

“It’s Your Fault I Killed.”

by Theodore Dalrymple

No one, not even the most murderous psychopath, is so lacking in compassion that he does not pity himself. Indeed, exaggerated self-pity may be one of the salient characteristics of those who commit the most awful acts, for it is what justifies almost anything in a mind devoid of balance and proportion.

Self-pity is what unites the stories of two notorious recent English killers, Raoul Moat and Mohammed Emwazi (better known as Jihadi John), about whom books have recently appeared: Andrew Hankinson’s [Jihadi John: The Making of a Terrorist](#).

Early in the morning of July 10, 2010, Raoul Moat approached a stationary police car on the outskirts of Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the north of England and shot twice through the window at David Rathband, the officer sitting in it. The policeman was permanently blinded and suffered other serious injuries to his face; 20 months later, he hanged himself.

The day before he shot Rathband, Moat, 37, had lurked outside the home of a neighbor of his 23-year-old estranged girlfriend (with whom he had a young daughter), Samantha Stobbart, in another suburb of Newcastle. She was with her new boyfriend, Christopher Brown. Moat sat under a window for an hour and a half, during which he allegedly heard them mocking him. When the two came out of the house in the early morning hours, Moat shot Brown with a sawed-off shotgun; as his victim tried to get away, Moat then shot him in the head, killing him. Stobbart rushed back into the neighbor’s house, but Moat shot her through the window, injuring her seriously (she required emergency surgery to her liver).

Two days before this attack, Moat had left prison, where he had spent eight weeks for an assault on a child. It was while

Moat was behind bars that Stobbart told him by telephone that their six-year relationship was over and that she was now involved with Brown. Moat was a large, intimidating man, a bodybuilder on steroids, with the kind of face (which seems now to be common in England, as if Lombroso's theories were correct) that would make any sensible person want to avoid him. Trying to frighten Moat, Stobbart told him that her new boyfriend was a karate teacher, which was true, and a policeman, which was false. This fueled Moat's anger and thirst for "revenge."

After shooting Rathband, Moat, assisted by two acolytes who had procured him his gun, went to ground for six days, setting off one of the largest manhunts in British history, including search by a heat-seeking military aircraft. Eventually, armed police cornered him and then, during negotiations for him to give himself up, he turned his gun on himself.

Before his short imprisonment in 2010, Moat had never been incarcerated, and he maintained his innocence of the crime with which he was charged. His main argument in his own defense: if he had assaulted a child, the child would have been seriously injured, which this child wasn't. But just because Moat hadn't been in prison before did not mean that he was a fine, upstanding citizen who had never deserved to go to prison. If there was justice in the world, he would not long have been at liberty.

Moat was working as a bouncer at Liquid, a Newcastle nightclub, when he first met Stobbart. She was 16 at the time and impressed by his steroidal physique. In a certain social milieu, bouncers are the *crème de la crème*, and Moat used his position to attract women. He decided that Stobbart was the love of his life, which is no doubt why he went one day to her grandmother's home, where she was staying to escape his violence, and threatened her with a gun after she posted on Facebook that she was going out for the evening. He told Stobbart's grandmother that if she called the police, he would

kill them when they arrived.

In Andrew Hankinson's account, this kind of behavior was by no means abnormal for Moat; once, he hit Stobbart and split her scalp open; he dragged her by her hair, threw her against the wall and onto the ground, and jumped on her stomach. His violence was habitual, and Stobbart's relatives also experienced it. He used the most dangerous words in the English language, at least in the context of a "love" affair: "If I can't have her, no one else will." But for some reason—fear of retribution or a mysterious kind of affection—she stayed with him until his imprisonment gave her the courage or the clear-sightedness to break from him. She told him that she had to leave, or social services would remove her daughter from her care.

Stobbart was not Moat's first victim. He already had two children by a woman named Marissa Reid. According to Reid, on different occasions, he had raped her while she was tied to her bed, beat her back with a baseball bat, and choked her to the point of unconsciousness. After Moat's death, she said: "That man was a living, breathing monster. Thank God, he's dead. He made my and my children's lives a misery." Moat's own grandmother, who had brought him up, also thought his death a good thing.

Police had arrested Moat at least 12 times—once for public possession of a serrated knuckle-duster and a five-foot samurai sword and another time for threatening council workers. His daughter had fallen out of a window, and Moat blamed the council because it owned the property and had put no locks on the windows. Ten years before killing Christopher Brown, he was arrested for conspiracy to murder but was released for lack of evidence. The fact that he was arrested so many times but never convicted gave rise to rumors that he was a police informant—in effect, allowed to commit his depredations in return for information about other criminals; though anyone familiar with the British criminal-justice

system knows that it is not necessary to invoke such an arrangement to explain his escape from justice.

Moat was a voluble and voluminous explainer of his motives. He saw himself as a victim rather than as a perpetrator. He recorded lengthy tapes about himself; he wrote a 49-page letter to the police; and he telephoned the police to explain himself and threaten them.

