# Picnic at Hanging Rock

*by Miles Mathis*

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This will be a bit lighter, after months of heavy papers. I watched *Picnic at Hanging Rock* again on Valentine's Day, alone. I have seen it a couple of times before, but not for many many years. I bought the British release of 2013, but since my DVD player is all-region, that wasn't a problem. It includes a director's cut, but I passed over that for the original version. Director's cuts are normally longer, including previously unreleased footage, but I knew that this director's cut was notorious for being shorter and cutting well loved scenes. I wasn't interested in that. I also had a bad taste in my mouth from recently viewing the director's cut of *Amadeus*, which was a disaster. I hadn't realized how near that film was to being a flop, but it only took the inclusion of a couple of out-takes to make it unwatchable. The film editors should have won an Oscar. It went from being fairly entertaining (though false) to being a real stinker. If you like *Amadeus*, I recommend you never watch the director's cut.

Anyway, I watched *Picnic* again simply to gaze at Anne Lambert, and I admit it. There is just something about her, and perhaps the best thing is that she doesn't know it herself. . . and still doesn't.

This release includes a making-of documentary called “A Dream within a Dream”, and many original characters provide commentary, including Lambert. She still looked good in her late 50s, though some of the magic was gone—as is to be expected. But I mention it because they ask her about her role in the film's success, and she chalks it all up to promotion, denying she had much to do with it. And I don't think she is just being modest.

Of course she is wrong. She had *everything* to do with it, and I would venture to say that without her the movie would have bombed. There were many pretty girls and women in the film, but after 45 years I remembered nothing but her. She only appears in the first third, but in my memory the whole movie was just her and a blur around her, with the last part an unnecessary tack-on, one where you were hoping the whole time she would come back. The opening scenes are glorious and all-too-short, including the one where she is in the mirror singing the little song about horses in the paddock. She is so charming you want to crawl into that scene and live there the rest of your life.

Apparently director Peter Weir came perilously close to cutting his own throat here, since he fired Lambert after the first day's shooting, simply because she didn't feel right to him. You can tell she never got along well with Weir, since her comments show it. It is easy to see that he didn't treat her very well during the shooting, and she also didn't mix well with the other girls, except perhaps Helen Morse. And we can guess why: jealousy.

At any rate, after working a couple of days with a second girl, Weir realized his mistake and brought Lambert back. And the rest is history. Somehow, after absolutely stealing the show in this film—a film that put Australian cinema on the international map for the first time—Lambert wasn't snapped up by Hollywood or any other directors. She returned to Aussie soaps. Maybe that was because she wasn't willing to leave Australia, or for other reasons. I wasn't able to find out.

Since most people—like me—couldn't make heads or tails of the plot, we have to imagine the film has been such an arthouse success due to Lambert and the other pretty girls in white frocks. Weir and his cameramen were able to do what what David Hamilton always wanted to do, but never did. That is, insert us into the world of the young woman without making us feel like absolute leches and voyeurs. All cinema is voyeurism, but successful cinema is the successful pretense that it isn't. To achieve that, a director has to go to some trouble to make everything seem natural and straightforward and artless, though it's not. In cheesy 1970s films like *Bilitis*, Hamilton got the artistic side right, which is why Russell Boyd, the cinematographer of *Picnic,* bows to him in the making-of documentary. In other words, Hamilton got the lighting right, the settings, the backgrounds, and things like that. But Hamilton had no story or plot: he just pieced together some lame excuses to get his teen girls naked, so his films feel like longer and more artistic Playboy sketches. The dialogue is embarrassing and there is not even an attempt at acting. I admit to having watched them—they are sometimes interesting as a sort of moving painting—but they lack the magic of *Picnic* because there is nothing real about them. There is no suspension of disbelief and nothing natural to witness. They are completely artificial.

So what Weir and the producers of *Picnic* saw in the book was the perfect excuse to put together a cast of pretty girls in white frocks, while not just recreating another *Bilitis* or *Little House on the Prairie*. I haven't read the book, but I must suppose that it contained the outline of a plot with some apparent depth to it, some dialogue, some historical and religious references, and even a sort of mystery. This all gave the girls in white frocks some narrative weight, justifying the whole thing beyond naked voyeurism.

