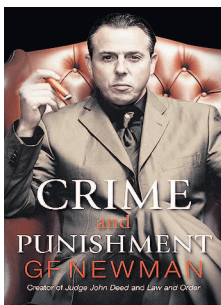


thrillers

Bent Britain



Crime and Punishment
by G. F. Newman

Quercus, £18.99 * £17.09, 698pp
Peter Millar

You can't libel the dead, and it's seriously hard work to libel violent criminals. Which is just as well for G. F. Newman — creator of the television series *Law and Order* and *Judge John Deed* — or he would have the late legal eagle Lord Goodman starting the writs flying and a fair few villains on his tail.

Newman's latest magnum opus, *Crime and Punishment*, is a roll-call of Britain from the 1950s to the 1980s, a *Sopranos*-meets-*EastEnders* underworld saga that consumes lowlife and highlife alike and spits out both with the same bad taste.

Newman has invented his own East End mobster family and put them in the same world as the Kray twins and Richardson brothers, forging a crooked career path that goes from boxing to blagging payroll lorries to the biggest scam of all — one that rings an all-too-familiar bell today — bent banking.

En route we get walk-on parts for the strip-show magnate Paul Raymond, the Profumo pimp Stephen Ward, *Rumpole* creator John Mortimer, fellow barrister George Carman and Superintendent Jack Slipper ("Slipper of the Yard").

The chief protagonist is Brian Oldman, whose earliest memory is seeing his

mother murder his grandfather, who had sexually abused her. His wicked uncle is Jack Braden, a wannabe big-time boxer who decides to use his fists to make money in the same way as the Krays.

But it is Brian's father, Joey, a Jewish immigrant from Central Europe, who has the brains. When his greengrocer's shop is trashed by the Krays, he sees that honesty does not pay and sets about worming his way into the heart of a British Establishment portrayed as almost totally corrupt.

Almost every member of the Metropolitan Police is on the take — Newman acknowledges his debt to the large numbers who anonymously helped him — living in a symbiotic relationship with the worst of the criminal fraternity.

Brian — like Ronnie Kray a violent homosexual in a country where not just his violence but his very sexuality is a crime — and Jack expand from robbing Fleet Street salary trucks to a spectacular bank robbery.

Meanwhile, the low-profile Joey emulates Peter Rachman's property scams to amass a small fortune with the help of a money-laundering scheme involving a respected City bank. He can afford to hire Lord Goodman to swing court cases for him.

At the same time Brian's mother is establishing herself as a leading light in the Conservative Party, eventually becoming an ardent supporter of its new hope, Margaret Thatcher. In the background is Leah Cohen, a bright girl brutalised almost to the point of oblivion by the men who abuse her.

This is a rumbustious, violent, cynical and yet frighteningly credible romp through the underbelly of three decades of British history. Clearly written with a view to a television series, where so many of Newman's previous creations have ended up, it climaxes in a courtroom drama laced with hilarious East End profanity.

At a time when British identity is increasingly swamped by American influences, this is an unashamedly unselfconscious bath in a wholly English underworld. There is even a glossary to help with the language.

telephone number to bookscomp@thetimes.co.uk with CrimeFest in the subject line. Entries must be received by 10am on April 30. Winners will be notified by May 1. The first correct entry drawn at random will win. One entry per person. No expenses or travel costs will be provided. Entrants must be aged 18 or over and residents of the UK or ROI. For full terms and conditions see timesonline.co.uk/books. For details of CrimeFest see crimefest.com

CrimeFest competition

CrimeFest is a celebration of crime fiction that draws top novelists, publishers and readers from around the world. It also hosts the Last Laugh Award and the Sounds of Crime Award for audiobooks. We have two weekend passes for this year's CrimeFest, which takes place in Bristol from May 14-17, to give away. One lucky winner will receive two weekend passes for all the



events, plus three nights at a four-star hotel and two tickets to the CrimeFest gala dinner. The prize is worth £640.

