



Murder and Madness: The Myth of the Kentucky Tragedy (Topics In Kentucky History)

Matthew Schoenbachler

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The "Kentucky Tragedy" was early America's best known true crime story. In 1825, Jereboam O. Beauchamp assassinated Kentucky attorney general Solomon P. Sharp. The murder, trial, conviction, and execution of the killer, as well as the suicide of his wife, Anna Cooke Beauchamp, fascinated Americans. The episode became the basis of dozens of novels and plays composed by some of the country's most esteemed literary talents, among them Edgar Allan Poe and William Gilmore Simms. In *Murder and Madness*, Matthew G. Schoenbachler peels away two centuries of myth to provide a more accurate account of the murder. Schoenbachler also reveals how Jereboam and Anna Beauchamp shaped the meaning and memory of the event by manipulating romantic ideals at the heart of early American society. Concocting a story in which Solomon Sharp had seduced and abandoned Anna, the couple transformed a sordid murder committed because the Beauchamps believed Sharp to be spreading a rumor that Anna had had an affair with a family slave into a maudlin tale of feminine virtue assailed, honor asserted, and a young rebel's revenge. *Murder and Madness* reveals the true story behind the murder and demonstrates enduring influence of Romanticism in early America.

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