Let me be clear: there is nothing wrong with voyeurism. All of life is voyeurism, greater or smaller.

We are all looking all the time, or should be. If anything, people need to open their eyes *more*. But what separates cinema from peeping or porn is a larger artistic intention, whereby the viewer is transported into a created world where he feels like a real participant. To do that requires being in control of a larger set of variables, including plot, dialog, backstory, weather, sets, real actors, and talented writers.

We know this is what Weir and the others were after, since they did indeed end up getting Lambert nude. They looked hard for an excuse to get her nude, and manufactured one where she appeared to Michael in a dream as a Botticelli angel. But that was so artificial they had to end up cutting it. The footage appears in the documentary, and it was right to cut it. It is harmless and wouldn't have seriously damaged the film, but it was laughably gratuitous and not really artistic at all. She appears at a great distance like a marble statue, failing as art, failing as titillation, failing as voyeurism, and failing to fit into the plot. There was only one way to fit a nude scene into this movie, and though the French might have managed it, the Australians weren't up to it. It could have only been accomplished in the most straightforward and natural way: having Miranda take off her frock and put on her nightgown for bed, with no mood music, no lingering shots, no trick lighting, no head tosses or toe points. But I am glad they didn't attempt it, to be honest. There was one way of getting it right and a thousand ways to get it wrong. Given what they did with the Botticelli angel scene, we can be sure they would have gotten it wrong. In almost every case, seeing Miranda nude would conflict with our idea of her innocence, and for American audiences it was probably not possible to start with. Nudity can be innocent, but in modern depictions it never is.

As I say, the first times I watched *Picnic* I was pretty much oblivious to the mystery being spooled out. One, I wasn't really interested; two, it all seemed so airy and convoluted I couldn't possibly follow it; and three, the ending appeared to confirm it was all a conceit anyway, not meant to be taken seriously. This was "a mystery with no right answer." In other words, a mystery manufactured by the writers and therefore not worth thinking about. I could see from the beginning the movie wasn't really about the mystery: it was about having an excuse for a lot of beautiful scenes, like a Tarkovsky movie (see *Andrei Rublev*). Others have spent time trying to solve it, but until today I never did. The making-of documentary misdirects you away from trying to solve it as well, by again stressing the "no right answer" theme as well as implying it was fiction to start with. The author of the book, Lady Joan Lindsay, passed it off as a true story, and the producers of the film did as well, at least originally. This was to promote interest. But now they pretty much concede Lindsay made it up.

Or did she? Researchers have found no missing girls in 1900 [though they should be looking in 1911-14 when Lindsay would have been of that age], but we know some parts of the book are based on fact. Lindsay did go to a posh girls' school* near Hanging Rock, and her classes may have spent time there on holidays. She was married on Valentine's Day, so the day did mean a lot to her, for some reason. And she claims to have been able to stop clocks by her presence. So it wasn't Hanging Rock that stopped clocks, it was Lindsay.**

And on my latest viewing, suddenly the plot all came together. I saw what I hadn't seen before. I solved the mystery, though whether it is the mystery of the fictional story or the mystery of a real story in Lindsay's life, of course I cannot say. Maybe some others have already solved it, I don't know. I haven't researched that. I don't claim to be the first, though maybe I am.

What I hadn't noticed before is that two of the characters are related. Sara, the dark-haired girl who gives Miranda a Valentine's card in the first scene, is the sister of Bertie/Albert, Michael's Aussie servant. They had been in the orphanage together as children, before being split for reasons not given.

This clue is given to you twice, so though not obvious, it is also not hidden. You also get a huge clue in the very first scene, in that Valentine's card. Miranda reads it, and it says, “Meet me, love, as day is ending”. Very soon we find that Sara has a crush on Miranda, and Miranda is well aware of it. Miranda also seems to be aware of the threat, since she says she is about to go away. Later we learn that Sara considers herself to be a poet, so the poem in the first scene is not a quote from a famous poet, it was written by Sara herself. It is not a Valentine so much as it is an actual assignment for later that day: *they will meet at dusk*.

