

Deviant: The Shocking True Story of Ed Gein, the Original Psycho Study Guide

Deviant: The Shocking True Story of Ed Gein, the Original Psycho by Harold Schechter

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Plot Summary

The book opens with a recounting of the story of a case in 1853 in which two men, Cartwright and Firman, enter into a deadly argument. Cartwright is chased by vigilantes but he kills off one of the mob before they capture and hang him. It's noted that the identities of the mob were generally known, but that the men weren't punished for the lynching. This remains the "most sensational" event of the area of Plainfield, Wisconsin, until a century later when a man named Ed Gein will "make the name of Plainfield, Wisconsin, forever synonymous with darkness, insanity, and unimaginable horror." Ed's father, George, is orphaned at the age of three. George marries Augusta, a strictly religious woman who concedes to having intercourse only for the sake of parenting. They have two sons, Henry and Ed. The family moves to a farm near Plainfield while the boys are young. When George dies, the boys and Augusta work the farm. Henry dies mysteriously in a wildfire though the death isn't questioned until years later. When Augusta dies, Ed is left alone and lonely.

Ed soon stops working on the farm and lives in squalor in the house without electricity or indoor plumbing. Ed is not exactly shunned though he has few friends. He does hire out regularly as a handyman, painter and as part of farming crews during harvest season. He is always willing to help his neighbors and often runs errands or even babysits. He enjoys the company of young people, seemingly uncomfortable around adults. It's this friendship with a young boy, Bob Hill, that apparently prompts Ed to show off one of his prized trophies - a pair of preserved heads that he says were sent to him by a relative from the South Seas. When another boy reports seeing three of the heads on Ed's bedroom door, the rumors begin to circulate that Ed's house is haunted though the children who fear the house don't seem to fear Ed himself.

Meanwhile, Ed is descending into full-blown madness. He spends the majority of his time with cadavers retrieved from area graveyards. He cuts off skin, preserving faces so that they resemble masks. He strips skin and uses it for covering chair bottoms. He preserves lips, noses and genitalia. He also commits a murder, killing a tavern keeper named Mary Hogue because of her evil ways. The murder occurs in broad daylight but Ed's role is not discovered for some three years, until the death of another business woman, Bernice Worden. Bernice is the owner of a hardware store and Ed shoots her in broad daylight as well. This time the victim's son immediately names Ed as a suspect and Ed is quickly arrested. When police enter his home, they find Bernice's headless corpse hanging in the summer kitchen, having been dressed like a deer. The officers then discover Mary's face, skin and an array of other body parts throughout the rooms Ed used.

As the case unfolds, Ed admits to robbing graves but refuses to admit to murder, insisting that his shooting of Bernice must have been accidental and that he doesn't remember the details that came after. The media descends on the little community throughout the investigation, exhumation of two graves, and the decision that Ed is insane. A full trial ten years later finds Ed guilty and he is ordered to return to the mental hospital. A petition for release is later denied and Ed dies in the facility, leaving behind a

legacy of ghoulish details that have influenced pop culture for the decades since the discovery of Ed Gein's death house in 1950.

Part 1

Part 1 Summary and Analysis

The book opens with a recounting of the story of a case in 1853 in which two men, Cartwright and Firman, enter into a deadly argument. Cartwright is chased by vigilantes but he kills off one of the mob before they capture and hang him. It's noted that the identities of the mob were generally known, but that the men weren't punished for the lynching. This remains the "most sensational" event of the area of Plainfield, Wisconsin, until a century later when a man named Ed Gein will "make the name of Plainfield, Wisconsin, forever synonymous with darkness, insanity, and unimaginable horror." In chapter two, some history of Ed's family is presented. Ed's father, George, is orphaned at age three and raised by his Scottish grandparents. As an adult, he drinks often and drifts regularly from one job to another.

George meets Augusta and she, apparently with few suitors, accepts his proposal but is quickly disappointed with his lack of drive and ability, taking over the role of "dominant tyrant" in the household. She gives birth to a son, Henry, but is disappointed with his gender and tries again for a daughter. This son, Ed, would be her last but she vows that he won't grow up to be like other men. In chapter three, it's noted that Ed always becomes emotional when speaking of his mother and claims that she was as near perfect as is humanly possible. Ed recalls an incident in which he entered a forbidden area and found his parents dressing a hog that would be sold in their small meat and grocery store on Caledonia Street in La Crosse.

In chapter four, the Geins move briefly to a farm in Camp Douglas before buying the one hundred ninety-five acre tract and house in Plainfield. Augusta seems happy here, working herself and the boys relentlessly though George by now has become useless. Chapter five opens with the death of George in 1940. The house becomes more dilapidated. Ed, now an adult, is often seen playing with youngsters of the neighborhood. He feels insecure with adults of his own age but joins the children for snowball fights or buys them ice cream. In 1944, Ed and Henry are fighting a wildfire in a marshland near their home and Ed returns from the situation to announce that he can't find Henry. When law enforcement go with him to the scene of the fire, Ed takes them directly to Henry's body. Though there are some momentary suspicions, there is no real investigation into Henry's death and no one considers that Ed would have been capable of murdering his brother until years later.

Soon after Henry's death Augusta has a stroke and is almost helpless for some time. She grows angry when she sees a man beat a puppy to death, though her anger is directed at a woman who tries to intervene in the beating. Immediately after the beating of the pup, Augusta dies near the Thanksgiving season.

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It's noted that Augusta is disappointed that her two children are males, though she allows George back into her bed to try again after the first son is born. Augusta apparently holds to the notion that sex for any reason other than procreation is a sin. Augusta's vow to make certain that Ed wasn't corrupted by the world goes so far as to exclude his friendship with other boys his age. Augusta makes Ed and Henry swear that they will never allow themselves to be "contaminated" by women. Ed will always obey though he never feels he's fully pleased Augusta. Ed also believes Augusta when she tells him that she is the only person who does - and could - love him. It will later be noted that this is typical of young men who develop schizophrenia as a result of parental demands such as those placed on Ed by Augusta.

