proportion of psychopaths who have chosen a particularly sadistic avenue of psychological expression: the sequential killing of strangers.

Holmes and De Burger identify three distinguishing core characteristics of the serial murderer. First, the origins of the pattern are almost always psychogenic and occur within the structure of a sociopathic, or psychopathic, personality. His psyche is characterized by "norms, values, beliefs, perceptions, and propensities that legitimize and facilitate repetitive killing" (p. 63). Second, the motives that impel the serial killings are intrinsic to the mind of the murderer, but they may not be at all apparent to homicide investigators, who are accustomed to extrinsic, instrumental motives. Third, the rewards or gains from the serial murder are almost always psychological, and the homicidal acts are expressive of this psychological gain.

In the Oakland County (Michigan) child killings, the murderer selected children in the same age range, sodomized the boys and forced the girls into oral sexual acts, was gentle in his method of killing, washed the bodies and dressed the victims, and always left the body where it was sure to be found. He acted out a story in which he replaced the natural parents of the child he abducted, committed a sexually perverse act on the child, then murdered him or her; in so doing, he showed the parents how poorly they protected their child and how great their loss could be.<sup>7</sup>

Holmes and De Burger divide their sample of serial murderers into four different motivational groups, all of them both psychological and expressive. The *visionary type* commits his sequential murders in response to "voices or visions" that command the destruction of certain persons or categories of persons. Herbert Mullin, a young paranoid schizophrenic with antisocial personality disorder who killed 13 victims in northern California in 1972, is the epitome of the visionary type. He was assured by his voices and telepathic messages that his killings would save millions from cataclysmic earthquakes in the Bay Area.<sup>8</sup>

This subtype is the most biogenic, since it necessitates the presence of psychotic symptoms, what would be called auditory or visual hallucinations; i.e., false perceptions or sensations that are believed by the murderer to come from outside himself. Such symptoms would implicate a major psychotic disorder, such as schizophrenia or an organic syndrome, in this rare subtype of serial murderer, but it would be inaccurate to assume that the presence of any psychotic disorder increases the risk of this form of violence. A visionary subtype of serial murder is typologically useful if it is kept in mind that schizophrenics as a group are neither more nor less violent than the general population and that most schizophrenics do *not* experience command hallucinations. For those that do, most are able to successfully *resist* the commands.

The *mission-oriented type* has the conscious goal of eliminating a particular group or category of people, a "fervent, seething desire to take charge or do something about some aspect of life that is seen as undesirable, immoral, or needing drastic correction" (p. 75). When these desires are malignantly combined with psychopathy and aggression, the individual may begin to murder quite systematically and purposefully. His group marked for extinction may range from prostitutes to the homeless mentally ill to nursing home residents. Before he was arrested, Beoria Simmons, a 29-year-old social worker in Louisville, Kentucky, killed three females whom he assumed were prostitutes. He sincerely believed that he was solving a social problem and showed no signs of psychotic disorder.<sup>9</sup> Donald Harvey, the so-called "angel of death," may have sequentially murdered, usually with poison, more than 50 elderly residents of hospitals and nursing homes in the Cincinnati, Ohio, area before he was apprehended in late 1987.

The *power- and control-oriented type* is propelled to kill by a desire to exert "absolute and unquestioned dominance" over another human being. The sexual aspects of these murders, argue Holmes and De Burger, are incidental, not central, to the act of violence. Although difficult to distinguish from the fourth type, this subgroup of serial murderers finds its fundamental source of pleasure in rendering the victims completely helpless.

The "I-5 Killer" . . . turned out to be Randall Brent Woodfield. Woodfield's prehomocidal history is similar to patterns observed in other serial killers. High level of overt ego strength and confidence that usually exceeded actual performance; "hero" status and the object of adoring fans at one stage, with loss of adulation and "reject" status at the next stage; high performance expectations from parents, but low levels of warmth and emotional rewards from them, even when a good job is done. Woodfield was an outstanding football player . . . but was cut (rejected) by the Green Bay Packers after one tryout . . . if this pattern of background factors is linked with Woodfield's obvious capacity for

violence and his demonstrable sociopathic tendencies, we can discern an ominous potential for assertive, power- and control-oriented violence . . . 60 rapes have been attributed to Woodfield . . . Present indications are that Woodfield murdered 12–18 young women along Interstate 5.<sup>10</sup>

The *hedonistic type* is motivated primarily by lust, sensation-seeking, or instrumental gain. Although Holmes and De Burger do not provide any quantitative breakdown of their sample according to types, they do emphasize the lust-oriented hedonistic type in several chapters, and they suggest that this sexually sadistic form of murder may represent the motives of most serial murderers.

