

## **TWO WRITERS SEPARATED BY A COMMON MURDER: A KIWI CANTEBURY TALE**

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*“Parting is all we know of heaven,  
And all we need of hell.”*  
Emily Dickinson

*Abstract: Pauline Yvonne and Juliet Marion are two kiwi girls—best friends and worst teenagers, sixteen and fifteen respectively—, who, after deliberate planning, bludgeoned to death the former’s mother, Honorah (in June 1954, Christchurch, New Zealand); Hilary Nathan and Anne Perry, a former crime diarist and a present-day crime novelist, live as the remorseless reinvented aged versions of the two girls, completely separated for over sixty years: the words that bonded them so closely together appear useless in bridging the chasm created by their heinous unmotivated act; writing itself may appear as both motive and opportunity for a scholarly investigation.*

*Keywords: murder, trial, writing, psychopathy, Electra*

Our title paraphrase of the Shavian paradox (“England and America are two great nations separated by a common language”) also involves the paradox in the lives of the two kiwi (New Zealand=“the land of the long white cloud” in Maori) writers, who had decided to do absolutely anything they could to protect their friendship/companionship/partnership...; only “absolutely anything” proved to be the crucial event resulting in their lifelong separation. As we shall presently see, our crime novel writer seems unable to stop writing about murder (over one hundred volumes so far), while the diary crime writer stops on the very threshold of the murder, the specific murder that the crime novelist “didn’t want to talk about”; both writers find it difficult—even impossible—to use certain words, which they systematically avoid.

At this point we can quote an authority on the subject—Susan Sontag (1933-2004; “Notes on Camp,”—1964; “What’s Happening to America?”—1967...): “The writer is either a practicing recluse or a delinquent /Nathan or Perry/, guilt-ridden one—or both. Usually both!/Nathan and Perry/” With a life that was both promiscuous and the embodiment of scandal, Sontag does not hesitate to write about the promiscuity of art and literature in general and the willingness of writers to scandalize their readers; for a queer person, writing was a form of transcending the ugly, unpleasant truth about herself, resulting in her lifelong frustration with her inability to think her way out of the unwanted reality of her eroticism—her inability to be honest about it; consequently, she “has always been placing conceptual obstacles” in her own path and always “wanted a new name,” a new identity “as a weapon to match the weapon that society” had against her; it looks like one would have to also go to Cixous, Irigaray, Carter, and Kristeva... to get a feeling of “writing /and rewriting/ that inscribes femininity” by “escaping from the ordinary limits of the self...” (Drayton) One remains, of course, uncertain whether a crisis of self-difference and hyperidentification (Wen) and a change of name is equivalent to a change of identity—but we shall see.

The **TWO WRITERS** are, first, Anne Perry, author—between 1979 and 2019 of 108 volumes; as multi-million selling crime novelist, acclaimed as “the queen of Victorian crime” for her Thomas Pitt (20 books) and William Monk (24 books) series, plus Christmas stories,

WWI books... and others (including three edited anthologies--Death by Dickens, Much Ado About Murder, A Century of British Mystery and Suspense--, two “Sherlock Holmes” collections, an Introduction to Writing and one about Plotting, three young adult novels, two collaborative novels...)

The novelist herself has been described as “churning dozens of bloody and graphic murder mysteries,” with serial killers, headless corpses, girls strangled and cut open, explosions killing hundreds; all in all, mostly dark issues (including infanticide and incest), but always returning to the themes of identity, guilt, remorse, forgiveness and redemption; for Joanne Drayton (2013), “Perry writes to rewrite /a good synonym for deception/ herself...; a reconfiguring of the construction of evil to that of writer and published author;” we can remember (sic) that her amnesiac private investigator Monk cannot know if he is the murderer of Jocelyn Grey, or who he is, or why others (in fact, the author herself) see him as brutal, cruel and evil.