It's interesting that Augusta Gein is angry when she sees a puppy beaten to death, but isn't angry at the man who killed the pup. Instead, Augusta's anger seems to be directed at a woman who was also at the scene because this woman was not married to the man and her presence seems to Augusta to be a declaration of moral wrongdoing. This opinion transfers to Ed and he later says that the woman was ultimately responsible for Augusta's death.

Part 2

Part 2 Summary and Analysis

Chapter six begins with the comment that there is little privacy in a small town, but that people have a tendency to overlook things they don't want to see or can't believe to be true. This is how it's explained that Ed could live in a community with a total population of some six hundred people and for a decade get away with murder and grave robbing, slipping steadily into madness. There are some who cite the condition of the farm as a sign of "shiftlessness," but he is generally regarded as a hardworking man. He's commonly hired for handyman jobs such as painting. When anyone needs a hand, they call on Ed. This includes favors that are done without pay, such as taking a neighbor to town or babysitting. When Ed is among those hired for harvest time, he often remains inside after the other men have gone out. He watches the women who are serving the meal until someone makes a point of noticing him, at which point he takes his plate to the sink - a courtesy none of the others make time for - and leaves.

By the 1950s, Ed is "in full retreat" from the world, though no one sees the signs of madness that will soon emerge. At this point, Ed is seldom seen anywhere though he makes it a point to regularly visit the tavern of a woman named Mary Hogan. Chapter seven contains a detailed description of Ed's house and how he arrives home on a particular fall day. He puts his chewing gum into a can where his gum collection is kept, builds a small fire in the old wood cook stove, heats beans in a can directly on the stove and then pours the beans into a "special bowl" that has a somewhat rounded bottom and uses a dirty spoon from the sink to eat. He uses only two rooms in the house and both are filled with rotting, moldering debris, including household trash. After he eats, he sits quietly and listens for his mother's voice, noting that he has heard her before.

Chapter eight details some cases in Wisconsin that occur from the late-1940s and covering a ten-year period that include the disappearance of an eight-year-old girl, Georgia Weckler, who disappeared from Jefferson after being dropped at her mailbox after school. She never arrives home and the only lead is the reported sighting of a black car in the area. The second is Evelyn Harley, a teenager who agrees to babysit for neighbors but who fails to call her parents during the evening as she has always done. Her father drives to the house to check on Evelyn but finds only blood. Police eventually find bloody panties and a brassiere, and later bloody men's trousers, but Evelyn is never found. These first two cases occur about one hundred miles apart but three more disappearances - Victor "Bunk" Travis, Ray Burgess and Mary Hogan - all happen near Plainfield. Victor and Ray leave the house one morning with the intention of going hunting but never return. A man steps into Mary Hogan's tavern and finds a pool of blood. Law enforcement find a single gun cartridge but a year passes, then two, with no solution to the case.

In chapter nine, someone teases Ed about Mary's disappearance, saying that if he'd courted her, she'd be cooking his dinner now instead of being counted as a missing

person. The tease is repeated by others and Ed always responds that Mary isn't missing, but is "down at the house now," adding details such as the fact that he'd gone to pick her up in his truck. About this same time, Bob Hill, son of Lester and Irene, is spending time with Ed. They hunt together and sometimes go to movies or a local baseball game. One day Ed shows Bob a "pair of preserved human heads," complete with hair, and tells Bob that they're from the South Seas, sent to Ed by a relative. The story of the preserved heads is backed up by two other boys who sometimes stop by Ed's house, though they are not allowed back in the house after the younger asks about the heads. The stories soon grow so that it's reported that Ed's house is haunted, though it's noted that the children who believe this aren't afraid of Ed, only of the house.

Chapter ten describes Eleanor Adams, fifty-one, who is "alone" with Ed on a particular night. Ed prepares to take his time with her, knowing from past experience that no one will realize she's missing.

Ed sees Mary Hogan, owner of an area tavern, as a rough talking woman who cannot possibly be allowed to continue to live, though he seems to believe that God will be responsible for Mary's demise. Though Ed never claims to be a messenger of God, he does seem to believe himself to be a messenger of his mother's wrath and his idea that Mary Hogan is a bad person seems to stem from his knowledge that his mother would believe her to be so. Ed has, on a particular evening, run an errand for Lester and Irene Hill and Ed seems to believe them to be among the few who treat him well. He notes that they sometimes allow him to watch television at their house though he generally feels completely alone since his mother's death.

There is an important episode of foreshadowing in chapter seven. There it's noted that Ed desperately misses his mother, but that there are other women who play an important role in his life. He does note that they are "poor substitutes" for his mother. It's then noted that there's been a recent rain that left the land smelling fresh, but that Ed smells something different. Though there's little nightlife in the area, Ed knows "at least three places nearby where the women are always waiting and available." It will later be revealed that these are cemeteries.

Ed's desire to show off his trophy to Bob Hill is an interesting look into Ed's desire for friendship. Bob is the son of Lester and Irene Hill, a couple Ed counts among the few who are nice to him. It seems that Ed counts Bob as a friend and that he was eager to show off a prized possession to his friend.

The description of Ed's time with Eleanor Adams is something of a mystery. There are clues that she is dead, such as the fact that she has an odor, but the truth of the situation is not given in full detail. As it turns out, Ed had exhumed the body of Mrs. Adams and taken her back to his own house. Her grave will later be exhumed, proving that Ed's stories of digging up cadavers is true.

Part 3, Chapters 11 through 18

Part 3, Chapters 11 through 18 Summary and Analysis

Chapter eleven begins with a description of the times, which wasn't all "Happy Days" and soda fountains, but included some turmoil and the advent of the ghoulish "Bloody Mary" jokes. On November 16, 1957, the men of the town have all gone deer hunting, including Frank Worden, son of business owner Bernice Worden. Ed arrives at the store that morning to buy antifreeze, shoots Bernice in the head and drags her body out of the store to the business's panel truck. Later that day, Bob Hill arrives at Ed's house, asking for help getting the family car started. Ed agrees but says he has to wash up first, that he was dressing out a deer inside the summer kitchen - a smallish building built onto the kitchen of his house.

