

Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* & Jacob Appel's *The Mask of Sanity*

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In the year 1886, a medical doctor who was “recognized as an authority on deviant sexual behavior and its medico-legal aspects” (Kupferschmidt, 1987) published *Psychopathia Sexualis*. This expert was Richard von Krafft-Ebbing, a University of Heidelberg graduate who practiced psychiatry within asylums across Germany. One-hundred-thirty-one years later in the year 2017, a Bronx-born lawyer/bioethicist/physician who specializes in emergency psychiatry published *Mask of Sanity*. This professional is Jacob Appel, professor of psychiatry and medical education at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York. While Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* is a German-printed, non-fictional piece classified as a medico-legal reference, and Appel’s *Mask of Sanity* is an American novel of the fiction genre, both pieces are scribed by authorities in their field and both publications address individuals who suffer from pervasive mental disorders steeped in criminality.

Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* was ground-breaking for its time, and addressed a multitude of nineteenth century taboos and acts that were considered to be sexual deviations during that period. In this work, Krafft-Ebing forged a cataloging of what would have been considered paraphilias a whopping eighteen years before an Austrian ethnologist by the name of Friedrich Salomon Krauss would have even coined the word “paraphilia” in 1904 (Friedemann, 2015). He addressed behaviors like cunnilingus, fellatio, and masturbation and labeled them “perversions”, as during the nineteenth century, “procreation was the purpose of sexual desire and any form of recreational sex was a perversion of the sex drive” (Krafft-Ebing, 1892). This is the polar opposite of how twenty-first century psychiatrists label these behaviors, as all are now considered “normal activities to arouse and stimulate sexual interest” (Brown, 2013). The norm, sociologically speaking, is what is typical and common, and nowadays, sex and sexual behaviors

for the sole purpose of creating more humans is not the norm at all. In fact, nowadays many individuals who never want to be parents engage in sexual activity and take many precautions to ensure pregnancy will not occur.

In addition to addressing these sexual acts, Krafft-Ebing examined what he called “abnormal congenital manifestation” (Krafft-Ebing, 1892) in the forms of male homosexuality and lesbianism. This belief that gays and lesbians were suffering from some irregular, hereditary factor that displayed itself as lust for those of the same sex was prevalent among psychiatrists for eighty-seven years after *Psychopathia Sexualis* was first published. It wasn’t until as recently as 1973 that “the American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed the diagnosis of ‘homosexuality’ from the second edition of its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM)” (Drescher, 2015). Again, this was yet another major change that was on account of more and more professionals viewing homosexuality as normal.

While the passage of time and the changes in societies brought forth the normalizing of cunnilingus, fellatio, masturbation, and homosexuality, other behaviors are still considered abnormal and rightfully so. These are the acts that are heinous enough to be considered felonious. Krafft-Ebing branded “abnormal sexual life in various forms and states of mental disturbance” as pathological sexualities and even focused upon legal aspects and repercussions of taking part in such activities. He specifically named “rape, murder with rape, incest, necrophilia, or immoral acts on persons under care” (Krafft-Ebing, 1892), all of which are still

considered to be criminal in America today, and all of which are committed by individuals who have a pervasive mental disorder, or at least did so at the time of their offense.

Continuing onward with criminality on account of pervasive mental disorder, Appel's *Mask of Sanity* brings forth just that. Appel's main character, Jeremy Balint, MD, is essentially a sociopath hiding in plain sight amongst his seemingly ideal family and successful, professional, wealthy peers. He is a loving son who makes his aging parents proud with the life he created for himself. He is also a dedicated father to his two little girls and a committed husband to his wife. Balint is at the top of his game, clinching the title and salary of Division Chief of Cardiology at a much younger age than any other physicians at the hospital that employs him.

To the casual observer, Balint's existence is the epitome of morality, but the fact that Balint has achieved everything he set out to achieve, at a younger age than most, leaves many goal-less years ahead. That can sometimes be dangerous. At that point, the only thing he aimed for was the maintenance of his already acquired idyllic life. The remainder of his life should have played out with no problem, and it would have gone quite smoothly if not for that nagging feeling that, somehow, a metaphorical tidal wave would wash away his life of perfection. Often times, when an individual has no further goals to reach, no bigger mountain to climb, his mind is idle and creates an obsession of conservation for what has already been acquired. With that sometimes a "preserve what exists at all costs" mentality manifests.

Balint's wife was maintaining her own social life outside of her marriage with a less than savory character, ironically named Sugarman, who was actually a colleague and pal of Balint. Balint's wife was more invested in Sugarman than Sugarman was in her, as she was only one of many women he was courting. Upon finding out about his wife's affair with Sugarman, Balint did not go into a frenzied rage and call both parties out on their wrongdoing. He was stoic and stealth in his methodology. He kept it hidden that he even knew at all, and functioned as usual amongst them both, knowing full well that he would soon take Sugarman's life. Had he killed Sugarman immediately upon learning of the affair, heat of passion would be the case. But this was not to be. Balint premeditated and justified it all in his mind's eye. His rationalization for the murder was to preserve his family unit and to maintain consistency and normalcy of life for his young daughters who he loved more than anyone else in the world.

While murdering for this reason is definitely unacceptable, it is certainly understandable as a motive considering everything Balint had to lose if the affair continued. These things include a failed marriage, daughters having to cope with a broken home, and gossip that he could not satisfy his wife. These all would bring irreparable shame to such a successful physician. How could Balint get away with the killing of Sugarman? It was simple. He would also kill five other individuals, at random, with the same modus operandi as to make it look like Sugarman was merely a victim of a serial killer whose signature was an emerald ribbon around the necks of his victims. This was quite the signature, as green "is a dominant color in nature that makes you think of growth" (Wharton, 2019). I am almost certain that Appel chose green as the color for the ribbon to indicate growth... the growth of a sociopathic serial killer dubbed The Emerald Choker. Murdering people at random, with no regard for their futures or their families to satisfy

one's own agenda of appearing innocent and uninvolved is quite sociopathic indeed. Moreover, the fact that Balint enjoyed each murder more than the last while accepting awards and honors for ethics in medicine in between shows his lack of both conscience and empathy.

Appel's character, Dr. Balint, does not have the lifestyle of which an individual with Antisocial Personality Disorder (APD) typically would. His entire educational background in medicine and his work as a practitioner is steeped in the "Do No Harm" clause of the Hippocratic Oath on which he vowed. His entire livelihood is based on a solid ethical foundation, and doctoring is one of the most caring professions one can choose. This attests to the book's title, as only a mask of this caliber could disguise a sociopath of this capacity.

Criminality on account of pervasive mental disorder is the tie that binds Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* and Appel's *Mask of Sanity* together. Though they were written and published more than one century and three decades apart, both were scribed by bests in their arena, and both brought forth the contemplation of psychological anomalies in relation to law-breaking tendencies. Because of this, it is more than likely that both Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* and Appel's *Mask of Sanity* will be studied and pondered for years and years to come.

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