Heavenly Images

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In 1954 Honora Parker was murdered by her daughter Pauline Parker, then aged 16, and Pauline's friend and probable lover, Juliet Hulme, aged 15. The case was sensationalised in the media at the time and subsequently. In 1995, the film *Heavenly Creatures*, directed by Peter Jackson and co-written by Fran Walsh, was released. This fictionalised the events, but used the real names and locations of the people involved. The interest of the present paper is the public portrayal of lesbians in a discourse which connects lesbians and murder, sex and death, and which portrays the two girls involved in this killing as either 'mad' or 'bad'. There is no one historical truth or grand narrative of any event(s), and I see the various media accounts as competing versions of this case, perhaps revealing more about their authors than the events they depict.

Pauline Parker and Juliet Hulme are both still alive, but were not consulted about any contemporary or later accounts. To help compensate for this, I privilege Pauline Parker's version of events as described in her 1953 and 1954 diaries, and the evidence given at the trial by Hilda Hulme. As both girls signed confessions before lawyers could advise them, the only possible defence was insanity. This posed major problems. As junior defence counsel Brian McLelland later explained: 'We had to find the two of them mad . . . it was very difficult . . . and then this clever chap Medlicott came up with this idea of 'folie à deux', so we went with that'.[1]

The Parker-Hulme case was defence psychiatrist Dr Reginald Medlicott's first appearance in a courtroom giving psychiatric evidence, and he found it very difficult. Nearly 35 years later, he still recalled the days of the trial as grueling.[2] His 'folie à deux' theory was discredited under cross-examination by Crown prosecutors Allan Brown and Peter Mahon. The judge, Francis Boyd Adams, called the defence and the prosecution to his rooms and informed them that he thought the defence case had not been presented satisfactorily and that he was considering instructing the jury that no defence had been entered. This was humiliating for the defence, and Peter Mahon, then junior counsel for the prosecution, found it unacceptable. Displaying the commitment to justice characteristic of his subsequent legal career, he worked all night with McLelland, searching for a precedent involving double insanity. The two juniors found a case, and were able to persuade

the judge that a defence had been entered, enabling the prosecution to respond.

The jury deliberated for only two hours, then returned a verdict of guilty, rejecting the double insanity defence. Both being under 18, the girls were sentenced to imprisonment 'at Her Majesty's Pleasure', an alternative to the death penalty.[3] It was a condition of the sentence that they be separated; Hulme served most of her time at Mt Eden Prison in Auckland, while Parker was at Arohata Women's Prison in Wellington. They were released in 1959, after serving five years, Hulme to her family in England, and Parker to probation until she also left New Zealand in 1966.[4] Neither woman has re-offended. Today, Hulme, living as Anne Perry, is a successful murder mystery writer; Parker, living as Hilary Nathan, is a retired teacher in England.

In this paper I argue that Jackson has produced a filmic version of Dr Medlicott's discredited 'folie à deux' theory, using special effects with plasticine model figures to construct a delusionary world for the two girls. In places the film closely follows Medlicott's evidence at the trial, as if the producers were dramatising his theories. Some scenes in the film, which portray Medlicott's version, are considered, as are media reports following the expose of Anne Perry as Juliet Hume, and her responses. I also consider the distinction between 'fiction' and 'biography', the ethics of producing books or films on people without their permission, and the continuing significance of the Parker-Hulme case for New Zealand lesbians.

The Families[5]

Honora Parker, the murdered woman, emigrated from England to New Zealand when she was eighteen years old and met Herbert Rieper at her workplace in Raetihi. Rieper, from Tasmania, was fifteen years older than Honora, and was married to Louise, thirteen years older than himself, and had two sons. He left this marriage and moved with Honora to Christchurch where they lived as a married couple, no-one suspecting otherwise. Their first child, a boy, had cardiac difficulties and died within a few hours. Their second child, Wendy, was born in 1937, followed by Pauline Yvonne in 1938. Pauline, diagnosed with osteomylitis at the age of five, was hospitalised for a long period of time and is reported to have nearly died. In 1949, when Pauline was eleven, another girl, Rosemary, was born. She had Downs' Syndrome, remaining at home for three years before she was placed in Templeton, a Christchurch institution. At the time of the murder Honora Parker kept a boarding house in the inner city and Herbert Rieper managed a fish shop.

Juliet Hulme was the daughter of Henry and Hilda Hulme. She was born in England in 1938. A younger brother, Jonathon, was born in 1944.

Juliet suffered from severe respiratory ailments as a child and spent long periods of time away from her family, in warmer climates, being sent to the Bahamas and later New Zealand. In 1948 the family moved to New Zealand, Henry Hulme having been appointed Rector (the equivalent of modern Vice-Chancellor) of Canterbury College in Christchurch, part of the University of New Zealand. Henry and Hilda were members of the Christchurch upper classes, living in the luxurious mansion owned by the university at Ilam (presently the University Staff Club). Hilda was on the board of the Christchurch Girls' High School, which Juliet attended. It was there she met Pauline Parker. Hilda was also a Vice-President and a founder of the Christchurch Marriage Guidance Council and a broadcaster on National Radio. From an early stage the professors at Canterbury College had been dissatisfied with Henry Hulme's appointment, and in 1954 he was forced to discreetly resign. Meanwhile, Hilda Hulme had begun a relationship with a former client, Walter Perry, who moved in with the Hulmes. Things came to a head in April 1954, when the Hulmes told Juliet that they were going to divorce, were leaving New Zealand, and that she would be sent to an aunt in South Africa.