Already in her eighties and living in a house built by herself from the remains of an old barn in a small Scottish village, Perry “remains a handsome woman...,” (Wichtel)—a likeable, elusive, and bracing companion, but also “commanding, self-assured and utterly humourless...” in her superficial charm. She writes: “I was born in Blackheath, London England in October 1938. At age six I was severely ill... and at age eight I was sent to the Bahamas to live with a family that fostered me... After the Bahamas they moved to a private island off the coast of New Zealand... By the time I was ten I had missed three years schooling.../and/...at thirteen I became ill again and was off school from then on. /Later on, /...there was never anything I seriously wished to do except write... However, I was in my twenties before I started putting together the first semblance of a book... It took many years before my first book was accepted for publication /1979/. During those years I had various jobs... /Then/...I began writing mysteries set in Victorian London.../and/...found that I was totally absorbed by what happens to people under pressure of investigation, how old relationships and trusts are eroded... I began the Monk series... to raise questions about responsibility, particularly that of a person for acts he cannot remember. How much of a person’s identity is bound up in memory?... We are in so many ways the sum of all we have been!... I have lots of ideas ahead, but I am not ready to speak about them... I shall continue the Pitts, Monks, and Christmas novellas as long as anyone is still interested in reading them... Tathea /1999/ and Come Armageddon /2001/ have caused people to ask if I am a member of The Church of Jesus Christ and Latter Day Saints /Mormon/--yes, I am, and have been for about 40 years.” (About Anne Perry, 2019)

And the second writer—author of a crime diary, (necessarily reminiscent of Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s 1981 Chronicle of a Death Foretold) covering the period between the New Year of 1953 to the morning of June 22, 1954; dozens and dozens of entries describing the relationship between two teenage girls from the older one’s (by 51/2 months) point of view; mostly a sickly kind of personal writing, kept hidden even from her family (see Graham, Medlicott, Clarkson, Howe...), about the two girls’ discussions and plans (write and publish books, become actresses in Hollywood, “murder all odd wives who get in our way...”—June 18. 1954), how to make money as prostitutes— “we worked out how much we would make in such a profession...”—January 28-29, 1954, about their night escapades, robberies (shoplifting), bedroom scenes, thoughts of suicide, “the joy of the thing called sin,” their madness and depression, ceremonies, acting their characters...

Peter Graham: “In their warped minds they thought they were superbeings, above the law...”; March 1, 1953—“We have decided how sad it is for other people that they cannot appreciate our genius...”; in a 22-line poem on the back of her 1953 diary the two are seen as “the most glorious beings in creation” and could be “the pride and joy of any nation” with their “outstanding genius..., so rare.../like/ Goddesses /and, as such, they might get to decide who

lives and who dies, among other things/, or heavenly creatures /infra/, wonderful people... with wisdom hidden behind their eyes...” In the meantime, they invented a new religion—“Juliet and I decided the Christian religion had become too much of a farce and we decided to make up one of our own...,” with such saints as Mario Lanza, Orson Welles, Harry Lime, Mel Ferrer, Guy Rolfe..., plus characters from the books they were writing; for the purpose, both copied out the Ten Commandments so that they could break them; they also imagined (April 3, 1953) a parallel dimension, “The Fourth World,” that only they could enter with their secret key, as they “have an extra part of their/our brain which can appreciate” it; “only about ten people have it;” and it also contains the imaginary kingdom of Borovnia (a world of violence, sadism, bondage, rape, and torture).

Still, while in the process of writing and completing (by June 19, 1954) their six books/novels, along with plays, poetry and an opera (Dr. Medlicott thought that all these “did not show talent and there was nothing to suggest that they could be published...”), the threat of separation (the motive) was driving them insane; June 6—“We are both stark, staring, raving mad. There is definitely no doubt about it and we are thrilled by the thought...”; June 9—“I am feeling particularly mad today... Mother and I had a disagreement as I wished to see Trent’s Last Case /Orson Welles/ tonight /the last film the girls watched together/ and the bloody bitch would not let me...”; and gradually, a concrete plan had begun to take shape.

