

Death at the gates essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Doris Duke came into the world in grand fashion, just as she would live her life. Born in a state of the art hospital, constructed within the walls of the Fifth Avenue Mansion built for her anticipated arrival. That arrival came on November 22, 1912, she was quickly dubbed, 'The Richest Baby In The World' (Thomas & Duke, 1995, p. 222). Doris Duke was the combination of passion, brilliance, indulgence, and greed.

Vindictiveness never far removed from her surface. Doris Duke was the quintessence of wealth and power, additionally; she heeded her father's warning and trusted no one. Exit from her life was on her terms, terms, which were cold, calculated, and methodically carried out. Damage control fell into the laps of the army of attorneys under her employ. Never was this more evident than the night of October 7, 1966, with the violent death of Eduardo Tirella.

While Eduardo Tirella's death is viewed accidental, Doris Duke's innocence is at question because evidence suggests murder covered up and masked by her influence, power, and wealth. On December 11, 1924, with the passing of her father, James B. Duke, Doris Duke at age 12, would receive an estimated \$100 million from an established trust set forth by her father (Doris Duke Trust, 1981). Following his death, at the reading of the will, Doris Duke, in addition to the trust, assumed her father's assets and four estates, estimated at \$80 million (J. Williams, Doris Duke, nd). With her independent wealth, seeking escape from the mother she loathed, Nanaline Duke; Doris Duke would retreat to her father's beloved Duke Farm estate, to live alone, accompanied only by staff (Harmon, 2001).

Doris Duke found solace at Duke Farm; it was here she felt safe. Although safe from outside intrusions she was lonely. Life was less than happy; she would have numerous failed attempts at love, two failed marriages, suffer her only child's death within hours of birth, and encounter many friends looking for money. Each instance brought Duke's attorneys to action, they were there to cover up, dismiss, and handle court proceedings. No expense was spared while protecting her pride, dignity, and wealth. Duke was always triumphant; winning established a pattern in the use of power, wealth, and influence in dealing with anyone going against her.

Doris Duke realized money could buy whatever and whomever she desired, than discard them as easily as they were acquired. This was soon to be the reality of Eduardo Tirella. Eduardo Tirella was a motion picture set designer and interior decorator. His touch alone could transform drab into beauty.

Tirella would enter Duke's life through a mutual friend in October 1960, as shown in financial records (Doris Duke Paper, 1798-2003). In Tirella, she envisioned the transformation his talents could bring to her various estates. Rough Point, in the affluent town of Newport, Rhode Island; would become the setting for Tirella's entrance into Duke's grand life. Six years later it would become the scene of his tragic death.

Rough Point was considered the white elephant; it was cold, drafty, and dark. Hanging from the walls were huge dark tapestries, oversized ominous paintings, and gilded furniture. Noise would echo down the barren halls, trees brushing against the windows were amplified causing bone-chilling fear, intensified by the crashing waves of the Atlantic Ocean. Duke needed

Tirella's expertise at Rough Point, and he needed her checkbook. Without hesitation when offered the job to redesign Rough Point he accepted. Tirella was successful in transforming the 105 rooms at Rough Point (Doris Duke Papers, 1922-1997).

Tirella now saw opportunity into the depth of Duke's bank accounts, and the ability they possessed to finance his creativity (Thomas & Duke, 1995). Doris Duke thrilled with his work, expand his position to her other estates. Over the years his position transformed to that of friend and companion. As Duke's companion they traveled the world, shopping for the most valuable treasures that would find their way into the many estates and warehouses already filled with millions of dollars in rare paintings, sculptures, silver, tapestries, and Asian art. The two were inseparable, as evident of his pay and travel records (Doris Duke Paper, 1922-1998).

Travels took a toll on his finances, Doris Duke never carried cash, and he often found himself picking up the various tabs during their travels. In a letter dated January 11, 1962, Tirella while in Paris; writes to Duke's attorney Pete Cooley, asking for money in avoidance of asking Duke for a loan. Six hundred dollars was wired (Doris Duke Papers, 1922-1998). While unknown if this were an underhanded move, evidence shows his salary was reduced shortly there after. In February 1963 Duke enacted the aid of her attorney Pete Cooley to handle a payment dispute initiated by Tirella.

Tirella makes his attempt to request more money, feeling undercut for not receiving the wage of an architect. Two things of interest, Doris Duke had always given freely to Tirella, but now request her attorney's deal with

him. Additionally, Pete Cooley, who had wired the money to Tirella earlier without question, was now refusing his request. In his reply letter dated February 28, 1963, Cooley downplays the talent of Tirella in stating, ??? in our opinion, this is the job for an architect who has had experience in designing buildings, in drawing up the specifications, letting bids, supervising, etc??? (Doris Duke Papers, 1922-1998). Tirella viewed this as a fracture in his friendship with Duke and her associates. Over the next few years the friendship is further strained.