He believed—or, at any rate, claimed to believe—that he was the victim of his own psychology. One of his tapes contains the following:

I would like to have a psychiatrist, psychologist, have a word with me regularly, on a regular basis, to see if there's somewhere underlying like where I have problem that I haven't seen. You know, it's easy for me to say I don't do anything wrong but I would like a professional, you know, not a DIY thing you know? A professional thing for someone to come along and say: "Look there's area for improvement here, this is a problem." Why don't we just have a psychiatrist sit me down and say "Right OK, I want to see you regularly, then we can move towards where your areas of fault are, we can enhance on these areas you know, and work with us."

If I'm at fault myself in any way, I'm open to all kinds of suggestions, but I refuse to spend the rest of my time fighting with social services.

This would be hilarious—a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* of popular faith in so-called depth psychology and its powers to transform lives and character—had not the speaker gone on to murder. In fact, Moat had been offered appointments with psychologists, which, to do him justice, he was sensible enough not to keep. But even more than his own psychology, Moat blamed the police for his behavior. This is what he said in his 49-page letter to them, written just after he shot David Rathband:

Last night I called 999 [the emergency number in Britain] and declared war on Northumbria Police before shooting an officer on the West End A69 roundabout in his [car]. Sitting there waiting to bully someone. Probably a single mum who couldn't afford her car tax. Rang again and told them they're gonna pay for what they've done to me and Sam. I went straight but they couldn't let it go.

No doubt the British police can be both bullying and ineffectual, but this would scarcely justify shooting one of them. But what is most astonishing is that Moat contrived to believe that it was the police and not his own conduct that brought his relationship with Stobbart to an end. A few minutes before his attack on Rathband, he telephoned the police. He said, inter alia:

I've had nothing but grief [from the police], and I've had a good relationship with her for six years, which is why we've stayed together. . . . I have been shafted, and you police have took too much off me over the years. You won't leave us alone. . . . You hassled me for so many years. . . . You've made me unwell. You made me do this because you just won't leave me out, you know, you just won't leave me alone.

Moat told the police that he regretted injuring Stobbart so seriously, claiming that he wanted to wound her only slightly so that she could claim compensation from the government-run Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority after his death. Not that he thought that Stobbart was entirely innocent in the matter:

She wouldn't let me go up to her house. . . . And she was threatening me with one of your officers. Now I've had enough. I've had enough of you. That jail made me unwell. I came out a different kid. . . . I've lost everything through you, right. You just won't leave me alone, right. So at the end of the day, you killed me.

As Moat saw it, he was not the author of his own actions: they (the psychologists with whom he never kept an appointment, Stobbart, the prison officials, the police) made him do it. And, oddly enough, he found more than a few people willing to sympathize with him, because many people now think about themselves and their actions in this way. A young single mother, who said that she knew what it was like to have a “partner” in jail (hers was a thief), set up a Facebook page called “RIP Raoul Moat You Legend!” She told one newspaper:

The lad who got shot, that was horrible but if she hadn't have said he was a police officer it would not have happened. Yes she was scared of [Moat] but she should not have written him a letter. Because of her that lad has lost his life really.

In other words, since cause cannot be distinguished from agency, Stobbart was the real killer of Christopher Brown. The single mother also said:

I thought him hiding from the police was legendary. He did make the coppers look stupid and that is why a lot of people respected him. And that's why people are classing him as a legend.

In her scale of values, making the police look stupid more than outweighed a murder, a permanent blinding, and a serious abdominal injury. This, as it turned out, was the scale of values of most of the 36,000 adherents to the page before it was closed down, many of them female, and some of whom thought Stobbart ought to be chased out of Newcastle or that she had blood on her hands. One person wrote:

She sleeps around, does her poor boyfriends head in and sits and laughs at him with her new love, Raoul was already over the edge with her cheating and then the poor guy has to listen to her and her love mock him, she should be charged

and taken to court.

Another group of people with warped values—not dissimilar from Raoul Moat's—are the young Islamists of Western Europe. Like Moat, they resent strongly but incoherently; they blame their conduct on others; they use their frustrations to justify their most outrageous and vicious acts. They pity themselves to the exclusion of all others; they use their own minds as echo chambers for the wrongs, real or imagined, that they have suffered. Like Moat, they have a grossly inflated sense of their own importance. Unlike him, however (and alas), they have an ideology at hand to make them dangerous on a much bigger scale than Moat could ever have envisaged.

Jihadi John's real name was Mohammed Emwazi. He was for a time globally infamous as the Islamic State's Internet decapitator, until killed by a drone in Raqqa, Syria. It was he who cut off the head of the American journalist James Foley, and later that of four other Western hostages.

Emwazi was born in Kuwait in 1988. His parents were Bedoon, a subgroup denied full Kuwaiti citizenship and suspected of sympathizing with Iraq. They were, however, disliked also by the Iraqis who invaded Kuwait in 1990. After the American-led coalition expelled the Iraqis from Kuwait, the Bedoon were still suspect and were denied employment. Emwazi's parents managed to get to England in 1993.