Both family situations were complicated and difficult, and the relationship between Pauline Parker and her mother was especially stressful. It is likely that Pauline was both physically and verbally abused. Hers was a home with hidden secrets and stresses, where money was short, and where her working-class English mother expected her to help with the boarding house rather than socialize with upper-class English friends.

The Murder

On 22 June 1954, Pauline Parker and Juliet Hulme took Honora Parker to Victoria Park where they killed her, brutally, with a brick in a stocking. They were arrested following the discovery of Pauline Parker's diaries, which described the planned murder in some detail. Both girls signed confessions, being interviewed by the police without lawyers present. They subsequently stood trial for murder. The defence claimed that they were not guilty by reason of joint insanity, while the prosecution argued that they were perfectly sane, 'dirty-minded' girls who had killed Honora because she was an 'obstacle' to their relationship. Both sides argued that an impending separation had precipitated the murder.

A Lesbian View

1954: Mario Lanza; rock n' roll; State housing; free school milk; the family benefit; the Cold War; censorship; Sunday schools; trams; the pictures; the radio; no television; six o'clock closing of the pubs; the RSA and returned men everywhere. The Mazengarb Report – which in the same year surveyed

the newly-invented phenomena of 'juvenile delinquency' in New Zealand – attributed much of it to 'working mothers', prescribing a specific domestic ideology of mother at home as the solution. The Mazengarb Report also specifically referred to the Parker-Hulme case, suggesting that these two young girls began with unnatural sexual practices, and went on to commit murder.[6] The contemporary newspapers described an intense lesbian relationship between Pauline Parker and Juliet Hulme. For many New Zealand girls and women these were the first images of 'lesbianism' and 'lesbians' they read about.

One of the purposes of my earlier book with Julie Glamuzina was to explore, from a lesbian perspective, the ways in which the case was described and depicted in the popular media and other books and articles. We presented accounts of the ways the case impacted upon some lesbians' lives, including interviews and responses to a questionnaire. We discussed the case within the social context of mid-1950s New Zealand, and were able to obtain access to a number of documents relating to the case, including copies of Pauline Parker's 1953 and 1954 diaries, which we analysed from the perspective of adolescent girls' diaries. We obtained official trial transcripts[7] and analysed the trial, seeking interviews with surviving legal counsel. In 1987 we obtained access through the Official Information Act to Parker and Hulme's prison files.[8] These revealed their new identities (we then discussed whether to contact the women, eventually deciding not to). After her 1994 exposure as Juliet Hulme by a tabloid journalist, I met with Anne Perry and asked her whether we should have contacted her earlier. Her response was that we had made the right decision. She would not have been able to deal with contact at that time.[9]

We interviewed everyone connected to the case still alive in 1987 and willing to speak with us. Some have subsequently died, including Dr Reginald Medlicott, defence psychiatrist and a key player in the constructions of the case, and the two surviving defence counsel, Brian McLelland and J.A. Wicks. We were also able to interview teachers from Christchurch Girls' High School and from Canterbury University College, school-friends (including Rachel MacAlpine, who has also written a radio play about the case), the Ritchies (Victoria Park caretaker and kiosk manager), also some family members and other informants who had information they were willing to share with us. Many of these people asked not to be named in the book.

We were particularly interested in examining the case from a context of women and children who kill, believing that such a context would enable us to see similarities between this case and others rather than treating Parker and Hulme as unique oddities, a view other writers had taken. Most depictions of the girls categorized them as either 'mad' or 'bad', and we

wanted to move beyond this simplistic dichotomy. The literature on women and children who kill suggested that women and children are the expected victims of violent crimes; when they become perpetrators they are depicted as either monsters or as insane (as occurred in the Parker and Hulme case). We also included an interpretation of the case from a Maori elder, being interested in describing a context in which ideas like 'The Fourth World' have meaning, especially because of the connection of the Hulme family and of some incidents involving Parker and Hulme at Puani, Port Levy, a pa site for six hundred years with several urupa and wahi tapu in the area.

