

Psychoanalysis on lizzie borden



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Lizzie Borden took an axe And gave her mother forty whacks. When she saw what she had done, She gave her Father forty- one One of the greatest unsolved mysteries of all time, right up there next to the Jack the Ripper murders, is the Borden double homicide. On August 4th, 1892, a hot, muggy day in Fall River, a prominent member of the community, Andrew Jackson Borden, and his wife, Abby Durfee Gray Borden, were killed in their home. The lead suspect in these grisly murders was Mr. Borden's youngest daughter by his first wife. Lizzie Borden was portrayed as a cool, calculating woman who killed her father and stepmother for financial gain and because she harbored a well-hidden hatred for the woman chosen to replace a mother she never knew. For over one hundred years, people have speculated as to her guilt or innocence. There have been arguments on both sides of the fence, some citing the fact that Lizzie—which was her christened name, not Elizabeth—never cried or showed any emotion over the death of her father, whom she supposedly looked up to, and her stepmother. Others have pointed the finger at Bridget Sullivan, the live-in maid, John Vinnicum Morse, the uncle of Lizzie, and even Emma, Lizzie's quiet, unassuming older sister. Lizzie herself pointed to an unknown assailant who may have broken into the house, hidden in the closet, run upstairs to kill Mrs. Borden, hidden again in the closet, and run out again to kill Mr. Borden as he lay on the couch. However, this seems highly unlikely as there are no bloody footprints to signify an unknown assailant, no indication that anyone had been in the front hall closet, and no possible way that assailant could get past Bridget, who was cleaning the windows on the ground floor that morning. The only possible suspects are Bridget and Lizzie, and it was the latter who had the greatest motive for wanting to see her father and stepmother dead. Today,

there are several psychological theories that show the reason why Lizzie would commit such a heinous crime and will be explained in detail later in this essay. The ultimate purpose of this information is to demonstrate how Lizzie, and Lizzie alone, killed her parents in a final act of defiance against parents who caused her mental harm throughout her young life. On the morning of August 4th, 1892, Mr. Borden left the house at 9: 30 to go about his daily routine. He was director of one bank, sat on the board of three others and was supervising the construction of the Andrew J. Borden Building, a monument to himself and the wealth he had gained throughout his life. He would return to the house at approximately 10: 45 that morning. Meanwhile, his wife, Abby Borden, was going about her dusting. These facts are uncontested and have been reported and confirmed by various witnesses. It is the remainder of the testimony that is in debate. According to Bridget, she was not asked to wash windows until at least 9: 30 where Lizzie contests she saw Bridget filling a bucket with water and leaving by the side door at 9: 05 (Radin, 1961: 220). At sometime between 9 o'clock that morning and 10: 30, Mrs. Borden was killed via 18 whacks with a hatchet to the head in the guest bedroom on the second story (Kent, 1992). At around 10: 45, Mr. Borden returned. Lizzie, who saw her elder father enter the house, helped him to the sofa where he lay down, his legs dangling over the edge of the too-short sofa. At some time between 10: 50, when Lizzie left him, and 11: 12, when Lizzie found him, he was killed, also with a hatchet to the head (Radin, 1961: 221). Contrary to the popular rhyme, there were only 10 gouges to the head of Mr. Borden (Kent, 1992: xiii). Born on July 19, 1860, Lizzie Andrew Borden was the third child born to Andrew Jackson Borden and his wife Sarah Anthony Morse Borden (Hoffman, 2000: 38). They had two

other daughters, Emma Lenora and Alice Esther, the latter having died at the age of two (Hoffman, 2000: 28). Just before Lizzie turned three, Sarah died, leaving twelve-year-old Emma in charge of raising her younger sister (Hoffman, 2000: 38). Lizzie enjoyed a relatively unremarkable youth in Fall River. " After all, in the 1890s in staid, Victorian New England, what little excitement there was was more likely to take place around the waterfront's roughhouse bars, not in the reserved parlors of the upper class" (Kent, 1992: 15). Her father did finance a " Grand Tour of Europe in 1890" (Hoffman, 2000: 38) for her thirtieth birthday (Radin, 1961: 33). She was a prominent member of charity organizations including the Women's Christian Temperance Union (Radin, 1961: 45). While there was very little tenderness or affection in Lizzie's home life, one instance shows her love of her father, despite his miserly ways. In her junior year, she gave her father a gold ring as a token of her love for him (Hoffman, 2000: 38). Mr. Borden was still wearing that ring upon the occasion of his death (Radin, 1961: 33). There have been dozens of book written on the subject of Lizzie Borden and her inexplicable killing of her father and stepmother. In Pearson's book, " Trial of Lizzie Borden", the author denounces the defense throughout the novel in its attempt to show Lizzie's innocence. Pearson praises the prosecution and even dedicated his book to Hosea Knowlton, the prosecutor in the Lizzie Borden trial. It was Pearson's opinion that Lizzie was guilty and he went to any lengths to demonstrate this to his readers. He ridiculed the people of Fall River in their sentimentality when Lizzie was formally arrested for the murders of her father and stepmother. " Such waves of emotion, inspired by prejudice or ignorance, more usually follow a conviction on the capital charge" (Pearson, 1937: 40). He referred to the church party who supported

