Book Review: I, Monster: Serial Killers in Their Own Chilling Words

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What is This?
With the publication of *I, Monster: Serial Killers in Their Own Chilling Words*, Tom Philbin has made a modest but novel contribution to the ever-burgeoning literature on true crime. This is familiar territory for Philbin. While he has also written or cowritten books on great inventions, horse racing, and harnessing our natural psychic powers, the bulk of Philbin’s works relate to true crime. His previously published titles in this genre include *The Killer Book of Infamous Murders*, *The Killer Book of Serial Killers*, and *Murder USA*.

The premise of *I, Monster* is ingenious: proffer a rudimentary context for a notorious serial killer’s crimes, and then use primary sources such as correspondence, diary entries, trial transcripts, and/or prison interviews to provide direct insights into the killer and his crimes. In this way, *I, Monster* promises its readers an insider’s “emic” account of serial murder—something quite different than the “etic” explanations of serial killing regularly provided by journalists and criminologists. This has rarely been attempted. While a sizeable emic literature of convict criminology exists, autobiographical accounts of serial murder are rare (Donald Gaskins’ *Final Truth: The Autobiography of a Serial Killer* and Ian Brady’s *At the Gates of Janus* are two exceptions).

It is strange that no book of this kind has yet been published. Writings from notorious killers are irresistible to the press and the public. The Zodiac Killer’s coded letters made national headlines during the 1970s. Jack the Ripper’s phrase, “From Hell,” from a taunting letter to the head of the Whitechapel Vigilance Committee, became the title of a graphic novel and a feature film. Given the popularity of true crime, a collection of writings and utterances from serial murderers makes obvious sense.

*I, Monster* provides primary source material on 20 serial killers: (a) “Son-of-Sam” David Berkowitz; (b) Ted Bundy; (c) Jeffrey Dahmer; (d) “Vancouver Child Killer” Westley Allan Dodd; (e) Albert Fish; (f) “Clown Killer” John Wayne Gacy; (g) Robert Hansen; (h) H. H. Holmes; (i) Jack the Ripper; (j) Edmund Kemper; (k) “Vampire of Düsseldorf” Peter Kürtken (l) “Confession Killer” Henry Lee Lucas; (m) Dennis Nilsen; (n) “BTK Killer” Dennis Rader; (o) “Toy-Box Killer” David Parker Ray; (p) “Green River Killer” Gary Ridgway; (q) “Genesee River Killer” Arthur Shawcross; (r) “Yorkshire Ripper” Peter Sutcliffe; (s) Michael Swango; and (t) Aileen Wuornos. Most, if not all, of these are well-known, either by name (e.g., Ted Bundy) or by their media appellation (e.g., the BTK Killer). While hewing to better-known cases, and focusing upon contemporary American males, the book does include historic and foreign cases (e.g., Jack the Ripper and Peter Kürtken) and one female (Aileen Wuornos).

While some discussion of the offenders’ backgrounds is provided, Philbin might have done a great deal more with these introductory sketches. Childhood circumstances are often summarized in a sentence or two, and the number of victims associated with these killers is not always provided. While Philbin describes the outcome in some of these cases (noting, for example, that Ted Bundy “rode the lightning” when Florida put him to death via electric chair), he does not describe outcomes in all cases. Similarly, photographs are provided for most, although not all, cases. The power of the killers’ own words would have been substantially strengthened if Philbin had provided richer descriptions for these offenders. Philbin does identify sources for each of his 20 profiles but these references are neither comprehensive nor scholarly. He sometimes cites as sources his own books; he also cites websites of questionable veracity such as Wikipedia, Serial Killer Central, and Brainyquote. Given the substantial literature afforded to these 20 high-profile serial killers, it would...
have been possible to assemble thorough bibliographies from which detailed biographical sketches could be distilled. Such a project would be invaluable to scholars interested in serial homicide, and certainly would have enhanced the impact of Philbin’s primary source materials.

For several reasons, Philbin’s *I, Monster* may be more appropriate for a popular true crime audience than for professional use. For example, the book contains no index. While not essential, an index would have made the book far more useful as a scholarly reference. More problematic are the book’s allusions to concepts relevant to serial murder, such as Joel Norris’ addiction model or the “homicidal triad,” without providing a background for these concepts. A serious work on serial murderers should initially define its subject and equip its readers with sufficient information to follow what is being written. Instead, in the introductory chapters, Philbin (and Robert Beattie, who wrote the foreword) take great pains to emphasize the graphic, disturbing nature of the book’s contents (“No normal person could read this book without taking several breaks to get away from these people”). Philbin distances himself from his subjects, calling them “monsters,” and describes his own loss of objectivity (“[M]ore than once my sense of liberalness, my constant quest to understand why, went away and all I wanted to do was use my bare hands to kill the killers.”). Philbin’s unconcealed antipathy for his subjects, coupled with his emphasis on the graphic nature of the book’s contents, and his conversational, informal style of writing, make it difficult to view *I, Monster* as a serious contribution to the scientific study of serial homicide.

The concept of *I, Monster* is brilliant, and the book is likely to achieve commercial success with true-crime aficionados, but from an academic standpoint, its execution is flawed. Scholars will need to do their own background research and dig through the book’s glib moralizing in order to realize its promise.
In this chilling book, you’ll read exactly what they were thinking in their own words as they committed horrible crimes. Using court transcripts and police interviews, veteran true-crime and crime-fiction writer Tom Philbin has compiled the testimony of twenty infamous serial killers—nineteen men and one woman. ~~~ Welcome to my Blogs ~~~ Do not forget to check it every day! If You should find any files not found, please PM me. ~ Download Download: Best Software for All ~ Tomorrowland2: Video Training ~ Pluralsight Tutorials: All Pluralsight Videos ~ EbookSA: Best Ebooks ~ Graphic World: Bes Serial killer Joseph Metheny who owned a burger stand claimed to have sold burgers with his victims’ flesh. Chairies Joobalee. just...oh wow! Fascinating facts: 42 super creepy facts will give you chills. Fun Facts Scary Weird Facts Fascinating Facts True Facts Funny Facts Boy Facts Random Facts Ted Bundy Creepy Stories.Â Fred West's daughter slams Wire star Dominic West for complaining of nightmares while playing serial killer in ITV drama. Rosemary West Dominic West Southern Plantations Horror House Serial Killers Psychopath Prison True Crime Children. Evil: Rosemary and Fred West tortured, raped and murdered at least 12 young women at the Gloucester home.