Medicine, Medea and the Media:

The Rise and Fall of Roy Meadow
Medicine, Medea and the Media:

The Rise and Fall of Roy Meadow

Nicola Elizabeth Goe BA

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of Tasmania
March 2007
Declaration:

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of the candidate's knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis, nor does the thesis contain any material that infringers copyright.

Statement of Access:

This thesis may not be made available for loan or copying until two years after the date below. After this date this thesis may be made available for loan and limited copying in accordance with the Copyright Act 1968 and with due acknowledgement to the author.

March 2007.
Abstract

For more than three decades eminent British paediatrician, Professor Sir Roy Meadow, was courted by the media for his startling pronouncements on maternal child murder and abuse, including his now infamous Meadow’s Law and his creation of Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy. His compelling evidence made headline news in the trials of several women, including Sally Clark, Donna Anthony, Angela Cannings and Trupti Patel.

Journalists, however, persistently failed to investigate Meadow’s potent claims, using the eminent paediatrician as a primary source to create highly newsworthy news narratives. Through an analysis of newspaper stories, primarily in the London Times, this study maps the rise and fall of Roy Meadow. My critique deploys a narrative trope I have called the Medea-Factor to explore the fictive qualities of news, and to develop an argument for understanding how Roy Meadow became the media’s national authority on maternal child murder and abuse, as well as how his glittering career came to an ignominious end.

An important key to revealing Meadow’s power—and why it was that journalists continued to privilege his voice for so long—came in the unearthing of Meadow’s nineteenth-century counterpart, and the first primary definer of infanticide news, Dr Edwin Lankester. This study concludes that the pattern for creating news narratives about mothers accused of murdering their children is so compelling that journalists, even when faced with the evidence of flawed science, will continue to create narratives shaped by the ideology of the Medea-Factor.

The thesis is situated within the discipline of English, and its approach and methodology belong to that discipline. Its textual sources, however, come from newspapers, and to the extent that it is concerned with the use of expert witnesses the thesis engages with matters important to the discipline of journalism and is therefore interdisciplinary.
Acknowledgements

I owe a debt of gratitude to my English supervisors, Professor Lucy Frost and Professor Ralph Crane, for their commitment and encouragement throughout this project. Professor Frost generously supported my entry into the world of academia after a career in journalism, and I thank her for her ongoing encouragement and for her wisdom. Thank you also to Ralph Crane for his critical eye and his insight that allowed me to tell this story of two medical men. To those of my colleagues in the School of English, Journalism and European Languages who have shared my journey with me I also give my deep gratitude, with particular gratitude to Dr Jason Bainbridge for his support and for keeping me smiling. Thank you also to Dr Helen MacDonald and Dr Helen Bowtock for their collegial friendship at both ends of the world, and to Professor Ray Hill, Dr Clive Baldwin, Dr Mary Beth Emmerichs, Dr Tony Ward and the staff at the British Library. Finally I offer my heartfelt gratitude to my family who have stoically endured my journey, and a special thank you to my most loyal supporter, Millie, who was always by my side.
Let no one think me a weak one, feeble-spirited,
A stay-at-home, but rather just the opposite,
One who can hurt my enemies and help my friends;
For the lives of such persons are most remembered.

(Medea lines 807-810)
Table of Contents

List of Illustrations i
Editorial Note iii
Introduction 1

Part One: Lankester, Infanticide and the Times
Chapter One: The Rise of the Medical Expert Witness Through the Columns of the Times 15
Chapter Two: Dr Edwin Lankester and the Times 42

Part Two: Meadow, Medea and the Media
Chapter Three: The Rise of Roy Meadow 80
Chapter Four: The Trial of Sally Clark 129
Chapter Five: “One Towering Piece of Evidence: Professor Meadow’s One in 73 Million Statistic” 158
Chapter Six: “Acquittal was Just a Chance in 73 Million” 193
Chapter Seven: “The Child-Snatcher in Chief”: Meadow in the Dock 220

Conclusion 248
List of Appendices 258
Works Cited 281
List of Illustrations

Part One: Infanticide, Dr Edwin Lankester and the Times

Figure 1 Medea About to Kill Her Children. Eugene Delacroix (1838). Musee du Louvre, Paris.

Figure 2 Medea Escaping in a Chariot Drawn by Serpents. Detail from Lucanian calyx-crater (circa 400 BC). Sotheby’s, New York.

Figure 3 Dr Edwin Lankester, Coroner for Central Middlesex. Ipswich Museum.

Figure 4 The Outcast. Richard Redgrave (1851). Royal Academy of the Arts, London.

Figure 5 Take Your Son, Sir. Ford Madox Brown (1858). Tate Gallery, London.

Figure 6 The district of Middlesex in the 1860s. Lionel Rose, Massacre of the Innocents.

Figure 7 “The Red Star Women Condemned to Imprisonment for Life for Infanticide.” (Circa 1860s.) Wellcome Library, London.

Figure 8 Pall Mall Gazette 22 August 1866.

Figure 9 “A Coroner’s Arithmetic.” The Times 23 August 1866.

Part Two: Meadow, Medea and the Media

Figure 10 Professor Sir Roy Meadow, the paediatrician described by the Times as “Britain’s leading expert on child abuse.” Reuters.

Figure 11 The Times news story written by sourcing Roy Meadow’s Lancet article “Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy: The Hinterland of Child Abuse.” The Times 12 August 1977.

Figure 12 Sally and Stephen Clark when Sally was pregnant with her first-born son Christopher. Source: Sally Clark Website.

Figure 13 Sally and Stephen Clark with baby Christopher. Source: Sally Clark Website.

Figure 14 Sally Clark during her 1999 trial for the murder of her two infant sons. Reuters.

Figure 15 Professor Sir Roy Meadow whose evidence was crucial to Sally Clark’s conviction. The Sunday Times 29 July 2001.

Figure 16 Margarette Driscoll’s profile, “He Won’t Let Sleeping Babies Lie.” The Sunday Times 29 July 2001.

Figure 17 Sally Clark being led handcuffed into the High Court during her second appeal. The Cheshire Chronicle 30 January 2003.

Figure 18 Sally Clark with her husband Stephen after her acquittal on 29 January 2003. The Sunday Times 2 February 2003.
Figure 19 Trupti Patel with her husband Jay after she was found not guilty of the murder of her three children. The Sunday Times 15 June 2003.

Figure 20 Angela Cannings and her husband Terry outside the High Court 10 December 2003 following her acquittal of the murder of her infant children. The verdict was finally quashed following the discrediting of Professor Sir Roy Meadow’s expert medical evidence. Reuters.

Figure 21 Margarette Driscoll’s second profile on Roy Meadow, “His Legacy of Shattered Lives.” The Sunday Times 25 January 2004.

Figure 22 Sally Clark, Trupti Patel, and Angela Cannings. The Times 7 September 2004.

Figure 23 Donna Anthony leaving the High Court after appeal judges quashed her murder conviction on 12 April 2005. Fiona Hanson/PA.

Figure 24 Roy Meadow arriving at the General Medical Council hearing in June 2005. PA.

Figure 25 Protestors outside London’s High Court draw attention to the powerlessness of mothers to fight incorrect diagnosis of Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy. Paul Grover. The Daily Telegraph 25 January 2004.

Figure 26 Professor Sir Roy Meadow leaves the High Court in London after winning his appeal against being struck off by the General Medical Council. The Times 26 October 2006. Nick Ray.