Lizzie as " clerical busybodies" and " hirsute pastors" (Pearson, 1937: 40) in his attempt to discredit any supporters of Miss Borden. It is easy to degrade someone after death, as Pearson had done in his own completely prejudiced account of the trial and the subsequent acquittal of Miss Borden. Pearson based his information mainly on the Fall River Globe, a paper that today would be equivalent to the National Enquirer. He edited testimony by omitting it throughout his trial book. He argued that it was greed that caused Lizzie Borden to kill her father and stepmother. It was quite possible that that was the case, despite Pearson's tilting of the evidence in his book (Kent, 1992: xiv). Mr. Borden was a tight-fisted gentleman. His father was a fish peddler and " ... [he] seems to have set out deliberately to be as unlike his father as he could" (Radin, 1961: 18). He accumulated a great deal of wealth, buying property at cut-rate prices by offering all cash to the sellers (Radin, 1992: 19). According to Radin, " This was the man who was to tutor Lizzie Borden, to instruct her in thrift, to teach her how to hold her emotions in check, to point out to her the value of downtown property and to prepare her to take his place when death inevitably came. Lizzie later told friends how her normally reticent father often discussed these matters at length. As a teacher he was often successful in influencing Lizzie; sometimes he failed." (21) While he taught her his spendthrift ways, he never anticipated her ongoing affair with charity organizations. Despite the fact that he only gave her an allowance of \$200 a year, she managed to save much of it and donate it to charities, childhood friends and teachers of whom she was particularly fond (Radin, 1961: 46-47). There have been theories that Lizzie killed her father because he had made a will excluding her from any of his accumulated wealth (Pearson, 1937; Brown, 1991). As was testified to in the <https://assignbuster.com/psychoanalysis-on-lizzie-borden/>

trial, Jennings, Mr. Borden's trusted lawyer, revealed that Mr. Borden had never asked for a will to be made. " ...Jennings...stated for the trial record that he had been Borden's lawyer for many years and the banker never had asked him to draw up a will nor had he ever discussed making a will. Knowlton [the prosecutor] accepted Jennings' statement as uncontested fact" (Radin, 1961: 114). However, further conjecture has been made about a " secret will" that Mr. Borden had made to not only exclude his two daughters from his wealth, but his illegitimate son (Brown, 1991: 318). Of course, this is entirely speculation on the part of Brown, and was poorly credited in his book. Lizzie has been described by many as coolly calculating. The idea that she may have been a sadist or a psychopath comes to the mind. The murders had to be carefully planned, especially with " Uncle John" visiting. Mr. Borden's brother-in-law had come by unannounced the preceding day. Despite the fact that her Uncle might be home at any minute, Lizzie had planned the murders for a long time, waiting until her sister left town, until Bridget was ordered out of the house to wash windows. Lizzie fabricated a note to get her stepmother out of the house in order kill the man who had betrayed her by giving her stepmother something Lizzie believed the older woman did not deserve (Spiering, 1984: 10). However, since her stepmother would not leave, and Lizzie was running out of time, she marched up to the guest bedroom where her slow, obese stepmother was finishing up the bed and killed her, swiftly and without mercy. No one else was in the house at the time, so Lizzie's plan was going smoothly. Because she had been planning this murder for weeks, the adrenaline rush must have made her faint; perhaps she went out to the orchard to have a pear, get out of the stifling house. A sadist once said that the best way to fool someone is

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to help them¹. Perhaps she had been fooling Abby and Mr. Borden all along, helping around the house, appearing to be the perfect daughter, all the while calculating and scheming on how best to go about disposing of them. It is the irrationality of thinking patterns that dictates the sadistic violent offender's actions. Lizzie had no empathy for anyone; in her lust for power she was using her charitable organizations and even her parents as a means to an end. She wanted power and money. Note that after her trial, she gave up on the organizations she "valued" so much and bought a large house she named "Maplecroft" (Spiering, 1984: 155). According to Script Theory, children who view violent behavior develop scripts associated with that behavior. There are official statements that Sarah Borden died due to uterine congestion and spinal disease (Hoffman, 2000: 41), medical technology of the 1860s was questionable at best; people routinely died from "consumption" and "the will of god". Perhaps it was Mr. Borden who killed Sarah, in a violent act that Lizzie would reenact nearly thirty years later. Lizzie would have rehearsed the scene over and over again, entrenching it into her subconscious until it became such a part of her that she was forced to commit a similar deed to the one her father had committed so many years before. In Travis Hirschi's Social Bond Theory, it is stated that "...criminality was caused by weakened ties that bind people to society. If you have a strong social bond to conventional society, that bond will stop you from breaking the law." The possibility that the bonds holding Lizzie in her stable, non-committal lifestyle had begun to weaken are evident in a case involving her shoplifting. According to hearsay, Lizzie was an avid shoplifter all her life. Mr. Borden simply paid for whatever she took and shopkeepers