To enter answer these questions about three of the authors appearing at CrimeFest

1. How is Simon Brett linked to Arthur Dent?

2. What connects Michael Connelly to the bicentenary of the inventor of American detective fiction?

3. What is the key link between Scandinavian crime writers Karin Fossum and Håkan Nesser?

E-mail your answers with your name, address and

bestsellers

	Last Week		Author	Publisher rtp	Sales this week
1	—	The Return	Victoria Hislop	Headline, £7.99	32,569
2	3	Twilight	Stephenie Meyer	Atom, £6.99	27,322
3	4	New Moon	Stephenie Meyer	Atom, £6.99	26,554
4	—	Forever in My Heart	Jade Goody	HarperCollins, £15.99	26,180
5	1	Jade: Fighting to the End	Jade Goody	John Blake, £7.99	25,023
6	7	Eclipse	Stephenie Meyer	Atom, £7.99	23,814
7	12	Breaking Dawn	Stephenie Meyer	Atom, £12.99	19,108
8	—	Gone Tomorrow	Lee Child	Bantam, £18.99	18,836
9	8	Fractured	Karin Slaughter	Arrow, £6.99	16,934
10	5	This Charming Man	Marian Keyes	Penguin, £7.99	16,909
11	2	Nothing to Lose	Lee Child	Bantam, £7.99	16,709
12	9	The Other Queen	Philippa Gregory	Harper, £7.99	14,934
13	6	Assegai	Wilbur Smith	Macmillan, £18.99	12,629
14	10	Play Dead	Richard Montanari	Arrow, £6.99	11,757
15	13	When Will There Be Good News?	Kate Atkinson	Black Swan, £7.99	10,911
16	16	A Darker Domain	Val McDermid	Harper, £6.99	10,035
17	14	The White Tiger	Aravind Adiga	Atlantic, £7.99	9,522
18	11	In the Dark	Mark Billingham	Sphere, £6.99	9,418
19	—	Devil Bones	Kathy Reichs	Arrow, £7.99	8,826
20	18	Dreams from My Father	Barack Obama	Canongate, £8.99	8,859
21	19	The Secret Scripture	Sebastian Barry	Faber & Faber, £7.99	8,374
22	—	Sea of Poppies	Amitav Ghosh	John Murray, £7.99	8,324
23	20	Wedding Season	Katie Forde	Arrow, £6.99	7,964
24	25	The Suspicions of Mr Whicher	Kate Summerscale	Bloomsbury, £7.99	7,741
25	21	Angel Uncovered	Katie Price	Arrow, £6.99	7,580
26	—	Proms Guide 2009		BBC, £6	7,518
27	15	The Other Hand	Chris Cleave	Sceptre, £6.99	7,199
28	23	The Navigator	Clive Cussler	Penguin, £6.99	7,051
29	22	Honour Thyself	Danielle Steel	Corgi, £7.99	6,978
30	24	The Damned United	David Peace	Faber & Faber, £7.99	6,453

between the lines

As reported in *The Times* a few weeks ago, John Blake snuck in ahead of HarperCollins by retitling its Jade Goody book *Jade: Fighting to the End*, even though the paperback contained only a limited amount of material added since first publication. But HC has regained ground, and succeeded in persuading Jade's fans that its book, *Forever in My Heart*, is the authorised account of the reality TV star's last months. Proceeds from sales of the books go to Goody's sons, with some revenues from *Forever in My Heart* going to Marie Curie Cancer Care.

Just outside the charts is a new ancient adventure series, a genre made fashionable recently by Conn Iggulden. *Warrior of Rome* is by Harry Sidebottom, an Oxford don who lists his interests as "fiction, travel, sport, booze, and women". Sidebottom had written one book, *Ancient Warfare: A Very Short Introduction* (OUP), before signing up with Michael Joseph/Penguin in a six-figure deal for a trilogy about Ballista, a Roman commander with Barbarian origins. Perhaps unwisely, Sidebottom has already advertised his feelings about fellow novelists in this field in reviews for *The Times Literary Supplement*. Robert Harris, good; Colleen McCullough, bad.