The first times I saw the movie, I saw Sara as a mistreated figure, but she is actually quite sinister throughout. Her full name is Sara Waybourne, as if she has been bourne away. In many scenes she appears quite mad. At first you think she is just distressed by the death of Miranda, but if you watch more closely, and watch many times, you begin to understand that she is the source of all the “evil”. I am not sure if Weir was not clear on that aspect of the book, or if he knew it and was masking it for some reason. Maybe you saw that the first time, but I didn't.

This reminds us of the first time we see Bertie in the film: he is saying crude things about Miranda as she crosses the stream, about her legs going all the way up to her bum, and Michael asks him to be quiet. I now see this as a clue that Bertie and Sara were working together here. As a local, Bertie would know things about the rock the others wouldn't. We see evidence of that in the film, for while others get lost on the rock, he quickly navigates the tunnels to find both Michael and Irma. He likely knew about some cave or hole in the rocks where the bodies could be disposed of, eluding even the bloodhounds.

This is confirmed when Bertie and Michael are talking about the bloodhounds looking for the girls. Bertie doesn't seem too concerned about them at all, feeling sure they *won't* be found. How would he know? Michael finds his nonchalance troubling, but Bertie says, “The sooner you forget the whole thing, the better”. Not exactly a heroic statement. In the book he tells Michael that every inch of the rock has already been gone over with a toothcomb, and in the film he says that “after a week in the bush they'd be dead by now”. So he is trying to prevent a further search by Michael.

So why was Irma not thrown in the hole with the others? Well, if Sara and Bertie had four people to deal with, including the old teacher Miss McCraw, one of them might have run away and hid during the event. The mountain was littered with little caves and crevices, and Irma was found hiding in one of them. She had to claw her way up into it, as we see from her damaged hands and fingernails. Michael is also seen crawling up to that point before he is found.

So when Irma was eventually found, why didn't Bertie drag her over to the hole and throw her in? Because he knew Michael was alive and had already seen her. He knew Michael would return to his senses and tell his story, so Bertie couldn't very well dispose of Irma at that point without arousing the suspicion of the police.

And what was the motive? Why would Bertie and Sara conspire to kill Miranda and her companions? Because, remember, Bertie and Sara were badly mistreated orphans, first abused in the orphanage and then split. Sara tells the story of having her head shaved and covered in purple paint. And she was still being mistreated in the school. We later see her tied up by Miss Lumley in ballet class. That is the scene where the girls attack Irma for not telling them what happened to Miranda, but they have no problem with Sara being tied to the rack off to the side. The first times I saw that I couldn't make sense of it. Miss Lumley doesn't seem the sort to tie anyone up, especially for “stooping”. So perhaps Sara was being tied up for other reasons: to prevent her from harming anyone else.

We have more confirmation this is what happened when Sara is sent to bed early by Miss Appleyard for not memorizing Longfellows' poem "The Wreck of the Hesperus"—which for some reason is misattributed to Felicia Hemans. Hemans is quoted later by Irma: "The boy who stood on the burning deck, whence all but he had fled, tra-la". I now see that as referring to Bertie standing on Hanging Rock after the murders, surrounded by the red cloud. "The Wreck of the Hesperus" was also chosen with full intent, since in it a captain ties his daughter to the mast of his ship in a storm, to prevent her from being carried overboard. She dies when the ship wrecks. Sara later mirrors that when she is tied up in ballet class. At any rate, at the end of this poetry scene, Sara puts her head down on the desk and says, "Oh where are you Bertie?" Indicating she has sent word to Bertie to come pick her up and that he is already late. She got in trouble with Miss Appleyard on purpose, knowing that she would be sent to bed early as punishment. Once there, she could climb from the window without anyone knowing she was gone for hours.

This means that Sara both loved and hated Miranda. She hated Miranda for not returning her love. The only way she could ever be with Miranda was in death or dream. Hence the whole "Dream within a Dream" start to the movie. At first I had thought it was Miranda saying that, but I now think it was Sara. Sara was the one caught in some waking dream, or waking nightmare.

Another clue in this direction is Irma saying that Sara reminded her of a little deer "who could never survive in captivity, being *doomed*". This tells us once again that Sara is the central character of the entire doom of the story, or its fate. Sara, not Miranda, is the hidden lead here. And this is because Sara stands for the author. Sara is the author Joan Lindsay in this tale, not Miranda.

