Table of Contents

Synopsis & Songs .................................................. 2
Lizzie Borden Biography ........................................ 4
Nine Things You May Not Know About Lizzie Borden ... 5
Inspiration – From the Writers ................................ 6
Lizzie Borden Took An Ax:
History, Feminism and American Culture .................. 7
Neuroses and the Structure of the Mind ....................... 9
Discussion Questions ............................................. 10
Local Connections ................................................. 10
Synopsis (Adapted from the LIZZIE script © Cheslik-DeMeyer, Hewitt and Maner)

In 1892 on a sweltering August day in a small New England town, “somebody” brutally murders Mr. Borden and his second wife with an axe. Mostly substantial evidence suggests that Lizzie Borden, the younger daughter of the Borden's, is the murderer. However, without any witnesses to the hideous crime, she was acquitted, and the murders remain unsolved to this day. Our show enters the Borden household to explore the entire notorious legend through the eyes of Lizzie Borden, her older sister Emma Borden, Lizzie’s close friend Alice, and the housemaid Bridget. Why would Lizzie do it? Who else knew what happened? How could she get away with the violent murder of her parents in broad daylight? Through original songs performed by four fierce rockers accompanied by a live band on stage, this driving musical presents a tale of repression and brutal parricide – and reveals why Lizzie Borden may have taken up that axe.

The Songs (Adapted from the Lizzie Borden script © Cheslik-DeMeyer, Hewitt and Maner)

Act I

Prologue 40 Whacks
Through the famous nursery rhyme and in their own words, we are introduced to the women of our story.

The House of Borden
Bridget and the women tell us of the dark history of the Borden home, the broken relationships of its inhabitants, and the dark secrets that haunt them.

This is Not Love
In her father’s room, Lizzie separates her voice from the acts committed upon her body.

Maybe Someday
Lizzie runs from her father, out of the house and into the arms of Alice Russell. She tells Alice of her fears and her desire to get away. Alice yearns to tell Lizzie her true feelings for her, but Lizzie runs off.

If You Knew
Alice reveals her true feelings for her best friend Lizzie.

The Soul of the White Bird
Lizzie escapes to the barn loft, her private sanctuary where she cares for her beloved wild pigeons. Lizzie is tortured by memories, fears, and desires, and she inches out perilously on a high beam, dislocated, lost. She appears ready to jump or fall when Alice discovers her and pulls her from danger. Lizzie collapses exhausted into Alice’s lap as the night passes.
Sweet Little Sister

Emma awakens the house with her frantic anger. She has discovered that their father, at the urging of their stepmother, has changed his will. Emma places the blame for all their troubles squarely on Mrs. Borden. Lizzie and Emma come to see in each other all the dark thoughts each has had, and they make a secret pact.

Shattercane and Velvet Grass

Emma departs, leaving behind The Book of Household Poisons. Bridget prepares tea for Mrs. Borden as Lizzie reads and fantasizes about poisoning their evil stepmother.

Will You Stay?

Lizzie hurries from the house to buy prussic acid, but she is again stopped by Alice. Lizzie tells Alice strange stories. Alice opens her heart to Lizzie, hoping that she feels the same. They kiss.

Why are All These Heads Off?

Lizzie and Alice head toward the barn loft, but they are stopped by Bridget. Bridget tells how Mr. Borden has beheaded Lizzie’s beloved birds. Bridget opens the bloody bundle. Lizzie’s rage explodes. Alice tries in vain to take Lizzie away with her. Bridget offers an alternate path.

Mercury Rising

In the quiet before the storm, Lizzie weeps as she prepares her beloved birds for burial. Bridget watches over as she has a vision of what is to come.

Somebody Will Do Something

The next morning, Lizzie and Bridget make small talk, both knowing what is about to happen. Lizzie murders her stepmother, and then her father.

Act II

The Fall of the House of Borden

Bridget brings us back from intermission and updates us on the situation with the murders, the police, the townsfolk and, of course, Lizzie. Alice questions Lizzie about the events.

What the Fuck Now, Lizzie?

Late that evening, Emma returns. She attacks Lizzie for killing Mr. Borden when she had only expected the stepmother to be killed. In the end, they both see the light on the horizon, and head off to sleep.

