

# CRIME SCENE: FRANCE

## A PRACTICAL GUIDE



*Inaugurating a major new Crime Time series of overviews: the very best of the international crime writing scene, country by country, the facts, the figures, the key trends. Produced in connection with AIEP/IACW (see below), the project is co-ordinated by Bob Cornwell. We begin with information provided by BILIPO, that distinguished institution at the heart of French crime fiction...*

### IN THE BEGINNING

Amongst the international predecessors of the crime novel<sup>1</sup>, François Vidocq is key. The first head of the French Sûreté and a friend of Balzac, the four volume *Mémoires* (1828) published under his name inspired numerous characters in nineteenth-century French literature including Balzac's own Vautrin and Victor Hugo's Javert. At that time the French were madly keen on novels in serial form, among which special mention should be made of *Rocambole* (1857 etc) by Pierre Alexis Ponson du Terrail, *Les Mystères de Londres* (*The London Mysteries*, 1843) and *Les Habits noirs* (*The Black Clothes*, 1863) by Paul Féval, or even Alexandre Dumas' *Le Comte de Monte Cristo* (1845) and *Les Mohicans de Paris* (*The Mohicans of Paris*, 1854). And it was a Frenchman, Emile Gaboriau, who was to be the true successor of Poe. A former secretary of Paul Féval, this native of Charente was to create what was known at the time as 'le roman judiciaire'. His main character, Inspector Lecocq, thus appears in *L'Affaire Lerouge* (1865), *Le Crime d'Orcival* (1866),

*Le Dossier No.113* (1867), *Monsieur Lecocq* (1868), and *La Corde au cou* (*The Noose*, 1872). Gaboriau's own secretary, Fortuné Du Boisgobey followed successfully in his master's footsteps. His major crime novels are currently being republished in France, for example the delightful *Le Crime de l'Omnibus* (*The Crime on the Omnibus*, 1881).

'La Belle Époque' witnessed the appearance of a rather special type of novel. A development of the serialised novel, it gave prominence to the villains. Leaving aside Joseph Rouletabille, the journalist-hero of Gaston Leroux, who solved mysteries worthy of Sherlock Holmes and who would be the first French writer to use the 'locked room' theme in *Le Mystère de la chambre jaune* (*Mystery of the Yellow Room*, 1912), the heroes of the immediate pre-war period are Maurice Leblanc's Arsène Lupin, the gentleman burglar explicitly conceived as a rival to Sherlock Holmes, Léon Sazie's Zigomar, and the abominable Fantomas, creation of the first duo of crime novel authors: Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain.

1. No attempt has been made to distinguish between the French terms 'roman policier', the diminutive 'polar' etc. Normally, these terms have been translated as 'crime novel'.

### THE KEY REFERENCE BOOKS

Intended for the general public as much as for the specialist, the works listed provide a comprehensive overview of crime writing, covering authors from all over the world.

- *Dictionnaire des littératures policières* (*Dictionary of Crime Literature*) dir. Claude Mesplède (Joseph K., 2003) revised in 2007
- *Dictionnaire du roman policier* (*Dictionary of the Crime Novel*) Jean Tulard (Fayard, 2005)
- *Le Polar* Jacques Baudou & Jean-Jacques Schleret (Totem Guide, Larousse, 2001)
- *Les Couleurs du noir: biographie d'un genre* (*Colours of Noir*) François Rivière (Le Chêne, 1989)
- *Le Guide du Polar: histoire du roman policier français* (*The Polar Guide: History of the French Crime Novel*) Michel Lebrun and Jean-Paul Schweighauser (Syros, 1987)

### RECENT TRENDS IN CRIME PUBLISHING

So great is the public appetite for crime fiction that nearly all French publishing houses are publishing crime novels (even some university publishers, whom one would not have expected to venture into this sector). Almost one in every five books sold is a crime novel.

