

Murder Most Foul

by Theodore Dalrymple



I have a habit—whether good or bad, I cannot say, though my wife does not fully approve—of buying books almost everywhere I go. I do not necessarily read them, though I always intend to do so: and good intentions are, of course, an important component of the moral life. Recently, on a short trip to Tenby, the ancient walled town in southwest Wales, I bought a book about four gruesome murders that took place in the village of Clydach, not far away geographically, but very far socially, from Tenby. *The Clydach Murders*, by John Morris, a retired lawyer, is first-rate, as gripping an account of a crime as one is likely to read. It is also an account of what seems a miscarriage of justice. Though, or perhaps because, Clydach is a small place, tight-knit and socially incestuous,

the story—a shocking one, of byzantine complexity—is more than enough to put one off the supposed joys of community, if not forever, at least for some time.

The murders took place at 9 Kelvin Road, Clydach, in the early hours of June 27, 1999. Mandy Power, aged 34, her invalid mother, Doris Dawson, and her two children, Katie and Emily, aged ten and eight, were killed with a blunt instrument, wielded with such force that it inflicted injuries far greater than those necessary to cause death. Whoever was responsible sought to destroy the evidence by trying to burn the house down, but firemen extinguished the blaze before total destruction ensued.

It took seven years before someone was convicted for the crimes—and then, it was possibly the wrong man. At the least, his guilt was not proved beyond reasonable doubt, and Morris lays bare a story of police corruption and incompetence, lawyerly dishonesty, and judicial unfairness—liberally assisted by local prejudice and a willingness to lie that is, as the outdated saying goes, “un-British.” The murderer either had a key, or was let in, to the house, suggesting that he was well-known at least to Mandy Power, who, it turned out, was well-known to many locals.

For a long time, the principal suspect or suspects were Alison Lewis and her husband, Stephen, a police officer in the area, and his identical twin brother, Stuart, also an officer. At the time, Alison was involved in a torrid affair with Mandy Power. Alison herself had been in the police force but had been invalided out on disability after witnessing an upsetting suicide. This government pension, granted because she supposedly could not work again for the police for psychological reasons, raised questions of fraud, for Alison was no shrinking violet. After her trauma, she went on to play women’s rugby, a rough sport that the feminist lobby wants us to believe, or pretend to believe, is as good as the men’s version; several times, she was selected to play for the Welsh

international team. She was also a black belt in karate, which she put into practice one day when a Welsh boxing champion objected to her same-sex canoodling in a pub. Alison was also known to be expert in handling the kind of blunt instruments used in some forms of martial arts.

By some credible accounts, Alison was jealous and domineering of her newfound partner, Mandy: not that she was faithful to her—far from it. The jealous are not ever jealous for the cause, says Emilia in *Othello*. Indeed, the jealous are often jealous because they themselves are unfaithful and suppose that everyone is like them. On this occasion, however, jealousy was in a sense justified, for Mandy Power was “one for the boys,” as a witness put it. She carried on casual affairs with men, including one eventually found guilty of the murders: David Morris (no relation to author Morris).

Morris was not a savory character. He had a long string of criminal convictions and had served time in prison for acts of violence as well as of dishonesty. Since most British criminals have committed five to ten times as many crimes as those for which they have been charged, he had doubtless caused others much misery. But he was in his late thirties, had not been in trouble for some years, and appeared to earn his living as a laborer. Many of his neighbors did not like him, true, though it is not clear whether this was because of past or present behavior. And one should remember that a man with a criminal record is not therefore a murderer, even when a murder takes place near to where he lives.

Morris knew Mandy Power: in fact, he was having a sexual relationship with her. A gold chain that he wore turned up at the murder site—in effect, the only evidence against him, other than his bad character and reputation for violence. At first, he denied that the chain was his, though he acknowledged the lie a few days before his first trial, three years later. His new story was that he had visited Power for sex two days before the murders, and it was then that the

chain had come off. He described the sex in some detail. They had intercourse against the wall, on the other side of which Power's 80-year-old invalid mother was sleeping. According to Morris, the element of danger, of getting caught in flagrante, excited Power.

This detail sounds true. Why would Morris, by now the accused, have made it up? It would not reflect well on him. Either it was true, in which case it suggested something about the morality of the eventual victim, as well as her attitude toward her elderly mother; or, if untrue, it suggested that Morris thought that it would have no effect on people's view of him because, around here, everyone behaved like this.