Burn the Old Thing Up

The next morning, Emma discovers, through Bridget, that Lizzie has not destroyed the bloodiest dress, the one piece of evidence against her. Together Emma and Lizzie burn the dress and the will. They believe their salvation is at hand.

Questions, Questions

Alice walks in on Emma and Lizzie. With the dress she has been questioned by the police. They’ve asked about the dress. The four women tell of the questions the police have asked them. Doubt builds in Alice until she no longer believes Lizzie.

Will You Lie?

Alice runs out of the house, Lizzie following. Lizzie tries to convince Alice that the end has justified the means, and that their love can endure. She begs her to lie for her, but in the end Alice cannot. She tells the police that she saw Lizzie burn the dress. The police immediately arrest Lizzie.

Watch for the Morning

Standing on the steps of their home with the people of Fall River around them, Lizzie and Emma offer a reward to anyone who can find the real killer. Lizzie is taken to jail.

13 Days in Taunton

The trial of Lizzie Borden takes place over 13 days in Taunton, Mass. In the end she is found “Not Guilty.”

Where are You, Lizzie?

Lizzie seems to have disappeared, but she rises again, like a rock goddess, like Medea in the golden chariot, in her final apotheosis.
Lizzie Borden, the wildly infamous New England woman accused in 1893 of brutally and viciously murdering her father and stepmother with an ax – found NOT GUILTY!

Lizzie Borden was the infamous New England woman accused of chopping up and killing her father and stepmother with an ax. She was the defendant in one of the most famous trials in U.S. history.

Lizzie Borden was born on July 19, 1860 in Fall River, Massachusetts and was the youngest daughter of the wealthy Andrew and Sarah Borden. After her mother died, her father remarried Abby Gray. Lizzie and her older sister allegedly hated their stepmother and made fun of her, because of their stepmother’s lower social standing and the attention their father was giving to her.

On August 4, 1892, Lizzie Borden’s father and stepmother were found brutality murdered--hacked to death with an ax. Lizzie and the maid admitted to being home at the time of the murders, but Lizzie said she was in the barn at that time (between 11:00 am to 11:15 am). Lizzie, 32 years old, became the prime suspect because she had the apparent motive and opportunity to kill them. Lizzie Borden was tried for the murders beginning on June 6, 1893. The prosecution claimed that Lizzie hated her stepmother and even tried to poison her the day before the murders. On the day of the murders, Lizzie allegedly first killed her stepmother in the bedroom and then cleaned the evidence. When Lizzie’s father came home to take a nap, she allegedly hacked him to death while he was sleeping on the couch. The supposed murder weapon, an ax, was found cleaned in the basement.

Because Lizzie had been involved in charitable organizations, the community backed her up and supported her. But many people thought that she was guilty and the case gathered huge national publicity. The jury found the case was built on mostly circumstantial evidence and the lack of concrete, direct evidence caused the jury to ultimately find Lizzie Borden NOT GUILTY.

This national sensational case had most people thinking that if Lizzie Borden had been a man, she would have been found guilty, but a woman in the year 1893 could never have committed such vicious and brutal killings.

Lizzie Borden died on June 1, 1927.

Lizzie Borden’s infamous popularity continues today, being the subject of a ballet, books and play, along with the rhyme:

“Lizzie Borden took an ax and gave her mother forty whacks; When she saw what she had done She gave her father forty-one.”
Nine Things You May Not Know About Lizzie Borden


1. Many people might have wanted to see Andrew Borden dead.

The gruesome murders shocked the community, but many in Fall River were perhaps not entirely surprised that Andrew Borden had met an untimely end. With a net worth of almost $10 million in today’s money, Borden was one of the wealthiest—and most unpopular—men in town. Frugal to a fault, he was a self-made man who had become the head of one of the town’s largest banks and a substantial property owner. The dour businessman had also made many enemies on his rise to the top, and rumors swirled that Andrew and Abby had perhaps been killed as revenge for Andrew’s shady business dealings.