#### NUMBER OF TITLES

Date	New Titles	Reprints	Original Language (%)		
			French	English	Other
2003	815	468	43.5	47.0	9.5
2004	706	456	40.5	51.5	8.0
2005	758	516	41.0	49.0	10.0
2006	910	492	46.0	45.0	9.0

#### THE BEST SELLERS

Excluding the Dan Brown phenomenon (several million hardback copies sold of his four translated titles), the biggest sales in recent years have been achieved by Fred Vargas and Jean-Christophe Grangé, two authors who for many years struggled to become known. Harlen Coben has become a major success followed by established Anglo-Saxon favourites such as: Mary Higgins Clark, Patricia D. Cornwell, Michael Connelly, and the American Patricia Macdonald. Stieg Larsson and Henning Mankell are well represented as well as the Icelandic author, Arnaldur Indridason. In the field of the spy story, John Le Carré and Robert Ludlum have retained their popularity.

## THE FRENCH CRIME NOVEL TODAY

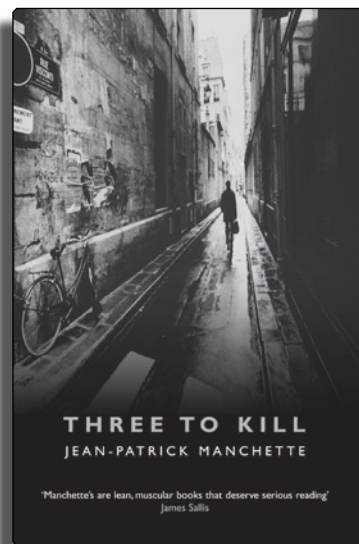
For a few years now the American-type thriller has been highly successful with such authors as **Grangé** but also the three young French writers **Maxime Chattam**, **Patrick Graham** and **Patrick Bauwen**. Anglo-Saxon writers always have a great attraction for French readers, who rush to obtain new novels by **James Ellroy** and **Tony Hillerman**, **Elizabeth George** as well as **John Grisham**, **Ian Rankin** or **Martha Grimes**. They have, however, also become interested in the Italian **Andrea Camilleri**, the Mexican **Paco Ignacio Taibo II**, the Russians **Boris Akunin** and **Alexandra Marinina** or the German **Frank Goyke**.

Prior to the 1990s women writers (just over 100 of them since the birth of the genre!) had only marginal success. (An exception was **Noëlle Lorient**, writing as **Laurence Oriol**, a man - a common strategy.) Women writers are now much more prominent, often as 'noir' writers. An early pioneer is the versatile **Virginie Brac**, who returned to crime writing in the mid-90s, winning the Grand Prix de la Littérature Policière in 2004. Other key writers include **Dominique Manotti**, **Stéphanie Benson**, a British woman who writes only in French, **Sylvie Granotier** and **Chantal Pelletier** (who are also actresses), **Dominique Sylvain** or the lawyer **Hannelore Cayre**. More influenced by Anglo-Saxon crime writing are **Maud Tabachnik**, **Brigitte Aubert**, and **Andrea H. Japp**.

As always, the historical crime novel has large numbers of devotees. Women have been successful here too. Not only **Andrea Japp** who recently embarked upon the writing of historical sagas like **Viviane Moore** but also **Claude Izner**, the shared pseudonym of two sisters, who write about Paris at the end of the nineteenth century. But in this category, it is the Frenchman, **Jean-François Parot** who tops the sales.

However it is the 'néopolar', a term invented

by its key writer, the much-mourned **Jean-Patrick Manchette**, that is favoured by most contemporary writers. This form of crime novel differs from the Anglo-Saxon novel by being more firmly grounded in the social and political realities of the French scene. It rarely introduces professional investigators or, if it does, this is in order to denounce their malaise or their corruption. Among the most popular authors of this type is the former police commissioner and a great writer, **Hughes Pagan**, the short-story writer **Marc Villard**, **Thierry Jonquet**, the prolific **Jean-Bernard Pouy**, **Didier Daeninckx** who was one of the first to denounce the atrocities committed during the war in Algeria, **Patrick Raynal**, former Director of Gallimard's legendary 'Série noire' and **Jean-Hughes Opper** who tends to specialise in overtly political plots. **Daniel Pennac** and **Tonino Benacquista** are now regarded as more mainstream writers. The latest arrivals include **Pascal Dessaint**, **Caryl Ferey**, **Patrick Pécherot**, **Thierry Crifo** and also **Franck Thilliez**. Another name to watch is **Marcus Malte** who in 2007 was crowned with many of the literary prizes for crime fiction.