During this first trial, he explained his lies about the chain not by a desire to avoid a murder conviction, but to conceal his affair with Power from his sexual partner, Mandy Jewell, a divorcée with a young child, with whom he had lived for four years. Morris's relationship with Jewell was volatile—the euphemistic expression for violence commonly employed when a couple exercises little self-control—and he feared her reaction on discovering his infidelity. (Incidentally, when hostilities broke out between them, he would retire for a time to his Winter Palace, a flat rented from the council. He also seems to have rented a room elsewhere as another alternative. It would be intriguing to know what proportion of Britain's serious housing shortage results from the increasingly kaleidoscopic, and constantly fracturing, nature of relationships in our society.)

Several witnesses testified that, the night before the murders, they had seen Morris in a pub, wearing his gold chain. The timing was important, given Morris's claim that he had left the chain in Power's house two days before the murders. Morris said that it was a different gold chain that he wore to the pub (he owned two) that evening and that, with the clothes he was then wearing, it would not have been visible, anyway. Certainly, the witnesses had axes to grind

with him. One, a chronic alcoholic, was angry because Morris had refused to have sex with her, which, given his typical conduct, must have been doubly wounding; and another, a man, was annoyed because Morris had boasted in the pub that he would be able to “pull”—have sex with—the witness’s girlfriend without difficulty.

Morris appeared to have no motive to kill Mandy Power or the three others, but the prosecution got around this by alleging that he was drunk and psychotically high on amphetamines at the time and had reacted furiously to Power’s refusal to have sex. To bolster this claim, the police produced a small-time drug dealer, who said that he had sold Morris amphetamines shortly before the murders. The drug dealer was awaiting a trial of his own, however, and it is not impossible that the police offered him a deal in exchange for his testimony. Morris, though he admitted to taking amphetamines in the past, denied that he had bought or used them this time; and no other witnesses were available to testify to his supposedly psychotic state.

Another possible motive was that Power threatened to expose him to his girlfriend Jewell, supposedly a close friend of hers. Morris’s way of removing the threat, on this view, would be to kill Power, and then the witnesses to the initial murder. But the forensic evidence strongly suggested that Power’s mother was the first to be killed, while the other victims-to-be were out of the house, only to be slaughtered on their return. Why would Morris have done this?

Morris’s first trial ended with his conviction, but it was quashed when it emerged that his solicitor (in England and Wales, the lawyer preparing the case “instructs” the advocate, who pleads it in court, the two functions being separated) was acting not only for Morris but for the three Lewises, the only other suspects in the case. Thus, he had an irreconcilable conflict of interest that he did not declare. He paid for his dishonesty because the court of appeal not only declared the

first trial unfair but also made him pay the costs of it from his own pocket, which ruined him.

Yet a second trial found Morris guilty on precisely the same evidence as had the first, flawed though it was. It appeared that both trial judges offered the jury a false, or at least irrelevant, dichotomy: either Morris was the killer, or one or more of the Lewises was. But the sole question should have been whether Morris had been proved guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, and I do not see how anybody could have reached that emphatic conclusion—even if Morris was guilty.

The evidence against the Lewises was more compelling, though not probative. Alison and Stephen had been arrested for the murders a year after the crime, but eventually released for lack of evidence. Stephen proceeded to sue his employer, the South Wales Police, for wrongful detention, using the services of Morris's lawyer to do so at the same time the lawyer was representing Morris in the first trial.

Stuart Lewis was the first senior policeman on the scene after firefighters had brought the blaze at 9 Kelvin Road under control and it became clear that four people had been killed before it was set. For some inexplicable reason, and in complete dereliction of duty, he left the site, returned to the police station, and did nothing, except telephone someone on a public—and therefore unrecorded—phone. Even more astonishingly, at neither trial was he called as a witness to explain his behavior. Further, an eyewitness had seen him, or someone who looked like him, on the street near the crime scene, around the right time, and gave such a good description that the police artist composite resembled him, or his identical twin brother, strongly.

As for Alison Lewis, she testified that she had first arrived at Kelvin Road at 9 AM, about five hours after the fire started. Several witnesses, however, deposed that she had arrived at 6 AM, before the events were common knowledge. They

said also that they had comforted her for her loss, knowing, as did many in the village, that she was carrying on with Mandy Power. But the judges ignored this evidence in their charges to the jury, giving credence to her alibi: that she was in bed with her husband, Stephen, at the time of the murders. The alibi could hardly be weaker: two suspects backing each other up. They might have been telling the truth, of course, but if so, given the definite recollections of the other witnesses, it is hard to resist concluding that, whoever was guilty, at least one criminal conspiracy was taking place in this so-called close-knit community.

