

**A Mind for Murder** by Noreen Renier with Naomi Lucks. New York: Berkley Books/Penguin, 2005. i–x + 310 pp. \$7.99 (paper). ISBN 0-425-20289-5.

Police detective Tom Atkinson sent Noreen Renier (pp. 137–142) an earring from a woman who had been stabbed to death, hoping to discover the identity of the murderer. The police investigation had produced no clue and the woman’s mother had asked Atkinson to contact the psychic. I knew Renier. Several years before, when the Psychological Research Foundation (PRF) was at Duke [1], she had been a volunteer subject for us.

With the earring in one hand and the phone in the other, Renier “closed my eyes, targeted my mind on the earring, and all of a sudden, it was like I was looking in a mirror. I could see the murderer washing his hands and combing his hair. I could see him perfectly. I saw the tattoos on his arm, I saw his whole face, and I described him over the phone.” The detective asked if Renier could see what was happening to the woman. This brought her back, “and this time I was being murdered by the tattooed man. He was holding me tight by the wrists...as the razor-sharp knife tore into my body over and over and over. The pain was like ice and the blood flowing out of my body was hot.” (p. 138) The detective asked her to continue and Renier gave a description of the house and location and also saw a small child. When asked what happened to the child, Renier found herself “in the messy bedroom of a child,” and then “I was the girl. I heard my mother screaming from the other room.” (p. 139) The child hid in her closet but was found by the killer and also stabbed to death.

Atkinson said that he first thought Renier had somehow learnt about the crime. “Then I realized that the information she had, no one knew.” Speaking of the murderer, Atkinson said, “His physical appearance was as she described. His social background was as she described. The tattoos she described were accurate.” (p. 141). Renier says, “My mind taps in to the turbulent energy left behind by a moment of explosive violence and I relive the turbulent event.” (p. 1). (Her impressions were not always on target; sometimes she would only get a partial picture, other times she would latch onto the wrong person.)

Psychometry, the ESP procedure where an object is used to learn about people who have touched the object, has been used to reach the departed (Sidgwick, 1915; see also my review, Roll, 2004) and to trace the location and fate of missing persons, including soldiers missing in action (Osty, 1923; see also my review, Roll, 2005). The first time I learned of a psychometrist working for the police was a talk by W. H. C. Tenhaeff (1953), the newly installed professor of parapsychology at the University of Utrecht, Holland. But the best psychometrist of all times may have been Stefan Ossowiecki (Barrington, 2005), a prominent businessman in Poland.

Psychometry may be the only form of ESP that is regularly used to solve real-life problems. Other forms of ESP are of interest mainly to ESP experimenters and to students of the current research scene. In this realm psychometry stands out only by its absence. This is not surprising. Psychological research began in England and continued as parapsychology in America because it seemed to prove a non-material aspect of human nature. In contrast, psychometry seems to be evidence that material objects have mental components—in other words, that the environment has mental as well as material properties. This does not make sense if you believe that mind and matter are

separate. In continental Europe, on the other hand, where psi researchers were less beholden to mind-matter dualism, important studies of psychometry were made (Osty, 1923; Barrington, 2005).

Renier's book is not about controlled tests that have been designed to exclude sensory cues or chance. Such artefacts have evidently been ruled out from the beginning because the police and others who sought her help did not know the events they hoped she would reveal. As for the possibility that she might have improved on her results after the sessions, there are police reports of her impressions and the matching events and also her own tape-recorded transcripts.

Renier is mainly concerned with the practical use of her ability. She advises law enforcement officers to try a psychic only after conventional methods have failed. She relies mainly on visual images but may also use other sensory modes ("Is there a special sound near his house..., a different odor?" p. 7). Unlike other sensitives, her psychic memory is short. This could be a device to shed the appalling images she often receives. Since she tape-records her sessions, nothing is lost. Also unlike other psychics, Renier's ability developed fairly late in life.

Because Renier's story may shed light on the nature and development of psychic development, a review may be of interest. In 1976, when she was director of advertising and public relations at the Hyatt Hotel in Orlando, Florida, pressure at work made her decide to try meditation to relax. After a few sessions she entered a "weird state of consciousness" (p. 16) and heard herself say something over which she had no control. When she returned to normal, the friend who brought her said tearfully, "You're a medium, Noreen. You have just spoken to my grandmother, who died three years ago." (p. 15) Her opening to another aspect to the mind may have occurred shortly before. A friend had suggested she ask a local psychic, Ann Gehman, to lecture at the Hyatt. Renier thought of psychics as women with crystal balls and flowing robes and was not interested but she agreed to visit Gehman. When the conservatively dressed psychic offered a mini-reading, she accepted. Gehman spoke about Renier's two daughters and her recent divorce. Renier suspected she had acquired these facts normally but when Gehman described a large abdominal scar, Renier thought she was in fact psychic and let her rent an auditorium.