On Feb. 13, with “mother most unreasonable,” the writer asks herself (or both)—“Why could not Mother die?”; April 28—“Anger against mother boiled up inside... Suddenly a means of ridding myself of this obstacle occurred to me...”; the next day the idea is presented to Juliet, “who does not disagree violently...”; June 19—“...our main idea for the day was to moider Mother...; this time is a definite plan which we intend to carry out. We have worked it out carefully and are both thrilled by the idea. Naturally /sic/ we feel a trifle nervous, but the pleasure of anticipation is great... We burnt our film books this evening...”; June 20— “...we discussed our plans for moidering Mother and made them a little clearer. Peculiarly enough I have no (qualms of/ conscience (or is it peculiar, we are so mad) ...”; June 21— “Deborah/Juliet rang, and we decided to use a rock in a stocking rather than a sandbag. We discussed the moider fully. I feel very keyed up, as though I were planning a surprise party. Mother has fallen in with everything beautifully and the happy event is to take place tomorrow afternoon. So next time I write in this diary Mother will be dead. How odd—yet how pleasing...”; Juliet/Deborah: “Gina is very excited, as am I. At last, we begin to move towards the final culmination of our dreams. Our consciences are clear. Great love requires great sacrifice.” (see McCurdy thesis)

“Gina’s” really last entry, on June 22: “The day of the happy event. I am writing a little of this on the morning before the death. I felt very excited and ‘the night-before-Christmassing’ last night. I didn’t have pleasant dreams though. I am about to rise.” At lunch, “the girls seemed very happy, laughing and joking during the meal...”(father); “Juliet left home radiantly happy...”(mother); the much discussed plan was that Juliet/Deborah would collect a large rock (half-a-brick in fact—the means) and place it in a stocking; they would persuade the victim to come with them on a farewell outing (the departure of the Hulmes to England, via South Africa, was fixed for July 3) on Port Hills in Victoria Park; she would be lured to a secluded, steep part of the hillside, near a small wooden bridge, where Juliet would drop a small pink stone removed from a broach on the ground (the opportunity); when the woman would lean down to pick up the stone, her daughter would hit her on the head with the brick in the stocking, killing her at once; this would hopefully look like she had tripped and hit her head on the hard stone ground (alibi), as the girls would be running for help (transcript references supra).

This morbid, lurid (even in its transcribed versions at the New Zealand National Archives) diary and the “extraordinarily naïve” (Medlicott), poorly planned—but undoubtedly “foretold”—moider showing a gross inability to think things through to their logical conclusion

(the “motive” becomes even less of a motive after the crime, the “obstacle” once removed does not open any prospect, the “means” is primitive, brutal, coarse, uningenious... as compared to poison, a gun, a knife even..., and the execution terrifying—infra) is the adolescent work of today’s Hilary Nathan (1964 BA from Auckland University), a mature devout Catholic, spending most of her ascetic life in prayer and contemplation; for the past several decades, she has lived in London (librarian), Hoo (near Rochester, Kent, as equestrian instructor in a riding school for disabled children), Strood (teacher and deputy headmistress in a special-needs school), Scotland and the Orkney Island(s) of Burray (retired).

The **VICTIM** in the “case,” “forgotten in the near-indecent fascination for the murderers.../infra”—see Andrew Conway’s Norasearch Diary—was Honorah/Honora/Nora Mary Parker, daughter of chartered accountant Robert William Parker and Amy Lillian Blakemore, born in 1909 in Birmingham, England; at 18, after father’s death in 1927, she migrated to New Zealand with her mother Amy; in 1930 she started living (never married) with Herbert Rieper, fifteen years her senior, and in 1936 they move to Christchurch, where he managed a fish supply shop; their first child, Herbert, died in infancy, Wendy Patricia was born in 1937, and Pauline Yvonne on May 26, 1938; Rosemary was born in March 1949 with Downs syndrome. To make ends meet, Honorah ran a boarding house from 1953; there was considerable friction between Honorah and Pauline, and she was murdered on June 22, 1954, at 45; “Honora lay, savagely murdered, in a sea of blood on a lonely track...”(Graham); “Blood streaming from her head, vomit in her mouth, her dentures tossed...”(Howe); she was cremated and services were held at Bromley Methodist Cemetery. “She appears to have been a person of normal intelligence with average social activities and interests..., intensely interested in her children...” (McCurdy/Medlicott)

