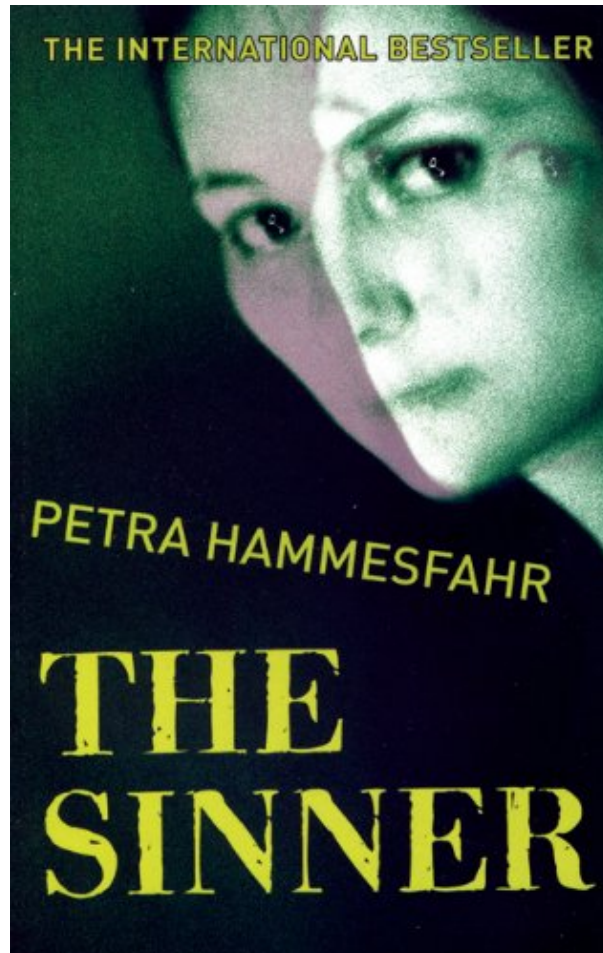
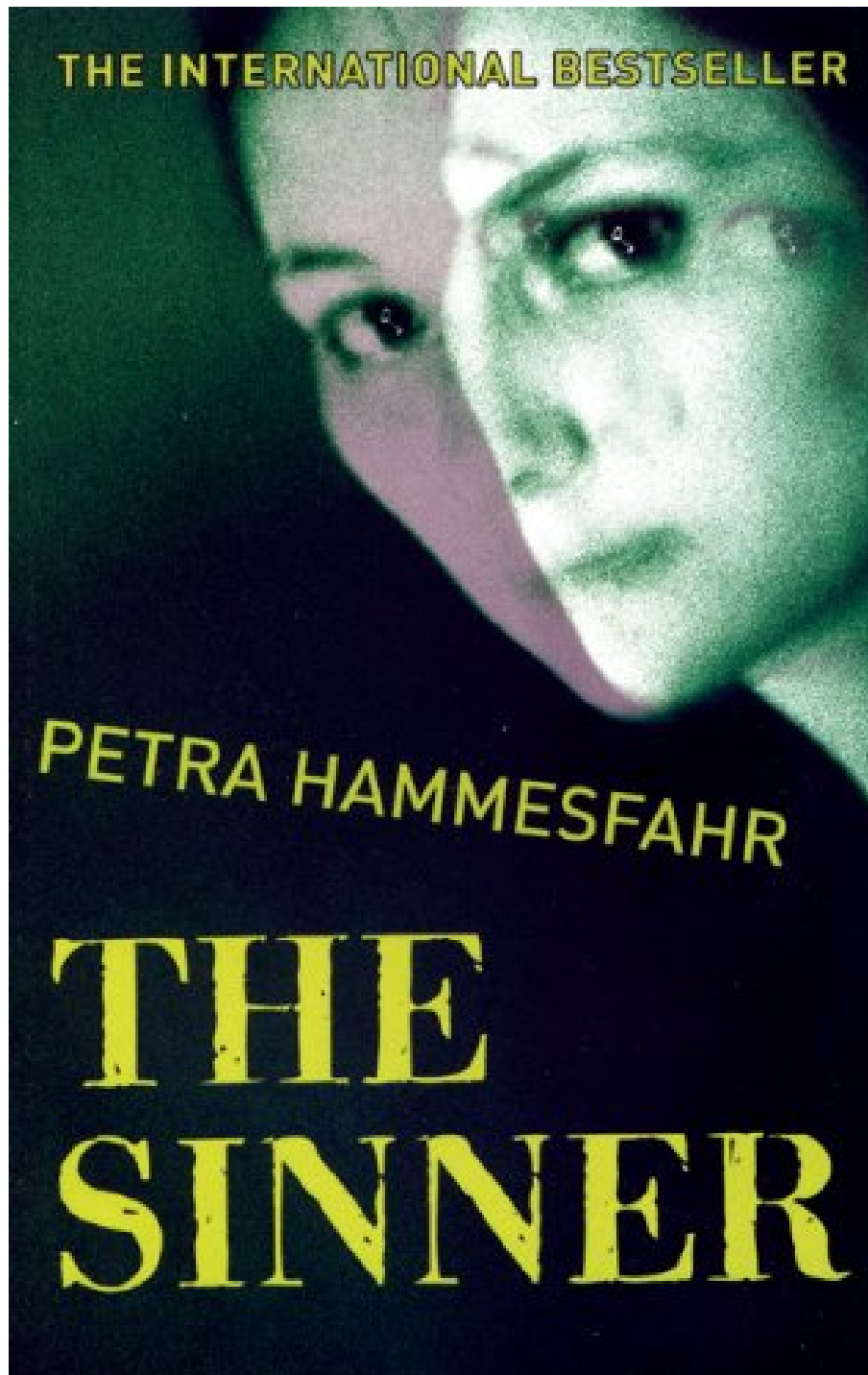