## II. The Lust to Kill

Sexual sadism is the fundamental psychodynamic of most serial murderers. In *The Lust to Kill*, Cameron and Frazer cogently define it as the wish to kill the object of one's sexual desire. At first sight, this is an extraordinary contradiction. Why would anyone want to eliminate through violence their source of sexual pleasure?

Donatien-Alphonse-François, Marquis de Sade (1740–1814) informed all his fictions with the premise that domination and cruelty were the true sources of eroticism—they were entirely natural, and they were exceedingly pleasurable because they did not obey man-made laws. Michel Foucault placed the advent of sadism at the end of the 18th century and viewed it as “one of the greatest conversions of Western imagination: unreason transformed into delirium of the heart, madness of desire, the insane dialogue of love and death in the limitless presumption of appetite.”<sup>11</sup> Lust murder, what the Germans call *lustmord*, is the ultimate expression of sexual sadism.

If sadism is a rather recent socio-cultural fact, is there anything to be learned from the psychobiological sciences that would help us understand how sexual cruelty inspires its own intense erotic value?

The biology of sexual sadism is unknown. The biological association between sexuality and pain makes sense, however. Freud<sup>12</sup> and others noted that cutaneous pain was often correlated with erotic sensation. Biting and scratching are a common part of foreplay, and a certain amount of forceful contact or movement is part of much sexual activity. The neurological proximity of the sexual and aggressive centers deep within the human brain in a portion of the limbic system called the hypothalamus is also suggestive.

In psychoanalysis, sadism has always been associated with rigid character, prompting the concept of an "anal sadistic" stage of development. Compulsive and obsessive traits in adulthood are viewed as the products of early defensive maneuvers in the child against certain aggressive and sadistic impulses. The roots of sexual sadism involve an early fixation or attachment to infantile sexual impulses and its commingling with genital sexuality to defend against castration anxiety and oedipal guilt.<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately, traditional psychoanalytic theory has done little to explain the link between sexual cruelty and erotic pleasure. More recent psychoanalytic theory, however, has elaborated on the elements of detachment, willful subjugation, humiliation, degradation, and the sexual sadist's contempt toward spontaneous sexual abandonment in his sexual activities.<sup>14</sup> These psychoanalytic ideas shadow the feminist arguments of Cameron and Frazer, two British sociologists, in their polemic *The Lust to Kill*; yet, paradoxically, these authors scorn all psychogenic explanations for sexual murder and instead argue that it is a cultural expression of the misogyny inherent in contemporary American and West European cultures. After all, sexual murder is virtually always

*men* killing the objects of their desire—usually women, and sometimes homosexual males (the symbolic female). Cameron and Frazer contend that sexual murder is a product of social structure and power differentials. The salient question for them: Why do men, as a group, want to hurt and kill the objects of their sexual arousal? They attempt to answer this question by conceptualizing the lust murderer as hero, deviant, and misogynist.

A conceptualization of the sexual murderer as “hero” finds its roots in the sensational yet moralistic “true crime” tabloids, in the Gothic literature of the 18th and 19th centuries, highlighted by the writings of de Sade, and in the clinical model of the sexual murderer as a social deviant. They explore in fascinating detail the criminal tabloids, originally called *broad-sides*, that were sold at fairs and other public gatherings beginning in the 16th century. Today such magazines focus simply upon murder; yet they still emphasize sexual murder as a product of sin rather than of social or psychiatric sickness. These magazines stress the need for retributive punishment, yet they also meet the reader’s desire for voyeuristic titillation. Cameron and Frazer found that most readers of these tabloids are women between the ages of 44 and 54. Their tentative explanation of this rather astonishing fact is the female’s “ambiguous relation to the pleasures and dangers of transgression” (p. 50). She perceives herself, they speculate, as merely an “eavesdropper on a dialogue really intended for men” (p. 51). The authors find two kinds of sexual murder “heroes”: the “fiend, beast, or monster” and the “libertine or rebel.” These versions reassure the populace that the lust murderer is different, a breed apart, someone who is consummately evil.

