

BY SUZANNE FOX

Only to modern eyes does the late 19th century seem cozy, staid, or secure. The Victorians themselves saw their age much as we do our own: as a time of tumult in which traditions crumbled and startling technological innovations inspired hope and instilled fear. The period saw the emergence of recognizably modern police forces and forensic science, as well as the rise of what we now call the serial killer. It also gave birth to the first true detective fiction, from Dickens's Bleak House and Wilkie Collins's The Woman in White to the work of Edgar Allan Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle in the genre. Decades of writers have taken up the detective novel since then, reimagining both the form and the age that produced it.

he similarities and differences between the Victorian era and our own are part of the former's enduring appeal to both writers and readers. "The Victorian period feels accessible to readers today," comments Barbara Peters of Poisoned Pen Press. "It's not that unfamiliar in its social structure. You don't have to learn a different language or distant history to understand it. Yet there was so much going on, and we're far enough away from it to enjoy paying it a visit." The fledgling state of Victorian forensic science is also interesting. "The forensics of the period tilt investigations back toward the heart and the brain—toward human effort rather than scientific process," says Kate Miciak, editorial director, v-p of Ballantine Bantam Dell.

The authors featured below reflect the contrasts of the period they depict. They take inspiration from literature, history, and geography, and they make use of American and British protagonists, plainspoken and trickier literary styles, early and late Victorian timeframes, moods ranging from cozy to blood-curdling, and every form of detective from titled amateur sleuth to working class "copper." What they share, along with a mastery of their craft and a fascination with the 19th century, is a capacity to reenvision the period in ways that are historically convincing and fictionally fresh, yet that resonate with today's concerns.

Period literature is a natural source of story for contemporary writers of Victorian mystery. Sherlock Holmes appears in a variety of recent mysteries, most notably those of Laurie R.

Ripping Yarns

Jack the Ripper is alive and well in the pages of mystery and crime fiction, 125 years after the Autumn of Terror. The story of the archetypical serial killer exemplifies the old adage about truth being stranger than fiction. Consider the apparent ritual significance of the murders, which were replete with savage gore—and the butchery that a correspondent to Scotland Yard (who signed himself Jack the Ripper, but whom many believe to have just been a journalist) dubbed the "double event": having been thwarted in his plan to mutilate Elizabeth Stride, the murderer claimed the life of Catherine Eddowes within the hour, and vented his frustration on her corpse. The Eddowes slaying, committed in a small square, regularly patrolled by a constable on 15-minute rounds, bolstered the notion that the killer managed to somehow turn invisible. And with the identity of the Ripper still unknown (and likely to remain so), armchair theorists have pointed the figure at a who's who of Victorian England, including Lewis Carroll, the royal physician, and even Queen Victoria's grandson.

Small wonder, then, that many writers continue to be tempted to offer their take on the Ripper. Sherlock Holmes was (again) on the trail in Lyndsay Faye's Dust & Shadow (Simon & Schuster, 2009). Time travel and H.G. Wells, first combined with Jack in Karl Alexander's 1979 Time After Time, are also in the mix of Felix Palma's The Map of Time (Atria, 2011). And 2015 will see the publication of Peter Straub's era-shifting Hello Jack (Doubleday), in which contemporary Ripper-like murders prove to be connected with the original crimes. And the appeal of the shadowy figure isn't restricted to genre regulars. Isabel Allende's forthcoming Ripper (HarperCollins, 2014), set in the present, fea-

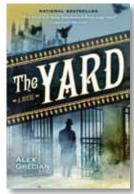


tures online roleplayers teaming up to catch a serial killer in a game called Ripper.

David Pirie used the Ripper in his Murder Room series featuring Dr. Joseph Bell, the real-life

inspiration for Sherlock Holmes. He observes that if the killer "had been identified and caught, it seems highly likely much of the uncanny aura of the murders would have been dissipated. The Yorkshire Ripper, who created such a stir in the U.K. some years back is still notorious of course but has nothing of the aura of the first Ripper because when arrested his public persona proved incredibly mundane. People are in the end people and criminals are not usually epic characters. The original Ripper, if identified, would probably have been mundane too, but as a mystery he remains so much more."