# THE SINNER BY PETRA HAMMESFAHR



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From Publishers Weekly

Hammesfahr's darkly depressing yet engrossing crime novel, a bestseller in Germany, examines the price of survival for two young girls growing up in a small German community. Police commissioner Rudolf Grovian is assigned the case of Cora Bender, a young woman who murders an apparent stranger in a crowded park. The local constabulary deems it an open and shut case, but Grovian, intrigued by Cora's strange behavior, pursues his own investigation. Cora reveals the bizarre circumstances of her claustrophobic family life, from her mother's relentless blaming of Cora for stealing her life to Cora's own complicated relationship with her disabled younger sister. The mixture of both first- and third-person perspectives and the explicit discussions of religious and sexual obsessions set this work apart from standard psychological fare. Dubbed Germany's answer to Patricia Highsmith, Hammesfahr should win new American fans with this English translation. (Feb.)

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Review

"In this intelligent novel Hammesfahr has etched with precision the thoughts of a woman on the edge of madness." *Der Spiegel* "Unrelenting suspense until the bitter end." *Stern*

About the Author

Hammesfahr, born 1951, left school at 13, became pregnant by an alcoholic at 17 and began writing novels in 1991. Her first thriller was turned down 159 times but eventually success arrived. Hammesfahr has written over twenty crime and suspense novels. She also writes scripts for television and film. She is married with three children and lives near Cologne.

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“In this intelligent novel Hammesfahr has etched with precision the thoughts of a woman on the edge of madness.”—Der Spiegel

Cora Bender killed a man. But why? What could have caused this quiet, lovable young mother to stab a stranger in the throat, again and again, until she was pulled off his body? For the local police it was an open-and-shut case. Cora confessed; there was no shortage of proof or witnesses. But Police Commissioner Rudolf Grovian refused to close the file and began his own maverick investigation. So begins the slow unraveling of Cora's past, a harrowing descent into a woman's private hell.

Hailed as Germany's Patricia Highsmith, Petra Hammesfahr has written a dark, spellbinding novel. At the top of the bestseller list, *The Sinner* has been reprinted sixteen times and sold over 760,000 copies at home. Translated into eleven languages, this is the first Hammesfahr title published in English.

Petra Hammesfahr, born in 1951, left school at thirteen, became pregnant by an alcoholic at seventeen, and began writing novels at the age of forty. Her first thriller was turned down 159 times, but eventually success arrived. Hammesfahr has written over twenty crime and suspense novels. She also writes scripts for television and film. She is married with three children and lives near Cologne.