Duke while enjoying her weekly spendable income of approximately \$1 million, Tirella was going broke. With his request for additional money rejected and his income spent primarily on his benefactor, Tirella was growing frustrated. Adding to the frustration, Duke began yelling and barking orders at Tirella, as witnessed by staff, an act of aggression new to Tirella. Tirella could no longer keep up with her demands.

Growing tired of Duke??? s mood swings and fearing his motion picture design career was suffering, Tirella needed a change. Change would come by way of phone (Thomas & Duke, 1995). In June 1966, Producer, Martin Ransohoff called to offer Tirella a set design job on the film ??? Don't Make Waves??? he accepted. This is supported by evidence of his last pay record dated June 2, 1966 (Doris Duke Papers, 1922-1998).

Intimidated by Duke, Tirella uses the excuse of needing dental work from his trusted Los Angeles dentist. Duke pleaded with Tirella to remain, but he chose Los Angeles, despite the pleas. In Los Angeles, Tirella began receiving pleading calls from Duke; anything he wanted was his for the taking if he

would return. Tirella, returned in October 1966, not to work, but to gather his belongings. Doris Duke was adamant she would not lose him a second time.

Over the next few days she tried feverishly to convince him to stay. Tirella was besieged with offers and promises, but his mind was set, he was returning to Hollywood. Eduardo's dreams were abruptly ended on October 7, 1966 (Thomas & Duke, 1955). Friday, October 7 1966, started out casually with Tirella agreeing to drive Doris Duke to a meeting.

At approximately four p. m. they got into a rented car, which Tirella found odd because the estate housed numerous luxury cars. Question is raised as to why the heiress took a rental car; this suggests Doris Duke had premeditated the event to come, not wanting to damage one of her luxury cars.

This fact is supported by evidence of the Avis Rental Car Agreement, (Doris Duke Papers, 1922-1998). With Tirella behind the wheel they approached the iron gates, reaching 20 feet tall, each weighing over a ton. Tirella got out to open the gate, Duke slid to the driver's seat; with her behind the wheel the car lurched forward wedging Tirella between the car and gate. The car continued roaring forward, the gates let loose, falling to the street below. The body of Tirella was caught between the car and toppled gates.

Still the automobile kept moving forward. ??? As his body was ground to pieces by a combination of scraping iron, machinery, and pavement, the car kept pushing until the wreckage, both human and mechanical, stopped on the other side of the street, jammed against a large tree??? (Thomas ; Duke,

1995, p. 3345). The arriving ambulance, called not for Tirella, but to whisk the heiress away to the hospital where she was kept in protected isolation.

Groundskeepers worked overnight erasing the blood and skid marks from the road; landscapers replaced damaged shrubbery and patches of lawn, erasing all traces of evidence. The gates were removed, repaired, and rehung; the rental car inspected only once disappeared and never seen again (Thomas ; Duke, 1955). Duke??? s lawyers knew she could be charged for manslaughter, or worse yet murder. They worked feverishly behind the scenes in an attempt to avoid charges; evidence suggests deals were successfully made (Doris Duke Papers, 1922-1998).

While there was an investigation, it was extremely brief. Questionable is why all records of the investigation into Tirella??? s death have mysteriously disappeared. What is known, Newport Police Chief, Joseph A. Radice headed up the investigation, along with Detective Capt. , Paul J. Sullivan.

What??? s peculiar in this case, a death occurred, yet there was no investigation at the scene or routine questioning as to Duke??? s demeanor that day. Additionally, the prime suspect would not be questioned until Sunday, two days later. The only surviving records, newspaper accounts, all police reports have mysteriously disappeared. We know the newspaper accounts are accurate because the police chief is quoted when speaking of the accounts.

Police Chief Joseph A. Radice said this morning Lieut. Frank H. Walsh questioned Miss Duke yesterday at Rough Point, her Bellevue Avenue home.

Walsh accompanied Detective George Watts. Miss Duke's attorney, Wesley N.

Fach of New York City, was present during the interrogation (Newport Daily News, 1966, p. 1). Chief Radice said this morning Miss Duke told police she had been sitting on the passenger's side of a late-model station wagon operated by Tirella, as they were driving out of the estate. When they reached the gates, Miss Duke said, Tirella got out of the car to open them and she slid over to the driver's side to drive out onto Bellevue Avenue. "It was something we done 100 times before," she told police.

Chief Radice said Miss Duke told police the car leaped forward and after that she could remember nothing (Newport Daily News, 1966, p. 1). "Dr. Philip C.

McAllister, state medical examiner said Tirella died instantly of brain injuries. Additionally, Radice said he was waiting for the full medical examiner's report, and the investigation was ongoing" (Newport Daily News, 1966, p. 1). Chief Radice's claim that they were "getting along" contradicts earlier claims of them fighting shortly before the incident. Something that would have been uncovered had the staff been questioned. Another oddity considering a death was involved, questioning of Doris Duke lasted approximately 20 minutes.

