



# bookshelf

WITH DARREN TANNER

## Usual suspects

This month, DARREN TANNER is in a criminal frame of mind . . .

I've got crime on my mind this month. For the first time, Foyles is the official bookseller at CrimeFest, an annual international crime-writing convention held right here in Bristol, and I've spent the last few weeks poring over lists of the best books and authors in the genre to make sure we're well-prepared.

So many authors have captured the reading public's imagination since the genre's roots in the early 19th century – certainly too many to mention here – but here's a whistle-stop through some of my favourites.

A series that I'm particularly fond of right now is the new collection of re-translated and re-jacketed Inspector Maigret novels by Georges Simenon. Penguin are, rather ambitiously, publishing a new book every month, and with 75 in the series in total, it's very much a long-term project, but one which has been eagerly awaited by fans of the pipe-smoking French detective.

**THIS SIMENON REVIVAL** is great news for European crime, but many iconic classics, especially those adapted for the big screen, have come from America. *Strangers on a Train* by Patricia Highsmith follows the predicament of Guy Haines, an architect whose wish to divorce his unfaithful wife leads him to become embroiled in a deadly situation beyond his control. The screenplay for Hitchcock's renowned re-imagining was adapted

by Raymond Chandler until writer and director spectacularly fell out over how best to interpret the novel; an artistic conflict which has been dramatised in a wonderful radio play, *Strangers on a Film*, starring Patrick Stewart and Clive Swift.

Chandler's own *The Big Sleep*, published in 1939 and a classic of the hardboiled crime oeuvre (yes, there are genres within genres here), is a taut and brilliant novel featuring private investigator Philip Marlowe, which layers complexity upon complexity as characters double-cross other characters and secret upon secret is revealed to the intrigued reader. Marlowe is a great early example of the cynical antihero who defines the pulp crime genres. Fans of contemporary crime will recognise many hardboiled traits in characters such as Mark Billingham's Tom Thorne, whose latest outing in *The Bones Beneath* sees him pitted against the most dangerous psychopath that he has ever put away, and is set against the backdrop of a wild and remote Welsh island.

**BILLINGHAM, PERHAPS ONE** of the UK's most successful crime writers, is in good home-grown company. An early favourite of mine by a British author is *The Man Who Was Thursday* by G. K. Chesterton, a 1908 metaphysical thriller with a mind-blowing and surreal twist at the end. It continued the move away from the 'gentleman' detective of 19th-century crime writing which was instigated by Arthur

Conan Doyle's creation of the brilliant but flawed Sherlock Holmes just a couple of decades earlier.

This year's CrimeFest line-up is testament to the vitality of contemporary crime writing in this country, with some truly talented British authors featuring over the festival, from Ben Aaronovitch to Sophie Hannah.

Aaronovitch in particular has carved his own niche of fantasy crime; fans will no doubt be champing at the bit to read the next instalment in his Rivers of London series, published this autumn, but in the meantime, last year's *Broken Homes* is out this month in paperback, with the usual blend of police work and magic – perfect summer reading.

Finally, I couldn't leave you without mentioning one British crime writer who is particularly close to our hearts here at Foyles; a former colleague of ours, Sarah Hilary published her debut novel *Someone Else's Skin* earlier this year to much critical acclaim, and I can vouch for it being a great read. If you visit us this May, you'll find this and plenty of other fantastic crime novels to explore, whether you're a newcomer to the genre or a seasoned fan. **OL**

- Crimefest takes place at the Marriott Hotel 15-8 May ([crimefest.com](http://crimefest.com))
- Foyles Bookshop, Philadelphia Street, Quakers Friars, Cabot Circus [foyles.co.uk](http://foyles.co.uk)