The authors’ analysis of the sex murderer as “deviant” attempts to critique relevant biological and psychological models of abnormality. Unfortunately, this is the weakest section in the book. The authors’ scientific references are quite dated, and they fail to cite some of the most widely

known researchers in these fields. For example, their review of the literature on the psychopathic personality focuses on an obscure psychiatric text written 22 years ago.<sup>15</sup> Then they make two misstatements that betray their ignorance of the field: "There is no international agreement on the diagnosis of psychopathy . . . quests for the underlying cause of psychopathy not only fail to give any positive results, they are confounded in any case by the prevailing definitional confusion" (pp. 88-89). The authors are clearly unaware of the classic work of Hervey Cleckley, *The Mask of Sanity*. Nor, indeed, do they seem aware of the subsequent research of psychologist Robert Hare, who, during the past 20 years, has empirically defined the disorder of psychopathy in a reliable and valid manner.

It is unfortunate that this section is so weak, for it detracts from the authors' credibility as thorough researchers and thoughtful analysts. Not only have they not done their homework, but they have also fallen prey to a false dichotomy: the idea that there is *either* a psychobiological explanation for sexual murder *or* a sociological explanation for it. I found this disheartening, because it ignores the much more tenable hypothesis that sexual murder is multidetermined behavior that has biological, psychological, *and* socio-cultural dimensions. Instead of adding what I consider an important socio-cultural factor—misogyny—to the existing research literature, the authors seem to believe that they must discredit the findings of psychobiology (as if only one dimension of human experience is valid—feminist sociology).

The authors' case studies of lust murderers are compelling, however. Specifically, they consider the change and continuity apparent in the killings of Jack the Ripper and of the Yorkshire Ripper, two serial killers who murdered prostitutes nearly a century apart; the assumption of a personal *identity* as a sexual murderer, apparent in the 1966 "Moors Murders" committed by Ian Brady and Myra Hindley; the

malignant narcissism present in the homosexual murders and necrophilia of Dennis Nilsen, who between 1978 and 1983 strangled to death 16 young men in his London flat; and the peculiarly American phenomenon of serial killing with its attendant mobility, frustration, and anomie. This engrossing portion of *The Lust to Kill* vividly illustrates the authors' arguments that sexual murder is more than misogyny. It accentuates the fact that sexual "desire itself has been masculinized, made dependent on dichotomies of self and other . . . which presupposes some version of the . . . hierarchy, male:female . . . deeply marked by the historical realities of gender and power" (p. 144). Women are cast in roles that reflect the dichotomous perception of them as examples of either "spotless innocence" or "essential wickedness." Indeed, male desires seem to be socially constructed in ways that define women as *repositories* of sex.

The gender of the victims in sexual murder, however, does vary. What does not vary in sexual murder is the gender of the perpetrator—virtually always male. It is within this social construction of masculine sexuality that the causes of sexual murder coalesce: misogyny, masculine transcendence, and sadistic sexuality. The motifs of this masculine sexuality are performance, penetration, and conquest, and their most extreme expression is found in the aberration we term sexual murder.

Although this book is a very well written sociological argument for the importance of masculine identity in sexual murder, it is doubly flawed. First, as I have already mentioned, the authors' arguments often posit a false dichotomy that disparages the work of researchers in biology and psychology and detracts from their own important contribution. Second, and more telling, the authors cannot account for *false positives* given their parochial theory (false positives are behaviors that do not occur although predicted). If misogyny, masculine transcendence, and sadistic sexuality are ubiquitous in American and West European cultures,

how can it be that most adult males *do not* sexually murder? The answer is to be found, of course, in the concept of individual differences—a concept that can be studied most usefully by employing the scientific disciplines that Cameron and Frazer criticize the most: biology and psychology. In fact, Hans Eysenck, a well-known British psychologist and researcher whom the authors seek to discredit, has continually emphasized that human behavior can be understood only if we study and appreciate both individual differences and normative group behavior. Cameron and Frazer seem unwilling to appreciate the biopsychosocial complexity of human behavior, even though their socio-cultural contribution warrants our attention.