Even the clothes in the film tell us this. Sara is the only girl in the school not wearing all white. She has a white pinafore with a black necktie, over a black skirt and blue gingham blouse.

In the bios, we have indications of Joan Lindsay's lesbianism, such as the strange book *Nuns in Jeopardy*. Although the author is given as her cousin Martin Boyd, it is admitted she supplied him with the plot, which concerned a group of nuns washed up on the shores of a desert island. This island, despite being remote and deserted, just happened to have a well stocked bungalow. Oi. Of course the nuns go through various sexual temptations. Author Boyd couldn't have been interested in this, because he was known to be gay. Gays writers aren't normally too interested in lesbian nuns.

The first times I saw the movie, I thought Sara had killed herself over grief from Miranda's death, but if we watch closer we see that Miss Appleyard pushed her out that window. Rewatch the scene where Miss Appleyard is in Sara's room after her death, going through her things, especially the Botticelli scrapbook. This tells me Miss Appleyard was not the villain. She had discovered Sara was the murderer, and tossed her out the window in revenge for the death of her companion Miss McCraw. We are given hints that Miss Appleyard and Miss McCraw are lovers, as when a drunk Miss Appleyard begins talking about her manly presence. We know Miss Appleyard murdered Sara regardless, since she lied about Sara's benefactor coming to get her, and then killed herself in the end by jumping off Hanging Rock. But she killed herself not because she was the murderer of Miranda and the others, but because she had lost the school and all hope of selling it. Sara had beaten her.

Despite that, in the making-of documentary, we find Weir had shot a variant ending where Miss Appleyard appears to be the murderer of Miranda, even more than in the released version. We are led to believe he ditched it for being too obvious, but you can now see it would have been further misdirection. All the evidence points not to Miss Appleyard, but to Sara and Bertie. Miss Appleyard

couldn't have hoped to kill several girls by herself, or even with the help of Miss Lumley; but with the strong and capable Bertie, Sara could have done so.

As further motive, it appears Sara knew that the loss of top students would destroy the school and therefore Miss Appleyard. See the scene where Miss Appleyard tells her she is being expelled for non-payment. She is in bed in her nightgown, and you would expect her to be crushed. But she smiles an evil smile. This is exactly why Miss Appleyard threw her out that window.

And what about the red cloud that Edith sees when she runs from the girls after screaming? That never made any sense, did it? The only way to fit that into the story is if Bertie threw some sort of acid on the bodies in the hole, to cover their smell from the dogs. Depending on the acid used—like nitric acid—that might send up a red cloud, which was then blown by the wind in the direction of Edith.

What makes the film so misty is that Weir didn't really give you enough to solve it on a first viewing. It takes quite a lot of effort to rebuild the full story from the few clues dropped, as I just showed you. You would have to key on the Sara/Bertie link the first time, and then watch very closely for other clues to fit to that line of reasoning. But Weir gives you no reason to do that, and every reason *not* to do it. Sara and Bertie almost never act suspiciously, and the clues we do get are very hard to read. Weir even ends the film on a canard, freeze-framing on Miss Appleyard.

So why would Weir either divert us to thinking Miss Appleyard did it, or hide the clues pointing to Sara so well? I can only imagine he did it at the request or direction of Joan Lindsay.

Lindsay needed to get this off her chest, but it appears she wanted it all to remain misty. She didn't really want the mystery solved, because that might point to some real event in her past. I now think something dreadful really did happen, probably on Hanging Rock. The book and movie may be some sort of cloaked confession. Lindsay is now long dead, so it doesn't really matter to her, but it may matter to the ghost of this girl/girls, which is why her Muses have appeared to me at last. The documentary provides a clue here, since Lindsay walked up to Lambert on set and gave her a big hug without even introducing herself. She treated Lambert as Miranda, ignoring the fact she was an actress. So Lindsay was definitely haunted by some demons, and was more than a bit mad.