2. The case revealed some skeletons in the Borden family closet.

The initial investigation focused outside of the immediate family and included local businessmen, neighbors and even the family maid, an Irish immigrant named Bridget Sullivan. Police soon realized that Andrew’s daughter, Lizzie, had as much to gain as anyone by the death of her father. Andrew’s tightfistedness extended to his own family—despite his wealth, the Borden home lacked even the most basic of conveniences, including indoor plumbing. Andrew’s remarriage to Abby Gray after the death of his first wife had soured his relationship with Lizzie and her older sister, Emma. The women, already in their 30s and considered spinsters by society, grew increasingly frustrated and resentful, with Lizzie in particular often exhibiting signs of mental instability. Lizzie’s actions in the days after the murders also raised eyebrows: She gave contradictory answers to questions and burned a dress that she claimed had been stained while doing housework, which police considered the destruction of evidence. On August 11, Lizzie was arrested for the murders.

3. The lack of forensic evidence played a key role in the case.

Despite their belief in Lizzie’s guilt, investigators faced an uphill battle in convicting her. There was no physical evidence linking her to the murders. A hatchet had been discovered in the basement of the Borden home, but its blade was clean and the handle had been broken off—by Lizzie, according to police. The police’s reluctance to use any sort of forensic testing also hampered the investigation. Fingerprint testing was then in its infancy and was never conducted as part of their inquiry. They did, however, establish that Lizzie had unsuccessfully attempted to purchase prussic acid, a highly poisonous liquid, in the days before the murders. Though investigators regarded this as evidence of an earlier failed attempt to kill her parents, they were unable to present it at trial.

4. Andrew and Abby Borden made an appearance at the trial—sort of.

The gruesome nature of the crimes, combined with the wealth of the Borden family, proved irresistible to newspaper publishers. Miles of ink were spilled as papers around the world printed hundreds of stories describing the deaths in lurid detail, speculating on possible motives and even alternative perpetrators. By the time the trial began in June 1893, Lizzie Borden had become a media sensation, and the proceedings themselves took on a circus-like air. The prosecution, faced with a lack of forensic evidence tying Lizzie to the murders, surmised that she had perhaps committed the crime while naked to avoid leaving behind physical clues. The presence of the hatchet-riddled skulls of Andrew and Abby Borden shocked those in the courtroom, leading to a dramatic—and perhaps well-timed—swoon by Lizzie. In what turned out to be a key moment, Lizzie’s defense team successfully pushed to have her contradictory testimony at the original inquest ruled inadmissible. Lizzie herself never took the stand, and the jury of 12 men deliberated for just 90 minutes before returning a verdict of not guilty.

5. The famous rope jumping rhyme got it wrong.

Children who learn the chant may believe that it took 40 blows to kill Abby Borden, and another 41 to kill Andrew. Well, that’s not quite true. The coroner did confirm that Abby was killed first, but by 19 blows—not the 40 popularized in the rhyme. Andrew Borden received even fewer wounds, but the 10 or 11 blows that finished him off were quite gruesome, focused mainly on the head and completely destroying much of his face. So it turns out the nursery rhyme overstates by half the total “whacks” it took to complete the job. In another inaccuracy, no “ax” was ever found. It seems more likely that the hatchet presented by the prosecution at trial was the true murder weapon, but “hatchet” and “whacks” simply don’t rhyme.
6. Lizzie Borden struggled in her later life.

Despite her newfound notoriety—and her neighbors’ whispers about her likely guilt—Lizzie remained in Fall River for the rest of her life. She and Emma inherited their father’s estate, gaining the financial freedom they had long craved. Lizzie bought a large house in one of the city’s most fashionable neighborhoods and spent her time traveling to Boston and New York to indulge in her love of theater. Just five years after the murder, Lizzie was briefly in the headlines again, when she was accused of—but not tried for—shoplifting. In 1905 the sisters became estranged over Lizzie’s relationship with actress Nance O’Neill, which Emma allegedly disapproved of. They rarely spoke in their later years but died within days of each other in June 1927. Both sisters were buried besides their murdered parents in the family plot in Oak Grove Cemetery.