Although two inspectors from the Registry of Motor Vehicles reported everything on the car functioned properly, Radice closed the case ruling it an accident (Lodi News-Sentinel, 1966). Just as quickly as the case was closed, Doris Duke signed a check for \$25, 000. 00 to the commissioner heading the <https://assignbuster.com/death-at-the-gates-essay/>

restoration of the Cliff Walk. Ironically, this was the very commission she had battled from the late fifties into the late sixties, in an attempted to keep pedestrians away from her estate. The Cliff Walk was her Achilles' heel, but just eight days after Eduardo's death, Doris Duke became their largest supporter and benefactor. This act alone, along with evidence, supports the theory of a back room deal made the night of Tirella's death.

Even more intriguing, Police Chief, Radice abruptly and comfortably retires just months after closing the investigation (Davis, 2009). Doris Duke was again successful in ridding her troubles, due in part to wealth and influence. This would soon change when served notice of claim filed against her by Eduardo Tirellas heirs in October 1967. The claim caused panic in the Duke camp. Attorneys began drafting letters in hopes of resolve. As letters went out, evidence-supportive of murder came in.

One such letter addressed to Duke's attorney, Wesley Fach, states, "please be reminded that we are waiting for a copy of the lease agreement which Miss Dukes signed with Avis Rent A Car System, Inc. , we would appreciate your forwarding it by return mail" (personal communication, December 5, 1966, p. 1). This is damaging, Doris Duke had over 200 servants to carry out her task, why had she singlehandedly signed for a rental car within days of Tirella's death.

This supports the theory Duke's act was premeditated. In another letter Duke's attorney Pete Cooley writes to Duke, "Yesterday I had a meeting with the two Tirella brothers, their lawyer and the lawyer for Avis. It boils down to this; Tirellas are seeking \$600, 000 and a settlement out of court. The next

step awaits the reply of the Avis Insurance Company. I do not, of course, know, but I feel the answer will be no, with perhaps an offer of a smaller amount.

After that we will just have to wait and see. Hope and pray a court battle can be avoided (personal communication, January 25, 1967). This also supports the claim of murder, from the earliest age of 12; Doris Duke welcomed the opportunity to do battle in court regardless of expense, now all attempts are made to avoid it. What is the cause of the underlying fear and panic? On December 12, 1967 after two months of negotiations without settlement, the lawsuit was officially filed.

The stakes now rose to \$1, 250, 000 -plus interest and cost (Doris Duke Papers, 1928-1998). Attorneys for Duke proved successful in tying up litigation in the courts, the trial would not get underway until June 1971, five years after Tirella's death. Lewis Perrotti, assistant to the registrar of motor vehicles, and Chief Field Investigator, Alfred Massarone, informs the jury the brakes and gas pedal were fully functional, thus disputing the claim the car jumped forward on its own. Doris Duke took the stand, neither admitting nor denying her guilt, claiming she could not remember if she stepped on the gas pedal, or if she slipped it into gear from park to drive. This goes against her earlier account when questioned by police two days after the accident (Newport Daily News, 1971). The trial concludes finding Duke guilty in the wrongful death of Eduardo Tirella, further proving her guilt.

Victory was bittersweet for the Tirella family, the award \$96, 000. An appeal on the ruling was immediately filed. On May 4, 1973, Doris Duke would again be found guilty however; the Supreme Court of Rhode Island upheld the original award (Court Records, 1973). This ruling is the only remaining document; court records of testimony in both trials have disappeared.

During the time leading to the first trial Duke would bestow her wealth to the citizens of Newport. Within days of Tirella's death, in what most agree to be another backroom deal, freeing her from murder charges, she would fund a restoration project benefiting the town. Work on the foundation began within days of Tirella's death however, due to the planning and identification of buildings the official announcement of The Newport Restoration Foundation would not come until 1968. With her funding, and the goal of preserving Newport's 18th- and 19th-century architectural heritage her extraordinary vision resulted in an almost single-handed rescue of Newport's early architectural heritage (Newport Restoration Foundation, 2009, p. 1). Doris Duke's last-ditch effort, with help from her attorneys, and the announcement of the foundation, Eduardo Tirella's death was finally put to rest.

Doris Duke's innocence remains in question some 46 years later. In revisiting the facts there can be no doubt her power, wealth, and influence played a roll in the investigation of Tirella's death. Considering the circumstances, there is no logic behind a twenty-minute interview of the prime suspect, dismissal of facts that the vehicle was fully operable, no questioning of staff, and closure of case that resulted in a horrible death.

Doris Duke's vindictiveness was not secreted; entrance and exit into her world was on her terms.

In viewing the preponderance of evidence, Eduardo Tirella's death may have in fact been covered up and dismissed due to Doris Duke's influence, power, and wealth. References [http://www. learningtogive. org/papers/paper190. html](http://www.learningtogive.org/papers/paper190.html)