Renier continued to meditate and her psychic side became more prominent. She was best at psychometry but needed people on whom to practice. To combine her new interest with work, she invited businesspeople in Orlando to check the hotel facilities and join her for lunch. She would mention psychic phenomena, and if they seemed receptive, she would ask for their watches or rings and give her impressions of their body scars, the kind of car they drove and what their loved ones looked like. The hotel personnel also wanted readings. Renier let her work slip and was fired. "Some psychic I was turning out to be. I didn't even see it coming." (p. 20) The inability to see their own future is typical of psychics.

To continue to support her two girls and do what she had come to enjoy, Renier created a job for herself as resident psychic at the Sheraton Jetport. The hotel gave her a booth in the lounge; otherwise, she relied on whatever her clients paid. She thought she must be tapping into their minds until one of them thrust a ring into her hand asking to see what was wrong with her nephew who had been in a car wreck. The images came quickly and vividly. "I see a young man ...curly brown hair ...a scar on the left side

if his head.” (p. 38) But the woman said her nephew had long bleached blond hair and no scars. It turned out that he had cut his hair four months before the accident and had let it grow into a natural brown curl.

Renier discovered something else about her psychic talent. While she was working with Dr. David Jones, a professor of anthropology at the University of Central Florida, deciphering ancient bone fragments, Jones said that a friend of his had been burglarized and was frantic to get her things back. But the burglars had not left anything in the house and, without an object, Renier did not know how to proceed. But Jones said they had left their energy which Renier could pick up and interpret. Sitting in each room with her new tape-recorder, she saw two men and their gray van. When the burglars were caught a few weeks later, Renier was proven correct. She was using psychometry but this time from inside the object.

In 1979, Renier moved near Charlottesville, Virginia. This brought her a few hours' drive from Duke and the PRF and she often participated in our research. This was also the year of her first serious police investigation. A rapist had been terrorizing a nearby town and a sister of one of the victims asked the police, who had come to a dead-end, to seek Renier's assistance. The detectives brought her to one victim's home and then to another's. Renier felt she was inside the rapist and said he drove a truck with something on it “that goes round and round,” (p. 73) that he had been in prison and that the detectives would find evidence in his home that would prove his guilt. One of them asked jokingly, “When will we get our man?” “Before Christmas,” she replied. He was caught December 22 for being a Peeping Tom and confessed to the rapes. The truck he was driving was a cement mixer, he was an ex-felon and his house was full of things he had stolen.

Other cases followed and Renier was asked to lecture at the FBI Academy. After her first lecture, when she invited questions from the audience, an agent asked what lay ahead for President Reagan, who had just been inaugurated. She closed her eyes and said, “The President is going to be popular,” (p. 130) then patted her hand on her left side and said, “He is going to be shot in the upper left chest in about three months,” but that he would survive. On March 30, 1981, John Hinckley fired several bullets at Reagan, one of which entered his left lung.

A search for a lost plane showed a new aspect of Renier's mental agility. In the winter of 1984, a four-person plane had gone down in the Northeast. Combing the countryside from the air had been abandoned after ten days but the sister of one of the passengers thought Renier might help. Holding the wallet of the woman's brother, Renier began her usual warm-up period to see if she was on the right track. She says, “If this part is at least 75% successful, I continue. If not, I call it a day and stop.” (p. 186) Her description matched the brother and she went on. She saw the downed plane but its location was obscured by trees beyond which she could not see. Renier remembered that Dr. Jones had told her that if a particular image was unclear she could change her perspective. She told herself to go higher and found herself above the trees. Then, “I was the plane. It was an impossible, exhilarating feeling.” (p. 187) The night was black and she found herself sucked by a downdraft into the hills. Then she was back in the air, not as the plane but as a center of consciousness. She saw a dirt road wind down the mountain to a decrepit gas station and she saw the face of an old woman and heard barking dogs. Renier told her visitor, “When you reach the gas station, take the dirt road

up the mountain...The plane will be found to the right of the road.” She saw no survivors except for a young man who got out on the mangled plane and sank to the ground. She identified him as the brother, which made her visitor hopeful he might still be alive. The details provided by Renier were sufficient to renew the search. The gas station and the barking dogs were found but the old lady who ran it had died. Further search was postponed because of bad weather but a man and his daughter had seen the circling (renewed) search plane, drove up the mountain on a snowmobile and found the plane. The brother was sitting outside with a broken leg but was deceased.

