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NEW LIGHT ON BEAUCHAMP'S *CONFESSION*?

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The present paper is an analysis of a manuscript in a box labeled *Beachamp Family Papers* in the collection of the Filson Club. The document is approximately fourteen inches long and nine inches wide. Differences in handwriting indicate that there were at least two authors. It also bears marks of extensive revision. It appears to be a compositor's copy of *The Confession of Jereboam Beauchamp,* an important document in the famous "Kentucky Tragedy," the assassination of the Attorney General of Kentucky, Solomon Porcius Sharp, a New Court luminary, on the night of November 5/6, 1825. The next day Sharp would have become Speaker of the House and would have announced a plan to reconcile the Old Court and the New Court factions, according to some sources.

Putting it *very* briefly, the New Court faction generally, and the Sharp family in particular, however much dismayed by the loss of a leader and a husband and brother, desperately wanted to put their own particular "spin" on the *motive* for the killing, preferring that posterity see it as a purely political assassination. Working in their favor was the fact that the killer, Jereboam O. Beauchamp, was an Old Court partisan much given to such remarks about New Court people as terming them "animals we call Relief men in my country" and "anyone who would vote for Solomon P. Sharp ought to be damned," and the like. On this aspect, he was made to order as a logical suspect.

The problem was that, given an *extremely* liberal interpretation of the "unwritten law," Beauchamp could be seen as an aggrieved husband avenging the honor of his wife, even though Sharp's alleged seduction and impregnation of Anna Cooke had occurred in September 1818, seven years before, when Beauchamp was a mere lad of sixteen or so. Although Sharp's being stabbed in the middle of the night seemed to be carrying things a bit too far even in the honor-defending category, this particular onus was there and had been exploited in one of Sharp's previous runs for office in 1820, as well as in the just-concluded election. Broadsides by John U. Waring, "one of the most dangerous and desperate men of blood in Kentucky," attacked Sharp for victimizing Anna Cooke. It was one of these broadsides, on June 8, that "exasperated" Beauchamp to k ill Sharp -- one of the rare points on which all parties agree. Although it does not survive, allegedly the nature of this particular handbill was that the Sharps had started an out-of-bounds counter-rumor -- that the illegitimate child had been born black, and furthermore that they had an affidavit from the attending midwife saying so, which they could produce if need be. But, cleverly preempting the Sharps' preemptive strategy, Waring turned it against them, a fact that also indicates just how much Sharp's affair with Anna was probably common knowledge.

However much Beauchamp may have thought he could successfully sail close to the wind and avoid suspicion, not to mention conviction for murder, it turned out that he was too clever by half. Part of his assumption -- as presented in the *Confession* -- was that the very fact he *was* a logical suspect would shield him. Indeed, given the temper of the times, a number of others could also be considered "usual suspects," especially John U. Waring. The problem here was that Waring was incapacitated with a gunshot wound in the hip, an occupational hazard, being

the compulsive duelist that he was. Beauchamp felt that any number of other Old Court *promenenti* would be suspected, and therefore that an organized conspiracy would be assumed, thereby deflecting suspicion from him alone. If this logic seems exactly backward, it was. In fact, as I hope to show, the *Confession* is an "anticipatory rehabilitation" wherein Beauchamp attempts to combine all the facts relevant to his capture and conviction, and claim that they were the outcomes of his careful planning. The fact that he was convicted was merely a bad break; in any case, he says, he did not value his life. In his words, "Never was a murder planned with such studied precaution since the world began. I knew well it was impossible to avoid being arrested for the murder. I therefore planned everything with a view to the evidence which I should be able to bring forward in my favour" (Bamberg 42). Nevertheless Beauchamp was quickly linked with Patrick Henry Darby, an Old Court editorialist, and a notorious enemy of Sharp, who was alleged to have said that Sharp and the rest of the New Court party *did* assume a conspiracy and, further, that Beauchamp was its tool. However, as far as the Sharp family was concerned, the less openly *said* about the revenge motive, the better. In fact, from their point of view, the best "usual suspect" would have been Darby, not Beauchamp, because Darby would drag other Old Court personalities down with him, including John U. Waring. Beauchamp was an inconvenient "adverb" in a paragraph of the political essay being played out in the early 1920s. Robert D. Bamberg, the editor of the *Confession* in the Matthew Carey Library of English and American Literature, puts Beauchamp's dilemma best when he says, "Whether or not Sharp's murder was part of a political plot is hard to determine [but] Beauchamp, shortly after his indictment, was becoming entangled in a political web which he had probably not anticipated. . . . Beauchamp could neither extricate himself from the political web, nor use it to his advantage, and the very publication of the *Confession* and much of its content is steeped in a bitter political struggle" (10).

Putting the best face possible on his circumstances -- he has been sentenced to hang -- Beauchamp denies being part of any conspiracy, and avers that he did the murder out of what passed for honorable motives. He does, naturally, lambaste the New Court Party and singles out for particularly harsh treatment the Old Court mainstay, Patrick Henry Darby, who in Beauchamp's version perjured himself in the trial in order to obtain Beauchamp's conviction. However, Beauchamp goes on to give Darby an extremely elaborate exoneration -- so elaborate that the reader is left still feeling that Beauchamp is giving just enough of a hint that Darby may well *have* been a conspirator; this gave Darby great consternation, inasmuch as the Sharp family would have been happier to see him in the dock rather than Beauchamp, who may well have been the "fall guy." (This is not to imply Beauchamp's innocence).

