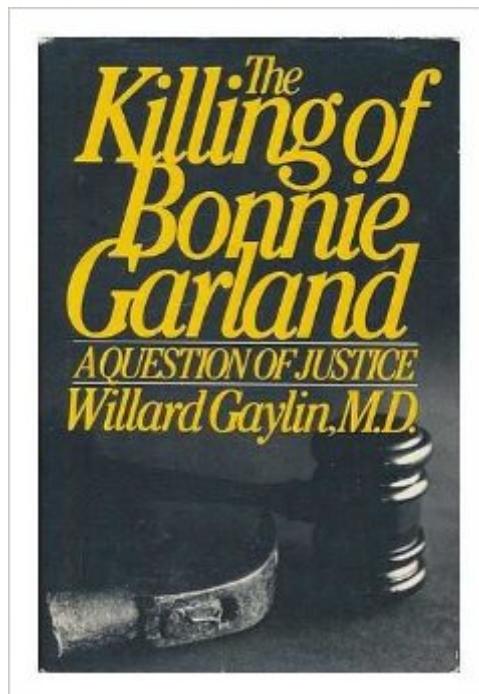


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The Killing Of Bonnie Garland: A Question Of Justice



Synopsis

"A powerful and passionate indictment of the use of psychiatric testimony in criminal cases."
The Cleveland Plain DealerA year after Richard Herrin confessed to killing his girlfriend, Bonnie Garland, he was found not guilty of murder. His crime, he pleaded, was committed "under extreme emotional disturbance," excusing him from maximum responsibility. He was convicted on the reduced charge of manslaughter.In this incisive examination of the murder, the trial, and its aftermath, a distinguished psychiatrist addresses the issue of the insanity defense. He shows how psychiatric testimony can distort court proceedings, and brilliantly analyzes the conflict between the individual rights of the accused and society's right to justice. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The best true crime books reveal not simply the crime and the criminals but the times in which both existed. While not really a True Crime book per se, it does reveal the crime, the criminal and the times.I reread this book after reading American Taboo by Philip Weiss. Both books are about young, sexually liberated young women in their early twenties who are murdered in the mid 1970s by men whose claims of "insanity" successfully save them from murder convictions. In both cases people rally around the murderer because "no one can help" the dead victim anymore. In American Taboo, it's "us" (read "Americans") against "them" (read the Tongans). In Bonnie Garland's case the us are people who passionately believe that "prison does no good" versus "the establishment."Gaylin delves deeply into the minds of all involved to understand their motivations and goals. He nails Herrin's defenders on their strange inability to differentiate punishment and rehabilitation. He also

exposes their contempt for imprisonment in general - most can barely summon up an example of a crime that would warrant a long stint in jail. Gaylin isn't one sided, he depicts both sides with compassion and respect, he is especially good at drawing out the passionate desire for social justice that lead some of Herrin's supporters to see this case in political terms. Would committed Catholic clergy like Sister Ramona Pena and the Christian Brothers have championed the cause of a man who bludgeoned his girlfriend with a claw-hammer in any other time but the early 1970s? Most unsettling is the reaction of the Yale establishment many of who voice a feeling that Bonnie Garland's father needed to just get over it, that his grief and rage were somehow out of proportion.

This is one of those rare books that, for better or worse, keeps me under its daunting yoke. It's gory depiction of the murder of Bonnie Garland, a 1970s Yale undergraduate, and of the mindset of her murderer, a fellow student, is breathtaking in an eerie, dreadful sort of way. When I read this book about four years ago, the hairs on my arms stood straight up. When I think about this book today, my Pavlovian hairs march in step. Giving me a glimpse of the mind of a killer is what I liked about this book. What I didn't like, and what the second half of this book concerns itself with, is the psychological analysis of why the killer did what he did. This was the bane of an otherwise great book. The first half of the book was written in a reporter-like, just-the-facts-ma'am style. I liked that. Part of the joy of the book for me was to figure out how the killer thought, and to extrapolate his motive(s) for the crime. The author's Mickey-mouse psychological analysis of the killer's motives in the second half of the book was amateurish at best, and to my reckoning, just plain wrong. In any event, I couldn't stop reading the book and the pitfalls of its second half weren't so bad as to destroy the enjoyment I gained from the first half. Personally, however, I would just read the first half and leave it at that. One important note: my enjoyment of this book was purely on an intellectual level -- in trying to answer the question "why do killers kill." However, on an emotional level, this book was nauseating and, quite frankly, sick. I often had to put the book down and wonder (1) how could someone commit such a heinous act and (2) how could somebody write a book about it in such a cool-headed, detached fashion?

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