After five years of readings, Renier decided to write and rest, but a man affiliated with a group skeptical of psychic claims found and interviewed her. As with myself (Roll and Storey, 2004, ch. 16), her statements were turned upside down. In a letter to TV stations, newspapers, police agencies, and the FBI, the man accused her of making a series of fraudulent claims. Renier filed suit for libel and was awarded \$25,000 (Circuit Court of the State of Oregon for Jackson County, 1986). The man appealed but the judgment was upheld (Court of Appeals, State of Oregon, 1988; *Oregonian*, 1988).

The final case in the book takes a new turn. A racehorse had been shot and the owner wanted to know who did it. As she sat on a bale of hay with a piece of the horse’s tail in one hand and its halter in the other, a flood of faces entered Renier’s mind, apparently of the people who had looked after the horse but with no clue as to who might have shot it. Since the horse would not have known enough to fear a gun or the person who yielded it, Renier asked for the bullets. With a bullet in her hand, a single face appeared. Renier dictated her impression to a sketch artist, who drew the face of a woman in her 40s. The horse’s owner recognized his ex-wife and she confessed to the crime. He did not press charges.

Before she held the bullet that had killed the horse, Renier wondered if instead of the killer she would focus on the officers who had handled the projectile. “Still, from experience I knew that the energy emanating from killers was powerfully enduring, and could overshadow the others.” (p. 301) Some of the cases were old when Renier was asked to help. A woman was talking with her mother on the phone when she heard a scream, a shot, and then silence. She called the police and rushed to the house with her son, finding both her mother and father shot dead. They had no enemies, and their relatives and acquaintances all had alibis. But after reading an article about Renier, the daughter persuaded the police to interview her. Seventeen months had elapsed since the double murder, but using the woman’s glasses and the belt of her husband, Renier relived the murders and retrieved evidence that they had been committed by three men, one being the grandson who had gone to the scene with his mother. It turned out he hoped to inherit a large sum after their death.

Renier compares herself to a radio receiver: “The information waves are out here, and I need to tune in to the correct channel.” (p. 171) This can be difficult if she is not feeling well, if there is hostility in the room or if someone other than the target has touched the object.

The condition for a clear connection is best in private readings when the person is in the same room. Then she estimates she is about 80 percent correct. In police cases where she works over the phone, “I consider 70 percent accuracy a good day.” (p. 172)

A unique aspect of Renier's psychic perception is her adaptability. She experiences herself as becoming the people she reads and even once identified with an inanimate structure, the airplane that was about to crash. At other times she seemed to be only a point of view in space. Her psychic world is like a collection of perspectives outside her body, any one of which she may occupy to perceive a relevant fact about the past.

Renier's description of her method is reminiscent of the proposal by H. H. Price (1940) that "memory is not just a property of living organisms, as we ordinarily think; but that it, or something essentially like it, is a property of every point of physical space ... from which 'perspectives' exist. We could then suggest that these rudimentary 'place memories' can on occasion affect human minds telepathically...This amounts to saying that every point in physical space is the point of view of a rudimentary mind, and that there is a telepathic linkage between these...sub-minds and ourselves" (p. 384).

How might a person connect with this field of sub-minds? Renier believes her information is due to the right brain hemisphere, "a vast, unknown and barely tapped territory" (p. 303). It is her hope "to train cold case squad members to tune into their own 'irrational' minds."

A final observation. If something is called a place memory, this must mean that it exhibits some of the characteristics of brain memory. For instance, we should expect that place memories of recent events associated with an object or location should come to mind more readily than remote events because it is usually easier to recall recent events. But distance in time may be overridden by an event that has a large emotional charge. Such an event may persist for a lifetime in the mind of the injured.

The emotion is compounded in assault and killing because two or more persons are involved, each incorporating some of the strongest emotions humans can experience, intense hate and fear among them, and each set of emotions is entangled with the other. This is not limited to unlawful acts but is also true for war-time injury and can leave lasting scars in the combatants. The work of Renier and others like her suggests that in addition to the mental harm, emotional conflagration may scorch the social and physical environment.

WILLIAM ROLL  
University of West Georgia  
Carrollton, Georgia, 30118  
rollpsi@aol.com

## Note

1.) The PRF was founded by Dr. J. B. Rhine in 1961, with me as project director. After 1964 when Rhine retired from Duke (and established the Foundation for Research on the Nature of Man, now the Rhine Research Center) I returned to the University where the PRF had become a sponsored program at the Department of Electrical Engineering. It was during the latter period that Ms. Renier participated in our research.

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