The cunning, calculating, honor-driven anger that Beauchamp gives us in the *Confession* is his way of compensating for appearing to have been a "tool-villain" or merely an incompetent, cowardly assassin. The present *Confession*, however, may not have been the only one. It was alleged by Solomon P. Sharp's brother, Leander J. Sharp, that Beauchamp confessed the crime to his uncle, (the confusingly named) Jereboam O. Beauchamp, a few hours after his conviction, naming Darby as a co-conspirator. Leander Sharp printed a summary of this so-called "first" confession in his *Vindication of the Character of the Late Colonel Solomon P. Sharp, from the Calumnies Published Against Him Since His Murder, by Patrick Darby and Jereboam O. Beauchamp*. [1] (Although printed in 1827, *Vindication* was never sold to the public, because Darby threatened to sue if it was and, perhaps more persuasively, John U. Waring said he would kill L. J. Sharp if it was. All copies were walled up in the Sharp home in Frankfort, not to be discovered until many years late during its remodeling.)

This so-called "first" *Confession* could have been in outline form or perhaps even in some sketchy final version, because Sharp quotes one of Beauchamp's guards as saying that the "last part, the only true part, never saw the light of day" (Bamberg 15). But this doesn't make sense, for it implies that the version we have now merely had an end-piece implicating Darby and other Old Court notables, which certainly does not square with Beauchamp's

presentation of himself as a lone avenger. To admit having assistance, or to have acted in concert with a political cabal, would have besmirched the act of chivalry that Beauchamp has been orchestrating for himself. There may have been a *sui generis* "first" *Confession*-- or the threat of one, for on June 17, 1826, Beauchamp's uncle submitted for the purpose of copyright a title page of a "confession" supposedly naming Darby specifically, but this version, if there was one, was never published, and even the title page has vanished, surviving only as Item 1649 in J. Winston Coleman's *A Bibliography of Kentucky History*, which counts six editions in the nineteenth century.

After his sentencing, Beauchamp requested a three weeks' stay in order to write a confession. This is not the "first" confession just alluded to, however, although I hypothesized that vestiges of it may have survived in the present one, the reason for writing this paper. "Old Jerry," as his uncle was called, had given the manuscript of, it appears, the present *Confession* to the state printer, J.H. Holeman, who refused to print it. Rebuffed, "Old Jerry" then took the manuscript to Gervis S. Hammond, a Bloomfield printer, and *Confession* appeared August 11 1826, about a month after Beauchamp's execution. Since Leander Sharp's *Vindication* never appeared, Beauchamp's version of the "Kentucky Tragedy," famed in song and story, is the "official" one, fulfilling his motives for writing it. Literally adding insult to injury, *Confession* ruined Sharp's name for posterity, if not for his relatives and close contemporaries. Indeed, at least one folk song survives, the given of which is that Sharp is just as bad as Beauchamp has painted him.

Bamberg's edition of *Confession* is from this first *printed* edition, not the manuscript about to be discussed. As he remarks, it "was obviously neither revised nor proofread by its author, is carelessly printed on coarse paper, is illegible in parts, and is full of typographical errors and typesetter's misspellings" (15). However much it may be likely that Beauchamp didn't do his own revising, *somebody did*, for the document in the Filson Club is replete with revisions of all kinds, including crosshatchings-out, interlinear corrections and word substitutions, arrows indicating transpositions and the like. Most intriguing, however, is one curious form of editing -- effacing, really. This was done by pasting strips of paper over lines and whole paragraphs. My attention was called to this manuscript by Jack Cooke, to whom I owe whatever I've ever done, or will do, on the Tragedy. [2] My original hunch was that this effacing indicated that perhaps someone wanted to hide something, but what? Or perhaps to hide something *now* preserving it for a later edition? This theory has to be predicated upon the assumption that this manuscript is in Beauchamp's hand, which I believe not to be the case. So much for conspiracy theories! But among the things predisposing me to a hypothesis that there may have been in this document "archeological remains" of the "truth" was the Sharps' own conspiratorial, paranoid nature in *Vindication*. As Henry Kissinger is supposed to have said, even paranoids have real enemies.

There were four cryptic remarks which impact on the conspiracy theory: two made by Beauchamp; the other at a hearsay's remove, by his jailer; another by the editor/compositor of this manuscript, W.H. Holmes. First, a remark by Beauchamp lends credence to the theory that there may have been a "first" confession, or at least the threat of one. Shortly before his execution, Beauchamp said a very curious thing, words to the effect that he had "been New Court long enough, and would die an Old Court man" (Kallen 357). Given his ardent backing of the Old Court cause, this is strange, but it could be interpreted that Beauchamp had been, through middle-men, negotiating with the New Court government to write a confession that would implicate certain Old Court personalities -- this was alleged by the Sharps, among others. The payoff would be Beauchamp's pardon. At the last, Beauchamp says, he decided that he would be doublecrossed and thus left without the honor of having avenged his wife, a pure act of chivalry. There had also been reports that the Beauchamps had been treated to various delicacies, drinks, desserts and the like during their residence in Frankfort jail, which seems hardly to have been a season in durance vile (Kallen 358). (Anna had decided to share her husband's imprisonment, and wrote one of their benefactors a poem thanking her for her kindness.) Another intriguing remark made by Beauchamp appears not in Bamberg's edition,

