



Cézanne's Quarry

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A young woman is found murdered ...and the clues to her death point to her spurned lover, Paul Cezanne. In this richly atmospheric novel, a mysterious young woman named Solange Vernet arrives in Aix-en-Provence with her lover, a Darwinian scholar named Charles Westbury, and a year later is found strangled in a quarry outside the city. The young and inexperienced magistrate, Bernard Martin, finds his investigation caught in the crossfires of a raging cultural debate. Many of the more conservative residents of Aix, including Martin's own police investigator, believe that Solange reaped what she sowed for entertaining such radical scientific theories. Initially assuming that Solange's murder was a simple crime de passion by either a spurned Cezanne or a betrayed Westbury, Bernard soon finds himself on a mission to unravel the secrets of Solange and Cezanne's hidden past--the key to which may be a series of his paintings which depict the strangulation and violation of a woman with golden-red hair. Exploring questions of science and religion--and the role of women in these realms--that persist even today, Cezanne's Quarry is an impressive debut mystery about life, death, love, and art.

Cézanne's Quarry Details

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From Reader Review Cézanne's Quarry for online ebook

Ian says

For the last couple of weeks now I have been promising myself that I would start Cezanne's Quarry (I don't know how to do the accent so I am not even going to try). However I haven't been able to get the ball rolling for a number of excuses; I lost the book for a while, I have other reading and homework that is actually required, and I have been trying to get into running which is turning out to be a lot harder than I first thought. Now that I actually have started reading it, I find that I could not read it any slower, for example the last time I sat down to read I only got through the first chapter which is 18 pages. Perhaps this is an advantage however because the chapters are not so much representations in the changing of focus or ideas but rather chronological shifts. So when two days pass by in the life of Martin. I am not too familiar with the way Mystery novels are written but I certainly am a fan. I believe it makes the book more real. In Law and Order in the sense that an episode of LO takes about one hour but covers about 3 months and time becomes hard to grasp which is the opposite of Cezanne's Quarry.

It is hard for me to talk at a great length about the actual meat of the story because I am so close to the beginning but I think that one of Pope's strong points is introducing the complexity of the characters from an early stage so from the first moment we are introduced to them we begin to analyze every action and word they speak. Pope creates in her characters this ying and yang aspect in which they are two opposites at the same time. Martin is on the one hand pious (he owns a copy of the bible and goes to religious celebrations and mass) yet at the same time his faith is fundamentally being challenged by his reading of *The Origin of Species*. Solange also shares this quality by on the one hand being dainty, at multiple points she is identified not by her face or voice but by her gloved hand holding a parasol; at the same time she is thought of by others to be promiscuous. Both of these conclusions are drawn not from interactions but from appearance. The final aspect of Cezanne's Quarry that I found fascinating was the character of Franc. Franc is the very embodiment of negative interpretations of France. He is loud, unattractive, and rough around the edges, to say the least, yet he is revered for those qualities by those in positions of power. In fact even though he is of a lesser societal rank than Martin, Martin still looks up to Franc and feels intimidated by him. Needless to say it will be interesting what the future role of Franc will be.

Deon Stonehouse says

Solange is discovered strangled at the bottom of a quarry. Was it her lover, Charles Westbury, a Darwinian scholar and geologist? Did the artist Cezanne strangle her in a fit of jealousy? Or could there be another cause to Solange's demise. Bernard is being pressured to find the truth quick! The paintings mentioned in the books are Cezanne's real work. Pope skillfully blends the worlds of art and science in this captivating first in the series.

Sarah says

For me, what makes a mystery novel great is not a cleverly-constructed case with a surprising solution

(though that helps), but rather a compelling detective figure. I want to be invested in the person tasked with solving the crime. More so even than the victim, it is the methods and motivations of the detective figure that must interest me. By this standard, *Cezanne's Quarry* is quite a success. Through the character of magistrate Bernard Martin, Pope illuminates and interrogates the ideologies that shaped life in Aix, France in the 1800s—the tensions between law and justice, science and religion, passion and reason. The exploration of these issues makes the setting and characters come alive and makes the novel unique and engaging.

Cheryl says

Definitely for literary readers. Fictional story and characters incorporating Cezanne and Zola. Great depiction of the time period.

Terri Lynn says

I started this series by reading the most current book *The Missing Italian Girl* and fell so much in love with it that I am now reading the first two books.