For Lyndsay Faye, it's not just that the Ripper has never been identified. "His enduring legend has everything to do with the fact that he was a darling of the popular press. Slap Jack the Ripper on a headline and you were instantly raking in the shillings; add a frightening illustration and amplify that to sovereigns. The English have frankly always been riveted by gore. So the conservative press used him



to shriek about foreign influence and moral depravity, and the liberal press used him to flog the plight of the poor in the East End." For Faye, it was "extremely difficult to treat the horrendous details of the crimes fairly, tastefully, without doing a severe disservice to the victims by glossing over their grisly fates. They didn't have a choice in the matter and we do-as a female writer especially, it's a fine line between historical accuracy and the same variety of sordid money-grubbing the Victorian gutter press was reveling in."

French impossible crime master Paul Halter, whose The Red Fog will be published by Locked Room International in late 2013, has a different take. "It's question of period and décor. Victorian London is a marvelous canvas for crime stories (hansom cabs, gas lamps, fog, badly paved streets, etc.)." Channeling Golden Age greats such as John Dickson Carr, Halter's Ripper novel emphasizes the miraculous nature of the murderer's disappearances after the crimes, which for Halter is "perhaps their most fascinating aspect."

Alex Grecian, author of the Murder Squad series, doesn't "really care who the Ripper was or what his/her agenda was. The effect of the Ripper on society is what intrigues me." In The Yard (his 2012 series debut), he dealt with "the morale of the people living in London at the time, the aftermath of the Ripper's actions and the results, or lack of results, that the police force was faced with." He understands why people play Guess-the-Ripper, "but figuring out how society's grown up around the myth of the Ripper is much more fascinating."

Perhaps Straub sums up the rationale for fictional use of the killer best; he notes that "the evocation of Jack the Ripper calls up a wonderful sense of historical solidity: mental graphics that come laden with suspense, terror, mystery, and fascination."



<u>WhyIWrite...</u>

By John Harwood

riting fiction is the hardest, the most frustrating, the most rewarding, the most exhilarating work I've ever done, or can imagine doing. Rationally speaking, what I do is make up stories, but it feels like discovery—as if the story already exists, and my task is to divine the shape of it. As if I were a dog following a scent through a dark forest, blundering into trees and losing the trail, casting blindly around until I find it again.

I'd been writing fiction for years—decades—but nothing that really satisfied me, until I stumbled on the idea for The Ghost Writer, a novel built around a series of Victorian ghost stories supposedly written by woman in the 1890s. I still vividly recall being halfway through "The Gift of Flight," a story set in the old reading room of the British Museum in 1899. Julia, my character, was sitting at a desk on a freezing February morning, and looked up to find herself surrounded by dense fog. I knew that something sinister was going to emerge from that fog, but I had no more idea than Julia of what to expect. When I saw what it was, the hair on the back of my neck stood up.

These are the moments that make all the false starts and



dead ends, all the gnashing of teeth over intractable sentences, worthwhile-when a story takes on a life of its own, independent of my plans for it. Tregannon House, the labyrinthine asylum at the heart of my latest book, began as a chaotic litter of maps and sketches and floor plans, but when I finally had it all straight in my mind, the place seemed to materialize above those fragments—a house remembered rather than something invented.

In the early stages of a new book, there's often a moment when the whole thing seems to unfold before me in full cinematic vision and I think, "All I have to do now is write it down." But when I get to my desk there's nothing there, because novels, sadly, aren't made out of vivid cinematic images but out of words, one after another, like footsteps. Still, there's immense satisfaction in getting a plain descriptive passage absolutely right, the scene safely on the page. And even if the finished book doesn't quite capture that first, tantalizingly elusive vision, there's always next time...