This cold-blooded **MURDER**, once again, took place on June 22 (winter solstice), 1954; after lunch with the Parkers, Juliet, Pauline and Honora walk together to central city, Christchurch, take a bus to Cashmere, and then walk 1.5 km. to Victoria Park; at about 2:30 p.m. they called at the park kiosk and had afternoon tea (the half-brick was in Pauline’s shoulder bag), then walked together over the brow of a hill and down a tree-lined track into a wooded area; in a secluded spot (apparently visited by Pauline six months earlier), Juliet drops down the little pink stone, Pauline points it out to her mother, who bends down to pick it up; the assault begins, Pauline hits Honora with the brick in the stocking, Juliet—walking ahead—turns back, “kneels down and joins in, grips her around the throat and holds her head against the ground with Pauline, grasping the half-brick in her hand and hammering again and again—on the forehead, the temples, wherever she could land a blow “; “Mrs Parker twisted convulsively..., they tried to drag her to a place where they could roll her down a bank, but she was already a dead weight. It was all they could do to shift her a few feet. She was gurgling blood as they left...” (Graham). The girls are then seen running to the kiosk out of breath and asking Kenneth Ritchie (kiosk manageress’s husband) for help: “Mother has fallen and hit her head on a rock and is covered in blood. I think she is dead”—cried Pauline.

Police, photographers, coroner and forensic team soon arrive on the crime scene: “Honora was found lying on her back with blood streaming from her head wounds..., one of her shoes had been tossed to the side, her possessions and her dentures were scattered all around and nearby was the half-brick and a blooded stocking... There were crushing injuries to her skull and bruising to the neck, which suggested that the head had been held to the ground during the beating...” (Howe); the brick must have been used 24 to 45 times (one blow could produce more than one lacerated wound or fracture to the skull); the girls’ clothing was blood-stained. With no other witnesses at the scene of the crime, the two perpetrators’ subsequent depositions and the coroner’s statements were the only sources for investigators. One can remind here two sententious expressions from the writers introduced above; first writer—“It’s who you are when you die that matters, not what you did while you were alive...”; second writer—“I would

like to kill someone sometime because I think it is an experience that is necessary to life...”; an experience including the sound of the mother’s crushed skull and face bones, blood gurgling through her mouth, eyes, nostrils, ears and wounds, her brain fragments scattered about the pavement, the dull noises and cries of the dying victim... Journalists described it as one of the most intriguing cases in New Zealand criminal history; within a day both girls were arrested for murder.

The **MURDERESSES** (with whom we are far from fascinated—sic, supra) were, at the time of the event, sixteen and fifteen-and-a-half years old; Juliet Marion Hulme was born on October 28, 1938 in London, so two years before the German blitz, that gave her nightmares; at six she had bronchitis and pneumonia, at eight was sent to the Bahamas for one year; her brother Jonathan was born in 1944. Their father, Henry Rainsford Hulme (a well-known and respected mathematical physicist, who worked on the Manhattan Project developing the nuclear bomb, author of a book on Nuclear Fusion—1969) took the position of Rector of the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, so he moved with his family to New Zealand in 1948; Hilda Hulme, “a self-possessed, highly intelligent woman with many cultural and social activities” (Medlicott), started an affair (known by accident to Juliet) with an engineer, Walter Perry, whom she would marry after Hulme’s resignation in 1954 and their divorce in 1955. Juliet’s post-primary education was at Christchurch Girls’ High School. Better known as Cranmen Center, where she met (in February 1952) and befriended Pauline Parker; their two-year-five-month “togetherness” ended with the murder, then trial and time in prison, until November 1959—then off-the-grid for forty years.

There is no evidence that Juliet kept a diary herself (if so, her mother had it destroyed after the murder, during the inquest) as did her “co-conspirator” and partner in crime; Pauline Yvonne Parker/Rieper (born May 26, 1938 in Christchurch, New Zealand) was the second daughter (supra) of Herbert Rieper and Honorah Mary Parker; at five she was diagnosed with osteomyelitis in one leg and hospitalized for one year (several operation—a slight limping); between May and October 1953, Pauline attempted relationships with a couple of boys boarded in their home; in April 1954 she left Girls’ High and moved to a private vocational school; two months later, Pauline and Juliet (i.e. Gina and Deborah,...) took turns in bludgeoning Honorah Parker to death; trial and incarceration followed; then she became Hilary Nathan.