7. Lizzie Borden made an appearance on “The Simpsons.”

A media sensation in its own day, the Borden murders continue to fascinate the public more than a century after they occurred. Lizzie and her family have been the focus of dozens of books, plays and films. In 1975 actress Elizabeth Montgomery, star of television’s “Bewitched” and also a distant relative of Lizzie, portrayed her in a television movie. Famed choreographer Agnes de Mille created a ballet about the trial, a new opera has been in the works and Lizzie even made a cameo on “The Simpsons,” in which she—along with other notorious figures such as Benedict Arnold, Richard Nixon and John Wilkes Booth—served in the jury during a trial over Homer Simpson's soul.

8. New information may still come to light.

In March 2012, the Borden case was back in the headlines when researchers at the Fall River Historical Society announced the discovery of the handwritten journals of Andrew Jennings, Lizzie’s defense attorney. The journals, which contain newspaper clippings as well as interview notes Jennings made during his pre-trial preparation, may yield new insight into the crimes. The extremely fragile material is currently being preserved by the museum before its contents are made available to the public.

9. You can stay at the Lizzie Borden Bed & Breakfast.

More than a century after the murders, Fall River, Massachusetts, continues to be a hot spot for those fascinated by the case. For the most daring aficionados, a night at the Lizzie Borden Bed & Breakfast provides the ultimate Borden experience. Guests can tour the property at 92 Second Street, watch an annual dramatization of the events, stay overnight in the bedrooms originally occupied by Lizzie, Emma and their parents, and even enjoy the same breakfast the family shared on the morning of August 4, 1892.

Inspiration – From the Writers

When we started talking about turning the Lizzie Borden story into a musical, we had the crazy realization that Lizzie Borden’s story embodies the very ethos of Rock’n’Roll rebellion: the destruction of the old generation to make room for the new. I mean, what’s more rock and roll than a beaten down girl who kills her parents with an axe, works the crowds and the media, becomes rich and turns her own historical infamy into an ascension to legend.

We imagine the show as a rock concept album turned into epic rock theatrical – so, telling the story with rock’s chosen weapon for rebellion, redemption and revolution – the “Ax” (as wielded so violently by Townsend and again by Cobain) – was only natural. Our inspirations turn naturally to the bloody great rock spectacles of the 70s (Ozzy Osbourne, Alice Cooper, Kiss) and to generations of strong, hard-cutting women rockers (Grace Slick, Heart, Patti Smith, The Runaways, Joan Jett and Lita Ford, Wendy O.Williams, Courtney Love) whose sound is pitch-perfect for the explosion from repression that Lizzie’s acts mirror for her turn of the century generation.

We were deeply inspired by the actual historical events. The book is almost entirely adapted from court transcripts. You hear the women speak in their own words. But when they sing … that’s us giving voice to the other side of the Lizzie story, the rumors, the innuendo, the theories, the jump rope rhyme, the legend that she became.

We want it loud, sexy, bloody, angry, creepy, funny, rebellious, and thoroughly entertaining.

– Steven, Tim, and Alan
Lizzie Borden Took an Ax: History, Feminism and American Culture

by Ann Schofield

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On a sweltering August day in 1892, an unremarkable New England spinster hacked her father and stepmother to death with an ax; or so the story goes. The ax precipitated more than these brutal murders, though. The hundred years following the Fall River crime have seen a remarkable body of creative work based on it: two operas, a ballet, numerous novels, eight plays, a film, a television show, two short stories, four poems, various popular songs, and, of course, the children’s rhyme, “Lizzie Borden with an ax, Gave her father forty wacks, When she saw what she had done, She gave her mother forty-one.” Is it any wonder that few Americans don’t know who Lizzie Borden was and that most of them likely believe the rhyme that convicts her, unaware that the twelve gentlemen of a New Bedford jury found her innocent? Indeed, the persistent attraction of the Borden story is in large measure due to how the fictive Lizzie Borden has been constructed in the twentieth century.