John Harwood is the recipient of the International Horror Guild's First Novel Award and the Aurealis Award. He lives in Hobart, Tasmania. In May, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt will publish The Asylum.

King, while Arthur Conan Doyle himself partners with the period's most scandalous poet in Gyles Brandreth's Oscar Wilde mysteries. The series' sixth installment, Oscar Wilde and the Murders at Reading Goal (Touchstone, May), proves that Brandreth's Wilde is astute enough to solve a murder from the confines of a cell and clever enough to be entertaining in the process.

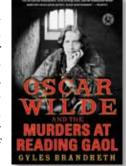
Another mystery drawn from Victorian literature, American David Morrell's Murder as a Fine Art (Mulholland, May), represents a significant and successful shift for a veteran author best known for First Blood, the source of the Rambo films.

Reminded of 19th-century author Thomas De Quincey by chance, Morrell found himself fascinated by the man, his work, and his influence on such writers as Poe and Collins. In Morrell's novel, set in 1854, an elderly De Quincey visits London with his daughter Emily; at the same time, a copycat murderer recreates the Ratcliffe Highway killings. So minutely do the new murders reflect De

> Quincey's essay "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts" that he is soon arrested. Revealed through both Emily's journal and omniscient narration, the plot balances the DeQuinceys' amateur detection with the work of a fictional plainclothes detective and his ambitious constable. "This is a period when plainclothes detectives and plaster casting of footprints

were still innovations," Morrell explains. "[My] characters see them through fresh eyes."

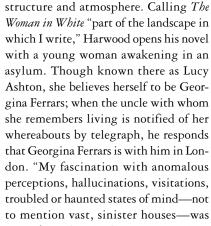
Some of the most inventive combinations of literary sources and mystery fiction being written today come from Britain's Lynn Shepherd. Shepherd's The Solitary House introduced two Charles Maddoxes—a struggling private detective and his great-uncle, a legendary "thief taker"—amid a cast of characters drawn from Dickens's Bleak House. Adding the Romantics to the mix, A Fatal Likeness (Delacorte, Aug.) finds the younger Maddox investigating the often sinister secrets of poet Percy Bysshe Shelley and his circle. Historical figures such as Claire Clairmont, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, and others play a role; the elder Maddox, dimmed by what we now call Alzheimer's,



can offer little assistance, but his hidden case files guide his namesake toward answers that other sources obscure. Like Morrell, Shepherd juxtaposes period documents with omniscient narration, but her narrative tone is confiding, a bit gossipy, and sometimes cheekily modern. The layering of modern voice, Dickensian London, and the Romantic literary past is both complex and convincing, as are Shepherd's answers to the long-standing literary mysteries that crop up in the novel.

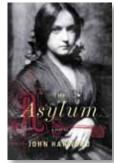
Unlike those of Morrell and Shepherd,

Australian writer John Harwood's latest novel makes no explicit references to writers or literature. As with his previous mystery, *The Séance*, however, *The Asylum* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, May) draws on the Victorian novel of sensation for both



bound to lead me to an asylum sooner or later," Harwood says playfully. The book is a psychological puzzle rather than story of detection, and the heroine's literal and figurative search for self offers the haunting pleasures of a Victorian novel of sensation as well as a rich modern meditation on identity.

Like literature, place is a powerful inspiration for all of the writers featured here, and both British and American mystery authors often set their novels on British soil. "I think that everyone who loves to read was to one degree or another raised on Victorian literature. So much of what we take in with our mother's milk is Victorian England, when England and London were the center of the universe," says Charles Finch, an American who has lived in both the U.S. and England. Though his protagonist, Charles Lenox, is a Londoner, last year's A Death in the Small Hours takes the private detective and member of Parliament, along with his small family, to Everley, the Somerset estate of a beloved relative. There, he finds Frederick Ponsonby planning to pass the estate to a younger relation; meanwhile, the nearby village is threatened by vandalism and murder. Both lyrically and accurately rendered, Finch's Everley is Edenic. Yet he imagines the