but in the manuscript. However, this was edited out as being perhaps *too* "confessional," at least for the comfort of Governor Desha. The context is Beauchamp's exonerating his jailer, John McIntosh, from the charge that McIntosh had acted as the go-between in Beauchamp's alleged negotiations with the New Court. But in an introductory sentence to this exoneration, Beauchamp has said -- and has been silenced -- "Let this be added to the charge I made against the Governor from promising me a pardon for accusing the Old Court Party." Then, in Bamberg (112) the passage continues, which brings us to the third bemusing remark, Beauchamp's characterization of McIntosh that "he ever, from the day of my conviction, told me frankly nothing would avail towards getting a pardon." All of this backing and filling indicates to me that there had been a fairly brisk give and take between Beauchamp and the New Court to sell out the Old Court in general and Darby in particular.

Now let us turn to the editor and compositor, and probably one of the authors of this manuscript. W. H. Holmes is worth quoting. Written 28 November 1826 on a copy of "Dinsmore's Railroad and Steam Navigation and Route Book," Holmes's afterword to *Confession* reads as follows:

> I do certify that the foregoing narrative is a true copy [italics mine] taken from and printed from the original manuscript written by J.O. Beauchamp, as presented to me by Mr. G. S. Hammond -- some trifling and unimportant alterations excepted. Some hard expressions against individuals were softened or expunged.
>
> In witness whereof, I subscribe, et.
> William H. Holmes
> November 28 1826

The missing preface, edited out by Holmes, and his editorial comment, might lend credence to the belief that the Filson manuscript is in Beauchamp's own hand. This is too good to be true, however. For one thing, the document is in at least two, probably three, and possibly four, hands. There is even a second, truncated, manuscript, beginning at the beginning, but which breaks off. For another, until it had been subjected to Holmes's tender mercies, it was remarkably "fair," as if the writer[s] had known for quite some time what was going to be said and how. Samuel Johnson once observed that the imminent prospect of being hanged concentrates the mind wonderfully. That being the case, Beauchamp and/or his amanuenses had theirs made up. Part of our difficulty is deciding what Holmes means by *true copy*. Is this document a copy of the one given by "Old Jerry" to Hammond? Is it Holmes's copy from the Beauchamp original? Until the provenance of the manuscript is investigated, these questions will remain -- and there is another paper in that! In any case the manuscript is uniformly neat, as if its writers were in no hurry. It will also have been noted that although Bamberg says that Confession was published 11 November, Holmes's testimony is dated 28 November. Frankly, I don't know what to make of this.

When Jack Cooke told me of the mysterious, tantalizing paperings-over and effacings of this document, my first thought was that this might be remnants of the legended "first" Confession. Perhaps these effacings covered over the "whodunit" elements that the Sharps allege Beauchamp had dealt -- or was going to deal -- to Desha. In this scenario, then, the version we have is just minus the "good stuff" -- taken out by Holmes's ostensible concern for sparing the survivors Beauchamp's "hard expression." The real agenda, of course, would be to suppress embarrassing revelations about the coziness between Beauchamp, the "fall guy," and the real movers and shakers. Further consideration rendered this theory extremely unlikely, for the abovementioned reason that after depicting himself as a lone-wolf avenger, it would be insane to have mentioned accomplices. The next possibility, less attractive and conspiratorial -- conspiracy is always more attractive -- is the logical one. Holmes merely acted as a kind of censor; I must admit a certain amount of chagrin here, as the lines from Robert Penn Warren's *World*

Enough and Time still resonate: "We have what is left, the lies and half-lies and the truths and half-truths. We do not know that we have the Truth. But we must have it" (3)."

What we lack, then, is a "smoking gun." We will not get it in this document, either, no matter who wrote it. We don't even know if it is in Beauchamp's hand, although in the papers of J. Winston Coleman there supposedly exists such a sample, and a letter in the Filson Club collection allows that Coleman has said he would provide a photostat. If he did, it does not appear in the Filson's card catalogue. It turns out, prosaically, that Holmes's editing is just what he says it was. Beauchamp *did* indeed have some harsh words for Eliza Sharp, and some rather ungallant things to say about a woman known as Ruth Reed. Holmes actually did Beauchamp's image a good turn here, inasmuch as he had been at pains to present himself as woman's avenger and a chivalric idealist insofar as trifling with affections was concerned.