In chapter twelve, Frank Worden arrives back in town to learn that his mother has apparently locked up early. Knowing that hadn't been his mother's plan, Frank goes to the store and finds a large amount of blood. Frank immediately names Ed as a suspect in his mother's disappearance, saying that Ed had asked Bernice to go skating with him on several occasions. A receipt for antifreeze made out to Ed that day seems to confirm Frank's suspicion and police find Ed just leaving the Hill's having eaten dinner with them. Officer Dan Chase questions Ed who indicates through his answers that Bernice is dead and tries to cover up his blunder by saying that he'd heard that she was dead. Ed is taken into custody as a suspect in the robbery of Bernice's store.

In chapter thirteen, two officers arrive at Ed's home, hoping to find Bernice. What they find in the summer kitchen - a smallish room just off the house's full kitchen - is Bernice Worden's headless corpse, hanging by the ankles and dressed out as a deer would have been dressed. The two officers are newly-elected Sheriff Arthur Schley who is nervous about being handed such an important case so early in his new career, and Captain Lloyd Schoephoerster, a member of the Green Lake County Sheriff's Department. The two men run out of the kitchen and vomit. In chapter fourteen, word of the grisly find spreads. Armed only with flashlights, they enter the house which has no electricity. They discover Ed's bowls are the tops of human skulls. There's a call for a portable generator and lights when it's realized that they've made an incredible discovery inside the house. The media becomes interested and the discoveries continue, including a shoe box filled with "human genitalia" and a pair of lips on the string of a window shade. A chair bottom is covered by human skin. It's also during this initial search that Mary Hogan's face is discovered though there are no signs of her body.

It's determined that some of the horrible discoveries found by law enforcement are intended to be worn. This includes a "vest" that has breasts, apparently from a woman's upper body. They then find a boarded up door and fear the worst but find inside Augusta's rooms, untouched and uncluttered, as they apparently appeared upon her

death. It takes some time but officers eventually find Bernice's head which has ten penny nails driven into each of her ears so that the head can be hung as a trophy.

In chapter fifteen, Ed is taken to Wautoma jail and media interest increases when Deputy Frank Worden, son of the murdered Bernice, says the story is more horrible than just the death of his mother. Chapter sixteen contains details of the autopsy, including personal notations by the secretary taking notes. At one point, it's noted that Bernice Worden's body cavity was washed out, just as a field dressed deer would have been.

In chapter seventeen, the stories of Ed's atrocities are soon exaggerated and every rumor reported as fact. In chapter eighteen, every case of a missing person throughout the region is soon attributed to Ed. There's a theory that there are at least eleven murders to Ed's credit and possibly more, considering the number of body parts found in the house. Ed denies any memory of having killed Bernice though he swears that the gun must have gone off accidentally. He also claims no memory of what he planned to do with Bernice's body though he says he must have reacted to all the blood by taking her body home and essentially dressing it out. Ed is taken back to the farm by law enforcement and the media gets a look at him, noting his "shy grin" and that he is, by his own admission, a "ghoul." Ed is arraigned later in the day for the robbery with prosecutors putting off prosecution for the murder until more of the evidence has been processed. Bail is set at ten thousand dollars and Ed is returned to jail.

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Mary Hogan's face has been peeled from the skull but the skin is so well preserved that officers immediately recognize her. It will later be revealed that Ed had learned the techniques from various books and that he'd rubbed oil on the skin whenever it appeared to be drying out too much.

The notes on Bernice Worden's autopsy include a concern that her death was prompted by "comic book violence," and it's noted that this is a major concern during this period. The note taker, Mrs. Eigenberger, seems to condemn the comic book fad but then makes notes such as "Sex Slayer" in the margin of her paper, apparently seeking a headline or catchy nickname for the murder. This sensationalistic view will be typical of media coverage of the event.

Part 3, Chapters 19 through 26

Part 3, Chapters 19 through 26 Summary and Analysis

In chapter nineteen, La Crosse Police Department Lieutenant Vern Weber questions Ed about his possible involvement in the disappearance of Evelyn Hartley. Ed tells Weber that he has exhumed graves to satisfy his own scientific curiosity. Based partly on Ed's statements and partly on the fact that Ed's shoe size doesn't match a pair of shoes found at the time of Evelyn's abduction, Weber eliminates Ed as a suspect. Weber also offers a person opinion, saying that Ed is "sincere," "very meek" and "in need of help." Others involved with the case refuse to allow Gein any leeway, seeking nothing less than a confession.

In chapter twenty, the press is allowed into the Gein house for the first time and William Belter, a former member of the state assembly, is hired as Ed's attorney. There are continuing debates about the number of bodies represented at Ed's house and the report becomes that there are "ten masks, Mrs. Worden's severed head, and four extra noses." All the occupants of the jail are dismissed for "good behavior," apparently in an effort to keep Gein away from other prisoners. When it's suggested that Ed has been digging up graves, a state polygraph expert says that there's no way yet to be certain of that fact and suggests that for all they know, Ed is an "amateur taxidermist," a suggestion that is soon reported as fact. It's Portage County Sheriff Herbert Wanerski who makes the announcement that a "mask" of Mary Hogan's face was found, a fact that media hadn't known for certain until that point. Reporters are at the state's crime lab when the items from the Gein house are unloaded and it's noted that there is an incredibly amount of evidence - a huge task for a crime lab that has been in existence only a few years.

In chapter twenty-one, the people of Plainfield hate the extraordinary amount of attention by media and curious visitors who just want a glimpse of the house though some can't resist the opportunity to be in print. Adeline Watkins tells a reporter that she and Ed are dating, that she loves him and that he had proposed. She later recants, saying that she hadn't meant what she said and that she was misquoted on several points. Some feel they should have paid more attention to Ed and that someone should have realized what was happening. There is also a sudden rash of nightmares and "irrational" fear.