## KEY PUBLISHERS (imprints in brackets)

Most of the big publishing firms publish crime novels. A French speciality however is to package them in well-known and easily identifiable collections. As a general rule these include both French titles and translations.

A few small publishing houses publish only French authors. Many of these are based in a particular region and offer numerous titles linked to their area (Nord-Pas de Calais, Brittany, Marseilles etc), which explains why there are so many books published in French every year. These novels generally have only a local readership except for those indicated in the following list.

### MAJOR PUBLISHERS

- **10/18** (Grands détectives): 10-18.fr
- **Actes sud** (Actes noirs): actes-sud.fr
- **Albin-Michel** (Spécial suspense): albin-michel.fr
- **Calmann-Lévy** (Suspense): editions-calmann-levy.com
- **Editions des 2 terres**: les-deux-terres.com
- **Editions du Masque**: lemasque.com (*NB publishes crime fiction exclusively*)
- **Fayard** (Fayard noir): editions-fayard.fr
- **Fleuve noir**: fleuve noir.fr
- **Gallimard** (Série noire): gallimard.fr
- **Laffont** (Best-Sellers): laffont.fr
- **Lattès** (Suspense & Cie): editions-jclattes.fr
- **L'Aube** (L'Aube noire): aube-editions.com
- **Liana Levi** (A corps et à crime): lianalevi.fr
- **Métailié** (Noir): editions-metailie.com
- **Payot & Rivages** (Payot suspense, Rivages/Noir, Rivages/Thriller): payot-rivages.fr
- **Picquier**: editions-picquier.fr (*NB specialist in literature from the Far East*)
- **Presses de la Cité** (Sang d'encre): pressesdelacite.com
- **Seuil** (Seuil policiers, Seuil thrillers): editionsduseuil.fr
- **Viviane Hamy** (Chemins nocturnes): viviane-hamy.fr

### SPECIALISTS IN FRENCH AUTHORS

- **Après la lune** (Lunes blafardes): apreslalune.free.fr
- **Le Passage**: lepassage-editions.fr

### REGIONAL PUBLISHERS

- **Jigal** (Polar): jigal.com
- **Liv'éditions**: liv-editions.com
- **L'Ecailler**: librairie-lecailler.fr
- **Ravet-Anceau** (Polars en Nord): ravet-anceau.fr
- **Terre de brume** (Granit noir): terredebrume.com

## CRIME FICTION: WHERE TO FIND IT

France is home to an institution unique in the world of crime fiction. This is BILIPO, the Bibliothèque des Littératures Policières (Library of Crime Writing). In fact part of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, it holds copies of all French-language publications in the genre throughout its history. Open to crime fiction enthusiasts Tues-Fri (2-6), Sat (10-6)

48-50 rue du Cardinal-Lemoine 75005 PARIS - Tel: 33-1 42 34 93 00

### OTHER CRIME SPECIALISTS

Specialist crime fiction bookshops are mainly devoted to secondhand books. Comprehensive lists can be found in BILIPO's *Crimes de l'année* (see below) or on the website of Association 813. Here is a selection:

- **L'Amour du noir**  
11 rue du Cardinal Lemoine  
75005 PARIS  
Tel: 33-1 43 29 25 66
- **Au troisième œil**  
37 rue Montholon  
75009 PARIS  
Tel: 33-1 48 74 73 17
- **L'Introuvable**  
23/25 rue Juliette Dodu  
75010 PARIS  
Tel: 33-1 42 00 61 43
- **Les Chasseurs de Livres**  
18 Bd Rouget de l'Isle  
93100 MONTREUIL  
Tel: 33-1 42 87 62 12
- **Urubu**  
17 Grande rue  
26000 VALENCE  
Tel/Fax 33-4 75 56 13 33
- **Entre-deux-noirs**  
25/27 cours des Carmes  
33210 LANGON  
Tel 33-5 56 76 67 97
- **Ultime razzia**  
12 rue des Capucins  
69001 LYON  
Tel 33-4 78 27 05 68

