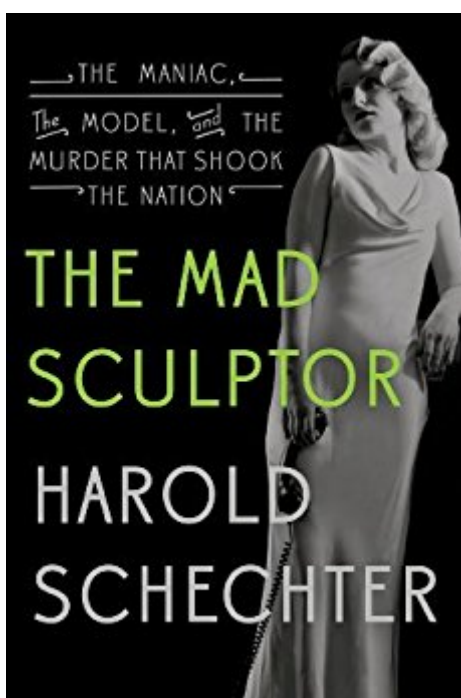


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The Mad Sculptor: The Maniac, The Model, And The Murder That Shook The Nation



Synopsis

2015 Edgar Award Nominee Beekman Place, once one of the most exclusive addresses in Manhattan, had a curious way of making it into the tabloids in the 1930s: “SKYSCRAPER SLAYER,” “BEAUTY SLAIN IN BATHTUB” read the headlines. On Easter Sunday in 1937, the discovery of a grisly triple homicide at Beekman Place would rock the neighborhood yet again and enthrall the nation. The young man who committed the murders would come to be known in the annals of American crime as the Mad Sculptor. Caught up in the Easter Sunday slayings was a bizarre and sensationalistic cast of characters, seemingly cooked up in a tabloid editor’s overheated imagination. The charismatic perpetrator, Robert Irwin, was a brilliant young sculptor who had studied with some of the masters of the era. But with his genius also came a deeply disturbed psyche; Irwin was obsessed with sexual self-mutilation and was frequently overcome by outbursts of violent rage. Irwin’s primary victim, Veronica Gideon, was a figure from the world of pulp fantasy—a stunning photographer’s model whose scandalous seminude pinups would titillate the public for weeks after her death. Irwin’s defense attorney, Samuel Leibowitz, was a courtroom celebrity with an unmatched record of acquittals and clients ranging from Al Capone to the Scottsboro Boys. And Dr. Fredric Wertham, psychiatrist and forensic scientist, befriended Irwin years before the murders and had predicted them in a public lecture months before the crime. Based on extensive research and archival records, *The Mad Sculptor* recounts the chilling story of the Easter Sunday murders—a case that sparked a nationwide manhunt and endures as one of the most engrossing American crime dramas of the twentieth century. Harold Schechter’s masterful prose evokes the faded glory of post-Depression New York and the singular madness of a brilliant mind turned against itself. It will keep you riveted until the very last page.

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Customer Reviews

Mr. Schechter does it again with a fascinating account of lurid criminal trials from 1930s Manhattan. Anyone interested in the judicial system, the early days of forensic investigation and the psyche of the criminal mind will truly enjoy this read. The author has excellent research skills, delivers with no prejudice and produces a wonderful account of the process from all views. Enjoy!

On Easter Sunday in 1937, police were called to the scene of a triple homicide at an apartment in a fashionable Manhattan neighborhood. The victims were Veronica "Ronnie" Gedeon, a pretty young model who'd earned her living posing, often in dishabille or even nude, for the popular detective magazines of the day; Mary Gedeon, Veronica's mother, who was separated from her husband; and their boarder, an Englishman by the name of Frank Byrnes. The two women had been strangled to death, their lodger beaten and stabbed in the back of the head, and while the police questioned an array of possible perps, they really had no solid suspects. Until, that is, a close examination of Veronica's diary pointed them to Robert Irwin, a handsome young sculptor who had once dated Veronica's sister, Ethel. Irwin, an talented young artist who had trained under two of America's most prominent and successful commercial sculptors, was known for his off-the-wall ideas about art, metaphysics and religion, and life in general. Not only that, he was known to have a violent and uncontrollable temper, and there was reason to believe that he held a grudge against the family for encouraging Ethel to break off her relationship with him. How police tie Irwin to the murders and the efforts to bring him to justice form the focus of Harold Schechter's **THE MAD SCULPTOR: THE MANIAC, THE MODEL, AND THE MURDER THAT SHOOK THE NATION**, a true-crime book that far outranks most others of the genre in terms of both quality and readability. One thing that makes **THE MAD SCULPTOR** the cream of the true-crime crop is that author Schechter, a professor of

American literature and culture at Queens College in New York, did extensive scholarly research to ensure that the facts of the case are accurate. But it's clear that he didn't just limit himself to researching the details of the murder alone. Schechter researched the historical context surrounding the crime, too, uncovering the bits and pieces that made up the patchwork of American culture at the time. And he also uncovered plenty of information about the secondary players in the case: Irwin's parents, defense lawyer Samuel Leibowitz, psychiatrist Fredric Wertham, and newspapermen Harry Romanoff and John Dienhart, to name just a few. Thus, instead of giving readers the expanded tabloid version offered by most of today's true-crime books, Schechter offers up a riveting story with a richly detailed setting and fully three-dimensional characters. In other words, *THE MAD SCULPTOR* reads more like a historical novel--but one that is completely factual--instead of a stodgy history book or a stoic fact-by-fact news report. So, by the time you've finished *THE MAD SCULPTOR: THE MANIAC, THE MODEL, AND THE MURDER THAT SHOOK THE NATION*, you'll feel like you've actually taken a trip back to Depression-era America. You'll feel you got to know the mad sculptor Robert Irwin and his victims, and you'll have more than an inkling of how the social and cultural environment in which they lived enabled such a crime to occur. You'll also have gotten a glimpse inside the heads of the attorneys, psychiatrists, police officers, judges, newspaper reporters, and the like, and you'll understand why some of them had sympathy for Irwin while others wanted to send him straight to the electric chair. You'll come away feeling like you were an insider in the case rather than a casual spectator, and isn't that what we fans of true crime really want--to see the crime and the players from the inside out so that we can try to make sense of it all? If you answered yes, then you'll definitely want to pick up a copy of Schechter's book.

Schechter writes fact-filled and fascinating books about people, crimes and murders you have never heard of. He is very good at creating the environment in which his characters live and is an excellent researcher. I have read all his books and will continue to buy new ones.

Horribly boring. I started this for book club and couldn't get halfway through. Unlike other historical works (for example, Daniel James Brown's *The Boys in the Boat*), which can draw you into the story and characters, this felt like a bunch of strung together news reports. Either the author attempted to infuse life and then just sounded overly dramatic, or he told everything in a monotone. Completely hated it.

I love murder and mayhem. Therefore I looked forward to this read with great anticipation. It did not

live up to my hopes at all. Instead it was a rather boring book of newspaper quotes, and little else. It mentioned murders, then dropped that one to skip to another. Dull is the best thing I can say. It should have been a lot better than it was.

Totally engrossing story, with very detailed background on the killers and the actual incidents. Excellent incite into journalism in the 1930's. I was absolutely enthralled. It would appeal to fans of history, psychology, mysteries and journalism.

Many true crime books write about a particular crime or criminal. This book is different in that it focuses on a specific area and murders that were committed there, followed by the " Mad Scupter" then to a subsequent murder. The details and tie ins are well presented, and it was an interesting and informative book.

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