### III. Compulsive Killers

Elliott Leyton, a Canadian cultural anthropologist, adopts another perspective, and builds a different causative theory, in *Compulsive Killers: The Story of Modern Multiple Murder*. Leyton's approach is intriguing. He uses the extensive published material concerning serial murderers in the United States as "field notes" to conduct an anthropological study of the phenomenon. His fundamental hypothesis is that serial murder is a "subpolitical and conservative protest" (p. 26) against the established socio-economic order and is virtually always committed by a member of the threatened class. He does not dismiss the sexually psychopathic nature of this form of violence, but he emphasizes its subordinate relationship to the primary goal: to wreak vengeance upon the social order. He stresses the "fundamentally social nature of their creation and the deep social meaning of their acts" (p. 31). To make his case, Leyton studies four cases of serial murder and two cases of spree murder (the rapid killing of several individuals over a brief period of time, usually ending in the suicide of the perpetrator). An analysis of serial murderer Edmund Kemper illustrates the complexity and power of his theory.

Raised by a belittling mother and incarcerated throughout most of his adolescence in Atascadero State Hospital, a California institution for the criminally insane, Edmund Kemper made his first kill at age 10—he buried alive the family cat, cut off its head, and stuck it on a spindle in his room. His sadistic fantasies blended mutilation, murder, possession, justice, and revenge with his own pubescent sexuality.

At the age of 14, Kemper, then living with his grandparents on an isolated California ranch, impulsively shot his grandmother with a .22 rifle and then slew his grandfather before he could discover his wife's body. After spending the following seven years at Atascadero and the California Youth Authority, he was paroled to his mother—against psychiatric advice—at age 21.

At six feet nine inches tall and 300 pounds, Kemper continued to develop his “gentle giant” presentation of himself now that he was free. He picked up dozens of pretty female hitchhikers in the Santa Cruz area, a northern coastal California university community.

On May 7, 1972, he lured into his car Mary Ann Pesce and Anita Luchessa, co-eds on their way to visit friends at Stanford. He handcuffed Mary Ann to the back seat and put a plastic bag over her head. He locked Anita in the trunk. He “poised the blade over [Mary Ann’s] back, trying to decide where her heart was, and struck and hit her in the middle of the back . . . she turned completely over to see . . . or to get her back away from me . . . I felt I was getting nowhere . . . I reached around and grabbed her by the chin and pulled her head back and slashed her throat . . . She lost consciousness immediately” (p. 40). Kemper then stabbed Anita to death.

He drove back home and carried the bodies into his room. Taking Polaroid pictures, he decapitated Anita, disrobed and dissected Mary Ann, and sexually molested various body parts. He kept the heads of both women for a time, as he did with his next victim, 15-year-old Aiko Koo, four months later. The day after he murdered Aiko—and while he was still carrying her head in the trunk of his car in the parking lot—he was interviewed by two psychiatrists, who agreed that he was “safe” and recommended that his juvenile record be sealed so he could lead a normal adult life.

Over the course of his serial murdering, Kemper killed 10 people in almost perfect symmetry: two kin (his grandparents); six beautiful young girls who were strangers to him; and then a kinswoman (his mother) and a quasi-kin (her best friend). Following the throat-slashing of his mother, he decapitated her, cut out her larynx and pushed it down the garbage disposal. “What’s good for my victims was good for my mother” (p. 44). Kemper had finished his mission. He drove to Colorado, but then, afraid, in his own words, that he was “losing control . . . I had never been out of control in my life” (p. 45), he telephoned the Santa Cruz police and eventually convinced them that he was the serial murderer they were searching for.

Leyton’s analysis of Kemper’s motivation is significant because it is multifaceted. Kemper’s sexual psychopathy was most apparent in his exquisitely refined predatory behavior and his explicit sexual arousal through means that most people would consider perverse; i.e., the killing and mutilation, and the sexual assault of a lifeless body. Kemper was a true necrophiliac and enjoyed “making a doll out of a human being” (p. 50). In a primitive and fused psychological manner, Kemper found *death* ecstatic, because his sexual rapport with living girls was never achieved. Death rendered the object completely compliant and completely in his control.

Possession was Kemper's second motivational theme. The complete absence of closeness and affection with living persons, beginning with his mother and her husbands, led to behavior that would establish the semblance of a bond if the object was lifeless. By killing the objects of his desire, he both raged against them and possessed them most intimately. The appeal of necrophilia was the unconditional acceptance.