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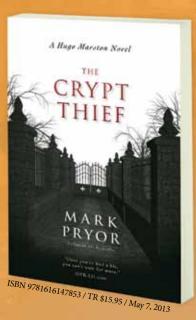
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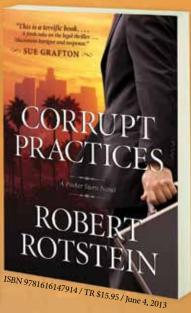
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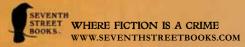
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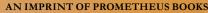
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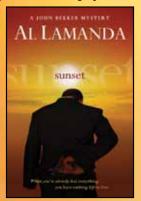


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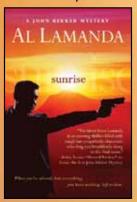
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Mysteries

YA Victorian-Era Offerings with a Mystery Twist

Changelings, freak-show attractions, Emily Dickinson, the daughter of Queen Victoria's royal surgeon, and a monster catcher's apprentice are among the diverse characters starring in a handful of YA novels, due this spring or fall, featuring Victorian settings—and a tinge of mystery.

A teenage girl in Victorian London is swept into a world of deception, betrayal, and revenge in Kristin Bailey's *Legacy of the Clockwork Key* (S&S/Simon Pulse, Mar.), the

first book in a trilogy. After a fire destroys Meg's home, her fortune, and her future, she rescues from the ashes a tarnished pocket watch that reveals clues about an elite secret society and a dangerous invention.

Kieran Larwood's *Freaks* (Scholastic/Chicken House, Mar.) introduces a cast of characters born with abnormalities that make them misfits. They spend their nights on public display, trapped in a traveling Victorian sideshow. But by day, they use their various talents to solve the mystery of why London street urchins are



disappearing and to protect those who remain. As the apparently mild-mannered daughter of Queen Victoria's surgeon, the eponymous heroine of Kate Maddison's *The Incredible Charlotte Sycamore* (Holiday House, Apr.) faces quite a challenge: she must keep her risky nightly efforts to solve murder mysteries a secret. She swordfights with her best friends, is mauled by apparently rabid dogs, steals medical supplies from the rich to give them to the poor, and saves the queen's life. Writing under a pseudonym, historical romance author Kate Bridges makes her YA debut with this steampunk novel.

Though set in New England rather than England, *Nobody's Secret* (Chronicle, Apr.) by Michaela MacColl features a fictional heroine based on celebrated 18th-century poet Emily Dickinson. When Dickinson meets a mysterious man who refuses to divulge his name, she enjoys a clandestine flirtation with him—until he turns up dead in her family's pond. She embarks on an investigation into his identity, uncovering her town's secrets and placing herself in deadly danger in the process. Also due is the trade paperback edition of MacColl's *Prisoners in the Palace: How Princess Victoria Became Queen with the Help of Her Maid, a Reporter, and a Scoundrel* (Chronicle, Mar.).

Colleen Gleason's *The Clockwork Scarab: A Stoker & Holmes Novel* (Chronicle, Oct.) is the first installment of a series starring two young women: Mina, the niece of Sherlock Holmes, who has inherited his investigative skills; and Evaline, the half-sister of Bram Stoker, who is a hunter of the undead. When two women disappear in London, the only clue connecting them is an Egyptian clockwork scarab, and Mina and Evaline team up to solve the case



Two fall novels set in Victorian London feature otherworldly creatures. In *The Whatnot* (Greenwillow, Sept.), Stefan Bachmann's sequel to *The Peculiar*, the faeries have been chased out of London, and Pikey Thomas and changeling Bartholomew Kettle follow, piecing together clues and searching for the doorway that will lead them to Bartholomew's sister Hattie. And *How to Catch a Bogle* (Harcourt, Sept.) by Catherine Jinks is the first book in a middle-grade trilogy featuring Birdie, an orphan who is an apprentice to a monster catcher. Her job is to lure bogles out of their lairs and she is happy with her lot—until the orphans of London start disappearing.—Sally Lodge

British country house less as a haven of privilege than as the hub of a community connected across classes and generations. "I wanted to talk about the social role and responsibilities of the squire," the author says. "There has always been a squire in this house. But what I find fascinating in the period are the huge changes afoot. These seismic social changes are what interest me, under the guise of a very proper, staid society." Lenox returns to London in the upcoming An Old Betrayal (Minotaur, Nov.), in which a new case leads him close to the British royal family.