If I had to guess, I would say Lindsay has reversed the roles here, making the poor orphan the villain where she was probably the victim. In other words, if anyone was killed, it wasn't the poor girl killing the rich one, it was the rich one killing the poor one. Rich girls don't disappear without an investigation, but poor ones do, explaining why this never made the papers in real life. The Lindsays are from a line of Dukes, and Joan Lindsay's mother was a Hamilton from another line of Dukes. Her grandfather was governor of Tasmania. A cousin was Chief Justice of Victoria. Her sister married the Jewish philologist Hans Pollak. Her best friend Mae later married the Governor General of Australia, Richard Casey. Joan was née Weigall, and the Weigalls were also baronets recently, related to Curzon earls and Howe earls as well as the Spencer-Churchills, Dukes of Marlborough. Dukes can cover up anything. They and their families can literally get away with murder, either accidental or intentional, and they often have. So it is possible some pretty but poor girl refused Lindsay's advances when they were in school, and Lindsay severely punished her, possibly by murder but maybe by some lesser means. Lindsay had felt guilt about it ever since, and used the book as an oblique confession. That is the most likely explanation of all this.

[**Added later, after reading the book**: Seeming to confirm this is that Miranda is the only main character not given a surname by Joan Lindsay. It is conspicuously denied us, which is a telling bit of psychology. Since Lindsay is Sara in the story, Miranda is her victim. But not only can she not mention her name, she cannot even create a fake name for her. She is afraid that no matter what name she chose, it would somehow incriminate her without her even knowing. But she gives herself away anyway. In the book, Lindsay says that Miranda was "well used to the bush" and "born and bred in the bush" {p.77}. Why would the richest and most privileged girl of the group be well used to the bush? This tells me again that Lindsay has reversed the roles, with Miranda being the poor girl and Sara standing for Lindsay herself—the rich girl.

We also find that Bertie was a master horseman, having been hired mainly as a groom and coachman. So although we find it took the trap about three hours to travel to Hanging Rock from the school, Bertie and Sara could have made the trip much faster. Beyond that, on p. 25, we learn there is a short cut that the large five-horse carriage cannot take due to rough roads. The carriage must take a circuitous route that is described as the two legs of a triangle, while a horse alone can take the direct route over the Camel's Hump. More clues come from Michael's father, Colonel Fitzhubert, who admits on p. 110 that Bertie "knows this country like the back of his hand", especially Camel's Hump and that route. This isn't mentioned in the film, but it would indicate Bertie could have ridden to the school and back in under two hours. A very important point. The only problem is that this appears to kill my explanation of the red cloud, since the disposal of the bodies would have had to come later than Edith's descent. In that case, the red cloud could only have been Bertie practicing with the acid in the afternoon, perhaps on a bit of carrion on the lower levels.

On p. 117 Bertie admits his sister "was like me—wouldn't stand no nonsense from nobody". On the same page, Bertie says that their shortcut through the woods "took five miles off the journey" to Hanging Rock. On p. 120 we discover Bertie had spent time in jail. On p. 259 we discover he had been a professional boxer. On p. 122, Bertie thinks this is one "wild bloody goose chase if ever there was one. . ." Again, how would he know? And why the ellipsis {the three periods}? On p. 125, we find Bertie leaving Michael on Hanging Rock alone and making the trip back *in the dark*. Proof that Bertie knew the area well enough to travel it at night.

On page 168 we learn Irma's mother is a Rothschild. So that's why she had to be found, I guess.

On page 169, we get this huge clue: "The small pointed face {of Sara} was somehow the symbol of the nameless malady from which every inmate of the College was suffering in varying degrees. If it had been a weak rounded childish face it might have aroused an answering pity instead of a sense of resentment that one so puny and pale possessed a core of secret strength – a will as steely as her own". Straight confirmation of my reading of the film. Also confirmation that Sara is Joan Lindsay. This is confirmed on p. 173, where we are told Sara is the only one with any artistic talent. Joan Lindsay was a painter before she became a writer, and always considered herself an artist first. Also confirmed by the fact that in 1912, while at Clyde School, Lindsay wrote a poem "Your Valentine", exactly like Sara did in the film.

In an interview with John Taylor in 1975, Lindsay says this:

**The Weigall family had an old book of valentines which was produced on special days: 'we never knew who sent them, we thought they were from a mysterious man who appeared on St Valentine's Day and sent us these cards'**

That makes no sense. An unknown man sent the entire family a whole book of Valentines? And he "appeared"? Appeared where and to whom? Since this happened when Lindsay was still a girl at home, this tells me she was involved with some man at that point, just like Sara was. Not a boy, a man. Giving us our Bertie in the plot.