Lizzie Borden’s story has tended to take one or the other of two fictional forms: the tragic romance and the feminist quest. Gender plays a key role in both forms and both are plotted along such dramatic fault lines of American culture as Calvinism, the outlaw and violence. As the story of Lizzie Borden has been created and re-created through rhyme and fiction it has taken on the qualities of a popular American myth or legend that effectively links the present to the past. Its social meaning is like that of all myths in that it performs a “symbolizing function that is central to the cultural functioning of the society that produces them.” Like all myths, the Borden story is told and retold, which means, as Richard Slotkin has noted, “the range of reference of these stories is being expanded. Each new context in which the story is told adds meaning to it because the telling implies a metaphoric connection between the storied past and the present.” What is there, then, about the continually re-told tale of Lizzie Borden that resonates with fundamental elements of American culture? Why does it continue to fascinate authors, composers and choreographers? And what is the tale’s appeal, in fact and in fiction, for readers and audiences who consume the cultural products structured around it? Does this sensational murder case in its many fictive manifestations reflect the values, goals and worldview of American culture in the twentieth century? How does it make that “metaphoric connection between the storied past and the present?”

The intriguing question about the Borden case is not “whodunit?” Lizzie’s guilt or innocence is not at issue either in the fictions nor in this essay. The reader of both must share the ambivalence of the character in Sharon Pollock’s play Blood Relations who asks Lizzie, “Did you do it?” but then hastens to add, “If you say yes, I’ll be horrified; if you say no, I’d be disappointed.” Unlike the equally puzzling case of Jack the Ripper, where the fascination seems to be who done it, Lizzie biographers almost without exception agree that she done it. All, though, ask why she done it. Motivation becomes the open door through which these many authors step into a particular time and place to infuse characters and events with their own ideas drawn from a lexicon of American culture. In the 1948 ballet Fall River Legend, Lizzie’s stepmother thwarted a tender romance with a minister; in the 1967 Lizzie Borden: An Opera in Three Acts, the romance is with a sea captain who was her sister’s beau; in novelist Evan Hunter’s 1984 scenario, Lizzie is interrupted in a lesbian tryst with the Irish maid, lashes out at her stepmother with a candlestick, then does away with her father out of fear that he will discover the first murder. The list of why she done it goes on and on. In literary terms, the events, the murders and Lizzie’s subsequent acquittal become an ur-text for the contemplation of motive, of power, of patriarchy, of sexuality, and of love. They become a stage on which the original players—Lizzie, her stepmother Abby, her sister Emma, her father Andrew, their maid Bridget Sullivan and an assortment of lawyers, policemen and neighbors—are continually cast and re-cast by different directors to act out various cultural and political scripts.

Those authors who have commented on their own work support the notion that motivation is central to their conception of the Borden story. Jack Beeson and his librettist Richard Plant wrote in 1985, “the whole story is about why she did do it.” In their opera they created a Freudian family romance in which Lizzie’s forbidden fixation on her father is transferred to the equally unattainable suitor of her sister. Their New England Electra was to be a “distillation of the main currents of New England history. Mr. Borden is the latter-day version of the hanging judge of Salem; Lizzie is the passionate, repressed, upper-class unemployable Victorian spinster” and, they add, “don’t forget everyone hates a wicked stepmother.”
Fall River in 1892 was a typical New England mill town that owed its success to a fast running river, an abundance of Yankee capital and an ample supply of cheap immigrant labor. In Fall River, the well-to-do lived at the top of a hill, the poorer folks at its base. Andrew Borden’s household, however, was not in the better part of town, despite a considerable fortune amassed in various enterprises typical of an industrial capitalist economy. He kept his family in a small, rather shabby house with no electricity or indoor plumbing. His daughter Lizzie, unlike the daughters of eighteenth century New England households who spun, sewed, churned and baked, quite simply had very little to do. Unlike more educated women of her time, she did not aspire to the professions or to settlement house work. She tidied her room, ironed hankies, occasionally taught Sunday school and was a member of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and treasurer of her church. At age 32, she had become quite clearly a member of that category, New England spinster. Fame found this quite uninteresting and by all reports rather unpleasant woman on a horrifically hot August morning in 1892. Around nine o’clock her stepmother was brutally murdered by nineteen blows to her face so violent that to quote an observer her “skull bones, hair, face, switches, and flesh matted into what looked like badly dressed steak.” Less than two hours later Andrew Borden was killed by ten blows, presumably from the same weapon so that “one half of his face was all but sliced off, half an eye hung on his broken cheek.” Following an inquest a week later Lizzie Borden was charged with the crime and was brought to trial on June 5, 1893. The substance of the trial consisted in trying to discover where Lizzie was at the time of the deed—she claimed to be either eating pears in the garden or searching for fish sinkers in the barn—and why, if she were guilty, neither her bloody dress nor the murder weapon had been found. Despite these very concrete issues, both the prosecution and the defense of Lizzie Borden revolved around less tangible questions of class and gender.