The *Proms Guide* is a perennial bestseller, and one of the rare classical music titles to appear in the charts. But

the Proms audiences, though select, are dedicated. About 300,000 Proms tickets are sold each year, and the BBC claims that the Proms "reach" — the term may not exactly equate to the numbers who listen and watch — 16 million people.

Selection for the Richard and Judy Book Club does not guarantee bestsellerdom for life. But the endorsement that made Victoria Hislop's *The Island* the bestselling paperback of 2006 (after another R&J selection, Kate Mosse's *Labyrinth*) has rubbed off on its successor, *The Return* (Headline), helping to propel the Spanish Civil War tale to No 1. But books cannot reach No 1 on endorsements alone, they also require extraordinary planning by the publisher to get blanket exposure in diverse retailers' promotional slots.

Nicholas Clee

children's

Old hags make fun reading

The Poison Garden (11+)
by Sarah Singleton

Simon & Schuster, £6.99 * £6.64; 284pp

Pongwhiffy Back on Track (7+)
by Kaye Umansky

Bloomsbury, £5.99 * £5.69; 232pp

Amanda Craig

Sinister old women are a staple of children's stories — who can forget the terrifying scene in Disney's *Snow White* when her stepmother transforms herself into a hag with a poisoned apple? Yet old women can be not only powerful but also a force for good — and fun. Two new novels, one for teenagers and the other for 7+, play with these ideas.

Sarah Singleton is outstanding at creating creepy magical settings, and the Poison Garden of the title is one of seven created

by the Guild of Medical Herbalists. Thomas discovers this when he inherits a magical box from his dead grandmother, and enters a garden where her ghost tells him that she was poisoned. Her box lets him into Broceliande, the Garden of Dreams, but there are six others, congruent to six other boxes. Which belongs to his grandmother's murderer? Who is the sinister man trying to gain possession of all the boxes? Who paid for each murdered person to have a violin played at their funeral? Thomas lacks definition and individuality as a hero, but the world he enters is so richly fascinating that the reader is swept along.

Apprenticed to a master chemist, Thomas soon meets the other members of the guild, an eclectic bunch of witches that includes one other child — the pale, doll-like Maud. She takes him into the Poison Garden, where every plant brings death — but does she control it or does somebody else? Singleton's Gothic imagination works wonderfully in a story that is set in the late 19th century, but which is timeless. Are the seven gardens real or imaginary? Are they the product of magic or a kind of superior

alien technology? Like all Singleton's fiction, this treads a fine line between fantasy and philosophy, and will be particularly pleasing to readers of 11+.

Kaye Umansky's witch, Pongwhiffy, is 21 years old — though her habits, which make her as appealing as Horrid Henry crossed with Winnie the Witch, are unchanging. Eating skunk stew and guzzling toffees while her poor familiar, Hugo the hamster, does all the housework is the least of it. Even Pongwhiffy begins to realise that life can't be all sweets and sloth, so in a burst of determination she commandeers the Royal Gardens and a TV star and ropes in assorted inhabitants of the Wood for the O'Lumpick Games.

There are lots of heavy-handed jokes (a vampire called Vincent Van Ghoul, a goblin called Plugugly and a giant baby) that will give primary-age children the giggles. Regrettably, the book shows signs of having been written quickly, but it's genuinely amusing since children will spot how closely Pongwhiffy resembles the kind of middle-aged schoolteacher we all half-love and half-loathe.

Philip Howard's Lost words garbist

One who is skilled in polite behaviour; an expert in good manners and "etiquette". This comes directly from "garbe", the French word for grace and elegance, ultimately from the Old High German for preparation and adornment. 1640:

"Yes, this is backword Complement: this wipes off the false praise which the first thrust on: you must be seen in both, or you are no true garbist else." The golden rule of good manners for the garbist is to think of others before

himself or herself. In other words, garbism is self-effacing unselfishness: to put others first, and not to ask for any reward. As in: Be a garbist, Tom: do not gabble while you gobble with your mouth full.

