



Fiend: The Shocking True Story of America's Youngest Serial Killer

Harold Schechter

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A MONSTER PREYED UPON THE CHILDREN OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY BOSTON. HIS CRIMES WERE APPALLING -- AND YET HE WAS LITTLE MORE THAN A CHILD HIMSELF.

When fourteen-year-old Jesse Pomeroy was arrested in 1874, a nightmarish reign of terror over an unsuspecting city came to an end. "The Boston Boy Fiend" was imprisoned at last. But the complex questions sparked by his ghastly crime spree -- the hows and whys of vicious juvenile crime -- were as relevant in the so-called Age of Innocence as they are today.

Jesse Pomeroy was outwardly repellent in appearance, with a gruesome "dead" eye; inside, he was deformed beyond imagining. A sexual sadist of disturbing precocity, he satisfied his atrocious appetites by abducting and torturing his child victims. But soon, the teenager's bloodlust gave way to another obsession: murder.

Harold Schechter, whose true-crime masterpieces are "well-documented nightmares for anyone who dares to look" (*Peoria Journal Star*), brings his acclaimed mix of page-turning storytelling, brilliant insight, and fascinating historical documentation to *Fiend* -- an unforgettable account from the annals of American crime.

Fiend: The Shocking True Story of America's Youngest Serial Killer Details

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Laura says

This book was okay. It spent a great deal of analysis on the trial and the reaction moreso than the crime. If that interests you, than you will like this book. If not, than I would avoid it. It is great from a psycho-analysis point of view.

Brittany says

The beginning and end half of this book were great. The middle excruciating. It felt like the author was writing an essay with a high word count. Reiterations of boring court battles almost made me quit reading more than once.

Mr. Craig A. Maser says

Interesting Story for the Time

An easy read but certainly not one of my favorites. I wasn't expecting so much time to be given to his prison sentence.

Michael says

I can't say I had much pity for this kid after the horrid things he did. And most likely if all those people that asked for pity for him had their own infant suffer to his evil intentions they wouldn't feel his sentence was "too much". He got what monsters deserve. This is another good book from a great true crime author. It just reminds about how "forgiving" people are to others when nothing bad happened to them. When their child gets lured out to a remote place and is tortured and carved up we'd see how forgiving they really are.

Lady ♥ Belleza says

When Jesse Pomeroy was arrested in 1874, he was fourteen years old. When he was twelve he had abducted and tortured young boys, this lead to him being sent to reform school. He fooled people into believing he had changed, and was released. Returning to Boston, he went to work in his mother's store, eventually killing two young children. He was dubbed "The Boston Boy Fiend".

This book covers the life of Jesse Pomeroy, as much as is known, the crimes, the details of the investigation, trial and Pomeroy's eventual sentence. It is also a history lesson, detailing how life was at that time, how 'the good old days' were not always so good. And how juveniles committing crime is not a modern day

phenomenon. I know some will take exception to Pomeroy being labeled a serial killer, because he only killed two people, however, if he hadn't been caught he would surely have killed more. He fits all the other criteria.

When reading Schechter, I have learned to carry a notebook with me, he has so much other interesting information in his books. This is another well written book that I have no problem recommending.

Marianne Evans says

A heartbreaking thriller; this writer made me feel the pain of parents who lost their precious jewels for very innocent reasons. How tragic abusive parents can easily mess with the psyche of the young mind creating vicious criminals.

Jennifer Martin says

The story was interesting but the book was not. I wanted to keep reading to find out more about the boy but the way it was written made it hard to read. I found the writing style was very boring but the content was extremely intriguing.

Monique says

Good read.

Karyl says

This book isn't an easy one to read. Jesse Pomeroy's actions before he was finally jailed for his crimes are unspeakably horrific and sickening. He cut, slashed, stabbed, bit, and tortured his victims, killing two, all of whom were very young children. The detail in the beginning of the book, where Schechter discusses Pomeroy's depravity, is quite horrific, making this book not for the faint of heart or the squeamish.

About the only positive thing that can be said about "the boy fiend," as he was called in the media, is that he was apprehended after killing "only" two children. Of course, he never should have been let out of the reformatory, which would have prevented these two murders, but had he not been caught, I'm guessing he would have killed so many more innocent children.

It is interesting to see how pop culture in the guise of dime novels was blamed for Pomeroy's violence back in 1874, just the same way we nowadays blame violent video games and graphic films. It just goes to show that there isn't anything new under the sun, and some people seem to be naturally evil and depraved.

I was a bit horrified to realize that Pomeroy spent 41 years in isolation, a feat unmatched by any other prisoner. Generally prisoners in solitary confinement go mad after only a few weeks, and yet Pomeroy managed to complete 41 years before his sentence was commuted to simply life in prison. He was not

hanged for his crimes, mainly because of his youth (age 14) at the time of the killings. Massachusetts did not want to send a teenager to his death, yet his crimes were so horrific that they required a stiff punishment.

Schechter manages to make his point that society has too often blamed pop culture, instead of the responsible individual, quite well. He writes in such a way that the book reads more like a novel. However, I felt as though he gloried a bit too much in the lurid details of the case at the beginning of the novel.