This is the book that introduced French investigative judge Bernard Martin. Martin knows what it is to be a charity case at school, funded by rich relatives after his father died and his mother begged them for help. As the youngest judge in Aix-en-Provence in August of 1885, he got only the throwaway cases other judges didn't want but a plum assignment lands in his lap when an ambitious police inspector Albert Franc (a creep in every possible way imaginable) brings him the case of the murder of an intelligent and remarkable yet mysterious woman Solange Vernet (a most delicious name) who is found raped and murdered at the rock quarry. Since the other judges and Le Proc (the prosecutor) are away for 2 weeks (everyone in France seems to go away in August, even now), this is Martin's lone chance to prove himself and Franc tells him that they both can get off to a roaring start if they can find the killer before the other judges and prosecutor return.

The reader only gets to know Solange through the memories of others and a letter she wrote but I know I would have loved having her for a friend. She had lived through miserable times living with a relative who forced her out to work and then took all of her wages. This relative's policeman boyfriend then raped her repeatedly while her own family member held her down. While this was going on, young artist Paul Cezanne wandered on the scene and only watched without trying to save her. She will never forget this and vows revenge on him for not helping her. He goes on to have nightmares about what he saw and to paint paintings of it.

When Solange finds herself pregnant, she steals a fortune the cop had hidden and runs away to Paris. What she doesn't know is that the cop had retrieved the ransom money a little boy's (who was killed) paid to get him back and hid it. In Paris she has an abortion which leaves her sterile and then is taken in by a kind woman who runs a failing milliner's shop and invests the money in the shop which she helps make into a money-maker.

Solange later sold the shop which was left to her and moved to Aix-en-Provence with her long time lover and soul mate, the British Darwinian scholar and geologist Charles Westbury who begins teaching classes on evolution and geology to both men and ladies and causes a stir among the local Catholics who think the world was created 4,000 years earlier rather than evolving over billions of years. They hold salons in their

home and invite anyone who wants intellectually stimulating conversation. They boldly live together unmarried which causes something of another stir. Poor Solange wanted to adopt a child and do charity work with the poor and needy alongside the Catholic women but is rejected by the high-and-mighty religious sorts.

The question is- who sent her the note for which the young messenger boy was also murdered and that led to her going to meet someone at the quarry where she was murdered. Was it her lover Charles Westbury who had found love letters to her in their home from Paul Cezanne and had his first fight with her over them the day before? Was it Paul Cezanne himself who she intended to toy with then turn down once he loved her as revenge for him not helping her long ago as a teenager being raped and who had become obsessed with her? Was it Cezanne's longtime lover Hortense Figueat who had once been his model and the mother of his 13 year old son (he would not marry her nor even tell his father about her or the son though his mother and sisters knew)? Or was it the cop who raped her so long ago, now trying to preserve his new identity?

There is some ugly realism about the jail and corrupt and violent cops with Franc at the top. He abuses Westbury in jail and is even getting free meals at a new restaurant in town in exchange for "protection." There is also painful realism about the way the religious treat people like Solange, Westbury, and the poor. Franc suddenly has something to hold over Martin's head when Martin shelters his anarchist military deserter friend Merckx who was the other charity student in high school and who was nearly dead on arrival at Martin's. Merckx is murdered by Franc, shot 4 times in the back, and Franc threatens Martin with treason charges for feeding him.

I marvel at the skill of the writer (who is an historian and has lived in Provence) to evoke the atmosphere and flavor of the times and of the people. Even the famous French writer Emile Zola makes an appearance. In the end, will there be justice for Solange or will a killer go free?

Barbara says

The author blends the atmosphere and flavor of 19th century France with the murder of a mysterious and beautiful woman. The investigative judge has two weeks in which to solve it and the two suspects are Paul Cezanne and an Englishman. The author used some of the incidents in this story to give an explanation of some of Cezanne's early works which made the fictional murder appear to be real. I really enjoyed the book

Laurie says

About forty years ago I was an American studying French in Aix in a summer program and I had drinks in a café called "Les Deux Garçons" in honor of Cézanne and Zola, who grew up there. I had trouble finding Cézanne's studio, but had no trouble seeing the Mont ST. Victoire. Pope talks about real people like Zola and Cézanne in "Cézanne's Quarry" and blends them in with a murder mystery and the controversy over Darwin's ideas. The impoverished young judge tries to be impartial and fair, while dealing with his own past and his own flaws. Absinthe is mentioned. The food sounds good. A good escape and a good way of finding out about a fascinating period in French History. Kept my mind off the possible arrival of a hurricane, and that's not bad!

Meg Martin says

This historical novel held my interest on several fronts: I was born not far from the scene of the action and art, and Pope's portraits of the locals evoked memories of my childhood in the village. Cezanne is my favorite painter, so I was eager to settle into this read. It did not disappoint.

Julia Hendon says

Not bad but the author inexperience at writing fiction shows. I'm also not a fan of the trend to include real historical people as characters. Nevertheless might read the next one as I expect the author gets better.

