

The Arousal Template of Jack the Ripper (Patricia Cornwell, *Portrait of a Killer: Jack the Ripper Case Closed*, New York: GP Putnam, 2002)

Pat Cornwell has written a series of novels many of which feature the character of Dr. Kay Scarpetta, a coroner whose ability to follow complex threads of evidence has intrigued over 25 million readers. Cornwell's character reveals a fine clinical mind. Like Lucas Davenport, Alex Delaware, and other contemporary fictionalized sleuths she solves by looking at the patterns and noticing the anomalies (the two major activities of therapy I believe). Her ability to "decipher" becomes sharply realized in her book on the classic murder case of Jack the Ripper. She leaves the fictional world for the real world and solves in a most convincing fashion a series of crimes that occurred well over a century ago. To do that required extraordinary labor, dedication, and keen perception to what we as clinicians refer to as the arousal template.

Like Admiral Kirk and Spock, she had to transport herself back in time to appreciate the nuances of eroticism, art appreciation, and period police work. After an extraordinary amount of data, Walter Sickert, the nineteenth century artist, emerges as Jack the Ripper. As she builds her case, she is able to show the high probability that Sickert's deadly path probably included far more victims than ever attributed to Jack the Ripper. She starts with the primary focus of Sickert's penchant for prostitutes. Sickert "like thrill-seeking men of every era, would leave his respectable home and family to enter a forbidden world of low-life pub-hopping and music halls and cheap, anonymous sex. Some men from the better parts of the city became addicted to this secret entertainment; Walter Sickert was one of them." In addition, to his prostitution use, he had a chronic pattern of infidelity and violent sex.

Acknowledging both, she threads the needle of sociopathy and sex addiction with an awareness that eludes even some of our contemporary clinicians. She does note that the "violent psychopath strays off track in ways that would never register on the average person's navigational system." Cornwell weaves in additional issues of alcoholism and gambling, which she sees as pervasive also in the culture. She reconstructs the history of abuse, trauma, and abandonment, but also notes contemporary evidence of brain scans of sociopathic individuals. Certain patterns emerged from all of this history into an arousal template in which:

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- The women preferred were ugly
- They were overweight or very thin, no normal weight parameters
- Sickert's worst activities usually occurred in times of great stress such as lawsuits, public humiliations, or critical losses
- He was the consummate voyeur even to the extent of capturing his crime scenes in his art (Cornwell is at her best here)
- He left a signature in the form of a red handkerchief
- He taunted the police around the crimes – a "catch me if you can" theme

Cornwell's evidence emerges in layers. Starting with his art, the Ripper's letters to the police, watermarks on paper he used, DNA from known envelopes, and clues embedded in his known history. Basically that which aroused him becomes comprehensible once you have the weave of his history. The arousal template became a language that fit the events of his life. Once that pattern was explicit, Cornwell was able to show the high probability of Sickert's activities extended to other countries and other times.

Of interest is that even codependency becomes explicit in Cornwell's tale. It is no surprise that a man of Sickert's extremes would precipitate extreme reactions in others. Never faithful, always secretive, and always in need of money, he could still inspire devotion. Consider this description of Ellen Cobden, Sickert's first wife: "It was her nature to blame herself for whatever went wrong in the Cobden family or her marriage. No matter how often Sickert betrayed her, lied to her, abandoned her, made her feel unloved or invisible, she was loyal and would do anything she could for him. His happiness and health mattered to her, ever after they were divorced and he married somebody else. Emotionally and financially, Sickert bled Ellen Cobden to death."

Throughout all of this sad and horrid tale, Cornwell keeps a tally of what adds up and what does not. In part she was inspired by famous FBI profiler, Edward Sulzbach, who told her at one point, "There really aren't many coincidences in life. And to call coincidence after coincidence after coincidence a coincidence is just plain stupid." Clearly the reconstruction of how Sickert's

arousal patterns worked was the measured sifting of anomalies by the author. At another point, she quotes Sulzbach, "the actual murder is incidental to the fantasies." How often in sex addiction we find the behavior incidental to the fantasy.

This book is about the extreme end of human sexual behavior. Yet Pat Cornwell never flinches and keeps a bead on the truth. While this effort is about historical truth, the author is like her fictional character, Dr. Kay Scarpetta. She models the importance and the difficulty of sorting out appearances (deciphering) as they settle out through the arousal template to the bottom line of sexual behavior. Like we therapists, integrity is not what we want it to be, but in fact what it really is.

Well done Dr. Scarpetta.