

A crime gone tragically wrong

Which crimes go wonderfully right?



by Theodore Dalrymple

That bastion of upright British conservatism, the *Daily Telegraph*, evidently now believes in the legitimacy of gang warfare. How else to explain its reporting of the trial of Thomas Cashman for the murder of Olivia Pratt-Korbel, a young schoolgirl?

Thomas Cashman, a 34-year-old cannabis dealer, gunned down the nine-year-old in her own home as he chased a rival during a gangland hit gone wrong.

Ah, if only the gangland hit had gone right! Then Joseph Nee, the man whom Cashman was chasing, would have been dead instead of the little girl, and all would have been well.

Now it is perfectly true that Nee was himself, by all accounts, a criminal, and I suppose that most of us would rather a criminal were shot dead than a little girl: but that would not make the murder any the less a murder, nor the less legally reprehensible. The law does not say, "Thou shalt not kill, except for those you think are nasty pieces of work."

When police spokesmen these days report a murder to the press and public – for example the owner of a corner shop killed by a young tyke who was trying to rob him – they often say, "This was an armed robbery that went tragically wrong." A robbery that went happily right would have been one in which the redistribution of property had been effected and no one had been injured.

Does anyone think straight these days? In his own defence, the accused had said "I'm not a killer, I'm a dad," as if the one precluded the other. By this argument, Goebbels could have said, "I'm not a Minister of Propaganda, I'm a dad." The Chief Constable of Merseyside described the convicted man as a "despicable coward": but it seems to me that cowardice was not his main defect. I can't speak for readers, but I wouldn't dare to run down the street shooting a pistol.

First published in [*The Critic*](#).