Kemper was also motivated by trophy hunting. The heads became symbols of triumph. "What I wanted to see was the death, and I wanted to see the triumph, the exultation over the death . . . they were dead and I was alive. That was a victory in my case" (p. 53). Here is the struggle, both psychologically and socially, against detachment, the feeling of being alien or separate from the self, a violent reparative attempt to belong.

Yet the killings also satisfied another motivation, matricidal rage. It would be easy, and a mistake, to reduce the meaning of Kemper's behavior simply to rage displaced from his mother. Yet to ignore the reality of his hatred toward her, and its probable contribution to his killings, would also be an error. "I had this love-hate complex with my mother that was very hard for me to handle . . . I couldn't handle the hate, and the love was actually forced upon me. . . . There was a constant battle inside me that was the major thing of my whole life. I didn't have any social . . . personality at all" (p. 55). His hatred and fear of his mother were present, but they were insufficient as a single motivation for serial murder.

The final explanatory motivation for Edmund Kemper's acts was revenge. "I was striking out at what was hurting me the worst . . . deep down, I wanted to fit in the most, and I had never fit in, and that was the in-group" (p. 58). Kemper was making a social statement. He struck out at the most desired, and vulnerable, members of the socio-economic class above him. It was the flaunted indifference of the college co-eds

that hurt him the most. "I was swashbuckling, I was destroying only society's finest young girls. I was not interested in the ragged, dirty little hippies . . . I was trying to hurt society where it hurt the worst . . . what I considered to be snobby or snotty brats" (pp. 60-61). Leyton argues that Kemper cultivated conversations with his victims to obtain enough information to be certain they were members of the targeted class above him.

Kemper's sexual murders could not have been more intensely gratifying to him. They created for him a social niche—if not completed at the time, at least later ensured by the infamous nature of his acts. They exacted communal, sexual, and familial revenge. And they indulged his sadistic fantasies. As the French scholars Peter and Favret wrote, "Only to those who are excluded from the social nexus comes the idea of raising the question about the limits of human nature."<sup>16</sup>

The final portion of Leyton's book is an attempt to construct a historical sociology of multiple murder. He postulates three distinctive periods that have spawned multiple murder because of socio-economic conditions. First, the preindustrial period of 15th-century Europe witnessed the subordination of the rebellious peasantry through their torture and murder by wealthy aristocrats. The most notorious murderer of this era was Baron Gilles de Rais, who, during the last eight years of his life, murdered somewhere between 141 and 800 children in his castle. Leyton argues that this historical time in Europe was punctuated by attempts of the threatened aristocracy to reassert itself against the peasant class. As historian Immanuel Wallerstein wrote about the archaic feudal system, "The economic squeeze was leading to a generalized seigneur-peasant class war."<sup>17</sup> The baron's acts were a "personalized expression of the sweeping repressive thrust of his class" (p. 273), played out through terribly sadistic sexual metaphors.

The second historical period in Leyton's construct is the 19th-century industrial revolution and its creation of the so-called "middle class." Here one finds a rash of middle-class functionaries—doctors, teachers, professors—preying on members of the lower socio-economic stratum, especially prostitutes and housemaids. Leyton cites several dozen cases from the turn of the century and argues that by "killing the failures and unruly renegades from the system, and doing so with such obvious pleasure, they acted as reinforcers of the new moral order" (p. 276). A certain "defensive status hysteria" characterized by extreme personal insecurity prompted numerous sexual psychopaths of this period to select their stereotypical victims from the lower class, taking the prevailing ethos of willful Victorian repression to a deviant and murderous conclusion.

The third period of multiple murder began with the postindustrial closing of the middle class to many people in the 1960s. In a cultural milieu that glorified the nobility and beauty of violence in the United States, coupled with the demographic bulge of a "baby boom" generation fiercely competing for entrance into the middle class, a coterie of ambitious but untalented young men became disenfranchised from the social order. They were drawn from the ranks of the upper-working and lower-middle classes—security guards, postal clerks, construction workers. The nature of the homicidal protest changed. It became "an excluded individual wreaking vengeance on the symbol and source of his excommunication" (p. 288), usually the young, beautiful, and sexually vulnerable female progeny of the middle class.