Chapter twenty-two outlines further questioning of Ed, including that officials find they must be careful not to plant ideas because Ed "cheerfully" admits to almost everything though he claims not to remember some points. In chapter twenty-three, it's noted that Ed is confessing to an array of charges while Bernice Worden's funeral is being held. In chapter twenty-four, Ed, now 51, is eliminated as a suspect in the disappearances of Evelyn Hartley, Georgia Weckler and Victor Travis by the outcome of polygraph tests and District Attorney Kileen announces the plans to file murder charges and that he's been "spanked" and ordered by a judge to stop giving details of the case.

Eddie is returned to jail and his attorney, Belter, suggests an insanity plea. Ed agrees. It's not until now that anyone has particularly tried to explain Ed's actions but a headline sums up what some have come to believe - that Ed's love for his dead mother is the reason for the murders and the grave robbing. Ed is then formally charged with the murder of Bernice Worden in the courtroom of Waushara County Judge Boyd Clark. Later that day, Ed is visited by Adams County Sheriff Frank Searles who is unable to connect Ed to the murder of Victor Travis. Later, the Methodist preacher, Rev. Kenneth Engleman visits Ed and says that Ed cries during their visit. Meanwhile, Sheriff Schley is dealing with reporters and a situation that is far out of his area of expertise. When he's offered a bribe for an interview with Ed, Schley is angrier at the media attention. Belter arranges for a group of six reporters to have time with Ed but when others are angry at not being chosen, Schley reduces the number to three, prompting another bitter outcry after which Schley refuses any access to Ed. In chapter twenty-six, it's noted that Ed's story spreads quickly and prompts stories by fictional writers, including Robert Bloch, author of "Psycho."

There's an interesting division going on as to how Ed has all the human body parts he has. Some believe that he has dug up graves but others refuse to believe it, saying there's no doubt in their minds that Ed hasn't dug up cadavers. What's truly interesting about this is that grave robbing is a less serious legal offense than murder, but that people seem to be more willing to accept that Ed was a serial murderer than to accept that he might have taken dead bodies from graves.

Ed's "celebrity status" seems unexpected by those who are most closely associated with the case. An interesting point is that there are thousands of thrill seekers who travel to Plainfield and to the Gein house, apparently in hopes of meeting someone connected with the story or of seeing something dramatic, though by now the police have carted away everything believed to possibly have value as evidence. This interest in the story means that almost everyone alive during this time knows the name "Ed Gein" and the story of his ghoulish actions. The fact that the story is so sensational is bound to attract the interest of writers and it's noted that there is an entirely new genre born from this real-life event - the slasher movies.

Part 4

Part 4 Summary and Analysis

In chapter twenty-seven, it seems that Ed will remain locked up for the rest of his life though it will probably be in a mental hospital for the criminally insane rather than in jail. The people of Plainfield are angry at the thought that Ed might in this way escape the justice they believe he deserves. Before making the final decision, Ed is sent for a month-long stay at Central State Hospital where he is to be evaluated for his sanity. There are two major issues now on the agenda of those involved in the legal proceedings - whether cemetery plots should be exhumed to verify Ed's story of grave robbing and who should fit the bill for the continuing cost of the investigation. It's noted that Ed wasn't particularly smart about the murders of Bernice Worden and Mary Hogan and that it seems doubtful he could have committed almost a dozen such murders before being caught. It also seems unlikely to most that Ed could have dug up so many graves without being caught. Kileen comes to believe that the townspeople can't possibly have closure until it's proven whether Ed did dig up graves, but refuses to have the entire list of graves exhumed. Kileen refuses to tell the names of the list of those who Ed had claimed he dug up with one exception - Eleanor Adams. Mrs. Adams was to be the first of two graves chosen for exhumation.

In chapter twenty-eight, a week has passed since Ed's arrest and stories continue to grow - including that there are more horrors to be found in the walls and basement of Ed's house. The discovery of the gruesome remains that were logged into evidence seems sufficient, but rumors continue to be circulated, often as fact. There erupts a series of jokes known as "Geiners," that play on the grisly discoveries. These jokes are in question-and-answer format. One is "What did Ed Gein say to the sheriff who arrested him?" and the answer is, "Have a heart." There's also a morbid poem based on the rhyme and cadence of "The Night Before Christmas."

In chapter twenty-nine, Ed is supposed to be transferred to the state mental hospital but Schley delays the transfer. He first snaps at the reporters' questions, then promises that he won't move Ed without alerting them if they will grant him the favor of remaining out of the way for a final trip with Ed to the farmhouse. At the farm, Ed directs law enforcement to a burn pile where he tells them he disposed of Mary Hogan's body. Ed says that he chopped her up in the house, burned her in his wood stove and dumped the ashes in the location he points out. The news reporters then dash to Waupun to await Ed's arrival at the state hospital, leaving the town of Wautoma incredibly quiet. Ed is to be under the care of a team headed up by Edward F. Schubert, hospital superintendent.

In chapter thirty, the community continues to reel from the shock as thousands of people pour into the area, apparently hoping for a look at the Gein farm. One man becomes angry at the number of people looking for directions and draws a map to the Gein farm on a hundred pieces of paper so that he can simply hand them to anyone who stops



without having to exchange a single word. There are guards posted in an effort to keep the traffic flowing. As officers dig up a place Ed had claimed to have disposed of blood, they find additional bones and fragments and send them to the crime lab.