Jami says

This was a slow but interesting read for me. However, it was also disheartening. Not because of the subject matter but because I always thought scapegoating - blaming music, religion, video games, parents, etc - for violent crimes was something relatively new. However I see now it's something humanity has been doing for a long time. Jesse CHOOSE to murder and do evil from his own free will, and yet people blamed dime novels instead of blaming him. His mother blamed his smallpox vaccine. The author even blames the beatings Jesse received from his father.

Evil is a CHOICE.

I've known men and women who went through far worse abuse than Jesse, right down to their own fathers raping them, who turned out to be outstanding citizens. And I've known people whose parents never punished them for anything and acted like these spoiled little darlings pooped gold who grew up to be worthless drug addicts, hookers, and gang bangers. All because of the CHOICES the people made. NOT because of how they were raised.

And the people's sympathy in the past for Jesse made me want to steal a TARDIS and go back in time and cut the monster's throat. Jesse should have been executed, not left to sponge off taxpayers for years like Charles Manson still does today. Neither deserves sympathy or kindness - because both are monsters who have nothing of value to give to humanity. Because they CHOOSE to be evil.

It's disheartening to see even in the past people wanted to scapegoat and give sympathy to monsters who don't deserve it.

Juanita says

This book was a complete page turner until its mid-section. Although the newspaper article of the time were necessary for one to fully understand the era, the constant reports of how the people of the era felt got to be a little too redundant. In fact, I stopped reading the book for a while because of this. But once I started again about a week later, the book was devoured.

Schechter is a brilliant writer and always has the ability to tell the story straight while letting the reader reach his own conclusions about the horrific creatures that he writes about. I felt true sympathy for the people that were harmed at the hands of the Fiend.

This book was mesmerizing because of its explanation of evil at such a young age. One can never be completely sure as to why people behave the way that Jesse Pomeroy did, but learning about him can at least give us some possible reasons why.

This is a book I recommend to anyone interested in true crime reads!

Brad says

Harold Schechter really is at the top of the true crime game. Not only is he a solid writer, but he is also something of a true crime "historian." He reads less like a tabloid reporter (which is the way of most true crime authors I've read) than a professor taking a serious look at killers and their wider, sociological impact. And then there is his choice of criminals. Schechter is always picking the obscure and fascinating killers that others miss.

Case in point: Jesse Pomeroy.

Pomeroy was the "boy-fiend" of post U.S. Civil War South Boston. A process killer who started out by torturing eight boys younger than himself (his crimes began at twelve) in increasingly brutal ways before eventually moving on to the even more brutal murders of one young girl and one young boy.

Schechter covers all of that in the first half of the book, carefully cutting from Pomeroy himself to the wider Bostonian and even wider U.S. landscape of violence to contextualize Pomeroy's crimes. He uses the second half of the book to shift his focus to the U.S. culture of incarceration, using Pomeroy's fifty-plus years in solitary confinement to examine, quite subtly, the ethics and arguments surrounding imprisonment. He takes no side in any of this (well ... mostly. There are times when Schechter's judgment can be felt, but this is mostly reserved for Pomeroy, his mother and others who claimed or believed that Pomeroy was innocent), simply presenting the facts of Pomeroy's incarceration alongside the arguments of those who believed that solitary was necessary and those who believed it was cruel and inhuman punishment.

Fiend is a work of demystification when it comes to the legends that sprang up around Jesse Pomeroy, diminishing the "boy-fiend" apocrypha (a particularly fun version of this can be found in Caleb Carr's *The Alienist*) of bed time stories and fictional accounts, and showing, instead, that Jesse Pomeroy was a evil at its most banal.

I wonder? Can Schechter do the same with Carl Panzram?

Tara Lynn says

Although I enjoyed this book, it often had the feel of reading fiction. I don't know if Schechter's other books follow the same line of fictional seeming narrative, but I often felt that there was too much of the author's personal interest in what was supposed to have been a detailed catalogue of Jesse Pomeroy. I feel that the middle of book dragged a bit as the author had to search for material to pad the detail that he could glean about Pomeroy's life in prison. All in all, it was interesting, but the style of the work put me off.

Kara says

This was a strange book. I assumed it would be because of the subject, but I found myself feeling totally

engrossed in Jesse's story. He was so pathetic as well as hateable, I spent half my time feeling sorry for him and half my time wanting him to die. It was very conflicting.

I wish that the author had spent more time on the psychology of serial killers instead of the back and forth legal things that happened in Jesse's case. But all in all a very interesting book (even for non-fiction!)

Jessica says

Yes, I read two books called Fiend recently. I can access this one when looking for another one. The author teaches courses in American lit and culture at Queens College, and based on this book, he really knows his stuff!

I have always been fascinated with true crime, but the genre can be kind of dry, depending on the author's skill. Schechter's skill is outstanding. Using documents and newspapers from the time, he fleshes out the story of Jesse Pomeroy with all the flair of an action packed, adventure filled spy novel sort of way.

I would have given this five stars but for the graphic cringing, teeth baring descriptions of the crimes. I felt brutalized myself.