## KEY WEBSITES

**Association 813.** The French crime writer's association.

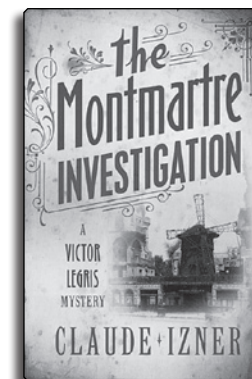
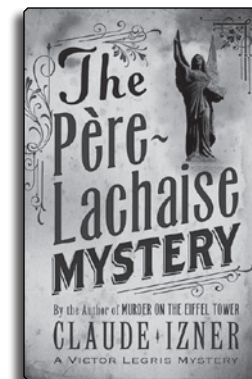
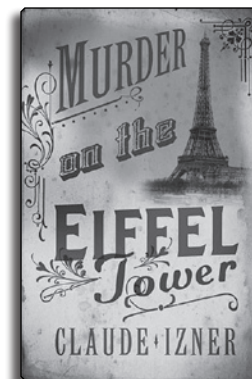
<http://813.fr/>



**Asociación Internacional de Escritores Policiacos/ International Association of Crime Writers (AIEP/IACW):**

<http://jmc.ou.edu/AIEP/>

AIEP/IACW was established in Havana in 1986 by a group of crime writers that included Julian Semyonov (Russia), Paco Ignacio Taibo II (Mexico) and Daniel Chavarria (Uruguay). Julian Symons (UK) was an early supporter. Today it has members in over twenty countries of the world, many of whom will contribute to this series.



## NEWS AND REVIEWS

- **Les Crimes de l'année** (Crimes of the Year), published annually by BILIPO. A selection of the best crime novels published in France in the preceding year, extensively analysed and indexed. Also comprehensive lists of magazines, festivals, bookshops and literary prizes.

### THE KEY SPECIALIST MAGAZINES

- **813**  
published three times a year:  
Association 813  
Hervé Delouche  
4 rue de Chanzy  
75011 PARIS  
813.fr
- **L'Ours polar** (Polar Bear - the editor signs himself The Bear!)  
six issues a year:  
Association Ours Polar  
Christophe Dupuis  
25 cours des Carmes  
33210 LANGON  
ours-polar.com
- **Temps noirs, la revue des littératures policières**  
2 issues a year:  
éditions Joseph K.  
21, rue Geoffroy Drouet  
44000 NANTES

### ON THE WEB

News on book and film, interviews, columnists, forums, downloads, short stories, links etc.

- **Noircommepolar:**  
noircommepolar.com
- **Le Rayon du polar:**  
rayonpolar.com

### NEWSPAPERS & OTHER MAGAZINES

Most of the big dailies and magazines publish occasional reviews of crime literature. Coverage is however on a much less regular basis than that in the UK.

### SHORT STORIES

There is no longer any magazine in France dedicated to short crime stories. Authors of short texts are published in the reviews **813** and **L'Ours polar** or take part in the many competitions organised in connection with festivals. Texts may then be issued as an anthology.

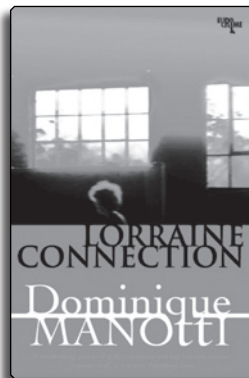
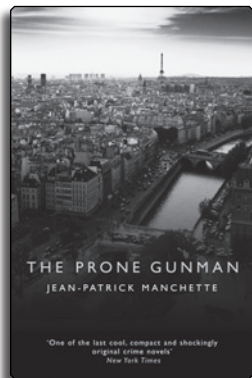
## FESTIVALS

At the last count there were over 30 crime fiction festivals across France. BILIPO's annual Crimes de l'année publishes a comprehensive list of them. Here is a selection:

- **POLAR & CO: LE SALON** is held annually in Cognac in October. Information from: Association Polar & Co  
32 rue Grande  
16100 COGNAC  
Tel: 33-5 45 36 11 16  
and 33-5 45 82 54 80  
NB A separate crime film festival takes place in April
- **FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL DU ROMAN NOIR** is held annually in Frontignan, near Montpellier in June. Information from: Association Soleil noir  
Michel Gueorguieff  
21, rue de Verdun  
34000 MONTPELLIER  
polar-frontignan.org
- **NOIR SUR LA VILLE** takes place annually in Lamballe in Brittany each November. Information from: Association Fureur du noir  
Bibliothèque municipale  
Rue Père Ange Le Proust  
22400 LAMBALLE  
Tel: 33-2 96 50 13 68
- **QUAIS DU POLAR** is held annually in Lyon in April. Information from: Association Quais du polar  
1 rue Audran  
69001 LYON  
quaisdupolar.com
- **SANG D'ENCRE** takes place in Vienne, near Lyon each November. Information from: Commission Polar  
M.J.C.  
11 quai Riondet  
38200 VIENNE  
Tel: 33-4 74 5321 96

Material compiled by Michèle Witt, BILIPO

Translated by Dorothy Williams



## MAJOR LITERARY PRIZES (and most recent winners)

BILIPO's Crimes de l'année publishes annually a comprehensive list of the latest awards. Here is a selection:

- GRAND PRIX DE LA LITTÉRATURE POLICIERE** awarded by a jury of specialists  
**Best French novel**
  - D.O.A. (pseudonym!) for *Citoyens clandestins (Illegal Citizens)*, Gallimard Série noire, 2007**Best foreign novel**
  - Arnaldur Indridason for *La Voix (The Voice)*, Métailié, 2006
- PRIX DU QUAI DES ORFEVRES** awarded by members of the National Police Force
  - Patrick-Jérôme Lambert for *Le Vengeur des catacombes (The Avenger of the Catacombs)*, Fayard, 2007
- PRIX MICHEL LEBRUN** awarded by a reader's jury
  - Marcus Malte for *Garden of love*, Zulma, 2007
- PRIX SANG D'ENCRE DE LA VILLE DE VIENNE** literally 'written in blood' and awarded at the annual festival in Vienne, near Lyon
  - Michel Bussi for *Omaha crimes: le polar du débarquement en Normandie (The Normandy Landings thriller)*, P.T.C., 2007
- PRIX SANG D'ENCRE** (Reader's prize)
  - Marcus Malte for *Garden of love*, Zulma, 2007
- PRIX SANG D'ENCRE DES LYCEENS** (Student's prize)
  - Marcus Malte for *Garden of Love*, Zulma, 2007
- PRIX S.N.C.F. DU POLAR** awarded by readers by means of an on-line vote  
**Best French-language novel**
  - Catherine Fradier for *Camino 999, Après la lune*, 2007
- Best European novel**
  - Gilda Piersanti for *Bleu catacombes*, Le Passage, 2006
- TROPHEES 813** awarded by members of the Association 813  
**Best French-language novel**
  - Dominique Manotti for *Lorraine connection*, Rivages, 2006
- Best foreign novel**
  - Arnaldur Indridason for *La Voix (The Voice)*, Métailié, 2007
- Maurice Renault Prize** for best critical work
  - Benoît Tadie for *Le Polar américain, la modernité et le mal*, P.U.F., 2006
- Best translator**
  - Eric Boury for *La Voix* by Arnaldur Indridason

## SELECTED FRENCH CRIME FICTION IN TRANSLATION: 2000 - 2008

2000



**Jean-Christophe Grangé**  
*The Flight of the Storks*  
tr. Ian Monk  
(Harvill)  
isbn: 978-0-09944-899-0

2001



**Brigitte Aubert**  
*Death from the Woods*  
tr. David L. Koral  
(Hodder & Stoughton)  
isbn: 978-0-34079-416-6



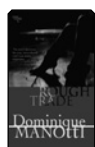
**Jean Christophe Grangé**  
*The Stone Council*  
tr. Ian Monk  
(Harvill)  
isbn: 978-1-86046-996-1