Leyton cites a sample of 24 multiple murderers to support his argument and finds that 80% of them were illegitimate, institutionalized, or adopted. This assumed social exclusion, coupled with a fierce but unattained ambition and a narcissistic preoccupation with the self as only a marketable commodity, provides the psychosocial milieu for the multiple murderer to orchestrate a social *leveling*.

Leyton's work introduces another socio-cultural factor into the complex motivational schemata of the serial murderer, a nihilistic reversal of social values to protest against the established order. Along with Cameron and Frazer's focus on misogyny as a socio-cultural motivation for sexual murder, Leyton's work further embeds the serial murderer in a contemporary social milieu that supports his psychobiological propensities to kill.

But Leyton's book is also problematic. Dogged by the same "false positive" issue, he at least attempts to address it, though rather weakly: "It seems most likely that such people [those who don't murder] are touched, however superficially, by some person or institution that renders their lives bearable" (p. 262). So much for individual differences from an anthropologist's point of view!

Leyton also fails to provide any descriptive analysis of the socio-economic status of his sample of 24 murderers; yet doing so would appear to be central to his hypothesis. His historical sociology construct is also flawed, if one looks carefully at contemporary victims of serial murder. Kenneth Bianchi and Angelo Buono, the "Hillside Stranglers" who terrorized Los Angeles in the late 1970s, serially murdered mostly prostitutes; the as yet uncaught "Green River Killer" in the state of Washington (and now San Diego) continues to murder virtually only female prostitutes. Both of these cases violate Leyton's postindustrial historical construct. Although his six case studies are a model of naturalistic field study, the danger of selective sampling without control groups is the introduction of bias that can balloon into unwarranted generalizations. This problem haunts any researcher investigating serial murder because of the small samples of individuals available for study and the retrospective nature of the task: the murderers are scrutinized *after* they have committed the violence.

Leyton also confuses his typology. His cases include both serial and spree murderers, yet he also introduces the idea of *mass murderer*. I have purposely not addressed this phenomenon because it implies convergence, at least in the psychological sphere, where I think there is none. Mass murderers are individuals who kill a group of persons in one sudden, explosive event. They are a much more heterogeneous group of individuals, usually quite antisocial and paranoid in personality style but distinctly different from the serial murderer. They do not have the compulsive, sadistic, hedonistic, and sexually psychopathic characteristics of the latter.

#### IV. Mass Murder

Typological confusion reaches its highwater mark in Levin and Fox's *Mass Murder: America's Growing Menace*, published first in the group of books reviewed here. *Mass Murder* is a quick read, a veritable hodgepodge of secondary sources, descriptive statistics, case vignettes, and opinion.

The authors' idea is to present data concerning a sample of "mass killers" culled from stories in major United States newspapers between 1974 and 1979 and defined as events involving the slaying of at least four victims. They emerge with a sample of 42 persons.

The authors then inform the reader that if their findings and observations are to have "full meaning, a basis of comparison is necessary" (p. 47). Expecting a *control* group with which the sample will be compared, the reader finds instead that the authors just searched for *additional* cases of mass murder in FBI sources. No comparison is forthcoming, and the sample is increased to 107 cases of "mass murder." This is confusing and misleading, and is typical of portions of the book.

Despite all this, the composite profile of the mass murderer gleaned from the authors' anecdotal sample is instructive. Typically, he is a white male in his late twenties or early thirties. If he is simultaneously murdering (mass murder), he kills people he knows with a handgun or rifle. If he is sequentially murdering (serial murder), he kills strangers by beating or strangulation. His motivation is money, expediency, jealousy, or lust; and he rarely has a history of felonious crime. Most important: severe mental illness or psychosis is rarely present. In background, personality, and appearance the mass murderer is "extraordinarily ordinary" (p. 48).

The book is filled with little gems of information. For instance, the importance of the availability of weapons to effect sudden mass murder is underscored by a study that found that children are more likely to act in a violent manner when a handgun is present in the room.<sup>18</sup> Another example: there is a general absence of mass murder in the deep South; yet Texas, New York, and California, which, taken together, hold 24% of the population, account for 42% of mass murders. Further: the fact that 75% of the authors' sample of mass murderers were manual laborers or were unemployed appears to validate some of Leyton's theories of profound social alienation.