According to various descriptions, Juliet was narcissistic, self-willed, demanding, excitable, intelligent, full of fantasy, intolerant of criticism; in her turn, Pauline was seen as rather sullen, self-contained, imaginative, sensitive, fond of solitude (sic), unable to tolerate criticism, with “a boyish /rebellious/ anarchic streak.”

Thus, quite similar in their having had health problems, their love of books, writing and acting, their lively imaginations and touch of arrogance, the girls may have still appeared as an odd pair, and it was only their togetherness/relationship/companionship/friendship/love/partnership...even two-ness that resulted in the “bestial, treacherous, filthy, appalling” (Dr. Francis Bennett) murder, concocted in their “nightlong verbal orgies;” this obsession with words and their meanings (or “semantic void”—they change their names—Deborah and Gina, or even Paul and Charles, later Anne and Hilary; “murder” is replaced by “moider,” slang from one of the films they watched; they are themselves “brilliantly clever,” “heavenly creatures,” or “daughters of heaven”...) along with their increasing urge to write (even more intense during Juliet’s tuberculosis and quarantine at Cashmere Sanitarium, May-September 1953), and thus attempting to cover their “secret” under piles and piles of words; the secret behind gestures, acts and behaviours tending to scandalize the kiwi society of the 1940’s and ‘50’s: holding hands, kissing openly, bathing together and going for midnight swims, riding horses and bicycles (sometimes naked), acting out fictional characters, building “temples” and performing strange ceremonies, watching “inspirational” films (The Third Man, Trent’s Last Case...) and making plans to go to New

York and find publishers for their tales, novels, poems, and opera (a total of six books between them), and then to Hollywood where they would be hailed as actresses; the travel and other expense money would come from stealing (from Pauline's father's shop once, shoplifting twice,...), blackmail and prostitution (supra).

But, as we have seen, there comes a time when “moider” regains its status as murder, when the saints become police detectives (Pauline was arrested overnight—fourteen exercise books and her diaries were confiscated—, and Juliet the next day), investigators, prosecutors, attorneys, jury members, psychiatrists, witnesses, journalists and magistrates from this rejected world, when “life” and “death” denote what they have always denoted, and the two “outstanding geniuses,” contemptuous of anyone else's opinion, have to stand **TRIAL**, i.e. come down from the Fourth World of ecstasy, delusion, escapism, hypocrisy and, most likely, insanity, to the Supreme Court in Christchurch for six days (August 23-28, 1954). Apart from their age, the difficulty, uniqueness, and complexity of the trial was given not so much by the girls' contradictory testimonies (especially Juliet's several versions), but by the fact that they both claimed to be mad; so, first, whatever the all-male jury got from them or the other actors (coroner's report, transcripts of Pauline's diaries, trial transcripts, long and repeated interviews with the culprits—five times each, for as long as seven hours at a time—, cross-examination of the doctors and psychiatrists, various witnesses testimonies...) consisted in corroborations of unreliable, “mad girls” statements; second, the lawyers (Terrence Gresson and Brian McClelland for Juliet, Alec Haslam and Jim Wicks for Pauline, Alan Brown and Peter Mahon for the Crown) could not possibly call Juliet and Pauline as witnesses (on account of their unpleasant, rude and abusive behavior, their obtuseness and venomous hostility..., bound to alienate not only the jury, and whatever they may have said could be negatively interpreted); and third, the defense's plea of insanity (for a “not guilty” verdict, as opposed to the Crown's plea for “sane in the legal sense..., fully aware of what they were doing..., but evil... and dirty-minded”) required the presence of two psychiatrists as medical witnesses, both fellows of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians: Dr. Reginald Medicott (“they have paranoia of an exalted type and it is in the setting of folie a deux...; it is form of systemized delusional insanity...; a communicative insanity..., consisting in the use of words empty of genuine content...; by June 1954 both accused were grossly insane, I would say...”) and Dr. Francis Bennett, also the Parker family physician (“The pair were insane at the time of the killing... They are still not sane. In my opinion, they will never be sane...”—both quotes in Clarkson). The prosecution (“Sentiment and emotionalism have no part in British justice...”) called three state psychiatrists to prove that the girls were “perfectly sane... and are not incurably insane. My submission /Senior Crown Counsel Alan Brown/ is they are incurably bad.”