Circumstantial evidence also implicated Alison Lewis, including her jealousy and capacity for violence and her awareness that her lover was still seeing men. The blunt instruments that her martial-arts training enabled her expertly to wield can produce injury or death, and it is noteworthy that, in all the multiple blows that the killer inflicted on the victims, not a single one struck the walls, ceilings, floors, or furniture, as one might expect if the killer was an enraged but amateur bludgeoner. The only DNA evidence found was hers, in Mandy Power's vagina. According to Lewis, they had made love three times the day before, though if the victim had showered thoroughly, as she habitually did several times a day because of the psoriasis from which she suffered, the DNA would not have been present. That it was present suggests, more likely than not, that Lewis's contact with the victim was more recent than she admitted.

A bloody print on the carpet, made with a gloved hand, fit Lewis's hand better than Morris's. As someone trained in forensics, moreover, she would know better how to clean up a crime scene than would Morris, who, according to some, had neither the intelligence nor the knowledge to do a good job of it.

The South Wales Police were under intense public pressure to find the culprit, or culprits. Nothing should have been easier

in a small community, where everyone knew everyone else (and not infrequently in the biblical sense). No one thought that an outsider had committed the murders. But the police were clearly reluctant to pin the blame on their own—namely, one or both Lewis twins, or Alison, a former police officer. They found a perfect substitute suspect in Morris, a man many believed capable of extreme violence.

Apart from the brutality of the killings, which hardly needs emphasizing (shown a video of the crime scene, one juror fainted, and felt unable to go on; later in the trial, another juror suffered a heart attack and also could not continue), the whole episode was disturbingly unedifying. It shows an almost complete breakdown of official probity—a probity that many of the British once (perhaps naively) thought characteristic of their society.

The police were, at minimum, grossly incompetent, gaining a doubtful final conviction after seven years, only after ignoring the obvious while pursuing mare's nests. But they were possibly worse than incompetent. The South Wales Police have a reputation, not for making the punishment fit the crime, but for making the evidence fit the suspect—in this case, perhaps without even believing the suspect guilty. They might have sought to protect their own, or those whom they thought were their own; and it was obvious from the outset that, with such a clear conflict of interest, the South Wales Police should have handed over the investigation to another force.

Just as alarming was the lack of probity of Morris's first lawyer, who imposed a condition on the barrister representing the client in court that he was not to adduce evidence that could implicate or cast suspicion on any of the Lewises. Surely this was a condition that the barrister should not have accepted? As for the prosecution, it is incumbent upon it to produce a fair case—and not to obtain a conviction, as it appears here to have done, by hook or by crook.

But perhaps the most significant feature of the story, at least to me, is what appears to be the total moral collapse of at least part of Welsh society. The actions of the protagonists (of which I have given only a brief outline) were utterly without dignity, self-respect, or self-restraint. The presence of children made no difference to their behavior, and since everyone in that small community was au courant with almost everything, it is unlikely that the children were protected from knowledge of that behavior. This was therefore to be their model.

What accounts for this collapse? No doubt many factors are to blame, but the total evaporation of religious belief must have played some part. Welsh society was long dominated by evangelical Christianity. The landscape itself proves it: countless former chapels dot the towns and countryside, now almost entirely converted into luxury apartments, houses, or nightclubs. The main chapel in the little city of Brecon is now a pharmacy, caring for the bodies instead of the souls of the local people.

Welsh Christianity was often narrow-minded, bigoted, censorious, and hypocritical. There is an extensive and extremely interesting literature on this subject, which obsessed Welsh writers for much of the twentieth century. But for all its unattractive qualities—I would have chafed under its domination—it provided a moral framework (or perhaps straitjacket would be a better way to put it) in which life was to be lived, and that gave a distinctive—and, in some ways, charming—character to Welsh life. It was also extremely earnest about educational effort. When it collapsed, the coarsest hedonism replaced it, which the Clydach murder case illustrates graphically.

Stephen and Alison Lewis separated after Morris's conviction. After a legal battle, Alison received custody of the children. Morris has from the first maintained his innocence. It is an irony that he has now achieved a dignity that he never had

while he was at liberty. Because he refuses to admit his guilt, he remains subjected to the prison regime with the least comforts and privileges—and he will remain so until he acknowledges his guilt. He has firmly vowed not to do so, and if he carries out his intention, he will not be granted the parole after 32 years for which he might otherwise have been eligible. There is an integrity to this, unlike to the system itself, which dishonestly takes acknowledgment of guilt and expressions of remorse as a proxy for improvement and reduced propensity to re-offend.

But in what kind of society can personal dignity and self-respect be achieved only through wrongful imprisonment for decades?

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