Levin and Fox also emphasize that most of their murderers, especially the serial murderers in their sample, are psychopaths. "They are often evil but not crazy" (p. 210). They note the important difference, and public confusion, between psychosis and psychopathy. Psychosis refers to a state of mind in which the person has lost contact with external reality and has, instead, created a fantastic and bizarre internal reality. This is quite different from, and is rarely found in, the psychopathic serial murderer, who, devoid of any affectional bonds or capacity for empathy, purposefully stalks his victims and usually murders for the pleasure of it.

What are we doing about serial murder? Levin and Fox explore both the legal response and the investigatory response to this crime. Most states (regrettably, the authors give us no tabulated data) now have criminal statutes that punish the multiple murderer with either the death penalty or life imprisonment without the possibility of parole. Psychological profiling is now employed by many local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, based on the premise that serial murderers kill in patterns that reflect their psychological characteristics. Though still an art rather than a science, psychological profiling is gaining acceptance, as exemplified by the work of the Behavioral Sciences Unit of the FBI. Crime scene analysis of the "disorganized asocial" serial murder usually reveals a randomness and sloppiness, a minimal use of restraints, sex after death, often a weapon present, and the victim's corpse left at the scene. The "organized nonsocial" serial murder, on the other hand, usually presents a crime scene that reflects control, the use of restraints, sexual activity prior to death, often no weapon, and the transportation and "dumping" of the victim's body. Holmes and De Burger provide an excellent introduction to profiling in *Serial Murder*.

The other investigatory tool being developed by the FBI is a computerized database to share criminal information. Called VICAP (Violent Criminal Apprehension Program), and developed by Pierce Brooks, it is predicated in part on the assumption that serial killers roam the country looking for victims. Levin and Fox caution, however, that the actual mobility of serial murderers may be more apparent than real, although the highly mobile cases tend to draw the most media attention.

The most disconcerting aspect of serial murder is the emotionless, predatory, and random nature of the act. It is abhorrent to our conscience because its victims are truly innocent, but before or after death they suffer sexual indignities that are repulsive to anyone with a semblance of caring

for the plight of another. Yet the capacities to form an affectional bond, to contain a sadistic impulse and to attach value to another's life other than as an object of narcissistic preoccupation are precisely what is missing in the psychopathic serial murderer. This stark absence of an identifying bond with others was no more apparent than in the words of Theodore Bundy when he was interviewed by police officers in Pensacola, Florida, following his last several murders: "I'm as cold a motherfucker as you've ever put your fucking eyes on. I don't give a shit about those people."<sup>19</sup> Bundy was executed in Florida State Prison on January 24, 1989, at 7 a.m.

## Notes

1. Wilson, C. & Seaman, D., *The Encyclopedia of Modern Murder, 1962-1982* (New York: Putnam's, 1985).
2. Leyton, E., *Compulsive Killers*, pp. 288-289.
3. Holmes, R. & De Burger, J., *Serial Murder*, p. 21.
4. See Wilson, J. & Herrnstein, R., *Crime and Human Nature* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985) for an excellent summary of research concerning constitutional factors in criminality.
5. See, for example, Lewis, D. O. et al., "Biopsychosocial characteristics of children who later murder: A prospective study," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 142:1161-1167, 1985.
6. American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, III-Revised* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1987), p. 343.
7. Danto, B., Bruhns, J., & Kutscher, A., *The Human Side of Homicide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 13-14.
8. Lunde, D. & Morgan, J., *The Die Song* (New York: Norton, 1980).
9. Holmes and De Burger, p. 75.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.
11. Foucault, M., *Madness and Civilization*, tr. R. Howard (New York: Pantheon/Tavistock, 1965), p. 210.
12. Freud, S., *Three Essays on Sexuality* (London: Hogarth Press, 1949), p. 81.

13. Fenichel, O., *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (New York: Norton, 1945), pp. 354-358.
14. Shapiro, D., *Autonomy and Rigid Character* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), pp. 101-133.
15. Craft, M., *Psychopathic Disorders* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1966).
16. In Foucault, M. (ed.), *I, Pierre Rivière, having slaughtered my mother, my sister, and my brother . . . A Case of Parricide in the 19th Century* (New York: Pantheon, 1975), p. 188.
17. Wallerstein, I., *The Modern World System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).
18. Berkowitz, L. & LePage, A., "Weapons as aggression-eliciting stimuli," *J. of Personality and Social Psychology*, 7:202-207, 1967.
19. Holmes and De Burger, p. 97.