The book itself became part of the discourse surrounding the case. At first it was the only published text on the case written from a lesbian perspective, though subsequently there have been reviews of the book and lesbian and gay comment on websites.[10]

The Stories

The discourses about the case were all negative. Images and representations included newspaper articles from the time featuring headlines such as 'GIRL MURDERERS',[11] 'I KILLED MY MOTHER WITH A BRICK',[12] 'DIRTY-MINDED GIRLS PLOTTED TO KILL MOTHER', [13] and the extensive use of words such as 'slaying',[14] 'plotted', 'callously planned' [15] and 'hideousness and ugliness'.[16] In later years regular media revisits of the case produced headlines such as 'TEEN PASSION FLARES – MOTHER HAS TO DIE',[17] and 'SEPARATION THREAT TRIGGER FOR A BRICK ATTACK'.[18] These articles addressed a presumed heterosexual audience who would apparently sympathise with a 'mad' or 'bad' interpretation and enjoy sensational and gruesome details about the killing. Glamuzina and I have suggested that 'the owners and editors of the main New Zealand media during the 1950s presumed that their audience either was, or ought to be, white, heterosexual, anti-communist and firm supporters of fixed gender roles and the nuclear family'.[19] One article claimed: 'Honora Parker suffered 45 injuries, mainly about the head and face, in a ferocious attack. A bloodstained brick lay beside her head, and its container – a stocking – was found on a nearby bank'. A staged photograph showed a battered and bloodstained model lying on the path with a brick beside her. The text quoted trial evidence by Dr Reginald Medlicott that 'there is evidence that their friendship became a homosexual one . . . homosexuality is frequently related to paranoia', and by Allan Brown, senior Crown prosecutor: 'Their main object in life was to be together and if any person dared to part them then that person should be forcibly removed'.[20]

Medlicott also produced articles about the case including 'Paranoia of the Exalted Type in a setting of Folie à Deux': a study of two adolescent homicides',[21] 'Some Reflections on the Parker-Hulme, Leopold-Loeb cases

with special reference to the concept of omnipotence',[22] and 'An examination of the necessity for a concept of evil: some aspects of evil as a form for perversion'.[23] The case was described in a variety of popular texts on murder,[24] and there was also a novel based on the case,[25] as well as a play.[26] Glamuzina and I argued that these texts showed how the case had been used as a cautionary tale for girls and women:

> In our view, the Parker-Hulme case became a cautionary tale . . . We think the stories contained clear warnings to readers about the possible consequences of lesbian relationships and of 'permissive' family life. In the Parker-Hulme case these messages were communicated by the way in which the stories about it were presented – words were sometimes put in the mouths of subjects of news items, certain features were highlighted while others were ignored, events were distorted and misrepresented, some material was blatantly invented, highly emotive adjectives were used, and selected aspects of the case were juxtaposed with others to emphasize certain ideas.[27]

Since our book there have been two major public texts, which have become part of the discourse – a 1992 play by Michelanne Forster, *Daughters of Heaven*,[28] and a film by New Zealand director Peter Jackson, co-written by his partner Fran Walsh, *Heavenly Creatures*.[29] These performance texts have added to the discourse in new ways.

The Performances

Laura Mulvey argues that gender difference is a significant factor in how people respond to and produce popular culture, suggesting there are three 'looks' – the 'look' of the camera, the 'looks' between the characters in films and the 'look' of the spectator.[30] She argues that, because most cinematographers are men and since the spectator can see only what the camera allows, spectators are forced to identify with the male gaze.[31] Extending this to all visual culture Elizabeth Grosz proposes that:

> Of all the senses, vision remains the one which most readily confirms the separation of subject from object. Vision performs a distancing function, leaving the looker unimplicated in or uncontaminated by its object . . . As Sartre recognised, the look is the domain of domination; it provides access to its object without necessarily being in contact with it.[32]

Visual texts invite spectators to consume female images.[33] As lesbian and feminist viewers, our relationship to these images is often problematic if these are negative images presented in homophobic ways. We can of course 'read against the grain' and subvert 'the preferred reading' by producing what queer theory calls 'oppositional readings'. As Diana Fuss puts it, 'there

is no "natural" way to read a text; ways of reading are historically specific and culturally variable, and reading positions are always constructed . . . Readers like texts, are constructed'.[34]

Many lesbian viewers have enjoyed *Daughters of Heaven* and *Heavenly Creatures* through such readings: as some deleted the ending of *Thelma and Louise*,[35] so they delete the craziness and murderous malevolence of these texts and enjoy the love story. This reflects the paucity of positive filmic images of female same-sexuality.

Heavenly Creatures

At the beginning of this film we are told: 'During 1953 and 1954 Pauline Yvonne Parker kept diaries recording her friendship with Juliet Marion Hulme. This is their story. All diary entries are in Pauline's own words'. In this way the audience is invited to consider that 'their story' is real, factual, biographic, documentary. Indeed, Peter Jackson and Fran Walsh insist that they carried out extensive research before producing the film, claiming 'everything in the movie is well-documented. We had psychological reports from the weeks and months following the murder. We did not put anything in the film that we could not back up'.[36] They were reported to have 'interviewed 17 of Pauline and Juliet's now 55-year-old classmates from Christchurch Girls' High School to flesh out the characterizations'.[37]

Like previous newspaper accounts, then, the film purports to tell a 'true' story. Viewers of the film, accustomed to televised versions of events, can imagine that the text is documentary truth, bringing them the 'inside story'. Many viewers undoubtedly regard the fictionalized dialogue, characters and events produced from the imaginations of Jackson and Walsh as authoritative. (Do ordinary film-going audiences understand doco-dramas as just one imagined 'version' of events?)

