



Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

MURDER AND MAYHEM

Poetic justice for Spader

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The trial of Steven Spader, charged with murdering Kimberly Cates of Mont Vernon, NH and mercilessly terrorizing her 11-year-old daughter Jaime, began with a stunning revelation. According to the prosecution, the 18-year-old defendant -- the first of several to stand trial on charges associated with the home invasion -- crafted from his jail cell a vile poem seemingly descriptive of the horrible events that unfolded a little more than a year ago.

In his opening argument before the jury, Assistant Attorney General Peter Hinckley read verses of the poem aloud, while its author sat silently at the defense table:

*Another toe is gone.
How did we go wrong?
We had the perfect plan.
Machetes in our hand.
We went out in the house.
Turned the power off.
Quiet as a mouse.
We went up in the house.
We went up in the room.
Mommy is it you?
Your mommy isn't here.
I slit her throat from ear to ear.
Now we're all in jail.
Now we all have no bail.
Friends turning over friends.
And this is how the story ends.*

It remains to be seen whether Spader is convicted or cleared of the charges against him. Of course, his artistic flair for the diabolical hardly advanced his cause, unless his purpose was to be viewed widely as a heartless rebel. Should the words reflect an accurate portrayal of events and should Spader be the killer as

alleged, then the poem, though shocking in content, is anything but surprising in terms of its intended effect.

Spader would hardly be the first murderer to chronicle the details of a vicious crime. Some have written letters, diaries or journals, while others have composed songs or drawn sketches to describe, if not to promote, their cruel accomplishments. Failing in other aspects of life, murderers sometimes derive tremendous satisfaction in feeling powerful and superior (at least over their defenseless victims).

For some assailants, the victims are actually secondary to the main purpose: establishing their credentials as a conqueror, someone to be feared. Those maimed or murdered in the process may be targeted and exploited only in order to enhance the killer's sense of importance. And when accomplices are involved -- as appears to be the case here -- the entire sequence of events involved in planning and executing the ambush may be more about cruel camaraderie and a perverted form of male bonding, than about wanting the victims to suffer or die.

According to reports, the "perfect plan," as described in the Spader's poem, fell apart when certain participants couldn't keep their secret. The need to be seen as powerful in the eyes of others would make silence entirely frustrating. How could they be feared and revered if no one else was aware of what they did?

If Spader wishes to see himself as a bold and rebellious non-conformist, willing to stand tall while his fate is determined by the jury, then the poem certainly has done the trick. However, having the jury gain some insight into the defendant's character and personality through his own words may eventually serve as poetic justice.