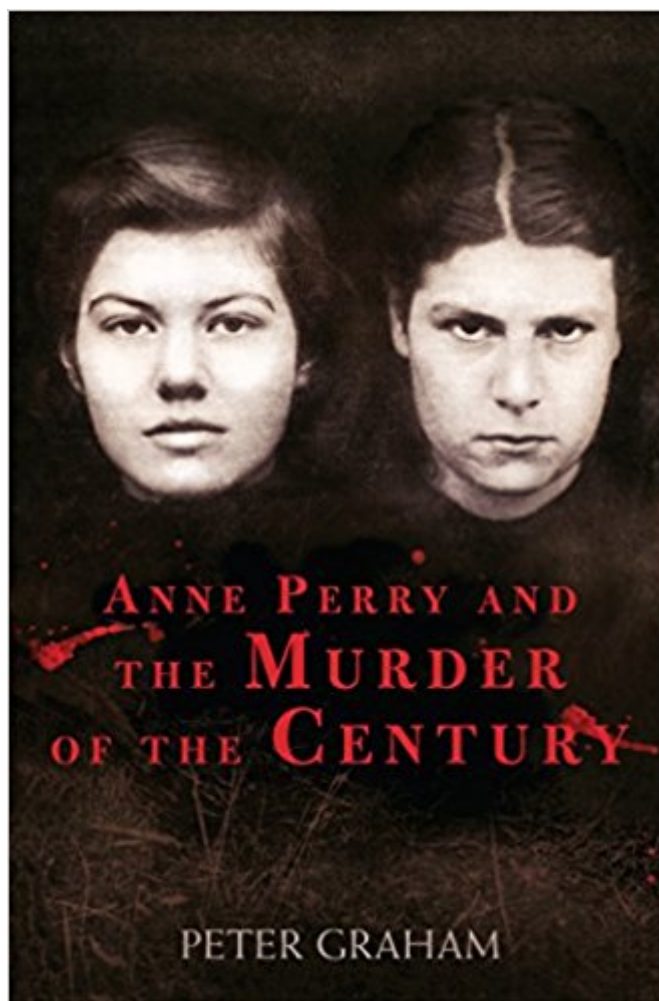


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Anne Perry And The Murder Of The Century



Synopsis

On June 22, 1954, teenage friends Juliet Hulme—better known as bestselling mystery writer Anne Perry—and Pauline Parker went for a walk in a New Zealand park with Pauline's mother, Honora. Half an hour later, the girls returned alone, claiming that Pauline's mother had had an accident. But when Honora Parker was found in a pool of blood with the brick used to bludgeon her to death close at hand, Juliet and Pauline were quickly arrested, and later confessed to the killing. Their motive? A plan to escape to the United States to become writers, and Honora's determination to keep them apart. Their incredible story made shocking headlines around the world and would provide the subject for Peter Jackson's Academy Award-nominated film, *Heavenly Creatures*. A sensational trial followed, with speculations about the nature of the girls' relationship and possible insanity playing a key role. Among other things, Parker and Hulme were suspected of lesbianism, which was widely considered to be a mental illness at the time. This mesmerizing book offers a brilliant account of the crime and ensuing trial and shares dramatic revelations about the fates of the young women after their release from prison. With penetrating insight, this thorough analysis applies modern psychology to analyze the shocking murder that remains one of the most interesting cases of all time.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I was 10 when Christchurch was shaken by the murder of Honora Reiper (Parker) by her daughter Pauline and Juliet Hulme, and my parents discussed it at length, so the case has always been with me. This book adds a great deal to our knowledge of it, especially about the relationship of the girls and the role of their parents. The Hulmes' coldness and neglect of Juliet accounts for a great deal in her personality. The Reipers were not blameless in their handling of Pauline, but they seem to have been much better than they were painted. While class was an important factor in 1950s Christchurch, both families made full use of the egalitarian aspect of New Zealand society to cross that divide, and the Reipers were not the clods they are sometimes painted. Juliet (Anne Perry) has made all the running in rewriting the history, turning herself almost into a bystander to the murder (as it may well now seem to her), but Peter Graham delves into her later life less sympathetically than more authorised biographers and interviewers. (Never has anyone whose life handed them such bitter lemons turned it into sweeter or more plentiful lemonade!) He finds a narcissistic personality, who welcomed Pauline's worship and may have taken a more active role in planning the murder and carrying it out than she now admits. She says the whole affair lasted little more than a day, but Graham indicates how circumstances built up over a period of months, the girls inseparable, the parents more or less intent on separating them, Henry Hulme clearly lying to Pauline that she could join Juliet in South Africa or England when he had no intention of letting that happen. As Graham implies, had the girls known their parents' true plans, it might not have been Pauline's mother who died. The film "Heavenly Creatures" has been criticised for suggesting the girls lived in a world of hysteria, yet as Graham tells it, that is how it was, each living for and through the other, feeding each other's fantasies. The lesbian aspect added titillation, but Graham puts it into perspective. It was physical, but that probably meant more to Pauline than Juliet, and not a great deal to either. The case's major source has always been Pauline's diary. Juliet also kept one, and her resourceful mother Hilda Hulme ensured that it was destroyed before the police could find it. What a different story it might have told us! Pauline has resolutely guarded her privacy. If she were to speak out, the kaleidoscope of this case might turn again, revealing a quite different pattern. I read this book under the title of "So Brilliantly Clever". Since it seems to be the same content, it is misleading to imply it is especially about Juliet Hulme/Anne Perry. While she may have smoothed over her past (who wouldn't?), she has served her time and is entitled to the new life she has made for herself. Putting her new name into the title is exploitive and cruel. And "the crime of the century"?