Annabelle says

A terrific who done it that merges an enticing description of the hills and caves of Aix-en-Provence with the familial and societal influences that formed artist Cezanne in the 1850s with a fascinating mystery of the murder of an early day feminist. Extremely well plotted, there are many red herrings including Cezanne and an English expatriate who teaches about the earth and evolution as Darwin's work is popularized. The main character is likable and is a young magistrate Bernand Martin, from working class, struggling to implement justice when his friends are revolutionist. Pope really marries a good yarn with the zeitgeist of France in the 1850s. I particularly like how she created that scenes that may have prompted Cezanne's most famous paintings. She also speaks out strongly about the rape of young working women as a common societal occurrence.

Brice says

Very enjoyable read about 19th century France. Fictional town, fictional storyline, but the details are all plausible. I'm already a big fan of Cezanne's paintings, so this was a fun read.

Cindy says

A good historical mystery involving the painter, Paul Cezanne.
Good characterizations and detail of France in the late 1800's.

Aarti says

Plot Summary:

In late summer, 1885, a woman's body is found in a quarry near Aix-en-Provence, France. She was raped and murdered. Bernard Martin, a shy new judge in the district, is assigned to the case along with the rough-and-tumble constable in the district, Franc. At first the case seems simple. The woman, Solange Vernet, was probably murdered in a jealous rage by her lover, the English geologist Charles Westerbury. But then they learn that the artist, Cezanne, had a relationship with the woman as well. So maybe it was he who killed her. Underlying the case, and running as a theme throughout the novel, is the French criminal justice system in the late 1900s, the terrifying prospect of being a woman with little means at the turn of the century, and the battle between science and religion.

Review:

Barbara Pope Corrado really packs a lot into a pretty quick read. In addition to a murder mystery (or two, or three), she gives readers a primer on French law and the country's difficulties choosing between religion and science. The murder mystery was interesting, but I didn't feel any particular affinity for any of the main characters in the novel, and so I didn't really care whether anyone was guilty or innocent.

I did, however, find the historical context fascinating, particularly the struggle for supremacy between science and religion. I didn't realize that it was a subject battled so openly and passionately at the turn of the 19th century, but Pope makes it clear that in France, at least, it certainly was.

I also don't know much about the French law system, but it seems like it was fairly unjust at the time. And, as usual in history, when laws are lax or unjust, it is often the women who suffer by them. This story certainly highlights that.

As to the characters in the novel- well, to be frank, I could take them or leave them. There were a lot, and many of them had chapters told from their points of view. I found the protagonist, Bernard Martin the judge, to be a nice if somewhat dull man. I just don't think I knew much more about him at the end of the book than I did at the beginning. As to the rest of the characters- Westerbury, Cezanne, Hortense and Franc- they all annoyed me. Westerbury was a pompous jerk, Cezanne was...odd. Hortense, Cezanne's lover, was whiny and crabby and Franc was a horror. The only character that I would have really liked to get to know more (and who did not have her POV represented) was Clarie, Martin's love interest.

I think in some ways the multiple points of view worked for the author as we got to see many characters in different lights- Cezanne, for example, is presented as very conflicted, depressed and ultimately run-down man. We would never have gotten so many dimensions on him as a character if not for the multiple points of view. But at the same time, we lost the ability to really bond with a character because it seemed like we were always being held at arms' length.

Overall, I think the book was a good read, and pretty quick considering the hefty themes it covers. I really enjoyed the exposure to an era of French history with which I am unfamiliar, and I hope to see more books by the author that are set in the same period.

Kathryn says

Cezanne's Quarry is a good historical mystery with a surprising suspect. The author examines the intricacies of 19th century French law, the status of women and the poor, class structure, and post revolution politics. However, the mystery is central to this story. Who killed the beautiful and intelligent Solange Vernet? Judge

Bernard Martin is faced with a brutal murder and two likely suspects. Is his investigation being helped or hindered by Gendarme Franz? He must sift through sparse evidence, while battling his own demons.

Christiane says

What I enjoyed most about this novel is the setting. The author beautifully evokes the Provence : the heat, the orange-red earth, the brilliant blue sky, the dusty green umbrella pines, the shrill sounds of the cicadas, the honey-coloured stone of Aix-en-Provence with its elegant plane-tree-shaded Cours Mirabeau, its fountains and cathedrals ...

Apart from that it's a satisfying murder mystery whose action unfolds in the second half of the 19th century against the background of the struggle between republicans and socialists against monarchists and arch-Catholics, science (Darwinism) against religion, advocates of women's and workers' rights against a reactionary Catholic Church, arrogant aristocracy and narrow-minded petite bourgeoisie. Most of the characters (except Clarie) are well-rounded and complex, the plot is suspenseful and the dénouement credible.

This is the first and in my opinion best book of the series.
