

Book Reviews

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THE MURDERING MIND. By Dr. David Abrahamsen. New York: Harper & Row. Pp. 245. 1973. Price \$6.95.

In semi-novelistic style Dr. Abrahamsen treats us to a bit of a psychiatric thriller. Speaking from many years of experience with the minds of murderers, he traces one case in depth from the arrest for a murder, through detention, to the ultimate hearing on the issue of insanity.

In the forty-plus-page introduction, the author addresses himself to general considerations of murder, emphasizing the interplay of murderer and victim, and demonstrating how the victim often is at least equally responsible for the final event. His explanations are larded with heavy Freudian interpolations, and naturally the Oedipal and other parental relations are very convincingly portrayed. He refers briefly to noted political assassins, and shows similarities, e.g., lack of strong fathers or male associations in childhood, among Bremer, Ray, Sirhan, Oswald, *et al.* One especially interesting point refers to frequent spelling errors in murderers' letters and diaries; I shall leave that to your own evaluations.

The author tells us that, in making his diagnosis of any given patient whose sanity is in question, he not only spends as much time as possible with the patient but also finds it essential to collect all available facts about the case or crime. He looks into the police reports, the court reports, the medical examiner's statements and any other relevant documents. He intimates that it is not wise to rely heavily upon the patient's defense counsel to the extent of eschewing the other facts and documents, but naturally advises us also to consult deeply with the defense attorney.

Once he starts on the case, he holds us. He tells us that this was a real case with the names changed to protect the participants. This claim is believable at first, but as we read on we may begin to feel that we have been had by that statement. It no longer matters, however, since the grip of the book is so strong.

Dr. Abrahamsen first meets his patient at the Tombs, and the story starts to unfold piece by piece. The patient is somewhat withdrawn and obviously depressed. We learn that he is accused of murdering his girl friend at her apartment and that he visited her two or three separate times that fateful night. We never find out whether he made that third visit. Other suspects could have done the killing. The autopsy report, when we finally read it, is rather strange and limited in a number of ways. We are given the search warrant for the accused's apartment in detail. We are taken step by careful step through the testimony of witnesses and the courtroom antics of both the defense attorney and the D.A. during a very protracted insanity hearing. Like any good mystery tale, the book will be spoiled by the reviewer's disclosure of too much detail.

The description of the psychodynamics of the murderer and the murderee is very thorough, and it unravels in a most informative fashion. Perhaps the major instructive point of the book is the author's interpretation of the murderer's state of mind at the time of the alleged crime. The question revolves about the state of "insanity" in an individual who does not present the classical symptoms of psychosis. He does not hallucinate; he has no severe, distorted delusions; he has suffered no marked disorientation. Yet, is he insane? We hear the opinions of the prosecutor's psychiatrists as well as those of Dr. Abrahamsen.

In relation to the victim of a murder, Dr. Abrahamsen enjoins us to ask the question, "How did this particular victim invite his own doom?" He points out that there are people who are accident-prone and unhappiness-prone, and people who tend to expose themselves to murder, and that they all may unconsciously set up a "homicidal process"

or a relationship that keeps intensifying until it inexorably results in a murder. He freely admits that this process may be difficult or even impossible to trace in a courtroom. There are endless problems of courtroom procedure and admissible evidence and the like; but he suggests we try. Some judges are willing to help.

I hope this book will be read by attorneys and judges. They will find it an eye-opener, and maybe it just might revise the "tunnel vision" some parties bring to insanity hearings. We are all familiar with M'Naghten and Durham and A.L.I. rules, but, as always, when faced with a specific case, we are thrust back upon the psychiatric facts as we know them. We can only draw our own conclusions about that person's sanity within the framework of that knowledge. Unfortunately for the law at large, these facts and conclusions do not conform readily to rules. Most of us would prefer legal latitude to rigid rules. Dr. Abrahamsen's fascinating book might help encourage such latitude.

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DEVIANT REALITY: ALTERNATIVE WORLD VIEWS. By Robert W. Winslow and Virginia Winslow. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. Pp. 335. 1974. Price \$4.95 paperbound.

Traditional courses in the behavioral sciences supplement textbooks, monographs, and journal articles with the instructor's and students' knowledge of related theories and research. But in the upper levels of academe the recounting of personal experience and anecdote is taboo. Only in clinical medicine (and, consequently, in psychiatry) are individual case histories a dietary staple among men who would call themselves scientists. Despite the availability of single-case experimental designs,¹ the typical case history is little more than an illustrative and interesting story. Too often, the cases which are best recalled are those least representative of the universe of similar cases. And when the storyteller is an untrained observer, this sampling bias is compounded by the vagaries of interpersonal perception. The traditional taboo against first-person accounts reflects the belief that the classroom should not be a marketplace for the exchange of the unreflective opinions of ordinary people.

The Winslows have violated the taboo. Exactly one-half of their book consists of transcribed interviews with people who have engaged in various deviant activities. Into the classrooms of California State University at San Diego came juvenile delinquents, participants in organized crime, alcohol abusers, a heroin addict, a nudist, male and female homosexuals, transsexuals, a prostitute, an embezzler, an armed robber, a rapist, and a murderer. For the most part, they tell their stories openly and coherently, neither proselytizing nor overtly defending their behavior. And the stories they tell reveal a curious blend of reflective opinion, rationalization, and the internalized cosmology of post-Freudian man (the product of repeated encounters with mental health professionals and other authorities versed in the behavioral sciences).

A full chapter is devoted to each form of deviance represented by the "guest lecturers." Each chapter begins with a definition of a form of deviance and a summary of the major explanatory theories fashionable among sociologists; the transcribed interview is presented; and the theories are briefly reconsidered in light of the interview. The theory portions are succinct and dense with information, while the first person accounts range from the vapid and vacuous to the rousing and replete. The result is a variegated textbook which should be well accepted by its intended audience of advanced undergraduates.

The book's subsidiary aim, to provide an original contribution to the sociology of deviance through a "confluence of methodological techniques," is less well fulfilled. Methodologies which the Winslows claim to have used in preparing their book include depth interviewing, focused interviewing, participant observation, ethnomethodology, and analytic induction. It is true that their interviews lie somewhere between depth and focused interviews in form, though they bear little resemblance to conventional psychiatric² or sociological³ interviews. It is true that their participants observed and their observers participated, though they did not employ the devices which transform casual observation into systematic research.⁴ And it is true that they recorded the everyday meanings and explanations of the deviant actors themselves, though they do not provide the sophisticated interpretation of detail which marks the finest ethnomethodological work.⁵ And finally, it is true that they hold each theory up to the light of one to three