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#### Most helpful customer reviews

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

deep psychological crime thriller

By A Customer

Police commissioner Rudolf Grovian decides to conduct an inquiry into the Cora Bender homicide case. In a park filled with people who witnessed Cora knife to the death n apparent stranger while her stunned husband Gereon tried to stop her after she slit the victim's throat. Although the local cops arrest Cora as the case is obvious with so many including her child and spouse seeing her do the act, Rudolf is fascinated by the culprit's behavior.

He interviews Cora trying to understand her motive for killing an apparent stranger. Instead Cora explains her family dynamics; not with Gereon who she loves and owes a debt of gratitude for allowing her to escape; instead with her blood family. Her mother hates her for being born and destroying her lifestyle with her birth; her disabled sister totally depended on Cora for everything. Still the cop struggles to comprehend why even as Cora explains her sexual obsession inside a religious fanaticism which bewilders him further.

This is a deep psychological crime thriller in which the audience learns the demons that haunt and obsess Cora. The story line rotates first and third person perspectives but that works quite nicely as the first person enables the reader to get inside Cora while the third person keeps the investigating exciting. Sub-genre readers will appreciate the character driven THE SINNER from the opening sequence when Cora almost kills Gereon with her powerful legs during a sexual moment until the final revelations that shake up Rudolf (and the audience).

#### Harriet Klausner

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Darkly Compelling Psychological Thriller

By Laurel Bradley

One hot July day, twenty-four year old Cora Bender decides to commit suicide. Her plan is simple, go to the beach with her husband and two year old son, swim out deep, and drown. Her death would stop the nightmares and silence the horrible song that plays in her head. Most importantly, it would keep her from remembering snippets of the "black time" in her life. But she isn't able to kill herself. Before she has the chance to swim out into deep water, her son wants an apple. As she peels it for him, the couple on the blanket a few feet away begins making out. The wife slips a tape into the player and Cora hears the song. Something snaps inside her. She takes the small knife she's been using and stabs the man in the neck over and over again until she's dragged from his lifeless body.

It should be an open and shut case. There are several eye witnesses, and Cora readily admits to the murder, but all that isn't enough for Police Commissioner Rudolf Grovian. He wants to know why, and he won't stop until he breaks down the wall in Cora's mind that hides the black time.

THE SINNER is the story of Grovian's investigation into Cora's past. Originally written in German, THE SINNER is an exhaustingly fascinating examination of the lengths the human mind will go to in order to protect itself. I was riveted by this story. Cora's world in all its variations stayed with me even when my schedule dictated I put the book down. I found myself wondering what really happened, what was truth, and what was fiction in this darkly compelling psychological thriller. It is easy to see how this book stayed on Germany's bestseller list for fifteen months.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Haunted by the Past

By A. Ross

In the vast preponderance of crime stories, the detective must examine means and motive (the how and why) in order to identify the culprit (the who). This English-language debut from German writer Hammesfahr flips the traditional arrangement, by making the who and the how absolutely clear from the start, and making the why completely unknown. There is no dispute that Cora Bender attacked a man at the park with a paring knife and killed him in plain sight of her own husband, son, and plenty of witnesses. What no one, including Commissioner Grovian, can figure out is why. And to my surprise, Hammesfahr manages to make his quest to understand the "why" into a gripping tale.

Even as Cora confesses and offers explanation, Grovian senses that her story isn't quite right. And for 300 pages, he prods, pokes, and literally digs into her past to try and figure out what triggered her seemingly senseless murder. Cora is a psychological mess, and as she throws out lies, half-truths, and whole truths in sometimes coherent, sometimes manic, monologues and interviews, Grovian is constantly sifting away. Cora's childhood was a very strange one, raised by an intensely Catholic mother, sexually frustrated father, and both religious and sexual themes pervade the story. Her youth was also overshadowed by her invalid younger sister, whose illness drained most of the family's energy, money, and love. Grovian must peel away at this complex family history to learn what triggered Cora, and the climactic revelation pays it all off beautifully.

I don't tend to go for crime stories that are this intensely psychological, but this is a corker. It's perhaps a touch too long, and in places a touch too slow, but these are relatively minor quibbles considering the mesmerizing tale. The comparisons to Patricia Highsmith are valid, and hopefully some of Hammesfahr's twenty or so other books are equally good and will become available in English.

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