The **VERDICT** came on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> of June— “Guilty!” Next, the **SENTENCE**: Mr. Justice F. B. Adams jailed the pair “at Her Majesty's pleasure /” too young for capital punishment”/ for an indefinite term of detention,” translated into five-and-a-half years in separate penal institutions (Wellington and Auckland). All the way through the trial and its outcome, the girls did not appear disturbed, showed little emotion, were often hostile and irritable and impressed by their complete lack of remorse or even regret, their incredible conceit, arrogance and self-inflation, their belief in the complete right “to do what they will” as they were proud of their “madness”; in their speech, they embraced evil openly, thought they were justified in their murder, most likely “mother wanted it,” though “the old girl took a bit more killing than we thought...” (Juliet to Pauline in a stage whisper, overheard by police woman during trial—see Graham). They were released in November 1959, and “were forced” to live their separate new lives in New Zealand, England, the United States, and Scotland as Hilary Nathan (who all but disappeared into rural oblivion) and Anne Stewart (later Anne

Perry), with new identities and never contacting each other (so far, when they are in their early eighties).

The **SECOND TRIAL**, infinitely more complex and apparently endless, goes through several phases, so we will try to concentrate and systematize: “The case brought out all the small-town prejudices one would expect to find in a place like Christchurch in 1954: anti-intellectualism, hypocritical disapproval of sexual misconduct, religious bigotry, and strange survivals of folk superstitions.” (Elric Hooper, “Introduction,” p.8—Michaelanne Forster) Isolated post-colonial New England as a whole, beginning with the dozens of articles, trial reports and newspaper stories in 1954 and the later coverage until 1994 (when, following the release of Peter Jackson’s film, journalists Chris Cooke, Lin Fergusson and others tracked down Juliet and Pauline as Perry and Nathan), completed by such titles as “To Moider Mother,” “Heavenly Images,” or “Dutiful Daughters” (articles), The Evil Friendship (novel), Minor Murder (play), Daughters of Heaven (play), Heavenly Creatures (Jackson’s famous movie), or So Brilliantly Clever (Peter Graham’s definitive account) seemed to have developed an ironically/sarcastic detached position, continued by other fictional (The Verdict—play, Obsession—novel, The Christchurch Murder—screenplay...) and scholarly (MA and PhD theses) accounts, documentaries (“Anne Perry—Interiors,” “Reflections of the Past,” ...), Web Sites, etc. (see REFERENCES).

And when all the world’s a courtroom, beyond kiwi city and country boundaries, specific clinical studies emphasized the uniqueness of the case, due to its diagnoses: folie a deux/shared psychosis/hysterical contagion/depression alliance, along with schizophrenia, narcissism, personality disorder, bipolar disorder... More general (pathological) studies send us to the Electra complex (madness connected to the relationship with the mother and her exclusion from the symbolic order—Jung, Irigaray, Lacan, Cixous...); to the “psychopathy checklist” (Cleckley, Hare especially)—need for excitement, megalomania, grandiosity and obsession with power, malignant narcissism and self-centeredness, lying and facile deceit, egocentricity, irresponsibility, predation, use of psychopathic fiction, others as objects and obstacles, inadequately motivated heinous criminal acts, lack of remorse or guilt, callousness, promiscuous sexual relations, sadism, theatricalness, hedonism, identity diffusion; or to the Dunning-Kruger effect (superiority, overestimating one’s abilities, self-serving cognitive bias, inflated self-assessment, illusion of grandeur once more, miscalibrated individuals/ “confident idiots”/ imposter syndrome...); and to a long list of uncomfortable reads (The Murder of the Century, “The Most Grotesque of the Crimes,” Famous Australasian Crimes, The Greatest Criminals of All Time, The World’s Worst Murderers, Queens of Crime...) that may make one believe that madness may be an important part of what makes the world go round; and that writing (our constant preoccupation for decades—past and to come) may be seen as simple provocation, (and) as a path to and beyond murder, and writers as erratic, reinvented individuals (Cleckley offers a long list of examples) who can manipulate the possible dissociation between the semantic and affective components of language; the real, hidden motive, means, and opportunity?

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