The prosecutor, Hosea Knowlton, well-expressed the centrality of these concepts to the case in his summation to the jury: The prisoner at the bar is a woman, and a Christian woman, as the expression is used. It is no ordinary criminal that we are trying today. It is one of the rank of lady, the equal of your wife and mine, of your friends and mine, of whom such things had never been suspected or dreamed before. I hope I may never forget, nor in anything that I say here today lose sight of the terrible significance of that fact... I am obliged to tread now upon a more delicate ground. The prisoner is a woman, one of that sex that all high-minded men revere, that all generous men love, that all wise men acknowledge their indebtedness to. It is hard, it is hard, Mr. Foreman and gentlemen, to conceive that woman can be guilty of crime but I am obliged to say, what strikes the justice of every man to whom I am talking, that while we revere the sex, while we show our courtesies to them, they are no worse than we. If they lack in strength and coarseness and vigor, they make up for it in cunning, in dispatch, in celerity, in ferocity. If their loves are stronger and more enduring than those of men, am I saying too much that, on the other hand, their hates are more undying, more unyielding, more persistent?

The jury, twelve middle-aged, middle class New England gentlemen, proved unable to accept Knowlton’s radical reinterpretation of nineteenth-century sex roles, unable to accept the notion that women might be like men, and perhaps, most importantly, unable to envision the possibility that if Lizzie Borden could commit parricide might not their own wives and daughters be capable of the same act? Within an hour they returned a verdict of not guilty. In a strangely ironic way the constraints of her role as a nineteenth-century lady may have pushed Lizzie Borden to her crime but that same role saved her from the gallows. Lizzie, once cast in the role of lady, and she played this role to the hilt every day of the trial, could have no acceptable motive. Her acquittal was as determined by her role as the guilt of the fictional Lizzie is determined by the roles in which Beeson, de Mille, Carter and others cast her. The murder of Andrew and Abby Borden was, as one can tell from the description of the bodies, a crime of great passion, and ladies in Fall River in 1892 were known to be “passionless.” With the sizable inheritance from her father’s estate, Lizzie, who changed her name to Lizbeth, and her sister Emma bought a stately Fall River mansion which they named Maplecroft. There Lizzie lived until her death in 1927.

As the historical Lizzie Borden is constructed through the trial she becomes not some sort of objective truth but a text as equally shaped by ideology and culture as are the fictions. The sharp distinction between women and men and their mutually exclusive characteristics are apparent in the case of the defense as well as in that of the prosecution. As one writer points out, nineteenth-century notions of gender might allow a gentleman to “wrestle with the good and evil within him but a woman... could only embody good or evil.” That sort of essentialism reflected the criminology of the time. Lizzie’s social rank removed her from the depraved underclass that supposedly spawned criminals; her “goodness” was apparent through her church and temperance activities. Faced with such evidence the prosecution was unable to make a convincing case for her evil.

The many historical and cultural texts constructed around Lizzie Borden contain different possibilities for women. The opera, for example, is clear in its archetypal characterization of women—the virginal Mary/Margret, the sensual Eve/Lizzie. Both the romances and the feminist texts suggest that Lizzie’s “feminine” qualities are socially structured, and the trial transcript provides ample evidence of that structuring to a modern reader. Are, then, women murderers inherently different than men who commit the same crime, or are we simply eager to see them as such? And do American women murder in unique and distinctive ways?