I think Parker/Hulme is challenged for that title by Leopold/Loeb, Christie/Evans (which helped bring an end to hanging in Britain), the Manson "family" or several others.

I had hoped to find the definitive account of this famous case of the so-called "Heavenly Creatures." I'm not entirely sure this is it, though Anne Perry and the Murder of the Century is exhaustive and leaves little to the imagination. The writing is very regional, at times somewhat stilted, and many of the author's Britishisms will land with a thud at the feet of readers from other areas of the world, or soar completely overhead. Some of the background material, such as bios of minor characters and descriptions of places, seems unnecessarily detailed and slows down the narrative. The book, however, is far from poorly written, and the author is a great deal more successful in describing the crime itself and the events and thoughts leading up to it. The picture painted of the two teenage killers is quite chilling and often surprising--particularly the icy calculation that led to the murder of Pauline Parker's mother. The motive for the crime, however twisted, is pretty clearly delineated and doesn't leave the reader wanting. And the case is so fascinating--and almost unfathomable in its more innocent time and place--it should keep you reading up to that point in the narrative. Also, the author's post-trial analysis of Juliet's and Pauline's characters is astute and avoids sensationalism. He rightly takes the adult Juliet (who now calls herself Anne Perry) to task for her convenient self-forgiveness and revisionism in painting herself as an unwitting child who was coerced by fear and guilt to take part in the crime, but he does so evenhandedly. Perry's comment when asked if she ever thinks about the woman she killed may tell the true story of her degree of contrition: "No. She was somebody I barely knew." Less is known about the adult Pauline, but her marginalizing herself on the fringes of a society she cannot face seems to at least suggest remorse. One more caveat: for a book named Anne Perry and the Murder of the Century, a much clearer picture is painted of the teenage Pauline than her partner in crime, Juliet Hulme (Perry). I get it; Perry is now a fairly well-known mystery writer. A book called Pauline Parker and the Murder of the Century would have sold fewer copies. And Juliet's personal diary, a potentially valuable resource to the author, had been (wisely) destroyed by her family. To be fair, this wasn't the author's original title; the book was originally released under the more measured title, So Brilliantly Clever: Parker, Hulme and the Murder that Shocked the World, and recently repackaged by the publishers for maximum sales punch. A good account of a very intriguing crime, despite its problems, and a worthwhile read once you get past the slow parts. Three and a half stars, perhaps four stars for the latter half of the book.

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