Lindsay also gives herself away on p. 176, when we are reminded this youngest student Sara is—for some reason not explained—rooming with the eldest, Miranda. It makes no sense. We would expect Miranda to be rooming with Irma, the other richest and eldest girl. This is the most coveted room, so why would Miss Appleyard give it to Sara, not only the youngest, but the only girl in the College who was formerly a orphan. We now see why: Sara is Joan Lindsay, so this is how it must be, whether it makes sense or not.

On p. 191, we find that Bertie doesn't want to meet Irma after her convalescence. He absolutely refuses. He is afraid she might recognize him, of course. We also discover Bertie is older and larger than he appears in the film. On the next page Irma sees him and shouts at him, but he pretends not hear. Only when she confronts him does he stop. Even then he won't look at her, "focused on some invisible object of interest above her head".

On p. 218, we find that when on the rack in the ballet class, Sara was not tied up vertically, but horizontally. "Stooping" is again given the reason, so I guess we are supposed to think her spine is being straightened by this torture. So we still have no idea what is meant by this, either in the book or the film. But since we now know Sara is Joan Lindsay herself, we can read this as some sort of self-torture or self-penance Lindsay is subjecting herself to in her own story.

Also remember that in the film, Sara's head was painted purple in the orphanage. But that isn't in the book. In the book, her head is shaved but not painted. So why was it painted purple in the film? Because, again, Sara is Joan Lindsay, and the Lindsays are nobility. Purple=nobility, especially "gentian violet". Weir or his writer is giving a clue even Lindsay didn't give us.

After about page 240, the book really begins to unwind, and one has doubts about the sanity of the author. Disjointed all along, the book soon develops cracks, which become chasms, which become vaults. For instance, in scenes that never make the film, Miss Lumley is violently dismissed by Miss Appleyard into the arms of her brother, Reg Lumley. They leave and immediately burn up in an

accidental fire that night, before they even get home. Lindsay describes their exit as "phoenix-like". In the endnotes, we find that the College itself was destroyed by a bush fire in the next year. So Lindsay is trying to burn up anything and everything to do with this event in a funereal pyre. The book isn't a mystery so much as it is a burning confessional, concealed under layers and layers of deception.

On p. 287, we learn that Sara's benefactor Mr. Cosgrove had not abandoned her, but was coming to pick her up on Easter morning, at which time he would pay her bill. So that whole subplot was a deadend, like most others. This turned out to be a mystery with lots of purposeful and accidental feints, as well as an inordinate amount of clutter. If you had ever wondered what one of Mark Twain's hated "lady authors" would have done to an Arthur Conan Doyle plot, now you know. She would have made a horrible mess of it, spinning it out to 300 pages, dozens of pointless characters, and a constant string of meaningless and flittery asides. As I now look back on the making-of documentary, and all the people, including Weir, swearing up and down how great the book was, how cinematic, and how they had breathlessly read it in one sitting, I have to wonder how they could say it with a straight face. I read it in a couple of hours, but only because I had to. I didn't enjoy it. I found it tiresome, undisciplined, and spooky. Not spooky as in a good thrill or scare, but as in being subjected to an author's undiagnosed madness.]

Also of interest is that cinematographer Russell Boyd was very closely related to Lindsay. Lindsay's cousin Emma á Beckett married Arthur Merric Boyd, of the Australian Boyd "artistic dynasty". Of course this also means Russell was closely related to David Hamilton, who we looked at above. Hamilton was a cousin of Lindsay, explaining why Boyd was giving him a mention in the credits.

Lindsay considered herself a painter first, but she hadn't much talent. Like the rest of these people, she progressed mostly on her connections. She was already being exhibited in galleries to rave reviews by the time she was 23. So you can see why I am not likely to feel much sympathy for her. I would not be averse to tying her to a real murder if I could. If you are an Aussie, I have given you the leads. If I were you I would look at the year 1913. Lindsay mentions that year several times in passing in the book, and Sara was 13.

Anne Lambert may also be related to Lindsay, since although she is not listed in the thepeerage, there are many Anne Lamberts there, Lambert being a very common peerage name with over 1000 listings. Many of them are related to Lindsays, Lindseys, and Hamiltons. Wikipedia tells us nothing about this Anne Lambert, including parents, husbands, or children. Here, I discovered the Lindsays were indeed related to the Lamberts, since they were close friends with the artist George Lambert, a cousin.

