

From The North American Review.

Anna Zwanziger, or Anna Schönleben, known as the German Brinvilliers, committed her crimes about the commencement of the present century. It is somewhat strange that this woman has also escaped the attention of Lombroso, for she exemplifies some of the most remarkable criminal traits, and her picture as handed down to us is so much direct evidence upon the outward aspect of her species. Zwanziger was of small stature, thin, deformed. her sallow, meagre face deeply furrowed by passion as well as by age. Her eyes expressed envy and malice; her brow was perpetually clouded; her manner cringing, servile, and affected; age and ugliness had not diminished her craving for admiration. Mock sensibility and weak moral sense and an undoubted taste for dissipation led her into evil courses at an early age, and left her at fifty reduced to the greatest poverty, homeless, friendless, and at her wit's end to live. It was then that she adopted poisoning as a means of livelihood, as a profession, and her own exultant account of the power it conferred on her may be commended to those who are interested in the psychological analysis of the female criminal mind.

Her attachment to poison was based upon the proud consciousness that it gave her the power to break through every restraint, to attain every object, to gratify every inclination; she could deal out death or sickness as she pleased, torture all who offended her or stood in her way; she could revenge herself through it for every slight; it amused her to see the contortions of her victims; she could get fellow-servants and others into trouble, throw suspicion upon any innocent persons whom she disliked. If she wished to bring a married man to her feet, she might murder his wife when she chose; if she hankered after the possessions of others, she might acquire them when the poison had done its work. As time went on she became an expert toxicologist; mixing and giving poison was her constant occupation. She was so devotedly attached to this deadly, familiar friend that she carried it always about with her, and when arrested and some arsenic was found in her pocket, "she seemed to tremble with pleasure and gazed upon the white powder with eyes beaming with rapture." When sentenced to capital punishment she told the Judge that her death was fortunate for mankind, as it would have been impossible for her to discontinue her trade of poisoning. There can be no question that Zwanziger fully fills up the type of "born" criminal; she was in truth a veritable monster, an incarnate female fiend.