Kileen announces that graves will be opened on Tuesday, but that Monday Ed Marolla becomes convinced that he's about to miss out on an important story. Marolla, editor of the Plainfield Sun, hurries to the Plainfield Cemetery where he finds guards at the gate. One reporter puts a ladder against the fence but can't get a clear view. The Milwaukee Journal hires a plane to circle the cemetery but a tent is erected over the grave site. When the grave of Eleanor Adams is opened, officers find that the lid has been broken. There's nothing inside the casket except a crowbar. The next grave to be opened is that of Mabel Everson, buried nearby and just a few months prior to Eleanor. Again, the casket is found to be empty but there are bones lying atop the casket. It's noted that Ed had said he was occasionally struck by remorse and at those times he sometimes returned the bodies he'd taken. Kileen says that these two graves confirm Ed's story and that he doesn't plan to open other graves. In chapter thirty-two, Ed says that he never had sex with the cadavers, but cites the reason as being because of the odor rather than any reluctance on his own part. It's here that Ed tells police that he initially believed he had the power to raise the dead.

In chapter thirty-three, the county petitions the governor to allow the prosecution against Ed to end with the case of Bernice Worden because there are split jurisdictions in the case and no one county has the financial resources to pay for the crime lab, security at the Gein farm and other costs associated with the case. The governor orders Stewart Honeck, the state's Attorney General, to take over the prosecution of the case. There are rumors of an accomplice, a mysterious man named Gus, but nothing comes of a search for this mystery man and Ed denies his existence. When additional bones are found on the Gein farm, it barely makes the news, probably because the finding of more bones is not nearly as sensational as the previous details of this case. The newest bones are in an area where people had thought Ed to be burying garbage and their size indicates that this could be a male - possibly the missing hunter, Victor Travis. The question of why Ed's childhood experiences and his loneliness prompted the crimes remains at the top of the unanswered questions.

In chapter thirty-four, Ed undergoes full physical and psychological exams. He's noted to have an average IQ though with emotional issues that lower his thinking ability. Ed tells doctors that he would not have committed the crimes if his neighbors had shown more interest in him, that he has no positive feeling at all about his father, and that he'd sought a way to preserve a body that would remind him of his mother. Ed describes the building of a "force" inside him and the staff diagnoses schizophrenic disorder, offering the opinion that Ed is not competent to stand trial. Chapter thirty-five details some fetishes, including voyeurism and necrophilia, and notes that Ed was apparently digging up older women who might serve as a replica for his own. It's also noted that his desecration of the bodies was probably his own attempt to get revenge for the hurts he'd suffered at the hands of his own mother.

In chapter thirty-six, Ed is soon to return to court for a formal declaration of his sanity with many of the townspeople believing that he isn't insane but has slyly gotten away with murder. In chapter thirty-seven, Ed appears in court with experts who declare by a vote of two to one that Ed is insane. The judge sides with the majority and sends Ed to the Central State Hospital until he is deemed able to stand trial. In chapter thirty-eight, Ed is taken to the hospital where, for the first time outside the courtroom, he objects to photos by reporters and then refuses to look their way for a final photo as he's taken inside.

In chapter thirty-nine, the people of Plainfield become angry again when an auction of the Gein estate sets off another flurry of media attention. The people appeal to the judge for intervention when it's learned that there's to be a fifty-cent admission charge and the judge tells the auction company they can't charge admission though the hope had been that the admission might keep sightseers down. There's another appeal made to change the date of the auction from the announced date on Palm Sunday, but the judge doesn't intervene on this matter. In chapter forty, the Gein house is burned to the ground. There's little doubt it's arson but even the fire chief - Frank Worden and son of Ed's final victim - isn't saddened by the event. Some believe this puts to rest the rumors that there are "greater horrors" in the walls of the house. Ed is told of the fire and he says only that it's "just as well."

In chapter forty-one, the sale takes place with little of interest except the sale of Ed's old car. A bidding war erupts and it's soon discovered that the buyer - who pays more than the car is worth - is actually owner of a small sideshow who plans to put the car on display as the Ed Gein "death car." He is eventually banned by the various shows and forced to stop the display. After the estate is settled - including payment for a civil suit filed by Eleanor Adams' widowed husband - three hundred dollars is set aside for Ed's funeral.

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There are studies into the reason for the "Geiners" and similar joke phenomenon and it's determined that this is simply a way of dealing with the horrors of the reality of Ed Gein's life. When people are trying to deal with their fears, they come up with these jokes as a way of coping. It's likened to the way a child will whistle as he passes a place reported to be haunted. It's noted that these jokes aren't considered funny in Plainfield. An interesting point here is that similar jokes have erupted from tragedies throughout history, including the sinking of the Titanic, the explosion of the Challenger and the fiasco at Waco, Texas.

It's while Ed is at the hospital for his initial one-month stay that he comes to a self-diagnosis about his situation - a conclusion immediately picked up by the press - in which he blames the incident during which a dog was beaten for all his troubles. He's referring to the man who beat the puppy just before Augusta's death and Ed now says that if the woman who tried to intervene hadn't been there, his mother wouldn't have been upset about the situation and wouldn't have died. This author notes that Ed is, as usual, blaming everyone else for his actions and that he's "too far gone to recognize the

real culprit," though it's left to the reader to determine whether this person is Ed himself or Augusta.

While some preachers are recommending forgiveness in their Sunday sermons, there are some people of Plainfield who can't. What's interesting here is that the influx of people into Plainfield is bringing in thousands of dollars. The media have been staying in local hotels and the visitors eat and drink at local businesses, buy gas and other items. Despite this financial boon, the overriding attitude seems to be one of anger that the town has become known as the home of a freak. It should be noted that this is the opinion presented by this author and that it could have been that some people relished the notoriety.