Also centering on London, the books of British writer Anne Perry (beginning with 1979's The Cater Street Hangman) have done much to popularize Victorian mysteries in the U.S. Like many of the authors here, Perry constructs her novels with an awareness of both historical realities and current events. "My recent plots come right from today's headlines," she notes. "People have said to me, 'I don't suppose you realize it, but this is right up to date.' But of course I do realize it-

that's probably why I wrote it." There are two deadly rapes in her 28th Charlotte and Thomas Pitt novel, Midnight at Marble Arch (Ballantine, Apr.). Pitt, an ordinary policeman who has risen to head Britain's Special Branch, looks into one case, while his friends and family, including his wife Charlotte, unofficially investigate the other. Character reactions to the sexual crimes—including shame, blame, and frustration at the gap between punishment and justice—feel authentic to their period, yet familiar today. "This was a theme I hadn't [written about] before, and it's very pertinent," Perry comments. "In some ways, not much has changed. But when events are set in a different place or time, we can look at them without feeling as self-conscious."

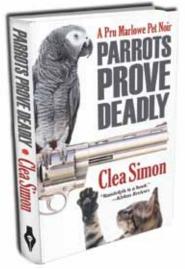
American writer Alex Grecian's highly praised 2012 debut, The Yard, was set in London, among a Murder Squad formed after Scotland Yard's failure to catch Jack the Ripper. The Black Country (Putnam, May) sends The Yard's Day, Hammersmith, and Kingsley into Britain's bleak industrial Midlands, where towns literally tremble on a landscape plundered for coal. "I read the journal of a woman who lived in the 'black country' during the period. She talked about how the town's houses were actually sinking into the mine tunnels," Grecian says. "There were open pits everywhere and children playing right in the mines. I had to bring my London characters there to see what would happen to them."

Scores of villagers fall ill, a terrifying figure is glimpsed in the woods, and a young girl discovers an eyeball under a tree in Grecian's fictional Blackhampton—even before the disappearance of a married couple and their toddler prompt local police to summon the Yard. The tale that unfolds pits science and deduction against local superstition, drawing on sources including international history and British folklore; the novel combines the cliffhangers of a serial and the scariness of Gothic horror.

American writer Tasha Alexander decided to make her series heroine, Lady Emily Hargreaves, a wellborn Englishwoman. "It's not difficult to understand why someone who is working in hideous conditions in the East End of Victorian London would want social change. But what about somebody with country houses?" Alexander asks. "From the start, my idea was to take a young woman from the top of society and explore the process in which she develops intellectually [and] begins to crusade for social change."

In researching the travels of her protagonist, Alexander reads the letters and diaries of real Victorian women travelers; these offer the author useful and sometimes surprising guidance. "We've really bought the Edwardian's view of their stodgy Victorian grandparents. But if you actually start delving into primary sources, you see that they were a lot less dull and fearful than their grandchildren would have us believe." Since the series' 2004 debut, Lady Emily has traveled to Vienna and Constantinople, among other places, and married Colin Hargreaves,

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Mysteries

who investigates sensitive matters for the British Crown. In addition to linking Lady Emily to a wider range of investigations, the relationship allows Alexander to explore new aspects of the Victorian female experience. With her protagonist newly pregnant at the end of last year's Death in the Floating City, Alexander's Behind the Shattered Glass (Minotaur, Oct.) will offer new insights, as well as new crimes.

