NATIONAL AFFAIRS

TRIALS:

Studies in Killing

All week long, Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, just turned 25, sat morose and fidgety by turns, listening to a succession of defense psychiatrists and psychologists assaulting his pathetic vanity in hopes of saving his life. The man who shot Robert Kennedy is, by the varying diagnoses rendered at his trial last week, a paranoid, a paranoid schizophrenic or maybe just a "very sick man." The prosecution tried with equal energy—and very possibly with Sirhan's approval—to picture him instead as a self-appointed Arab soldier committing an act not of lunacy but of war. The state's real innings were yet to come. But the defense managed to turn the elev-

[redacted]

The defense was thrown briefly on the defensive at the outset when the state—with an assist from The New York Times—discovered that Sirhan's first expert, psychologist Martin Schorr, had borrowed language from a popular psychiatric casebook for his report on Sirhan (NEWSWEEK, March 24). But Schorr kept his sang-froid. "I am not the best writer in the world," said Schorr. "I was looking for exciting language so I could make a more exciting report." Had he cribbed substance as well as style? Not at all, Schorr insisted—his diagnosis of paranoia was strictly his own.

And one after another, three more psychologists and two psychiatrists backed him up, in sum if not precise detail. One of them, psychologist Roderick Richardson, loosed a blizzard of symptoms that sounded like a carnival-mirror caricature of the Boy Scout virtues: Sirhan is "paranoid, blaming, suspicious, critical, unreasonable, demanding, attacking, opposing, [redacted]

[redacted] gullible, very vulnerable and socially inadequate. And what was more, Richardson suggested later, he was getting worse. Prosecutor David Fitts tried to shake this evidence by linking Sirhan with Al Fatah's anti-Israeli terrorists back home. "All these people are not paranoids or psychotics, are they?" asked Fitts. "That I don't know," Richardson countered mildly, "because I have not given the Rorschach [ink-blot test] to individuals in those organizations."

'More Will Come': According to psychiatrist Eric Marcus, Sirhan's fantasy life had spread far beyond the Middle East to embrace the entire world. "Sirhan thought," said Marcus, "that he was going to . . . destroy the political leaders of this country, start World War III. He would know what's best for society." Marcus's Sirhan, moreover, had a long-standing, morbid fascination with assassinations. The defense produced two of his high-school textbooks, one a European history with a paragraph on the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand underlined, the other a U.S. history with Sirhan's marginal note on the slaying of President McKinley: "Many more will come." Sirhan made no other marks in either book. "He had been thinking about assassinations . . ." said Marcus, "for an awful long period of time."

By Marcus's lights, Sirhan had deteriorated since taking a fall from a horse in 1966—a slide that had moved "in a rather slow, insidious way." Since Sirhan says he had had several drinks the night he killed Kennedy, Marcus once fed him 6 ounces of gin in eighteen minutes—actually more in less time than he had downed before the shooting—to test his reactions. Sirhan, he testified, "went berserk," raging around his cell like a "wild beast," mistaking his guards for Israeli soldiers, vowing to "get even with those Jews." Marcus prodded him to talk about Kennedy. "That bastard," spluttered Sirhan, "isn't worth the bullets."

'Fugue State': Yet something drew Sirhan to Kennedy's victory party at Los Angeles's Ambassador Hotel. "To Kennedy I was attracted like a magnet," Sirhan told Berkeley psychiatrist Bernard L. Diamond, the star defense expert. "I loved the man—I hated him." And something led Sirhan to put a bullet in Kennedy's brain. Diamond is expected to testify this week that Sirhan killed Bobby in a trance-like "fugue state" brought on by the sight of his own image diffracted in the many mirrors of the Ambassador's ballrooms. All of this seemed only to compound Sirhan's depression—a weeklong case of the glooms broken only by the sheaf of 25th-birthday cards he got from family, friends and fans. But Diamond may know more about Sirhan than Sirhan knows about himself. Scheduled to be played in court this week is a Diamond tape recapturing an event Sirhan says he has forgotten—a tape in which he relives, under hypnosis, the precise moment in which he assassinated Robert F. Kennedy.

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