Conclusion

Conclusion Summary and Analysis

Ten years pass. In chapter forty-two, Ed tells Governor-elect John Reynolds that he is happy at the hospital and that they treat him well, though Reynolds doesn't know until after the conversation that the man was the infamous Ed Gein. The state crime lab has been granted a burial site to re-enter the evidence involved in the Gein case at the request of clergy. In chapter forty-three, Central State Circuit Judge Rober Gollmer receives word that the hospital staff that Ed is ready to stand trial. Ed does so though the outcome seems inevitable. Missing from the witness roster is Schley who has died of a heart attack. The judge declares that Ed is guilty and then hears arguments to Ed's sanity at the time of the murders. Ed is found to be insane and returned to the hospital where he is to remain until doctors there will say that Ed is no longer a danger to himself or others. The judge notes that this is not likely ever to happen. In chapter forty-four, Ed files a petition for release in 1974, citing his desire to go places. His petition is heard and one doctor suggests that Ed might do well in a less restrictive environment, suggesting the Winnebago Mental Health Institute. Another says that Ed's access to women in another facility would not be prudent and predicted that Ed's tenuous hold on reality would break if he were put in a less restrictive environment. The petition is denied and Ed is returned to Central State.

In 1984, Gein, senile and seventy-eight years old, dies of respiratory failure at Medon Mental Health Institute, having been moved there when Central State became a full-scale correctional facility. He was buried quietly, with only a few of the employees of Gasperic Funeral Home at the site. There are some who believe the list of murdered victims to be higher than had been listed, and it's noted that there were never identities associated with all the body parts found at his home. While the end of Ed's life occurs quietly without nearly the fanfare associated with his arrest, his story has prompted cinematic events through the present day. An example of this continuing fascination with Ed Gein can be seen in the t-shirt design depicting Ed and bearing body parts spelling out the words, "Ed Gein lives."

Ed doesn't seem at all angry with the judge's decision that he be returned to Central State Hospital and it's noted that he sees a little girl sitting beside her mother as he's leaving the courtroom. Ed reportedly comments to the little girl that it "sure is hot," which seems out of place for a man who has just been told he cannot have his freedom as he requested. It seems possible that Ed, having shown such a tendency to go along with the directions of others, may have been prompted to apply for his release but this possibility is never addressed by this author.

Characters

Edward Theodore Gein

Called "Eddie" or "Ed" by some of his neighbors, Ed is often referred to as quiet and shy with many believing him to be somewhat odd. Ed's life is dictated by his mother up until her death so completely that it seems reasonable that he continues to seek her advice and voice in later situations. As a young man and up to some years past the time of his mother's death, Ed was sometimes called on as a babysitter for families of the neighborhood. While Augusta lives, he does chores around the house, including farming, but stops bothering with those following Augusta's death. Instead, he becomes a neighborhood handyman of sorts, taking on any number of odd jobs.

Though most of his neighbors seem to feel that he is overly strange, Ed is apparently invited to visit various neighbors at different times and to share a meal. He readily runs errands for anyone who asks. Ed eventually begins refusing to allow anyone into his house, apparently in an effort to conceal his grisly trophies. When the news of his secret life breaks, Ed's neighbors say they are surprised. In the psychiatric hospital, Ed is apparently cooperative and willing to do whatever tasks are assigned to him. There, with regular food and amenities unavailable in his life prior to his arrest, Ed thrives which leads some to believe that he had faked his mental illness. Ed dies in 1984.

Augusta Gein

A stoutly religious woman who claimed the Lutheran faith, Augusta is extremely strict with herself and with others, and overly disciplined. Augusta raises Ed and Henry to believe that all women are bad with herself as the only exception. It's noted that Augusta grew up as part of a large family and that this extended family could be one of the reasons George Gein was attracted to her. Augusta, it's noted, allows George into her bed for the sole purpose of procreation. Augusta is, in all obvious ways, the head of the household. Though it was unusual, Augusta has the property purchased by the family put in her own name and sets herself up as proprietor of a store with her husband, George, listed as a clerk.

Augusta suffers the stroke that causes her death after witnessing a man beating a puppy to death. The source of Augusta's anger at this situation was not at the man, but at a woman who was at the man's house though the couple was not married. An interesting point is that Augusta put the entire blame of the woman's presence on the woman. Though Augusta dies about twelve years prior to Ed Gein's arrest, she seems to continue to play a vital role in his life throughout his crimes,



George Gein

Ed Gein's father, George was apparently a quiet man who came to enjoy drinking entirely too much. His drinking prompted many mistakes in his life but the nagging of his wife, Augusta, seems an important aspect of George's tendency to drink too much and his tendency toward violence.

Henry Gein

Henry is the older brother of Ed. Henry's gender is a disappointment to his mother who tries for a girl but instead gives birth to Ed. Henry is also a quiet man and is generally believed to be more industrious than Ed. Henry never marries and when the two men are helping fight a wildfire, Henry is apparently caught up in the smoke and dies. The death is never probed though there are those who speculate later that Ed killed Henry.

Bernice Worden

Ed Gein's last victim, Bernice is a business owner in the town of Plainfield. She is shot in the head by Gein, then hauled to his farm where Gein hangs her as one would hang and dress a deer. Bernice's body is also decapitated and the searchers find various parts of her body around the house.

Mary Hogan

The woman who owns a tavern and who Ed Gein shoots and kills. It's noted that Mary is a woman who, in Ed's mind, is of questionable morals which makes him come to believe that she can't possibly escape the judgment of God.

Eleanor Adams

A woman who died and is buried in Plainfield Cemetery and who Ed Gein digs up and takes home. Ed admits to the crime but some law enforcement do not believe his claims, citing the fact that grave robbing is a much lesser crime than murder. Eleanor Adams' grave is exhumed and law enforcement officials find only a crow bar in the casket.

Frank Worden

Son of Bernice Worden, Ed's final victim. Frank arrives at his mother's store from a hunting trip to find blood and immediately names Ed as a suspect in her disappearance, citing Ed's recent interest in Bernice. Frank is also a member of the local law enforcement community and it's noted that he is part of the fire department when Ed's house is burned.

Arthur Schley

The man who has recently been elected sheriff when Bernice Worden is killed. Schley feels the weight of having to oversee a major investigation so soon after his election to office. When Ed's case eventually comes to trial after a long wait while Ed is in a mental hospital, Schley has a heart attack. Some say it was concern over having to reconsider the horror of the crimes against Ed that caused Schley's death.