They're reading

Virginia McKenna
English actress and
wildlife campaigner



"Michael Morpurgo is a master of storytelling. In *War Horse* he draws us in to the heart and soul of Joey the horse and, through him, reveals the bond that can be created between animal and Man. Animals' heightened senses enable us to share Joey's journey from the Devon farm to the battlefields of northern France in a vivid and disturbing way. Through Joey's eyes we see the marches, the hunger, the weight of the mud — as well as kindness and the rare moments of stillness. I was stirred beyond measure; only a writer of Michael's perception can do that." Virginia McKenna talks about her new book, *The Life in My Years*, at the National Theatre on Tuesday.

You're reading

David Baldwin



"*The Shack*, by William P. Young, is a bereaved father's journey of reconciliation — through a personal encounter with God — with the brutal murder of his young daughter. It's an imaginative, engaging and moving story that tries to answer the question: Why? It teems with vibrant, lively imagery that explodes and excites the imagination. This is a charming, challenging book in which sorrowful empathy and feel-good factor work surprisingly well together." David Baldwin, 64, is a former Royal Marines officer and crisis management consultant from Glastonbury, Somerset

In about 100 words, tell us about a book that you read recently or are reading. Send submissions (with "you're reading" in the subject line) to books@thetimes.co.uk or Books, The Times, 1 Pennington Street, London, E9 8JT. Include your name, age, profession, address and telephone number, and a head-and-shoulders photograph (digital if you submit by e-mail). We cannot return or acknowledge entries.

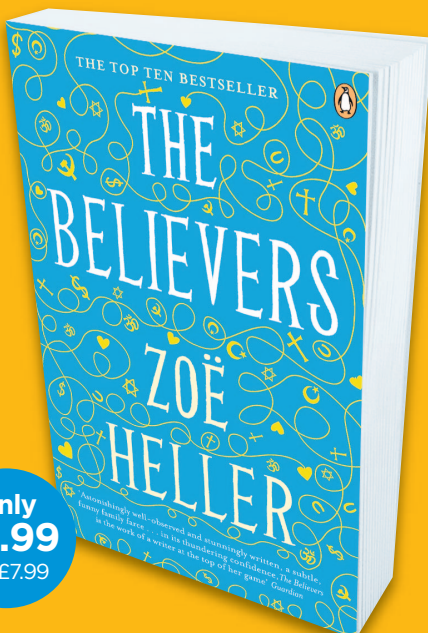
We're reading

The books we've loved in the past few weeks

Lords of Finance: 1929, The Great Depression — and the Bankers Who Broke the World by Liaquat Ahamed Heinemann, £20 * £18
A cogently explained account of how a normal cyclical downturn became a self-reinforcing slump.

Everything Ravaged, Everything Burned by Wells Tower Granta, £10.99 * £9.89
Short stories exploring love, violence, and the fear that has us lying, eyes open, in the dark. An extraordinary debut and a sensitive, surprising voice.

Paprika by Yasutaka Tsutsui, translated by Andrew Driver Alma, £9.99 * £9.49
When a dream-entering device goes missing, psychotherapist Atsuko Chiba must save the conscious world by doing battle in the unconscious. Sci-fi for the sophisticated.



THE TIMES

THE BELIEVERS

Buy Zoë Heller's *The Believers* for only £2.99

From this Monday until Sunday, you can buy *The Believers* — the superb novel by Zoë Heller — for just £2.99 at WHSmith. From the author of *Notes on a Scandal* comes a comic, moving and beautifully written story about a family coming to terms with a secret from the past. Faith, doubt and trust play their part in what *The Sunday Times* called 'one of the outstanding novels of the year.'

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