The film exists within a hegemonic heterosexual discourse, presenting 'Pauline' and 'Juliet' as objectified curiosities. It operates within the framework of media versions, which constructed and portrayed the girls and the events in sensational and negative ways, even though the filmmakers said they wanted to provide a sympathetic account. Jackson has claimed that 'the point of *Heavenly Creatures* was to tell the story in an unsensational way', and that the film was 'meant as a celebration of the friendship between Parker and Hulme rather than as an expose of their crime'.[38] Walsh asserted: 'These two girls had already been demonised in the press, and we didn't want to keep perpetuating the image of them as monsters.'[39]

Despite these stated intentions, the constructed 'Juliet' and 'Pauline' in *Heavenly Creatures* are depicted as giggling, running, hysterical, and eventually insane, schoolgirls. As spectators, we are shown the girls

screaming, laughing and running from one scene to another. 'Pauline' rides her bicycle to Ilam where 'Juliet' waits for her on the bridge. They run wildly into the gardens of Ilam clad in elaborate costumes; scenes of the girls dancing and leaping follow this. Later the girls are shown running hysterically in Christchurch city, kissing a large poster of Mario Lanza and then kissing a passing tramp (played by Peter Jackson himself, modeled on Alfred Hitchcock's appearances in his own films).

In the next scene 'Pauline' and 'Juliet' are shown riding their bicycles into the country where a car runs them off the road. 'Pauline' is portrayed as pretending to be hurt, after which the girls are exhibited as inexplicably running, screaming and tossing off their clothes. They are shown as frenetically dancing and singing through the bush until they emerge at a field where they encounter the gaze of a conveniently placed male fencer. They retreat back to the bush where they lie down in a glade and kiss, ending a sequence of scenes suggestive of the classic 'lesbian' plot in mainstream pornographic videos. No sex occurs here however; this is a family movie.

Subsequently we are shown 'Pauline' back on her bicycle riding in the dark to Ilam where she and 'Juliet' perform a night scene complete with crosses, photographs of film stars and a conversation which includes references to 'the fourth world' where Mario Lanza and James Mason will be present. This scene does not seem to invite viewers to join the girls or to obtain pleasure from watching lesbian onscreen eroticism – they are now embarked upon a stranger path, one that leads to the killing.

These scenes of frenzied, giggling, hysterical schoolgirls have no basis in reality. The descriptions in the diaries of Pauline Parker for 1953 and 1954 of the incidents on which Jackson's scenes may be based give no indication of frenzy or hysteria. For example, Parker's 1953 diary includes a description of a bike ride to Brighton for a moonlight swim in their underclothing:

> Juliet and I had three midnight sprees, being Nigel and Philip. Juliet did not turn up as arranged one night and I lay in wait for an hour at Ilam. One of the nights we stayed at Ilam but on another we biked out to Brighton and had a swim by moonlight in our singlets and pants. We started whitewashing the stable one night but we did not manage to do much and it was frightfully patchy and will have to be done again.[40]

This seems to be a description of ordinary teenage adventures. However, Jackson and Walsh have followed Dr Medlicott's lead in presenting Parker and Hulme as insane and suffering from 'folie à deux'. Medlicott needed this interpretation for his insanity defence at the trial, and interpreted all such diary entries as symptoms of abnormality. Drs Stallworthy, Savill and

Hunter, psychiatrists for the prosecution, saw the diary entries as referring to common adolescent activities, not evidence of insanity.

During the trial Hilda Hulme gave evidence about an incident in 1952 when Parker and Hulme went off on their bicycles and came back minus their windbreakers. She suggested that it was from this time that their friendship became 'very important to both of them'.[41] Dr Medlicott also referred to the incident and testified that Parker had told him that 'they took their wind-breakers and I think their shoes and socks off and wandered round becoming ecstatic'.[42] As he later testified that the girls were trying to convince him that they were insane, it seems unreasonable to regard his description of their behaviour as 'ecstatic' as factual. Certainly the judge and jury did not accept his interpretations of these ordinary events as insane or abnormal.

The Jackson-Walsh construction of a scene in which 'Pauline' and 'Juliet' dance about in their underwear, having tossed off their clothes, could be seen as fair poetic license based on a generalised interpretation of the moonlight swim in singlets and pants, conflated with Hilda's account of a bicycle ride. However, this interpretation works to direct spectators to the Medlicott analysis – the girls are mad; their frolicking is frenzied. The madness lies in this relationship itself – Medlicott thought homosexuality was a symptom of paranoia, claiming: 'repressed homosexuality has a special role in persecutory paranoia but there is some reason to believe that homosexuality might be prominent in other types of paranoia'.[43]

From the evidence of the diaries, the trials, and interviews with people who knew them, these frenzied personalities do not reflect the introverted, private, quiet and intense Parker and Hulme of the time. The personalities contrived by Jackson and Walsh are more attractive to audiences than the living Parker and Hulme may have been – brooding and reserved girls who preferred reading to games and writing to watching sports.

