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Serial Killers: Psychiatry, Criminology and Responsibility

Francesca Biagi-Chai

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Francesca Biagi-Chai’s book - a translation from the French of Le Cas Landru - tackles the issue of criminal responsibility in the case of serial killers, and other 'mad' people who are nonetheless deemed to be answerable before the law. The author, a Lacanian psychoanalyst and senior psychiatrist in France, with extensive experience working in institutional settings, analyses the logic informing the crimes of famous serial killers. Addressing the Landru case (which was the inspiration for Chaplin's Monsieur Verdoux), as well as those of Pierre Rivière and Donato Bilancia, Biagi-Chai casts light on the confusion that pervades forensic psychiatry and criminal law as to the distinction between mental illness and ‘madness’. She then elaborates the consequences of her argument in a sustained critique of the insanity defence. The book includes a Foreword by the renowned psychoanalyst, Jacques-Alain Miller, and an introduction by the translators on the question of insanity before the law in the US and in the UK, which considers the pertinence of Biagi-Chai’s argument for forensic psychiatry, for criminal law, and for the increasing contemporary focus on the assessment of dangerousness and risk-management strategies in crime control practices.

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