Other cast members are no doubt cousins, since—as we have seen many times—this is how it works. The actors chosen are related to their characters. I wouldn't be surprised if one of these girls is related to the real victim. The best bet would be Margaret Nelson, who disappeared off the face of the earth in about 1980.

No one has been able to track her down, which is pretty odd. Joan Lindsay died in 1984, so maybe she took Margaret Nelson out with her. I am only about half kidding.

The actress who played Miss Appleyard died about the same time. . . 1980. . . age 53. . . of poisoning by lye. Supposedly a suicide, but she had also fallen through a glass partition. Roberts was supposedly aggrieved by her separation with Rex Harrison, but Harrison was gay and Roberts' ashes were later mingled with her friend Jill Bennett, indicating she was also gay.

On the way out, let's look at the most memorable line of the film: "Everything begins and end at exactly the right time and place". I have to admit I always liked that, probably because it appears profound, came from the mouth of Miranda, and seems to explain her death. It was all appointed and couldn't have been otherwise, implying the Muses were taking care of her. But notice what else it does: it cancels the blame of her murderer, since it couldn't have been otherwise. He—or she—can't be held responsible, since it was all ordained. It was Miranda's fate to die and Sara's fate to kill her. So, once again, it may be a psychological pointer to Joan Lindsay, who was trying to assuage her own guilt by making any and all events look like fate.

Lindsay's deleted final chapter does the same thing. There, she proposed Miranda and the other girls were transported into another dimension. This fits Lindsay's other stated beliefs in her books and interviews, especially her belief that time was cyclical and transparent. *It also fits the beliefs of a person trying desperately to run from some inescapable truth in her past.*

But is this famous line from the movie true? I don't think so. It may be true in some smaller sense, in that I like to think the Muses were taking care of Miranda regardless. There are worse things than death, such as living with gnawing guilt for 70 years. Miranda can always come back to us if she wishes. But in a larger sense, I think the line is false. There is no predestination and we are responsible for our actions. We always have a choice, which means we could have done otherwise. What we do, *we* do, not the gods or fates, and there is no getting around that. But of course someone like me would believe that. I *want* credit for my actions and have no real interest in passing everything off on the gods.

Yes, the Muses keep a hand in. I said recently I was sent here to cause trouble for the Phoenicians, which would seem to imply we are all just pawns of the gods. But that isn't what I meant. I think I was sent here for a reason, and maybe with a specific assignment, but that doesn't mean anything I have done has been pre-ordained. I could have refused the assignment, bungled it completely, achieved it partially, or hit it out of the park. It was up to me. The Muses were there to help all along, but they couldn't grab the reins and force me to do anything. That isn't how it works.

I can help my kittens grow up, but I can't live their lives for them. And even if I had that level of power and control, it would be pointless. Such control wouldn't expand their opportunities or make their lives better, it would limit them and make them worse. We actually see this with people who try to do just that, never letting their cats go outside and trying to manage all aspects of their existence, in order to "protect" them. Ditto for modern children, who are over-managed in the same way. It can't work, one because you can't protect living beings from all possible events, and two because the more you do, the more you destroy their lives. We all have to be free, because only in state of freedom does life have any meaning. Only by being free can we make choices, responding to the test that is life.

*Clyde Girls Grammar School, where Lindsay was dux (lead girl) and school editor in 1913. I added this footnote later, but notice how it confirms my guess above, where I keyed on that date for other reasons. Just five years after Lindsay left, the school moved to Woodend in Central Victoria, though we don't know if it was because of any scandal. It was Woodend that was near Hanging Rock, so if something happened at Clyde in 1913, it didn't happen at Hanging Rock.

**__Added January 22, 2022__: In a recent paper on the *X-Files*, we discovered that this stopping of clocks is a real phenomenon, reported by people who have had a near-death experience. So Lindsay may be telling us she had a near-death experience. Given the book she wrote, we would assume this happened to her at the same time as the Hanging Rock mystery, indicating that BOTH she and "Miranda" almost died. Possibly they pushed one another off some ledge, Miranda dying and Lindsay coming back from the edge of death.