Anne Perry has noted that these filmed representations take no account of the severe illnesses from which both she and Pauline Parker suffered. Perry said she was unable to run up stairs, let alone around the garden or the city, due to her persistent respiratory ailments, which culminated in tuberculosis. Evidence from the Parker diaries shows that Pauline was frequently in pain from the effects of osteomyelitis in her lower leg. She often needed pain relief, and could never have run about as the characters 'Pauline' and 'Juliet' are depicted as doing in the film.

Perry has also stated that she and Pauline were not outgoing, excitable, giggling schoolgirls, confirming the evidence of the Parker diaries that they were basically quiet, studious girls who preferred hobbies such as writing, sewing, listening to records and going to the pictures. Although the diaries show Parker as interested in horses, riding her bike, going for occasional

swims and enjoying stays on the Rands' farm, she had no sporting interests, did not mention attending dances (or even wanting to) and by modern standards was involved in very few 'escapades'. She did sneak out at night to meet 'John' (Nicholas), her boyfriend for a time, and also went out with Jaya and other Ceylonese boys in Christchurch on the Colombo Plan, but she describes her activities with these boys in conventional terms, as involving a little sexual experimentation, visits to the pictures and conversations about books and films. The tone of the entries is simple and descriptive, not wild or frenzied.

Hilda Hulme testified at the trial that Juliet Hulme was, up until 1953, 'shy and inclined to be very reserved. She was not robust physically . . . She tired very easily and was exhausted when she came home each evening'.[44] She said that her daughter had to go to the Cashmere sanatorium in May 1953, remained there for over four months and was not discharged cured, and that 'Juliet had to spend a good deal of time in bed or resting on her bed and Pauline when visiting would go up to her room or sun balcony and keep her company'.[45] The activities available to the two invalid girls in this situation were limited to creative and imaginative hobbies. The writing and dressing-up which Parker and Hume enjoyed was the ordinary and sometimes complex playacting of reserved or invalid children, rather than delusional behaviour in which connections with reality were lost. There are interesting comparisons with the Bronte children's imaginary worlds.

A feature of *Heavenly Creatures* is the life-size plasticine figures devised by Peter Jackson, which are brilliantly technically executed. Unfortunately, they convey meanings of madness and murderous fantasies evolving in the mind of a 'Pauline' unable to distinguish between the imaginary world of Borovnia and the reality around her. The fantasies are depicted as starting in 1953, at Port Levy, based on Parker's diary entry:

> Today Juliet and I found the key to the 4th World. We realise now that we have had it in our possession for about 6 months but we only realised it on the day of the death of Christ. We saw a gateway through the clouds. We sat on the edge of the path and looked down the hill out over the bay. The island looked beautiful. The sea was blue. Everything was full of peace and bliss. We then realised we had the key. We know now that we are not genii as we thought. We have an extra part of our brain, which can appreciate the 4th World. Only about 10 people have it. When we die we will go to the 4th World, but meanwhile on two days every year we may use the ray and look into that beautiful world which we have been lucky enough to be allowed to know of, on this Day of Finding the Key to the Way through the Clouds.[46]

My earlier study with Glamuzina suggested various interpretations for this passage – it may refer to a 'falling in love' moment, or it could have been

a spiritual experience occurring in the vicinity of the old urupa near the track. There are no further references to a '4th World' in the Parker diaries, though Dr Medlicott testified at the trial regarding discussions he claimed to have had with both girls on the topic. For the scene in the film, 'Pauline' and 'Juliet' are shown above Port Levy, where 'Juliet' has run up the track crying because 'Hilda Hulme' has said she and Juliet's father 'Henry Hulme' are going to England. There is nothing in the Parker diaries to suggest Juliet learned of her parents' trip in this way, or that such a revelation precipitated the romantic incident.

Hilda Hulme testified at the trial that, before Juliet's diagnosis with tuberculosis, they had planned that she would stay with Pauline at the Riepers' boarding house while her parents were away. 'Mrs Rieper asked me to go and see her and invited Juliet to stay with them during our absence overseas as she looked on Juliet as another daughter.'[47] It is possible that the girls looked forward to this and were disappointed that it could not take place. However, it seems unlikely that Honora saw Juliet as another daughter, but rather as a profitable paying guest in the boarding house. While 'Pauline' comforts the crying 'Juliet' in the film, a garden emerges with birds and 'Juliet' points in delight at the unicorns and giant butterflies. The girls are ecstatic and in a state of hyper-excitement as they embrace in a context of erotic tension and sexual innuendo. The scene works to depict the girls as experiencing a delusional vision – they have now become mad. This was the central incident which Medlicott referred to at the trial, calling it 'one of the pegs' on which he based his theory of gross insanity. He admitted under cross-examination by Allan Brown that the alleged revelation at Port Levy had 'played a large part' in his opinion that the girls were insane.[48] The film connects the emergence of the Fourth World with Juliet feeling upset and abandoned. This connection reflects the Medlicott influence on the film. The sequence points up the difficulties involved when trying to impose a coherent narrative upon this case, and thus creating a filmed version of the defence plea.