Also of note is The Path of the Wicked (Severn/Crème de la Crime, June), the sixth Liberty Lane mystery by British author Gillian Linscott, writing as Caro Peacock. Despite operating in 1840, Lane makes a plausible and appealing female investigator and shows her mettle as she strives to exonerate a young man accused of murdering a governess in Cheltenham.

Though there is no Victorian era in American history, some mystery novels set in late-19th-century U.S. have a recognizably Victorian sensibility. Anne Perry finds a kind of American counterpart in Victoria Thompson, whose enduring Gaslight Mystery series explores the diverse neighborhoods of Manhattan during the period through the crimesolving exploits of midwife Sarah Brandt and police detective Frank Malloy. Like Perry, Thompson excels at finding themes that are both historically accurate and resonant now. Murder in Chelsea (Berkley Prime Crime, May) involves an issue of what we would today call child custody; and Thompson's next plot hinges on late-19th-century lonely hearts ads, foreshadowing some of the risks of online dating.

Lindsay Faye, another American writer evoking 19th-century New York City, has been praised "as an author of rare talent" by Caleb Carr, whose 1994 The Alienist is often credited for ushering in the "golden age" of contemporary historical fiction. After a successful debut novel set in London (see sidebar), Faye moved to 1840s Manhattan in

her 2012 The Gods of Gotham. Its striking sequel, Seven for a Secret (Putnam/

Amy Einhorn, Sept.), is again narrated by Timothy Wilde, an Irish ex-bartender and one of New York City's first "copper star" officers. The latter are a surprisingly small corps of virtually untrained, mostly working-class men charged with keeping a huge and violent city in check.

American Kieran Shields, who like Faye names Carr as an inspiration, explores a lesser-known American city with equal distinction. A Study in Revenge (Crown, Jan.) makes evocative use of settings in Portland, Maine (the author's hometown and a major 19th-century maritime center), as well as other environments from Boston to Mount Katahdin. In both Shield's widely praised 2012 debut, The Truth of All Things, and A Study in Revenge, Deputy Marshal Archie Lean and former-Pinkerton Perceval Grey explore the distant as well as the recent past. The history of the Salem Witch Trials is integral to the first book's mystery; Colonial history and alchemical lore are central to A Study in Revenge. Shields's work brings this discussion of Victorian mysteries full circle, melding vigorously American settings and themes with influences from British detective literature. Though Lean and Grey echo Doyle's Holmes and Watson, it's the differences between the two pairs that best showcase the author's gifts. The son of a Native American, Grey was raised by his mother's wealthy white family. He is visibly "other" in a world where darkskinned men are rarely seen in impeccably tailored suits. "Holmes is very much a product of his society, with a Queenand-country mentality," Shields comments. "Grey is an outsider. He's not truly a part of the culture that he's working to protect, even though he's probably smarter and more cultured than most of the people he's up against, and he's not entirely comfortable with his identity." Happily for readers, Grey, like the novels discussed here, is more interesting because he exists at the intersection of contrasting worlds.

Suzanne Fox, a Florida writer, teacher, and editor, reviews regularly for Publishers Weekly.

W W W . J O U R N A L S T O N E . C O M

The E-book Did It

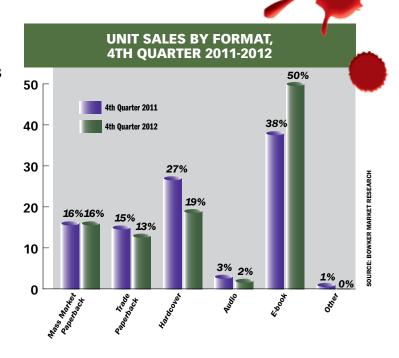
Digital editions accounted for half of mystery units sold in last year's fourth quarter, though print still lives

BY JIM MILLIOT

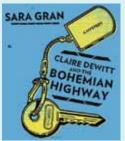
enre fiction has done very well in the e-book format and mysteries are no exception. Just how important e-books have become to the category can be seen in the latest figures from Bowker Market Research. In the fourth quarter of 2012, e-books accounted for half of all mystery (and detective) units sold, up from 38% in the same period the prior year. For the full year, e-books accounted for 35% of units sold and 24% of spending, according to Bowker. E-books' gain were print's loss of course, with the biggest decline coming in the hardcover format, whose share of units sold fell to 19% in last year's fourth quarter, from 27% in the comparable period in 2011. Mass market paperbacks-a category generally hit hard by the rise of e-books—fared relatively well, with units holding even between the fourth quarter of 2011 and that of 2012.