The essential role of gender in constructing both the historical and cultural representations of Lizzie Borden dramatically demonstrates the “usefulness” of gender as an analytic tool. Quite simply, the meaning and development of the Borden myth can be understood only by a careful examination of gender in the fictions and the history. As historian Joan Scott reminds us, gender “provides a way to decode meaning and to understand the complex connections among various forms of human interaction. When historians look for the ways in which the concept of gender legitimizes and constructs social
relationships, they develop insight into the reciprocal nature of gender and society...’ and, I would add, of culture. As seen most clearly in the trial transcript, Lizzie’s conviction or acquittal hinged upon the jury’s acceptance or denial of her gender and class defined role as “lady” thus filling Scott’s definition of gender as “a primary way of signifying relationships of power.” Although the all-male jury held the power of life or death over Lizzie, her power was contained in her role as lady, which, by definition, precluded her conviction.

In the fictions, gender becomes a more expansive and metaphorical category. The romantic representations of Lizzie Borden written in the twentieth century reinforce limiting stereotypes of womanhood. They draw their language and characterizations from a narrow repertoire of roles and a narrow range of motivation—romantic disappointment, sexual frustration, response to an evil stepmother. These archetypal characters implicitly are part of a patriarchal social agenda that perpetuates a transhistorical, essentialist notion of woman rather than a concept of woman responding to a specific historical situation. The fictions that offer alternative motivational possibilities—greed, avarice and a desire for independence—have their own political agenda. But these feminist texts, while no more or less “true” than the romances or the trial transcript, do open up a wider range of possibilities to their female characters and their female readers. These texts not only take a critical stance on the constraints of the late nineteenth century for women but they also offer a wider, albeit not particularly attractive, range of possibilities for women. In constructing Lizzie, they follow through on Prosecutor Knowlton’s suggestion that in some situations women may possibly be like men and may share men’s desire and capacity to murder.

As the story of Lizzie Borden proceeds from historical event to folk tale to romance to feminist texts, one feature remains constant: the gendered nature of the subject in all its complexity and contradictions. Even the rhetorical power of the children’s rhyme rests upon the shocking information that a daughter killed her parents. The construction of Lizzie Borden in these many stories incorporates women into classic American myths of violence, the outlaw and Calvinism, previously animated only by men, and confirms the judgement of the character in Colton and Miles’ 1934 play Nine Pine Street who tells Lizzie “you’re Americana.” The Lizzie Borden story in its varied manifestations is indeed Americana, but it reminds us that it is an America that is gendered in language, in subject, and in meaning.

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Neuroses and The Structure of the Mind
http://www.iep.utm.edu/freud/#H3

Freud's account of the unconscious, and the psychoanalytic therapy associated with it, is best illustrated by his famous tripartite model of the structure of the mind or personality (although, as we have seen, he did not formulate this until 1923). This model has many points of similarity with the account of the mind offered by Plato over 2,000 years earlier. The theory is termed ‘tripartite’ simply because, again like Plato, Freud distinguished three structural elements within the mind, which he called id, ego, and super-ego. The id is that part of the mind in which are situated the instinctual sexual drives which require satisfaction; the super-ego is that part which contains the “conscience,” namely, socially-acquired control mechanisms which have been internalized, and which are usually imparted in the first instance by the parents; while the ego is the conscious self that is created by the dynamic tensions and interactions between the id and the super-ego and has the task of reconciling their conflicting demands with the requirements of external reality. It is in this sense that the mind is to be understood as a dynamic energy-system. All objects of consciousness reside in the ego; the contents of the id belong permanently to the unconscious mind; while the super-ego is an unconscious screening-mechanism which seeks to limit the blind pleasure-seeking drives of the id by the imposition of restrictive rules. There is some debate as to how literally Freud intended this model to be taken (he appears to have taken it extremely literally himself), but it is important to note that what is being offered here is indeed a theoretical model rather than a description of an observable object, which functions as a frame of reference to explain the link between early childhood experience and the mature adult (normal or dysfunctional) personality.