In the next scene, the girls are shown as playing at giving birth – 'Juliet' uses a cushion to depict Diablo. The diary entries do not describe birthing games so this may be a metaphor for female creativity. The film-makers may believe that because the girls write stories they must really want babies. The female body is a site upon which meanings can be constructed and 'Juliet' is enabled to enter a world of language and metaphor through birthing. 'Juliet' and 'Pauline' seem to be shown here as suffering from penis envy, which of course they must relieve by producing a male baby – a symbolic event that would have received the approval of the Freudian Dr Medlicott. The multiple layers of meaning in this scene are significant. It was excerpted and used in television coverage of Anne Perry's exposure

in 1995. This coverage gave the fictional scene factual authority in defining Parker and Hulme's relationship by screening it during news items.

Soon after this scene in the film, a life-size plasticine figure appears. 'Juliet' imagines the figure killing a minister who visits her at the sanatorium. 'Pauline' imagines him attacking 'Doctor Bennett' as he questions her about her relationship with 'Juliet'. When 'Pauline' is shown having sex with 'John' (Nicholas) she enters a whole plasticine fantasy world. This world becomes more and more violent. The Parker diaries give no basis for such a delusional world. Parker modelled in plasticine as one of her indoor activities. She wrote out her story plots in the diaries, between descriptions of daily events. At no time does she confuse these plots with her own life – she is clearly writing stories. Her descriptions of play-acting are also straightforward – she plans dressing-up, making wigs and sewing clothes. Though she sometimes refers to 'daydreams', there is no evidence to suggest that these were murderous fantasies (though her story plots, as also Hulme's, were often violent, historical romances).

While Juliet was in the sanatorium they did correspond with one another as the characters in the books they were writing, perhaps to allow themselves more latitude should other people read their letters. In May 1953 Pauline writes, 'This evening I had a brainwave i.e. that Juliet and I should write to one another as Charles and Lance',[49] and the following day, 'I wrote to Juliet this evening. A 6-page letter as Lance and a 2-page letter as Paul.'[50] Hilda Hulme testified at the trial that Juliet wrote as Charles II, Emperor of Borovnia, Deborah his mistress and their son Diablo. She said that Pauline wrote as Lancelot Trelawney, a soldier of fortune who marries the Empress of Valumnia and becomes Emperor, and their daughter Marioli. Each girl, said Hilda, assumed all three parts in addition to several minor parts. [51] Walter Perry, Hilda Hulme's lover, testified that the correspondence worked as a connected story in which Charles II feels he is too old at 35 to carry on and hands over to his son Diablo, then 12 – the ' accent falls on teenager, on youth having control'.[52] Later, the girls play-acted Diablo's Coronation, presented by Medlicott at the trial as an insane activity, citing numerous diary entries referring to the event.[53] However, the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II had recently taken place and the screening in Christchurch of *A Queen is Crowned* may well have inspired the girls to hold a similar event for their fictitious characters. Many girls of the time also played 'coronations', play-acted, and modelled in plasticine, without being regarded as mad, or as having lost connection to reality.

In my discussion with Anne Perry, she said that she had not seen the film apart from the excerpts shown on television. She had heard about the plasticine fantasy world but protested that she and Parker did not have a delusional world. She always had a solid grasp of the difference between

story-telling and reality. Her first stories as a professional writer were historical romances of the kind begun when she was a teenager; though these were never published, some of her recent fiction re-visits these themes.[54]

What the film achieves is a promotion of the 'folie à deux' theory rejected at the trial. Much is based on Medlicott's version of events – the 'psychological reports' that Walsh referred to. Medlicott was retained by the defence in order to find both girls insane. He interviewed Parker and Hulme separately in June 1954 on two occasions, for four hours in total, and again twice in July for three hours in total. He also interviewed them separately in August, on the evening before the trial. The evidence he presented at the trial showed that the girls had at first attempted to convince him they were insane, thinking this would assist their defence. They had then decided it would be better to be found guilty and go to gaol rather than to a mental institution. They then began to play with him, giving smart answers to his questions. Hulme when asked if she believed there was a hell said no, the idea was too inartistic. Parker told him that he was an irritating fool and displeasing to look at.[55] Most importantly, his evidence and that of Dr F.O. Bennett, also testifying for the defence, was discredited under cross-examination and therefore rejected by the jury. Within two hours of deliberation both girls were found to be sane and therefore guilty of murder.

Dr Medlicott said later that he still considered the two girls insane, but had come to the conclusion that they were also 'evil'. He said Mrs Rieper 'did not deserve to die'[56] – a statement which implies some people do deserve to die – and would certainly have agreed with Walsh that 'Pauline began to scapegoat her mother for her problems . . . the woman who was killed was blameless'.[57] This view was not uncommon at the time. Many people even thought that 'the wrong mother got it'. Hilda was seen as 'immoral and as a negligent mother', while Honora was 'perceived as the good mother, the one who had tried to break up the undesirable relationship'.[58] However, the Parker diaries contain numerous entries about Honora 'lecturing' her daughter, or being in a temper. For example, on Pauline's birthday in 1953 she wrote 'I received the usual lecture from Mother. I am getting used to it now as she says exactly the same thing. However it appears to relieve her mind so I let her talk and don't listen.'[59] This was confirmed by Hilda who testified at the trial that Parker had said 'many times that she was very unhappy at home; she felt her mother did not understand her and did not love her . . . Sometimes after a related quarrel with her mother she would be in great distress . . . Pauline gave me to understand quite clearly that her mother often subjected her to severe corporal punishment'.[60] Only one diary entry refers specifically to

