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|  | Articles from *Le Minotaure*: **The Problem of Style and the Psychiatric Conception of Paranoiac**  **Forms of Experience** and Motives of Paranoiac Crime: The Crime of the Papin Sisters1  [**Motives of Paranoiac Crime: The Crime of the Papin Sisters**](http://www.lacan.com/papin.htm), transl. by Jon Anderson in *Critical Texts*, vol.5, 3, 1988. : published [www.lacan.com](http://www.lacan.com) |

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| Motives of Paranoiac Crime: The Crime of the Papin Sisters1  To doctor Georges Dumas, in respectful friendship  We recall the horrible circumstances of the massacre at Le Mans, and the emotion provoked in the public consciousness by the mysterious motives of the two murderesses, the sisters Christine and Léa Papin. The press, through the most informed minds of journalism,2 responded to this anxiety and interest with an amply factual investigation. So we need only have the facts of the crime summed up. |  |
| The two sisters, twenty-eight and twenty-one years old,3 were for several years the servants of honorable bourgeois in the little provincial town, a solicitor, his wife and daughter. Model servants, it was said, enviable houseworkers; mystery-servants too, for if one observes that the masters seem strangely to have lacked human sympathy, we can only reply that the haughty indifference of the domestics was but a response to this attitude; "one doesn't speak to the other." Yet this silence could not be empty, even if it was obscure in the eyes of the actors.  One evening, February 2, this obscurity materialized through a banal power failure. A blunder on the sisters' part caused it, and the absent mistresses had already displayed hot tempers on lesser occasions. What did the mother and daughter display when they returned and discovered the little disaster? Christine's statements varied on this point. However it may be, the drama unfolded very quickly, and it is difficult to avouch a version of the attack other than the one given by the sisters, that it was sudden, simultaneous, carried at once to a paroxysm of rage: each seized an adversary, tore her eyes from their sockets (a deed unheard of, it was said, in the annals of crime), and brained her. Next, with the aid of what could be found within reach, hammer, fin pitcher, kitchen knife, they assailed the bodies of their victims, bashing their faces, baring their genitals, and deeply slashing the thighs and buttocks of one in order to soil with blood the members of the other. Then they washed the instruments of these atrocious rites, cleansed themselves, and retired to the same bed. "That's a clean job of it!" ["En voila du propre"4]. Such is the phrase they exchanged, which seemed to restore to them a sober tone, empty of all emotion, after the bloody orgy.  They gave the court no comprehensible motive for their act, no hatred, no grievance against their victims; their sole concern was to share entirely the responsibility for the crime. They appeared to three medical experts to have no sign of delirium, nor of insanity, nor any real psychic or physical disorder, a fact which perforce had to be recorded.  As to the antecedents of the crime, it seems, the data is too imprecise to be taken into consideration; then there is a muddled attempt by the sisters to obtain through the mayor the freedom of the youngest, a general secretary who found them "cracked," and a central commissioner who testified that he considered them "persecuted." There is also the singular attachment that united them, their immunity to all other interests, the days off that they passed together and in their room. But have we been disquieted toe) much by these eccentricities? Yet we omit an alcoholic and brutal father, who, they say, raped one of his daughters, and the premature abandonment of their education.  After only five months of prison, Christine, isolated from her sister, exhibited a very violent fit of agitation, with terrifying hallucinations. In the course of another fit, she tried to tear out her eyes, in vain but not without injuring them. This lime the furious fit necessitated the use of a straitjacket; she indulged in erotic exhibitions, and then symptoms of melancholy appeared: depression, refusal to eat, selfaccusation, expiatory acts of a repugnant character, afterwards, she had several recurrences of delirious discourse. Christine's declaration that she simulated such states can in no way be taken as the real key to her nature: this playfulness was frequently evinced by the subject, without her behavior being less typically morbid.  On September 30 the sisters were condemned by the jury. Christine, hearing that she would have her head cut off in the square at Le Mans, received the news on her knees.  << >>  The aggressive drive, which resolves itself in murder, thus appears to be the malady that serves as the foundation of psychosis. We can call the drive unconscious, signifying that the intentional content which translates it into the conscious mind cannot manifest itself without a compromise with the social demands integrated by the subject, that is to say, without a camouflage of motives, which is quite precisely delirium.  << >>  The murderous drive that we consider the foundation of paranoia indeed would only be a scarcely satisfying abstraction, if it was not controlled by a series of correlative abnormalities of socialized instincts, and if the actual state of our knowledge about the evolution of the personality did not allow us to consider these instinctual [pulsionnelles]14 abnormalities as contemporaneous in their genesis. Homosexuality, sado-masochistic perversion and such are the instinctive disorders the existence and (as we have tried to show in our work) the genetic signification of which psychoanalysts alone, in this case, have been able to reveal- We should acknowledge that the sisters appear to bring to these correlations what one could call a crude confirmation: sadism is evident in the maneuvers executed upon the victims., and what significance cannot be found15 in the exclusive affection of the two sisters, the mystery of their life, the eccentricities of their cohabitation, and their fearful reconciliation in the same bed after the crime?  << >>  Christine's statement---21 really think that in another fife 1 must have been my sister's husband'--is reproduced in our patients by many fantastic themes which one has only to heed in order to take in. What a long torturous road she had to travel before the desperate experience of the crime tore her from her other self, and she could, after her first crisis of hallucinatory delirium, when she thought she saw her sister dead, dead doubtless from that blow, cry before the court who confronted them the words of unbridled [dessilée] 19 passion: "Yes, say yes."  That fateful evening, under anxiety of an imminent punishment, the sisters mingled the mirage of their illness with the image of their mistresses. They detested the distress of the couple whom they carried away in an atrocious quadrille. They tore out their eyes as Bacchantes castrate their victims. The sacrilegious curiosity which from the beginning of time has anguished man moved them in their desire for the victims and in their attempt to track down in the dead women's gaping wounds what Christine in her innocence later described to the court as "the mystery of life."    << >>   1. This article first appeared in Le Minotaure 3-4 (Dec. 1933) and was reprinted in De La Psychose Paranoiaque dans ses Rapports avec la Personnalité suivi de Premiers Acrits sur la Paranoia. Editions de Seuil, 1975.  |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | | | Motives of Paranoiac Crime: The Crime of the Papin Sisters1  To doctor Georges Dumas, in respectful friendship  We recall the horrible circumstances of the massacre at Le Mans, and the  emotion provoked in the public consciousness by the mysterious motives  of the two murderesses, the sisters Christine and Léa Papin. The press,  through the most informed minds of journalism,2 responded to this anxiety  and interest with an amply factual investigation. So we need only have  the facts of the crime summed up. |  | | The two sisters, twenty-eight and twenty-one years old,3 were for several  years the servants of honorable bourgeois in the little provincial town,  a solicitor, his wife and daughter. 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