Freud also followed Plato in his account of the nature of mental health or psychological well-being, which he saw as the establishment of a harmonious relationship between the three elements which constitute the mind. If the external world offers no scope for the satisfaction of the id’s pleasure drives, or more commonly, if the satisfaction of some or all of these drives would indeed transgress the moral sanctions laid down by the super-ego, then an inner conflict occurs in the mind between its constituent parts or elements. Failure to resolve this can lead to later neurosis. A key concept introduced here by Freud is that the mind possesses a number of ‘defense mechanisms’ to attempt to prevent conflicts from
becoming too acute, such as repression (pushing conflicts back into the unconscious), sublimation (channeling the sexual drives into the achievement socially acceptable goals, in art, science, poetry, and so forth), fixation (the failure to progress beyond one of the developmental stages), and regression (a return to the behavior characteristic of one of the stages).

Of these, repression is the most important, and Freud’s account of this is as follows: when a person experiences an instinctual impulse to behave in a manner which the super-ego deems to be reprehensible (for example, a strong erotic impulse on the part of the child towards the parent of the opposite sex), then it is possible for the mind to push this impulse away, to repress it into the unconscious. Repression is thus one of the central defense mechanisms by which the ego seeks to avoid internal conflict and pain, and to reconcile reality with the demands of both id and super-ego. As such it is completely normal and an integral part of the developmental process through which every child must pass on the way to adulthood. However, the repressed instinctual drive, as an energy-form, is not and cannot be destroyed when it is repressed—it continues to exist intact in the unconscious, from where it exerts a determining force upon the conscious mind, and can give rise to the dysfunctional behavior characteristic of neuroses. This is one reason why dreams and slips of the tongue possess such a strong symbolic significance for Freud, and why their analysis became such a key part of his treatment—they represent instances in which the vigilance of the super-ego is relaxed, and when the repressed drives are accordingly able to present themselves to the conscious mind in a transmuted form. The difference between ‘normal’ repression and the kind of repression which results in neurotic illness is one of degree, not of kind—the compulsive behavior of the neurotic is itself a manifestation of an instinctual drive repressed in childhood. Such behavioral symptoms are highly irrational (and may even be perceived as such by the neurotic), but are completely beyond the control of the subject because they are driven by the now unconscious repressed impulse. Freud positioned the key repressions for both, the normal individual and the neurotic, in the first five years of childhood, and of course, held them to be essentially sexual in nature; since, as we have seen, repressions which disrupt the process of infantile sexual development in particular, according to him, lead to a strong tendency to later neurosis in adult life. The task of psychoanalysis as a therapy is to find the repressions which cause the neurotic symptoms by delving into the unconscious mind of the subject, and by bringing them to the forefront of consciousness, to allow the ego to confront them directly and thus to discharge them.

Discussion Questions/Group Activities

• How does the play represent Lizzie’s motives for killing her father and stepmother?
• In the context of the play, Lizzie is definitely guilty of the murders, though the actual case is still unsolved. Do you think she is guilty? Why or why not?
• Why does the play simply have 4 female characters?
• Do you think Lizzie Borden’s act is justified by the evil deeds committed by her parents? What else could she have done to escape the house? Rewrite your own ending to the story.

Local Connections

Does your ax need a makeover? Drop it off for sharpening or handle replacement! Even take a wilderness survival training class!

**Old Federal Ax Co.**
(503) 309-1568
http://www.oldfedco.com

Having a guilty evening? Indulge at the Gilt Club, with a seasonal menu, swanky cocktails, and decadent desserts!

**The Gilt Club**
306 NW Broadway   (503) 222-4458
Portland, OR 97209  http://www.giltclub.com

Want to experience an evening in a Victorian home? This charming bed and breakfast spot can also be rented out for weddings and receptions!

**Lion and the Rose**
1810 NE 15th Ave.   (503) 287-9245
Portland, OR 97212  http://www.lionrose.com

Need a good whack? For only 7 bucks, Darlene will whack that hair away! Set in a strip-mall in North Portland, this hometown barbershop is full of personality.

**7 Bucks a Wack**
8321 N Denver Ave.   (503) 236-1010
Portland, OR 97217

Feeling spooky? The Beyond Bizarre Paranormal Ghost Tour will take you to some of the most haunted places in the city!

**Portland Walking Tours – Beyond Bizarre Ghost Tour**
Dates/Times: Friday, Saturday & Sunday, 7:00 p.m.
Over-18 only Friday, Saturday & Sunday, 10:00 p.m.
http://www.portlandwalkingtours.com