corporal punishment: 'We were having our argument in the bathroom. I said something which annoyed her. She slapped my face 7 times'.[61] This seems to be the basis for the scene in the film where 'Honora' slaps 'Pauline' and says she is 'nothing but a cheap little tart', to which 'Pauline' responds that she must 'take after you then – you ran off with Dad when you were only 17'. This fictional dialogue is the most interesting exchange in the film. It might have been explored further, to expose the tension between Pauline and her mother. The relationship between Pauline and her parents was deeply troubled. The explanations for this murder are certainly to be found in the unexplored context of these family relationships. The literature on women and children who kill suggests 'although the conflict may be a long-standing one, a series of events which occurs shortly before the killing may act as a trigger for the final outcome. Often, observers from outside the situation mistake the trigger for the cause.'[62]

It is hard sometimes to understand the rationale for particular scenes in the film. For example, 'Henry Hulme' is shown as initiating a visit to the 'Riepers' and raising his concern about the relationship between 'Pauline' and 'Juliet'. Yet, according to Herbert Rieper's evidence at the trial, 'Dr Hulme had called at our house at Mrs Rieper's request. As a result of that visit the accused Parker was taken to Dr F.O. Bennett.' Rieper was referring to events in 1953, and said that the preceding Easter holidays 'my daughter stayed at Ilam. Mrs Parker communicated with Dr Hulme about the association of the girls. He called or rang . . . I was then told Dr Hulme was leaving New Zealand in some weeks' time and would take Juliet with him.'[63] Changing the sequence of events in this way obscures the complexity of Honora Parker's actions. Honora instigated the conversations with the Hulmes because of her concern about the nature of the friendship; Henry Hulme dealt with the situation by suggesting she take Pauline Parker to his friend Dr F.O. Bennett for an examination; Hilda Hulme did not respond to Honora's request for a talk about their daughters' friendship.

The film represents the killing as occurring with an element of surprise and in silence; followed by the girls screaming and running hysterically up the steep path back to the kiosk. This construction is at odds with evidence given at the trial and distorts the complexity of the situation. In Juliet's second statement to the police, given on 23 June 1954 and containing her own confession to the murder, she states, 'I was expecting Mrs Rieper to be attacked. I heard noises behind me. It was loud conversation in anger. I saw Mrs Rieper in a sort of squatting position. They were quarrelling.'[64] It is likely that that the only way for Parker to have carried out the killing of her mother was within a situation of anger, and Hulme's statement conveys this. Her own motivations for joining in were different and complex: 'I saw Pauline hit Mrs Rieper with the brick in the stocking. I took the stocking

and hit her too. I was terrified. I thought that one of them had to die. I wanted to help Pauline.'[65] There was also discussion during the trial as to the demeanour of the girls when they arrived at the kiosk. The kiosk manager Mrs Ritchie testified that they were agitated, breathless and gasping, but not that they were screaming.[66] It was pointed out by the prosecution that the site of the killing was 420 yards from the top of the hill and was very steep in places and that 'the girls would have been breathless and gasping from the run uphill even at their age' and 'exhausted from the climb'.[67] It must have been very difficult for the tubercular Hulme to have run screaming up a steep hill when she had trouble running upstairs. Pauline, with better lungs, may have been more successful, but the scene appears false and sensational, simply adding to the frenzied madness, which is the underlying subtext of the film.

Anne Perry

The interest created by the film intensified the search for the present-day Juliet Hulme and Pauline Parker. It was easy for anyone who obtained access to the prison files to learn the present identities of Parker and Hulme, and was therefore only a matter of time before this occurred. The 1994 *Sunday News* headline ran 'MURDER SHE WROTE', giving details of Perry's life in Portmahomack, Scotland, and her success as a murder mystery writer.[68] She told her own story to journalist Sarah Gristwood[69] and this was reprinted throughout the world. She also agreed to a television interview. Meanwhile, Channel 3 in New Zealand had made up its own story, using excerpts from *Heavenly Creatures* juxtaposed with shots of Perry's home, thereby constructing a connection between the fiction of the film and the news items about Perry's present life.[70] Other newspapers also made sensationalised connections between Perry's work as a writer of murder mysteries and her conviction for murder as Juliet Hulme in 1954. Advertisements for the film also referred to Perry, one for example reading 'MURDER SHE WROTE! The True Story of the Mystery Writer who Committed Murder Herself. A WILDLY HYPNOTIC THRILLER! . . . CHILLING! . . . A SUSPENSEFUL THRILLING FILM!'[71] More chillingly, the depiction of lethal lesbians in films such as *Fun* and *Sister My Sister* places *Heavenly Creatures* within a framework of murderous deviancy and anti-lesbianism, as lesbian film critic B. Ruby Rich suggests.[72]