To take first his words for Ruth Reed, Beauchamp wants us to believe that he had set up an elaborate ruse for being in Frankfort on business, while intending to kill Sharp. It involved moving to Missouri, with all the obvious activity that would involve. The trip to Frankfort was supposedly to finalize his land affairs in Kentucky. He had set that trip up to his acquaintances. However, to make assurance doubly sure, Beauchamp claims that "I had secretly prepared me an excuse for running away and delaying my removal [to Missouri] for a week...I secretly procured a process to be issued against me, which if executed, would unavoidably prevent my intended removal for that season" (43). This gives Beauchamp a week to go to Frankfort and kill Sharp. What Beauchamp is doing here, however, is making the best of a bad situation by incorporating this event retrospectively -- and prospectively -- into his "master plan." For he had been named by Ruth Reed as the father of her illegitimate child, born 10 June 1824. The warrant for Beauchamp's arrest was dated 25 October 1825 (Coleman 47-48). Beauchamp avers that he avoided being served -- on the ostensible warrant he claims to have arranged -- vowed to stay and fight the charge, although never intending to do so, was advised by a Mr. Bradburn that the warrant was merely harassment, and Beauchamp should move to Missouri as he planned. In the *Confession* Beauchamp is careful not to state the nature of the process he procured. Somehow, given his own scenario as an avenging redeemer of wronged women, one doubts that it would involve a charge of fathering a child out of wedlock! But in the manuscript there is a rather long passage given to *l'affaire* Reed. Holmes had crossed out and papered over this passage -- as being unchivalric, one assumed.

At any rate, here is Beauchamp's posthumous damage control of his image. He manages not only to discount Reed's accusation, but shows posterity how he planned to use it:

> I had secretly prepared me an excuse for running away and delaying my removal for a week. [At this point Beauchamp renders the Reed story] There was a young Lady in the neighborhood who had complimented me for civilities of my wilder days with calling me the father of her child. But I was not and she has had the justice several times to declare I was not. But far be it from me to say anything which might add in the slightest degree to her misfortune. She has repeatedly however declared to the neighborhood that she did not doubt at all but that it was the child of another man. And she were [would?] now I have no doubt wholly exculpate me from all charge as she had heretofore done several times. I am compelled to thus far notice the charge of her seduction from the path of virtue if settled upon me, however humble the sphere in which she moves, infinitely more disgraceful to my memory than would be the charge of having stolen her father's horse. B[??] on the sev[??] evening before I was to die at Frankfort.

The sanctimony and arrant hypocritical gall of this passage notwithstanding, it is also notable for Beauchamp's

attempt to build an image that will stand up in posterity. As mentioned earlier, however, Holmes has done Beauchamp a favor by eliminating this rationale, for it should be transparently obvious that Reed *had* sworn out a warrant for Beauchamp, that Beauchamp probably *did* avoid being served, and indeed *did* have to go to Frankfort -- not, however, due to his meticulous planning of events. After searching for a month, the process-server "returned the warrant a month later with the short notation of the reverse side: 'the within named Beauchamp, not found in my county'" (Coleman 48). By this time, of course, Beauchamp was in Frankfort prison.

Holmes's other notable "expunging" is Beauchamp's commentary on Eliza Scott Sharp. Mrs. Sharp had made a very effective witness at Beauchamp's trial, his comments to the contrary. Naturally the recipient of everyone's sympathy, she also was as close as the Commonwealth had to an eyewitness. Her subdued and dignified demeanor and soft-voiced testimony added further to her credibility. She damaged Beauchamp in another way, as well. In the 3 April 1926b issue of *The Patriot*, a New Court newspaper, she accused Patrick Henry Darby of at least instigating the murder, but the fallout of accusing Darby inevitably covered Beauchamp as well. In fact, it appears that the accusation was written by L. J. Sharp over her signature -- at least this was Beauchamp's view. The article seemed to provide a plausible version of the times, places, motives, and plan of action that such a conspiracy would have encompassed. (Darby went to the counterattack in his own paper, the *Commentator* and the battle of the broadsides was on, Darby defending himself in an eight-part series -- another topic for a paper!) The following passage, crossed out heavily by Holmes, was to have appeared after Beauchamp's characteristically gloating remark concerning himself: "and robed [sic] her of her adored husband" (78).

> And Mrs. Sharp is a very weak minded female. This I was told so soon as I came to Frankfort; so that I never much dreaded her evidence; but was rather disposed to pity her for the misery I had brought upon her: altho' I knew she was not altogether guiltless of her husband's blood: as her licentious tongue had been in great degree the origin of those falsehoods and calumnies which accelerated her husband's doom. But when she yielded herself to say & swear whatever suited the views of those who sought to make Col. Sharp's death a political thing, the Anti-Relief people, who composed the greater portion of intelligence and respectability in the State, lost all confidence in any of her statements about the assassination.

Holmes may well have thought this was going too far, adding insult to injury as it does. Beauchamp's reference to Mrs. Sharp's "licentious tongue" refers to her supposed rankling about the affair between Solomon and Anna -- after all those years! According to Beauchamp, the story about the black child had been concocted to placate her, but for "in-house" consumption only. According to Beauchamp's version, the story managed somehow to go public -- probably due to Waring -- at which point the broadsidings became even more exasperating to the Sharps. For now Sharp was not only a seducer, he had gone so far as to defame his victim in the most vicious way imaginable in those days. At *that* point, then, the tale had to be documented in some way, hence the claim that the midwife had given testimony to that fact. As the Sharps point out, a handyman, French Fort, did swear that on the way to the burial he looked in the coffin and observed that the child was "not white, but evidently colored" (352). That the child may have been a "blue baby" seems not to have been considered. Also in *Vindication* a midwife does give testimony about the child's color. Whether this is *the* midwife we do not know or even whether the truth is being told.