Officer Dan Chase

The officer who takes Ed into custody and who is the first to realize that Ed is obviously guilty of Bernice Worden's death.

William Belter

The former member of the state assembly who takes on Gein's case as his attorney. It's noted that Belter apparently feels the pressure of taking on the high-profile case and is rebuked by a judge for telling reporters that he has reservations about representing Gein.

Objects/Places

Plainfield, Wisconsin

The town where Ed Gein performed his murders and grave robbing.

Coon Valley, Wisconsin

Where George Gein lived with his parents until their deaths.

914 Caledonia Street

The address of the small meat and grocery business owned by George and Augusta Gein though Augusta claimed its ownership solely for her own.

The Summer Kitchen

The room built onto the side of Ed Gein's house that is where Bernice Worden's body is discovered.

Wautoma Jail

Where Ed Gein is held immediately after his arrest. It's noted that Sheriff Schley and his family live at the front of the jail.

Goult's Funeral Home

Owned by Ray Goult, this is where Bernice Worden's body it taken for autopsy.

Waushara County

The county in which the murder of Bernice Worden takes place.

Central State Hospital

Where Ed Gein is sent for a mental evaluation and where he is held both prior to and after his trial for the murder of Bernice Worden.

Geiners

Jokes posed in the form of questions and answers that make light of Ed Gein's ghoulish habits and his arrest, such as, "Why won't anyone play cards with Ed Gein?" and the answer, "He might come up with a good hand."

Wisconsin Rapids

Where Ed Gein's sanity hearing takes place.

Medonat Mental Health Institute

Where Ed is moved to when Central State became a full-scale correctional facility.

Gasperic Funeral Home

Where Ed's body is taken after his death for secret burial.

Themes

The Need for Love

The need for love is at the heart of this story in several ways, beginning with Ed's relationship with his mother. Though she seems to care little for exhibiting affection for her sons and is readily willing to berate them, she seems to fully expect their complete love and devotion. She goes so far as to teach the boys that all women - with herself as the sole exception - are evil and wicked. She urges the boys to never allow themselves to be close to women and to never degrade themselves by having sex with a woman. While it's clear that Ed gets no real affection from his mother, he craves her approval, likely as the only form of love he believes is possible. He may not even realize that unconditional love exists. At one point, Ed recalls an event in which he was being either pushed or pulled down a flight of stairs and that his mother had grabbed his arm. Ed cites this as a supernatural force but it seems more likely it could have been his mother. Ed's major recollection from that event is his mother, holding to his arm and screaming at him that only a mother could love him. There's little doubt that Ed is deeply and forever scarred by this incident and that he never finds the kind and level of love he so keenly desires.

Coping with Fear

The immediate and ongoing presence of the press as the story of Ed Gein comes to light is an ongoing part of the story, and an aspect of the town's history that the townspeople hope will fade quickly away. As the rest of the country learns about Ed's horrific deeds, there evolves a series of jokes known as "Geiners" that poke fun at the ghoulish situation. These jokes are in question-and-answer form and attempt to make light of the horrible crimes. A study reveals this to be a coping mechanism, just as the young boy who whistles as he walks through a spooky neighborhood. In the case of the people of Plainfield, the coping comes at a higher price as there's an outburst of nightmares and irrational fears. People who had trusted their neighbors for decades suddenly found need to protect themselves, though realizing that locked doors were no match for the "boogey man" of their nightmares. Another coping mechanism seems to be found in the cinematic versions of the Ed Gein story. There are many of these, including "Psycho," "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre" and other slasher movies, many set in small towns with unassuming men as the source of the horror.

No One Really Knows Another Person

Ed Gein spends about a decade committing at least two murders and digging up at least nine graves, a feat that his neighbors first say is impossible because someone would have noticed what was happening. When it's believed that Ed might have been robbing graves on a fairly regular basis, one cemetery sexton says that there's no way

he wouldn't have noticed that graves had been disturbed. Ed says that whenever he did disturb a grave, he returned it to "apple pie order" so that it wouldn't be noticed. When the first of the graves is exhumed, they find only a crowbar in the casket - irrefutable evidence that Ed had come and robbed the grave exactly as he'd claimed. As it becomes increasingly evident that Ed did commit these atrocities, the neighbors begin blaming themselves for their failure to take notice of Ed's peculiarities and the small clues that led up to his capture as a murderer. In fact, this phenomenon is not at all uncommon and is a common theme among the neighbors of some of the most notorious criminals.

Style

Perspective

The story is written in third person with a somewhat limited omniscient view. The use of the third person perspective is the only option because Ed Gein did not tell his story and the story is non-fiction. No other person could have offered up the details presented by this author, making third person the only viable option. While an omniscient view might have been preferable, the author is again limited by the fact that this story is reported as nonfiction. There are many details that are simply not known. It should be noted that the author has taken some liberties with the story.

For example, there's a vivid description of a particular evening. Ed has just returned home from running an errand for Lester and Irene Hill, a couple who own a country store west of town. Apparently, it is quick common for Ed to go pick up supplies for the Hills when both are too busy to make the trip themselves. After returning home that night, Ed fixes himself a can of pork and beans, making a small fire in the wood stove and heating the beans in the can. He then eats from a "special bowl" that is somewhat rounded on the bottom, steps carefully over the debris littering the floor, and chooses a magazine called "Man's Action" to read that night. The fact that it is a common occurrence for Ed to make the trip for the Hills makes it acceptable that the author says that Ed did so on a particular fall day. However, the rest of Ed's evening seems to be pure conjecture based on the chaos of Ed's living conditions and opinions presented later by psychiatrists. It should be noted that there are other passages that are similarly based on fact but are liberally sprinkled with details that could not possibly have been known for certain. These details seem to be the author's way of adding a personal touch to the story and in this respect he seems to have accomplished the goal. It should be noted that these details are derived from later testimony by an array of people who saw Ed Gein's living conditions and the results of his murders and grave robbing forays first hand, so do not detract from the truth of the story.