¹ As stated in the video, "Sadistic and Non-Sadistic Violent Offenders..." seemed

satisfied by this². This may have led to a confrontation between Lizzie and her father, Mr. Borden telling his youngest daughter that he was not going to pay for her " indiscretions" anymore. Perhaps it was a lack of attachment to her family that led Lizzie to brutally murder Mr. Borden while he slept. While she may have been involved in numerous charity organizations, it was her lack of belief in respect for the authority of the police or the opinion of peers—especially her stepmother—that caused Lizzie to loose control and kill two people. In Dollard et. al.'s study on aggression, it was found that frustration was the leading source of aggressive behavior. Among the five elements of their theory was one that told of the risk of acting out those aggressive feelings increasing with the frequency of frustrating experiences, the amount of outside interference, and the intensity of the event that caused the frustration (Dollard, et. al., 1994). In Lizzie's case, the fact that her father was pandering to her stepmother, giving her money to buy a house (Spiering, 1984: 3), and allowing her more freedom than he did either of his two adult daughters, the amount of frustration Lizzie was feeling must have been great. Since she felt that no risk or punishment would come from her act, she released those frustrated feelings, venting her anger on the helpless Abby and the incapacitated Mr. Borden. What crops up in more than a few books was the idea that Lizzie was homosexual (Spiering, 1984; Duggan, 2000). In most cases, this has to do with an actress that Lizzie became enamored with in the late 1890s (Spiering, 1984). Nance O'Neil, an aspiring actress of the day, was followed by Lizzie—at this time calling herself Lizbeth—everywhere that she could. Was it possible, therefore, that Mr. Borden or even Abby ² It should be noted that this is indeed hearsay. Only one account of Lizzie Borden had ever mentioned it; a documentary on the Borden

Murders done by TLC. Found out about Lizzie's lesbian tendencies and become outraged? As appraised by Duggan, The period of relative autonomy emerging for some women during adolescence and early adulthood, generated by wages and new, unsupervised hetero-social pleasures, became the target of anxious state and public intervention. The possibility that this period of relative autonomy might be extended into alternative homo-social domesticities produced social opposition through moral judgment, contempt, or ridicule, as well as through visions of apocalyptic violence in patricide or love murder. (124) It was the idea that homo-sexualism may come into the home and disturb the minds of young people that had parents up in arms. The very thought of having an "irregular" child, especially in the 1800s was not only frowned upon, for the upper classes, it was akin to scandal. The additional fact that no suitors ever called upon Lizzie, despite her father's amassed wealth, leads to the conclusion that her preference of her own gender had been observed by others. However, having her parents know about this would surely have been outrageous. In an attempt to cover up the truth, Lizzie decided to kill them both, pinning the crime on an unknown intruder. This was seemingly plausible, given her high status in the community; and believable, if she did not want anyone to know the truth. James Messerschmitt, in his Masculinist Theory, took a look at how patriarchy constructs a particular version of masculinity that not only exploits women, but also makes crime more natural for men. Could it be that Lizzie's father, in his prim and proper way, objected to Lizzie's friends, the organizations she was associated with, or even the men she may have had relationships with? Is it possible that he beat her to the point of accepting "his way" without question? Could this account for the lack of intimacy between family

members? While there is little physical evidence that Mr. Borden hit either of his daughters, one must wonder as to why the two spinsters—Lizzie was thirty at the time of the murders, Emma was forty-two—continued to live with their father and stepmother in an obviously ill-suited house. Perhaps Mr. Borden was so cold and controlling and he ruled with such an iron will that no one dared oppose him until that fateful day when Lizzie decided she had had enough. The rage and energy that went into each of those blows was enough to crush the skulls of both Mr. Borden and his wife. There was obvious hatred involved in the murders. While the murders of Andrew J. Borden and his wife Abby may never be solved officially, it is safe to surmise that Lizzie—or Lizbeth, if she prefers—committed the crimes due to one or more of the above stated theories. It was impossible, given the time frames and fact that Mr. Borden kept the doors of the house locked incessantly that anyone from outside could have committed these murders without being seen and, more importantly, without leaving a trace of evidence behind. If these murders had been committed in the 1990s instead of the 1890s, one could assume that forensic science and psychological theories would dictate the how and the why of these gruesome murders. Despite the fact that Lizzie was acquitted at trial, key evidence was obviously missing that would name her as the murderess. Bibliography Brown, A. R. (1991). *Lizzie Borden: The legend, the truth, the final chapter*. Nashville, Tennessee: Rutledge Hill Press. Duggan, L. (2000). *Sapphic slashers: Sex, violence, and American Modernity*. Durham and London: Duke UP. Hoffman, P. D. (2000)/ *yesterday in old Fall River: A Lizzie Borden companion*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press. Kent, D. (1992). *Forty whacks: New evidence in the life and legend of Lizzie Borden*. Emmaus, Pennsylvania: Yankee Books. Pearson, E. (1937). *Trial of* <https://assignbuster.com/psychoanalysis-on-lizzie-borden/>

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