This concludes the significant changes from Bamberg's edition. So it would appear that there is no need as yet to edit, as it were, a Revised Standard Version: perhaps a Variorum edition? It was my hope that beneath Holmes's paper strips and crosshatchings there might have been the archeological remains, as it were, of the so-called "first" *Confession*. Such was not to be, however. I had hoped, upon opening the box containing the manuscript, to gaze

with wild surmise on the equivalent of Troy VIIa, with perhaps the mask of Agamemnon thrown in. Far from suppressing critical facts, things that may have shed "new light" on the Tragedy, Holmes's editing is just what he says it was: "trifling and unimportant." Ironically, Holmes did Beauchamp a big favor by effacing his very ungallant characterizations of Eliza Sharp and Ruth Reed. Especially in the latter case does Beauchamp look bad. Among his reasons for killing Sharp was that his seduction of Anna Cooke was "a species of dishonour, which from my earliest recollection, had ever excited by most violent reprobation..." He goes on to describe such behavior as having "dishonor and baseness in it" (26). True enough, but it appears possible that his behavior mirror-images Beauchamp's own. Otherwise, why his elaborate self-justification against poor Ruth Reed, who, one gets the impression, was one of life's victims? Aside from what might be regarded as the theme of "damage control" in Beauchamp's attempt at "prospective rehabilitation," what have we? No "smoking guns" certainly, no "now it can be told" revelations. Still, for a time it was very exciting up there in the Filson reading room.

NOTES

1. All quotations from Sharp's *Vindication* in this paper are drawn from Kallsen's volume, cited below.

2. For further discussion see: J. W. Cooke, "'Pride and Depravity': A Preliminary Examination of the Beauchamp-Sharp Affair," *Border States* 6 (1987): 1-12; Fred M. Johnson, "Letters of Ann Cooke: Fact or Factoid," *Border States* 6 (1987): 13-21.

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in any case, he says, he did not value his life. In his words, "Never was a murder planned with such studied precaution since the world began. I knew well it was impossible to avoid being arrested for the murder. I therefore planned everything with a view to the evidence which I should be able to bring forward in my favour" (Bamberg 42). Nevertheless Beauchamp was quickly linked with Patrick Henry Darby, an Old Court editorialist, and a notorious enemy of Sharp, who was alleged to have said that Sharp and the rest of the New Court party *did* assume a conspiracy and, further, that Beauchamp was its tool. However, as far as the Sharp family was concerned, the less openly *said* about the revenge motive, the better. In fact, from their point of view, the best "usual suspect" would have been Darby, not Beauchamp, because Darby would drag other Old Court personalities down with him, including John U. Waring. Beauchamp was an inconvenient "adverb" in a paragraph of the political essay being played out in the early 1920s. Robert D. Bamberg, the editor of the *Confession* in the Matthew Carey Library of English and American Literature, puts Beauchamp's dilemma best when he says, "Whether or not Sharp's murder was part of a political plot is hard to determine [but] Beauchamp, shortly after his indictment, was becoming entangled in a political web which he had probably not anticipated. . . . Beauchamp could neither extricate himself from the political web, nor use it to his advantage, and the very publication of the *Confession* and much of its content is steeped in a bitter political struggle" (10).

Putting the best face possible on his circumstances -- he has been sentenced to hang -- Beauchamp denies being part of any conspiracy, and avers that he did the murder out of what passed for honorable motives. He does, naturally, lambaste the New Court Party and singles out for particularly harsh treatment the Old Court mainstay, Patrick Henry Darby, who in Beauchamp's version perjured himself in the trial in order to obtain Beauchamp's conviction. However, Beauchamp goes on to give Darby an extremely elaborate exoneration -- so elaborate that the reader is left still feeling that Beauchamp is giving just enough of a hint that Darby may well *have* been a conspirator; this gave Darby great consternation, inasmuch as the Sharp family would have been happier to see him in the dock rather than Beauchamp, who may well have been the "fall guy." (This is not to imply Beauchamp's innocence).

The cunning, calculating, honor-driven anger that Beauchamp gives us in the *Confession* is his way of compensating for appearing to have been a "tool-villain" or merely an incompetent, cowardly assassin. The present *Confession*, however, may not have been the only one. It was alleged by Solomon P. Sharp's brother, Leander J. Sharp, that Beauchamp confessed the crime to his uncle, (the confusingly named) Jereboam O. Beauchamp, a few hours after his conviction, naming Darby as a co-conspirator. Leander Sharp printed a summary of this so-called "first" confession in his *Vindication of the Character of the Late Colonel Solomon P. Sharp, from the Calumnies Published Against Him Since His Murder, by Patrick Darby and Jereboam O. Beauchamp*. [1] (Although printed in 1827, *Vindication* was never sold to the public, because Darby threatened to sue if it was and, perhaps more persuasively, John U. Waring said he would kill L. J. Sharp if it was. All copies were walled up in the Sharp home in Frankfort, not to be discovered until many years late during its remodeling.)

This so-called "first" *Confession* could have been in outline form or perhaps even in some sketchy final version, because Sharp quotes one of Beauchamp's guards as saying that the "last part, the only true part, never saw the light of day" (Bamberg 15). But this doesn't make sense, for it implies that the version we have now merely had an end-piece implicating Darby and other Old Court notables, which certainly does not square with Beauchamp's presentation of himself as a lone avenger. To admit having assistance, or to have acted in concert with a political cabal, would have besmirched the act of chivalry that Beauchamp has been orchestrating for himself. There may have been a *sui generis* "first" *Confession*-- or the threat of one, for on June 17, 1826, Beauchamp's uncle submitted for the purpose of copyright a title page of a "confession" supposedly naming Darby specifically, but this version, if there was one, was never published, and even the title page has vanished, surviving only as Item

1649 in J. Winston Coleman's *A Bibliography of Kentucky History*, which counts six editions in the nineteenth century.