Tone

The story is written in a straight-forward style and is presented in chronological order with brief sections of foreshadowing. The majority of the words will be understood by anyone of average reading ability. The setting and the story are real though it's evident that the author has taken some journalistic liberties for the sake of producing an interesting story. The majority of the story occurs in the late-1940s and includes the 1950s. It's noted that there are some stereotypical ideas of the time that include sock hops and "Happy Days," but that it is also a time of turmoil with the National Guard being called out to oversee the forced integration of a Little Rock, Arkansas, school and the sudden popularity of ghoulish humor, including the "Bloody Mary" jokes. It should also be noted that the story is very disturbing. There are graphic details of the murders,

the grave robbing and the autopsy of Ed's final victim. These may be distressing to some readers and may be made more so by the fact that the story is real.

Structure

The story is divided into five sections and forty-four chapters. Chapters range in length from less than a page to about ten with four to six pages being a typical length. Each of the first four sections or "parts" is titled and numbered. The first is Bloodlines, the second is The Deadhouse, the third is The Butcher of Plainfield, and the final section is titled Diggings. Each provides insight into what is included in that section. For example, Bloodlines gives background of Ed's family, including the fact that his father was orphaned at three and was raised by his grandparents. At the heart of part four, Diggings, is the question of whether graves believed to have been robbed by Ed should be exhumed. The final section is the Conclusion, and is titled Psycho. There is also a prologue which gives a brief bit of history of the impact of the Ed Gein story on popular culture. There are a series of photos in the center of the book, a total of eight pages. These are printed on glossy paper as opposed to the rough paper of the rest of the book. All photos are in black and white with most attributed to various news services.

Quotes

"Cut off from all social contacts, completely separated from the life of the community, condemned to a crushing poverty in a remote and desolate region with two tormented and inimical parents, Eddie - never emotionally strong to begin with - was retreating farther and farther into a private world of fantasy. The Gein farm may not have been productive, but it was proving to be a fertile breeding ground for madness." Chapter Four, Page 22

"Like the parents who refuse to face the most disturbing signs of maladjustment in a favorite child, small-town dwellers will often manage to dismiss, explain away, or turn a blind eye to the extreme peculiarities of their neighbors." Chapter 6, Page 35

"All of this perhaps helps to explain how a middle-aged bachelor could live in a tightly knit community of over six hundred people, all of whom knew him by name, and, for more than a decade, get away with murder - and worse." Chapter 6, Page 36

"As he recalled years later, Eddie 'rolled his eyes and wiggled his nose like a dog sniffing a skunk.' Then he smiled and said, 'She's not missing. She's down at the house now.'" Chapter 9, Page 53

"They had no way of knowing, of course, that the next time they set eyes on their quiet little neighbor, his name would be known throughout the nation - indeed around the world. Or that they themselves were about to gain widespread and highly unwelcome celebrity as the last people to break bread with America's most notorious maniac." Chapter 12, Page 74

"But, to a man, the sight of Mrs. Worden's decapitated, and disemboweled body stunned them into silence. None of them had ever set eyes on anything so appalling." Chapter 14, Page 77

"For the dozens of local lawmen involved, the investigation of Bernice Worden's murder had turned into a macabre form of excavation. Sifting through the rubble of Gein's house was like conducting an archeological dig in hell." Chapter 14, Page 80

"Originally, the offer explained, the police believed there was a total of ten or eleven women involved - 'depending on whether Mrs. Worden's head was counted.' The sun now stood at fifteen, a figure based on the recovery of ten masks, Mrs. Worden's severed head, and four 'extra noses.'" Chapter 20, Page 106

"In the meantime, Kileen was under growing pressure from the Plainfield citizenry to determine the truth of Gein's assertion. It was becoming increasingly obvious that the townsfolk would never be able to rest without knowing whether their loved one had, in fact, been ravaged in their graves." Chapter 27, Page 150

"But however much they might have agreed with such sentiments in principle, the townsfolk of Plainfield were not about to forgive and forget." Chapter 30, Page 165

"He also confessed to another motive for his graveyard expeditions. Eddie had first been impelled to the Plainfield cemetery by a conviction that he possessed the power to raise the dead." Chapter 32, Page 173

"I believe if we'd have stayed in La Crosse, this thing would never have happened. I believe it was just my bad luck to go to a locality where the people were just not as friendly as they should have been." Chapter 43, Page 230

Topics for Discussion

How is Ed caught? Describe at least three of the "grisly" items discovered in Ed's house. What do officers find behind a boarded up door in Ed's house? What is the significance of this discovery? What happens to Ed's house over the weeks leading up to his sanity hearing? What is Ed's reaction when he's told that his house has burned? What do some people believe about the significance of that remark?

What do Mary Hogan and Bernice Worden have in common? What is different about the two women? How are their murders solved? There are three additional unsolved crimes that Ed is initially accused of. How are each resolved with regard to Ed's involvement? Offer a detailed reason you believe Ed was or was not involved in each of the three unsolved cases.

Describe Ed Gein's childhood. What are the details and events of this childhood that are supposedly to blame for his break with reality in later life? What could have been changed about his childhood to have changed the outcome of Ed's life?

Who is Henry? George? Augusta? How does each die? What is the impact of each death on Ed Gein? What is the significance of Augusta's death with Ed's later actions?

What is Ed's life like in the community of Plainfield? What does he say is wrong with his life? Compare this with other situations of mass murder in the news in recent years. What are some similarities?

What is the initial reaction of the people of Plainfield and of law enforcement when Ed claims to have dug up cadavers from area graveyards? What is the significance of this reaction? Is this a reasonable reaction? Why or why not.

What is the reaction of the people of Plainfield when the media descends on their town? Why do they react in this way? Why is there such a high level of media interest? Fully explain why you believe newspapers should be granted or denied access to details in sensational stories such as this.

What is the significance of Ed Gein's story with regard to popular culture. List at least two works of fiction that are based (at least somewhat) on Ed Gein's story. Compare details that point to Ed's story.