The increase in e-book units did not translate into a windfall for Amazon. According to Bowker, Amazon's share of total mystery unit sales actually fell by one percentage point in the final quarter of last year compared to 2011, as the e-tailing giant lost ground to other e-commerce competitors, such as Apple's iBookstore. B&N also lost ground in the year, with the second-largest bookseller's unit share falling to 18% from 23%. Independent booksellers and Books-A-Million gained market share 2012, each picking up one percentage point.

The decline in print sales of mystery titles continued into the first quarter of 2013. Data from Nielsen BookScan show that print sales at outlets reporting to the company's retail & club channel (which



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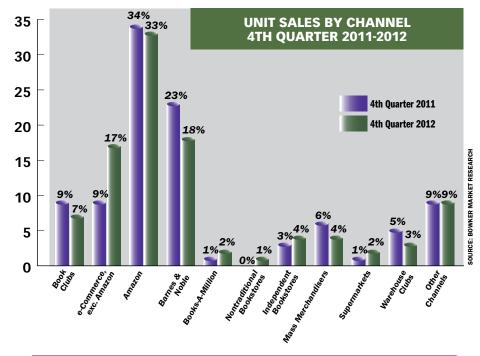
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includes bookstores and Amazon) fell 20% for the year-to-date period ended March 24 compared to the similar week in 2012.

Despite print's declining share of the market, a lot of mystery titles are still sold in hardcover, trade paperback, and mass market paperback formats. The top-selling mystery book at outlets that report to BookScan in 2012 was the hardcover edition of Janet Evanovich's Notorious Nineteen, at just under 290,000 copies. A mass market edition of Evanovich's Explosive Eighteen placed third last year. Of 2012's top-10 mystery/detective novels in terms of print sales, five were mass market paperbacks, three were hardcover, and two were trade paperback. Stieg Larsson's The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo has been impossible to kill off, with both the trade paperback and mass market editions making the top 10 last year, helped by the release of the movie.

UNIT SALES BY AGE 3% 13-17 6% 18-29 **12%** 30-44 33% 55-65 SOURCE: BOWKER MARKET RESEARCH 16% 45-54 32% over 65



BESTSELLING MYSTERY & DETECTIVE NOVELS II

2012

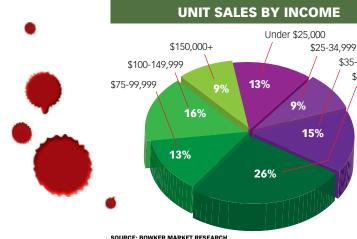
\$35-49,999

\$50-74,999

RANK	TITLE	AUTHOR	PUBLISHER	FROMAT	SALES
1	Notorious Nineteen	Janet Evanovich	Bantam	HC	289,671
2	The Affair	Lee Child	Dell	MM	218,723
3	Explosive Eighteen	Janet Evanovich	Bantam	MM	208,201
4	11th Hour	Patterson/Paetro	Little, Brown	HC	195,679
5	The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo	Stieg Larsson	Vintage	MM	180,194
6	Buried Prey	John Sandford	Berkley	MM	148,172
7	Red Mist	Patricia Cornwell	Berkley	MM	131,409
8	10th Anniversary	Patterson/Paetro	Grand Central	TR	130,223
9	Stolen Prey	John Sandford	Putnam	HC	122,993
10	The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo	Stieg Larsson	Vintage	TR	121,664

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SOURCE: ROWKER MARKET RESEARCH