After his sentencing, Beauchamp requested a three weeks' stay in order to write a confession. This is not the "first" confession just alluded to, however, although I hypothesized that vestiges of it may have survived in the present one, the reason for writing this paper. "Old Jerry," as his uncle was called, had given the manuscript of, it appears, the present *Confession* to the state printer, J.H. Holeman, who refused to print it. Rebuffed, "Old Jerry" then took the manuscript to Gervis S. Hammond, a Bloomfield printer, and *Confession* appeared August 11 1826, about a month after Beauchamp's execution. Since Leander Sharp's *Vindication* never appeared, Beauchamp's version of the "Kentucky Tragedy," famed in song and story, is the "official" one, fulfilling his motives for writing it. Literally adding insult to injury, *Confession* ruined Sharp's name for posterity, if not for his relatives and close contemporaries. Indeed, at least one folk song survives, the given of which is that Sharp is just as bad as Beauchamp has painted him.

Bamberg's edition of *Confession* is from this first *printed* edition, not the manuscript about to be discussed. As he remarks, it "was obviously neither revised nor proofread by its author, is carelessly printed on coarse paper, is illegible in parts, and is full of typographical errors and typesetter's misspellings" (15). However much it may be likely that Beauchamp didn't do his own revising, *somebody did*, for the document in the Filson Club is replete with revisions of all kinds, including crosshatchings-out, interlinear corrections and word substitutions, arrows indicating transpositions and the like. Most intriguing, however, is one curious form of editing -- effacing, really. This was done by pasting strips of paper over lines and whole paragraphs. My attention was called to this manuscript by Jack Cooke, to whom I owe whatever I've ever done, or will do, on the Tragedy. [2] My original hunch was that this effacing indicated that perhaps someone wanted to hide something, but what? Or perhaps to hide something *now* preserving it for a later edition? This theory has to be predicated upon the assumption that this manuscript is in Beauchamp's hand, which I believe not to be the case. So much for conspiracy theories! But among the things predisposing me to a hypothesis that there may have been in this document "archeological remains" of the "truth" was the Sharps' own conspiratorial, paranoid nature in *Vindication*. As Henry Kissinger is supposed to have said, even paranoids have real enemies.

There were four cryptic remarks which impact on the conspiracy theory: two made by Beauchamp; the other at a hearsay's remove, by his jailer; another by the editor/compositor of this manuscript, W.H. Holmes. First, a remark by Beauchamp lends credence to the theory that there may have been a "first" confession, or at least the threat of one. Shortly before his execution, Beauchamp said a very curious thing, words to the effect that he had "been New Court long enough, and would die an Old Court man" (Kallen 357). Given his ardent backing of the Old Court cause, this is strange, but it could be interpreted that Beauchamp had been, through middle-men, negotiating with the New Court government to write a confession that would implicate certain Old Court personalities -- this was alleged by the Sharps, among others. The payoff would be Beauchamp's pardon. At the last, Beauchamp says, he decided that he would be doublecrossed and thus left without the honor of having avenged his wife, a pure act of chivalry. There had also been reports that the Beauchamps had been treated to various delicacies, drinks, desserts and the like during their residence in Frankfort jail, which seems hardly to have been a season in durance vile (Kallen 358). (Anna had decided to share her husband's imprisonment, and wrote one of their benefactors a poem thanking her for her kindness.) Another intriguing remark made by Beauchamp appears not in Bamberg's edition, but in the manuscript. However, this was edited out as being perhaps *too* "confessional," at least for the comfort of Governor Desha. The context is Beauchamp's exonerating his jailer, John McIntosh, from the charge that McIntosh had acted as the go-between in Beauchamp's alleged negotiations with the New Court. But in an introductory sentence to this exoneration, Beauchamp has said -- and has been silenced -- "Let this be added to the charge I made against the Governor from promising me a pardon for accusing the Old Court Party." Then, in Bamberg

(112) the passage continues, which brings us to the third bemusing remark, Beauchamp's characterization of McIntosh that "he ever, from the day of my conviction, told me frankly nothing would avail towards getting a pardon." All of this backing and filling indicates to me that there had been a fairly brisk give and take between Beauchamp and the New Court to sell out the Old Court in general and Darby in particular.

