

Leading Mystery Writers of the 20th Century

The two "grande dames" of British mystery are Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers. They set the conventions for future mystery writers—the country house model where the inspector calls, ponders, and solves.

Agatha Christie

(Hercule Poirot/Miss Marple)

Dorothy L. Sayers

(Lord Peter Wimsey)



Cozy Mysteries

These were heavily influenced by Christie and Sayers. They have a small town setting, a domestic crime, and often involve solving some form of a puzzle through observation, deduction and the keen understanding of human nature. They have no graphic violence or use of strong language.

M.C. Beaton

(Hamish MacBeth/Agatha Raisin)

Elizabeth George

(Inspector Lynley)

Caroline Graham

(Midsomer Murders)

Martha Grimes

(Richard Jury and Melrose Plant)



Crime Fiction

These writers begin with a straight detective story, add some psychological suspense and create a novel of characterization and atmosphere which blends aspects of the cozy and the procedural with the tale of detection and suspense. The queens of this type of British mystery are:

P.D. James

(Adam Dalgliesh)

Ruth Rendell

(Inspector Wexford)

IDENTIFY YOUR FAVORITE BRITISH MYSTERY AUTHORS.

Police Procedurals

Gradually British mysteries changed in style to the police procedural where the emphasis is on the characterization of the investigating detective and a deeper look into the psychology of the criminal he faces. This style was influenced by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Stephen Booth

(Ben Cooper and Diane Fry)

Rhys Bowen

(Constable Evans)

Reginald Hill

(Dalziel and Pascoe)

Peter Robinson

(Inspector Banks)



Hard-Boiled, Neo-Noir

This genre began in the late 1980's and has a strong social realist element. They include "savvy street realism", depicting the rougher, inner life of British society. They were influenced more by Charles Dickens than by more traditional hard-boiled mystery writers.

Ken Bruen

(Jack Taylor)

John Harvey

(Charlie Resnick/Frank Elder)

Bill James

(Harpur and Iles)

Val McDermid

(Carol Jordan and Tony Hill)

Ian Rankin

(Rebus)

Peter Turnbull

(Hennessey & Yellich)



Specialty Mysteries

Within the area of mystery fiction specialty mysteries are growing. Perhaps the most prominent specialties visible in British fiction are historical and art mysteries.

Historical Mysteries

Anne Perry

(William Monk/Charlotte and Thomas Pitt)

Ellis Peters

(Brother Cadfael)

Elizabeth Peters

(Amelia Peabody)

Charles Todd

(Inspector Ian Rutledge)



Art Mysteries

Iain Pears

(Jonathan Argyll)

Humorous Mysteries

Humor is often put to good effect in mystery fiction where absurdity and understatement work to tone down the actual horror implicit in murder. Humor can be found in all styles of British mysteries: many of the police procedurals employ humor in depicting the main detective. These are some authors for whom humor has a large role.

Simon Brett

(Mrs. Pargeter/Fethering)

Jonathan Gash

(Lovejoy)

John Mortimer

(Rumpole)



Other British mystery writers worth reading:

Robert Barnard

Clare Curzon

(Mike Yeadings)

Lindsey Davis

(Marcus Didius Falco) (Historical/foreign locale)

Michael Dibdin

(Aurelio Zen) (Foreign locale)

Marjorie Eccles

(Gil Mayo)

Dick Francis

(Sid Halley)

Ann Granger

(Mitchell and Markby)

H.R.F. Keating

(Inspector Ghote) (Foreign locale)

Peter Lovesey

(Peter Diamond/Sergeant Cribb)

Stuart MacBride

(Detective Sergeant Logan MacRae)

Jill McGown

(Inspector Lloyd and Judy Hill)

Edward Marston

(Nicholas Bracewell)

Magdalen Nabb

(Marshal Guarnaccia) (Foreign locale)

Janet Neel

Michael Pearce

(Mamur Zapt) (Historical/Foreign locale)

Michael Robotham



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A lineup of some of the most popular British authors.