

Booth and Oswald: 2 Assassins Were Little Alike in Personality

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Actor Was an Extrovert With a Hatred of President—Kennedy's Slayer Was Bitter and Frustrated by Life

Except for the fact that each killed a President, John Wilkes Booth and Lee Harvey Oswald had little in common.

Booth belonged to a distinguished theatrical family. Oswald, a product of the lower middle class, never knew his father, a collector of insurance premiums, who died two months before he was born, and he had little use for his mother.

Booth knew applause. Although not so famous as his father, Junius Brutus Booth Sr., or his brother, Edwin, both great interpreters of Shakespearean roles, Wilkes (he preferred to be known as J. Wilkes Booth) could make an audience cheer and stomp. He was earning \$20,000 a year, an enormous sum at the time.

Oswald was a failure at everything he tried. His life was characterized by isolation, frustration and failure. In the 15 months prior to his attack on President Kennedy, the former marine rarely earned more than \$250 a month.

Booth was a warm, extroverted personality, lithe and sinewy of body, an expert swordsman, a crack pistol shot and an excellent horseman. Oswald shunned friendship. Profoundly alienated, he was continually looking for a meaningful role in life.

Hating the capitalist system, which he felt was grinding him down, he tried to live in the Soviet Union. But the food there depressed him and he resented the special privileges accorded members of the Communist party. Then he tried to visit Cuba, and was infuriated when the Cuban consul in Mexico City refused him a visa.

Booth Was Ladies' Man

Booth never married, but he had to fight off women. He was very handsome; his face had an ivory pallor that contrasted with his thick raven-black hair, inclined to curl, and with his heavy dark eyebrows.

He kept a mistress in Washington. He carried pictures of five women with him when he fled from the murder scene at Ford's Theater, and they were still in his possession when he was dragged, dying, from the Virginia tobacco barn where he was trapped twelve days later.

Oswald seems to have had little interest in women until he went to Russia in 1959. During the preceding 35 months, which he spent in the Marine Corps, he had the nickname "Ozzie Rabbit" because, in the words of a fellow marine, he seemed to be "the frail, little puppy in the litter."

In Minsk, where he was a metal worker in a radio and television factory, Oswald married Marina Nikolaevna Prusakova, a pharmacist, but the marriage was stormy. Back in the United States, when the Oswalds returned in 1961, Mrs. Oswald told friends that she found her husband "cold," that

he seldom sought sexual relations with her.

Booth, as a conspirator, was capable of recruiting fellow assassins and developing a complex plot. Oswald was a lonely sniper, whose plan to shoot President Kennedy could not have predated the act by more than a week.

Booth knew why he hated Lincoln, and broadcast his hatred. There was no secret of his motivation.

Oswald's motivation remains obscure. He had never betrayed any evidence of being a Kennedy-hater. His only vocal protest against the Kennedy Administration concerned its policy on Cuba. In the previous April he had tried to assassinate a leader of the extreme right—former Maj. Gen. Edwin A. Walker — telling his wife that Walker was "a fascist." But his wife could not recall that Oswald had ever denounced Kennedy.

Were Booth and Oswald insane?

Booth was subject to rages during which he ranted incoherently. His father seems to have suffered temporary spells of insanity, and some historians suggest that Booth's aberrations were inherited.

Oswald, contrary to reports that appeared after the Kennedy assassination, did not manifest, in a psychiatric examination in 1953, tendencies that would mark him as a potential assassin. In that year, while living with his mother in the Bronx, Oswald, then 13, stayed away from school so much that he was remanded for truancy.

Oswald Called Shy

Oswald was examined by Dr. Rhenatus Hartogs, who found him tense, withdrawn and evasive. Oswald's solitary habits were thought to be the result of "intense anxiety, shyness, feelings of awkwardness and insecurity." He was described as having a "vivid fantasy life, turning around the topics of omnipotence and power, through which he tries to compensate for his present shortcomings and frustrations."

Summarizing his report on Oswald, Dr. Hartogs said:

"This 13-year-old, well-built boy has superior mental resources and functions only slightly below his capacity level in spite of chronic truancy from school. . . . No finds of neurological impairment or psychotic mental changes could be made. Lee has to be diagnosed as 'personality pattern disturbance with schizoid features and passive aggressive tendencies.'"

"Lee has to be seen as an emotionally, quite disturbed youngster who suffers under the impact of really existing emotional isolation and deprivation, lack of affection, absence of family life and rejection by a self-involved and conflicted mother."