Now let us turn to the editor and compositor, and probably one of the authors of this manuscript. W. H. Holmes is worth quoting. Written 28 November 1826 on a copy of "Dinsmore's Railroad and Steam Navigation and Route Book," Holmes's afterword to *Confession* reads as follows:

> I do certify that the foregoing narrative is a true copy [italics mine] taken from and printed from the original manuscript written by J.O. Beauchamp, as presented to me by Mr. G. S. Hammond -- some trifling and unimportant alterations excepted. Some hard expressions against individuals were softened or expunged.
>
> In witness whereof, I subscribe, et.
> William H. Holmes
> November 28 1826

The missing preface, edited out by Holmes, and his editorial comment, might lend credence to the belief that the Filson manuscript is in Beauchamp's own hand. This is too good to be true, however. For one thing, the document is in at least two, probably three, and possibly four, hands. There is even a second, truncated, manuscript, beginning at the beginning, but which breaks off. For another, until it had been subjected to Holmes's tender mercies, it was remarkably "fair," as if the writer[s] had known for quite some time what was going to be said and how. Samuel Johnson once observed that the imminent prospect of being hanged concentrates the mind wonderfully. That being the case, Beauchamp and/or his amanuenses had theirs made up. Part of our difficulty is deciding what Holmes means by *true copy*. Is this document a copy of the one given by "Old Jerry" to Hammond? Is it Holmes's copy from the Beauchamp original? Until the provenance of the manuscript is investigated, these questions will remain -- and there is another paper in that! In any case the manuscript is uniformly neat, as if its writers were in no hurry. It will also have been noted that although Bamberg says that Confession was published 11 November, Holmes's testimony is dated 28 November. Frankly, I don't know what to make of this.

When Jack Cooke told me of the mysterious, tantalizing paperings-over and effacings of this document, my first thought was that this might be remnants of the legended "first" Confession. Perhaps these effacings covered over the "whodunit" elements that the Sharps allege Beauchamp had dealt -- or was going to deal -- to Desha. In this scenario, then, the version we have is just minus the "good stuff" -- taken out by Holmes's ostensible concern for sparing the survivors Beauchamp's "hard expression." The real agenda, of course, would be to suppress embarrassing revelations about the coziness between Beauchamp, the "fall guy," and the real movers and shakers. Further consideration rendered this theory extremely unlikely, for the abovementioned reason that after depicting himself as a lone-wolf avenger, it would be insane to have mentioned accomplices. The next possibility, less attractive and conspiratorial -- conspiracy is always more attractive -- is the logical one. Holmes merely acted as a kind of censor; I must admit a certain amount of chagrin here, as the lines from Robert Penn Warren's *World Enough and Time* still resonate: "We have what is left, the lies and half-lies and the truths and half-truths. We do not know that we have the Truth. But we must have it" (3)."

What we lack, then, is a "smoking gun." We will not get it in this document, either, no matter who wrote it. We don't even know if it is in Beauchamp's hand, although in the papers of J. Winston Coleman there supposedly

exists such a sample, and a letter in the Filson Club collection allows that Coleman has said he would provide a photostat. If he did, it does not appear in the Filson's card catalogue. It turns out, prosaically, that Holmes's editing is just what he says it was. Beauchamp *did* indeed have some harsh words for Eliza Sharp, and some rather ungallant things to say about a woman known as Ruth Reed. Holmes actually did Beauchamp's image a good turn here, inasmuch as he had been at pains to present himself as woman's avenger and a chivalric idealist insofar as trifling with affections was concerned.

To take first his words for Ruth Reed, Beauchamp wants us to believe that he had set up an elaborate ruse for being in Frankfort on business, while intending to kill Sharp. It involved moving to Missouri, with all the obvious activity that would involve. The trip to Frankfort was supposedly to finalize his land affairs in Kentucky. He had set that trip up to his acquaintances. However, to make assurance doubly sure, Beauchamp claims that "I had secretly prepared me an excuse for running away and delaying my removal [to Missouri] for a week...I secretly procured a process to be issued against me, which if executed, would unavoidably prevent my intended removal for that season" (43). This gives Beauchamp a week to go to Frankfort and kill Sharp. What Beauchamp is doing here, however, is making the best of a bad situation by incorporating this event retrospectively -- and prospectively -- into his "master plan." For he had been named by Ruth Reed as the father of her illegitimate child, born 10 June 1824. The warrant for Beauchamp's arrest was dated 25 October 1825 (Coleman 47-48). Beauchamp avers that he avoided being served -- on the ostensible warrant he claims to have arranged -- vowed to stay and fight the charge, although never intending to do so, was advised by a Mr. Bradburn that the warrant was merely harassment, and Beauchamp should move to Missouri as he planned. In the *Confession* Beauchamp is careful not to state the nature of the process he procured. Somehow, given his own scenario as an avenging redeemer of wronged women, one doubts that it would involve a charge of fathering a child out of wedlock! But in the manuscript there is a rather long passage given to *l'affaire* Reed. Holmes had crossed out and papered over this passage -- as being unchivalric, one assumed.

At any rate, here is Beauchamp's posthumous damage control of his image. He manages not only to discount Reed's accusation, but shows posterity how he planned to use it:

> I had secretly prepared me an excuse for running away and delaying my removal for a week. [At this point Beauchamp renders the Reed story] There was a young Lady in the neighborhood who had complimented me for civilities of my wilder days with calling me the father of her child. But I was not and she has had the justice several times to declare I was not. But far be it from me to say anything which might add in the slightest degree to her misfortune. She has repeatedly however declared to the neighborhood that she did not doubt at all but that it was the child of another man. And she were [would?] now I have no doubt wholly exculpate me from all charge as she had heretofore done several times. I am compelled to thus far notice the charge of her seduction from the path of virtue if settled upon me, however humble the sphere in which she moves, infinitely more disgraceful to my memory than would be the charge of having stolen her father's horse. B[??] on the sev[??] evening before I was to die at Frankfort.