All things considered, the young Emwazi at first integrated well. He attended a school where he drew no attention to himself but suffered occasional, not very severe, bullying and managed to gain admission to university to study business administration and information technology. He was not particularly religious, and his appearance when he entered university was more gangsta rapper than Muslim fanatic. He followed the monotonously usual path for future fanatics of a period of dissolute drinking in nightclubs, though apparently

he had difficulties with girls.

Unfortunately, the university he attended—Westminster—had a well-deserved reputation as a hotbed of Islamic extremism. The year that Emwazi entered the university, for example, the president of its Islamic Society was arrested at an airport for being in possession of technical details for the construction of missiles and explosives, as well as literature encouraging “martyrdom.”

Emwazi, who could hardly have failed to notice the 2005 terrorist attacks in London, began to associate with, and apparently to admire and wish to emulate, Bilal al-Berjawi, a young man of Lebanese descent of undoubted terrorist propensities and activities. Together with others, al-Berjawi used mugging in Belgravia (a wealthy district of London) as a means of raising money for jihad; and on one occasion, Emwazi was accused, but acquitted, of receiving stolen goods. It beggars belief that Emwazi could have chosen such an associate without sharing his outlook, opinions, and desires.

Emwazi managed to graduate, and it was then that he had his first difficulties with the security services. After his graduation, he went, allegedly on safari, to Tanzania in the company of two young men, neither of whom he had previously known well—one a Muslim Ethiopian later convicted of trying to overthrow the Ethiopian state and establish an Islamic government, and the other a German convert of radical views and terrorist frequentations. Emwazi packed a camouflage outfit in his luggage. East Africa was at that time (2009) a training ground and jumping-off point for Islamic terrorism in Somalia.

The three were refused admittance to Tanzania. Emwazi claimed not only to be innocent of all jihadist intentions but also to have been roughed up in Dar es Salaam. Back in Britain, he said that he was under constant and intrusive surveillance by the security services. He went to Kuwait, where he worked in

computer sales, but returned to England, supposedly for dental treatment. When he tried to go back to Kuwait, he was denied both exit from Britain and entry into Kuwait, an experience that aroused in him both resentment and self-pity: "I had a job waiting for me and marriage to get started," he told Asim Qureshi of CAGE, an organization in Britain opposed to the Western war on terrorism. "But now I feel like a prisoner, only not in a cage, in London. A person imprisoned and controlled by security service men, stopping me from living my new life in my birthplace & my country, Kuwait."

He changed his name and tried again to go to Kuwait, and was again refused exit and entry. He then managed to evade the security services, and the next that is known of him is that he had become Jihadi John, of unlamented memory.

The curious thing about the book by Robert Verkaik, the only journalist who ever met Jihadi John and lived to tell the tale, is that the author accepts almost completely—or, at least, gives great credence to—the Raoul-Moat-Facebook-page theory of Emwazi's radicalization and transformation into a man who appeared to relish cutting people's heads off in the name of a cause. On this theory, it was the security services that "made" Emwazi do it, just as Samantha Stobbart and the police "made" Moat kill Christopher Brown, shoot Stobbart, and attack a policeman in his car.

Let us suppose for a moment that Emwazi was completely innocent, that the security services got the wrong person (as must sometimes happen in a political situation like the present one), and in reality persecuted him. Would that really be enough to make him believe that he must go to Syria—not an easy country to reach—and there behave in the extremely sadistic way that he did? That there was no other alternative? That most people in his situation would have done precisely the same? That first, one is accused wrongly—and then, one goes cutting off people's heads who had nothing to do with the false accusations? That no ideas, no ideology, no influences

affected the way that one reacted?

In reality, it is unlikely that Emwazi did nothing to bring himself to the security services' attention, as the book makes clear. Verkaik, though, has a tendency to see Emwazi as a victim, in the same way that Moat saw himself as a victim and as his sympathizers saw him as a victim. Here is Verkaik: "The west London network [of jihadis] which had sucked Mohammed into its orbit was more than simply a group of like-minded radicals who dreamt of one day joining a caliphate in a foreign country."

Sucked into its orbit? Like a leaf into a whirlwind, perhaps? There was no elective affinity? Almost certainly, Emwazi was as seething with resentment as was Moat. Few people go through life without any cause for resentment, though many fail to identify those causes with accuracy, and almost as many nurse the resentment as birds incubate eggs. They are encouraged, though not forced, to do so by the ideas that others around them express. As his biography makes clear, Emwazi had little personal reason to resent the West until he joined the jihadi network—quite the reverse—but he nevertheless resented it in a most exaggerated way. There is little doubt that we live in times propitious for finding the causes of our dissatisfactions external to ourselves, precisely at a time when most of us have more choices than ever before in human history.

First published in