**Jean Claude Izzo**  
*One Helluva Mess*  
tr. Vivienne Menkes-Ivry  
(Arcadia)  
isbn: 978-1-90085-045-2



**Daniel Pennac**  
*Passion Fruit*  
tr. Ian Monk  
(Harvill)  
isbn: 978-1-86046-801-8



**Dominique Manotti**  
*Rough Trade*  
tr. Elfreda Powell,  
Margaret Crosland (Arcadia)  
isbn: 978-1-90085-087-2

2002



**Antoine Bello**  
*The Missing Piece*  
tr. Helen Stevenson  
(Serpent's Tail)  
isbn: 978-1-85242-648-4



**Michel Crespy**  
*Head Hunters*  
tr. John Brownjohn  
(Harvill)  
isbn: 978-0-09944-978-2

2003



**Fred Vargas**  
*Have Mercy on Us All*  
tr. David Belloc  
(Vintage)  
isbn: 978-0-09945-364-2



**Daniel Pennac**  
*Monsieur Malaussène*  
tr. Ian Monk  
(Harvill)  
isbn: 978-1-84343-020-9

2004



**Tonino Benacquista**  
*Holy Smoke*  
tr. Adriana Hunter  
(Bitter Lemon)  
isbn: 978-1-904738-01-5



**Jean Christophe Grangé**  
*The Empire of the Wolves*  
tr. Ian Monk (Vintage)  
isbn: 978-0-09946-666-6



**Chantal Pelletier**  
*Goat Song*  
tr. Ian Monk  
(Bitter Lemon)  
isbn: 978-1-904738-03-9



**Fred Vargas**  
*Seeking Whom He May Devour* †  
tr. David Bellos (Vintage)  
isbn: 978-0-09951-597-5

2005



**Tonino Benacquista**  
*Someone Else*  
tr. Adriana Hunter  
(Bitter Lemon)  
isbn: 978-1-904738-12-1



**Thierry Jonquet**  
*Tarantula*  
tr. Donald Nicholson-Smith  
(Serpent's Tail)  
isbn: 978-1-85242-895-2

2006



**Fred Vargas**  
*The Three Evangelists* ††  
tr. Sian Reynolds  
(Vintage)  
isbn: 978-009946-955-1



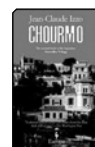
**Dominique Manotti**  
*Dead Horsemeat* †  
tr. Amanda Hopkinson,  
Ros Schwartz (Arcadia)  
isbn: 978-1-905147-35-9



**Tonino Benacquista**  
*Framed*  
tr. Adriana Hunter (Bitter  
Lemon)  
isbn: 978-1-904738-16-9



**Jean-Patrick Manchette**  
*The Prone Gunman*  
tr. James Brook  
(Serpent's Tail)  
isbn: 978-1-85242-474-9



**Jean-Claude Izzo**  
*Chourmo*  
tr. Howard Curtis  
(Europa)  
isbn: 978-1-933372-17-4

2007



**Fred Vargas**  
*Wash This Blood Clean from  
my Hand* ††  
tr. Sian Reynolds (Harvill Secker)  
isbn: 978-1-84343-273-9



**Jean-Patrick Manchette**  
*Three to Kill*  
tr. Donald Nicholson-Smith  
(Serpent's Tail)  
isbn: 978-1-85242-475-6



**Jean-Francois Parot**  
*The Chatelet Apprentice*  
tr. Michael Glencross  
(Gallic)  
isbn: 978-1-90604-006-2



**Claude Izner**  
*Murder on the Eiffel Tower*  
tr. Isabel Reid  
(Gallic)  
978-1-90604-001-7



**Claude Izner:**  
*The Père-Lachaise Mystery*  
tr. Lorenza Garcia, Isabel Reid  
(Gallic)  
isbn: 978-1-90604-004-8

2008



**Fred Vargas**  
*This Night's Foul Work*  
tr. Sian Reynolds  
(Harvill Secker)  
isbn: 978-1-84655-186-4



**Dominique Manotti**  
*Lorraine Connection* †  
tr. Amanda Hopkinson,  
Ros Schwartz (Arcadia)  
isbn: 978-1-905147-60-1



**Jean-François Parot**  
*The Man With The Lead Stomach*  
tr. Michael Glencross  
(Gallic)  
isbn: 978-1-906040-07-9



**Andrea H. Japp**  
*The Season of the Beast*  
tr. Lorenza Garcia  
(Gallic)  
isbn: 978-1-84655-186-4

† CWA Dagger nominated

†† CWA Dagger winner