The sanctimony and arrant hypocritical gall of this passage notwithstanding, it is also notable for Beauchamp's attempt to build an image that will stand up in posterity. As mentioned earlier, however, Holmes has done Beauchamp a favor by eliminating this rationale, for it should be transparently obvious that Reed *had* sworn out a warrant for Beauchamp, that Beauchamp probably *did* avoid being served, and indeed *did* have to go to Frankfort -- not, however, due to his meticulous planning of events. After searching for a month, the process-server "returned the warrant a month later with the short notation of the reverse side: 'the within named Beauchamp, not found in

my county'" (Coleman 48). By this time, of course, Beauchamp was in Frankfort prison.

Holmes's other notable "expunging" is Beauchamp's commentary on Eliza Scott Sharp. Mrs. Sharp had made a very effective witness at Beauchamp's trial, his comments to the contrary. Naturally the recipient of everyone's sympathy, she also was as close as the Commonwealth had to an eyewitness. Her subdued and dignified demeanor and soft-voiced testimony added further to her credibility. She damaged Beauchamp in another way, as well. In the 3 April 1926b issue of *The Patriot*, a New Court newspaper, she accused Patrick Henry Darby of at least instigating the murder, but the fallout of accusing Darby inevitably covered Beauchamp as well. In fact, it appears that the accusation was written by L. J. Sharp over her signature -- at least this was Beauchamp's view. The article seemed to provide a plausible version of the times, places, motives, and plan of action that such a conspiracy would have encompassed. (Darby went to the counterattack in his own paper, the *Commentator* and the battle of the broadsides was on, Darby defending himself in an eight-part series -- another topic for a paper!) The following passage, crossed out heavily by Holmes, was to have appeared after Beauchamp's characteristically gloating remark concerning himself: "and robed [sic] her of her adored husband" (78).

> And Mrs. Sharp is a very weak minded female. This I was told so soon as I came to Frankfort; so that I never much dreaded her evidence; but was rather disposed to pity her for the misery I had brought upon her: altho' I knew she was not altogether guiltless of her husband's blood: as her licentious tongue had been in great degree the origin of those falsehoods and calumnies which accelerated her husband's doom. But when she yielded herself to say & swear whatever suited the views of those who sought to make Col. Sharp's death a political thing, the Anti-Relief people, who composed the greater portion of intelligence and respectability in the State, lost all confidence in any of her statements about the assassination.

Holmes may well have thought this was going too far, adding insult to injury as it does. Beauchamp's reference to Mrs. Sharp's "licentious tongue" refers to her supposed rankling about the affair between Solomon and Anna -- after all those years! According to Beauchamp, the story about the black child had been concocted to placate her, but for "in-house" consumption only. According to Beauchamp's version, the story managed somehow to go public -- probably due to Waring -- at which point the broadsidings became even more exasperating to the Sharps. For now Sharp was not only a seducer, he had gone so far as to defame his victim in the most vicious way imaginable in those days. At *that* point, then, the tale had to be documented in some way, hence the claim that the midwife had given testimony to that fact. As the Sharps point out, a handyman, French Fort, did swear that on the way to the burial he looked in the coffin and observed that the child was "not white, but evidently colored" (352). That the child may have been a "blue baby" seems not to have been considered. Also in *Vindication* a midwife does give testimony about the child's color. Whether this is *the* midwife we do not know or even whether the truth is being told.

This concludes the significant changes from Bamberg's edition. So it would appear that there is no need as yet to edit, as it were, a Revised Standard Version: perhaps a Variorum edition? It was my hope that beneath Holmes's paper strips and crosshatchings there might have been the archeological remains, as it were, of the so-called "first" *Confession*. Such was not to be, however. I had hoped, upon opening the box containing the manuscript, to gaze with wild surmise on the equivalent of Troy VIIa, with perhaps the mask of Agamemnon thrown in. Far from suppressing critical facts, things that may have shed "new light" on the Tragedy, Holmes's editing is just what he says it was: "trifling and unimportant." Ironically, Holmes did Beauchamp a big favor by effacing his very ungallant characterizations of Eliza Sharp and Ruth Reed. Especially in the latter case does Beauchamp look bad. Among his reasons for killing Sharp was that his seduction of Anna Cooke was "a species of dishonour, which

from my earliest recollection, had ever excited by most violent reprobation..." He goes on to describe such behavior as having "dishonor and baseness in it" (26). True enough, but it appears possible that his behavior mirror-images Beauchamp's own. Otherwise, why his elaborate self-justification against poor Ruth Reed, who, one gets the impression, was one of life's victims? Aside from what might be regarded as the theme of "damage control" in Beauchamp's attempt at "prospective rehabilitation," what have we? No "smoking guns" certainly, no "now it can be told" revelations. Still, for a time it was very exciting up there in the Filson reading room.

NOTES

1. All quotations from Sharp's *Vindication* in this paper are drawn from Kallsen's volume, cited below.

2. For further discussion see: J. W. Cooke, "'Pride and Depravity': A Preliminary Examination of the Beauchamp-Sharp Affair," *Border States* 6 (1987): 1-12; Fred M. Johnson, "Letters of Ann Cooke: Fact or Factoid," *Border States* 6 (1987): 13-21.

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