

A Prescription for Murder: The Victorian Serial Killings of Dr. Thomas Neill Cream (The Chicago Series on Sexuality, History, and Society)

By Angus McLaren



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From 1877 to 1892, Dr. Thomas Neill Cream murdered seven women, all prostitutes or patients seeking abortions, in England and North America. *A Prescription for Murder* begins with Angus McLaren's vividly detailed story of the killings. Using press reports and police dossiers, McLaren investigates the links between crime and respectability to reveal a remarkable range of Victorian sexual tensions and fears. McLaren explores how the roles of murderer and victim were created, and how similar tensions might contribute to the onslaught of serial killing in today's society.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This perspective study by a professor of history at the University of Victoria, British Columbia, is less a truecrime story than a sociological analysis. Cream, imprisoned for murder in the U.S., emigrated to England on his release and there fatally poisoned at least four prostitutes in 1891 and 1892 with strychnine, for which he was hanged. McLaren views Cream as partly a madman and partly a product of the culture of his day, a society in which independent women began to demand rights. Their rebellion changed attitudes toward abortion and prostitution, but above all increased feelings of misogyny. The book provides a searching look at a murderer, London society of the 1890s, the demimonde and the police. Illustrations not seen by PW. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Library Journal

Everyone is familiar with the case of Jack the Ripper, who, in 1888, gained notoriety (and legendary status) through his horrific murders. Why have we never heard of Dr. Cream, who only a few years later committed the same crimes, and many more of them? McLaren (history, Univ. of Victoria, British Columbia) offers a strictly factual rundown of Cream's use of strychnine on his patients, prostitutes, and possibly even his wife during a 16-year period. Our interest in the case is then developed and deepened by the second part of the book, in which McLaren investigates the societal backdrop against which the murders took place. McLaren outlines the position of women, and specifically prostitutes, at the time and gives an excellent chapter on illegal abortion that sheds light on what women endured to end pregnancies (some of Cream's victims came to him for abortion purposes). This is an excellent addition to academic and larger public collections. *- Linda Smith, Mobil Corp. Lib., Fairfax, Va.*

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From the Back Cover

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