Perry denied that her relationship with Parker was lesbian. She may be telling the literal truth – that for her the relationship was not named as 'lesbian'. However, the case was, and still is, portrayed in a context of female homosexuality. Perry also denies any memory of the killing, or of the events leading up to it. She did say that she only heard about 'the whole thing three days before' – which corresponds with the Parker diary

entries. She was responsive to comment that she may have become involved in a family murder, one that might have taken place with or without her involvement, and that the Parker diaries were evidence only against Parker and not against herself except by hearsay. She was insistent that she had not wanted to put the blame onto Parker at the time or now. Parker had stood by her when she needed her, and she wanted to do the same by Parker.[73]

Walsh is reported as contradicting Perry about her reasons for committing the murder. Perry claims that the murder was 'a matter of honour. It wasn't a great " I can't live without you" business that these idiotic movie makers are making out of it'. But in the words of a popular women's journal, 'her claim is disputed by Fran Walsh . . . "I feel Anne Perry's comment is absurd" says Fran. "If you don't have a grand passion why commit a murder?"'[74] Walsh's version and understanding of the case is now based upon her knowledge of her own creation, the fictional 'Juliet', not on the protests of Anne Perry, who used to be the living Juliet Hulme. Who owns 'Juliet Hulme' and can interpret her to the world? She has lost control over her own remembered past life; others have become the authorities. But Perry doesn't see why it all has to be raised again: 'These people should get a life, as the Americans say'. However she also says that she found it really frustrating at the trial not to be allowed to testify, only to listen to what she claims were errors of fact and of interpretation, without a chance to give her own version of events.[75] She and Parker were silenced then and it seems they continue to have no voice within the discourse, as others become the experts on their lives and motivations. Because Perry claims she cannot remember much about that period of her life, her version of the case is limited and tentative. One of her protagonists, Inspector Monk, lost his memory in *The Face of a Stranger*. He is accused of committing a murder, and may be guilty – but he cannot remember anything about it. In later books in the series, his failed memory does not return.[76]

Perry observes that the filmmakers and journalists forget that there are real people behind their stories who can still be hurt and harmed. She says her brother and his family, living in a city where the film had just arrived, found it very difficult. She says that Hilda Hulme, in her eighties, has a heart condition and that the strains of Perry's exposure have been difficult for her. She did not comment directly on our book. I know she does not agree with the lesbian interpretation, but I explain that this is the way the case is seen. She makes no complaints about that, but as I say goodbye I wonder what she thinks.

The stories about her continue, and are added to my files. In 2002 the story reads 'I HOPE I'VE BEEN PUNISHED'.[77] The latest slant is one of contrition, where Perry expresses sorrow for her 'wicked, wicked deed',

and asks 'am I never to be forgiven?' Here she explains that of course she 'blocked out' the event, which was 'the most painful' of her life. In this interview she denies that she and Pauline were lovers; it is curious that Perry can now admit to having killed a woman, but not to having loved one.

There are whole discourses on the Internet, some positive, about Perry, the case, the film, and our book. However, as has already been suggested, the depiction of lethal lesbians in films such as *Fun* and *Sister My Sister* places *Heavenly Creatures* within a framework of murderous deviancy and anti-lesbianism. It is understandable that Perry avoids such an association.

Conclusion

There is no one version of a life. Liz Stanley asks two questions 'why this viewpoint and no other?', and 'the past from whose viewpoint?'[78] All histories are fictions and must be read as texts and stories, which we tell and re-tell. However, we live in a world where celluloid depictions become real to us, and our knowledge is distorted and blurred by our consumption of visual images.

Who should write the stories, and for what purpose? Is there an ethics of the imagination or may we imagine, write and perform texts about anyone, living or dead? What are the limits? Juliet Hulme (as Anne Perry), Pauline Parker (as Hilary Nathan) and Hilda Hulme Perry are alive. Is there an ethical responsibility? May we write films and invent dialogue about living people without permission, or are only some people, like dehumanized killers, 'fair game'? If subjects of films object to fictionalised versions of their lives and say these are distorted and inaccurate, should we take their views into account? Or do we own all such public stories to re-tell them as we wish?

I would have felt more comfortable with this film had it called the girls Betty and Mary, and said the script was loosely based on the Parker-Hulme case, as did Gurr and Cox in their 1958 novel.[79] The insistence that the film is a 'true story' I find unacceptable. No stories are entirely 'true'. My earlier book with Glamuzina does not claim to be the 'truth', rather one account and interpretation of the case from a lesbian perspective.

The case remains important to lesbians in Aotearoa/New Zealand because Parker and Hulme were presented as having a lesbian relationship, and for many people the case was their introduction to lesbianism. The film adds to this discourse and is read in a variety of ways, some viewers deciding that lesbian relationships are frenzied and crazed leading to disastrous consequences, while others see a filmed world of romantic love between young girls, with murder as incidental to the story.

Nonetheless, oppositional readings and viewing against the grain do not compensate for the sinister imagery and associations of love between women with insanity and murder so chillingly constructed in this cautionary tale retold from Dr Medlicott's unintended script.

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