

# Queen of Victorian Crime

by Jim Napier

*The Sherbrooke Record, 30 June 2005*

Summer has finally arrived, and with a vengeance! This is the time for backyard barbecues, weekends at the cottage, and vacations at the beach – all of which provide a welcome opportunity to stretch out on a lounge chair with a cool drink and a good book. And what is better than a good murder mystery? Every two weeks I'll be reviewing a juicy mystery, drawn from the best of British, American, and of course *Canadian* writers. I'll try to balance my choices between cozies, police procedurals, and noir, or "mean streets" novels. My aim is to help readers find enjoyable books — and occasionally to introduce you to something new. Along the way, I may test your mystery fiction knowledge with a contest or two, with novels as the prizes. I hope you like my choices; if you don't, let me know!

You can reach me at

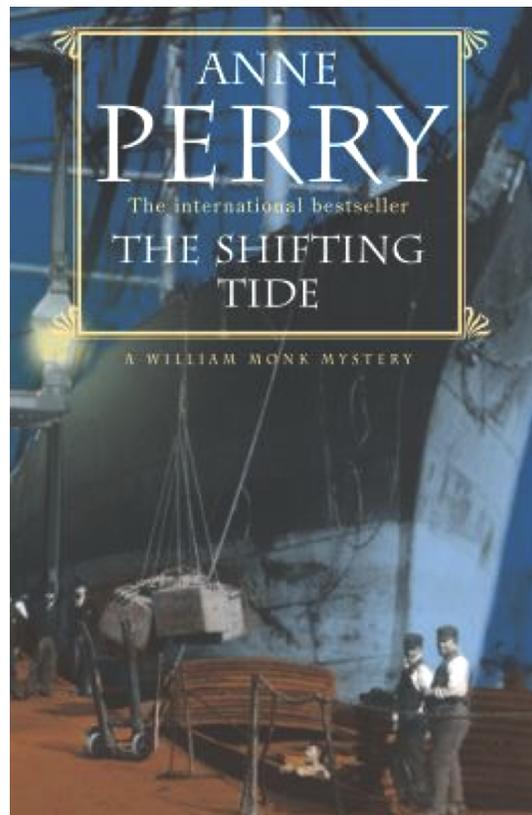
[jim.napier52@gmail.com](mailto:jim.napier52@gmail.com)

With that in mind, here is my first suggestion for summer reading. The author is British (they didn't invent the genre, as it happens, but they might as well have). Happy reading!

## *Anne Perry*

Anne Perry was born in England, and for several years lived in the U.S. She now makes her home in the Scottish Highlands. She is the author of more than forty novels, most of which are period mysteries set in the Victorian era. Her first, *The Cater Street Hangman*, featured police officer Thomas Pitt and his wife Charlotte, and was published to

enormous success in 1979. In 1990, after publishing nine novels in this series, Perry embarked on a new series with *The Face of a Stranger*. This series featured an ex-police officer turned private enquiry agent, named William Monk. *The Shifting Tide* is the fourteenth and most recent book in the



William Monk series.

In addition to her Victorian novels, Perry has recently written three novels about World War 1, and has a further two novels in this series slated to appear in 2006 and 2007.

***The Shifting Tide***  
(Ballantine Books, 2005)

William Monk is a private enquiry agent, in 1875 London. He has been hired by shipping magnate Clement Louvain to recover a cargo of ivory tusks, stolen from his four-masted schooner as it lay anchored in the Thames, awaiting off-loading. A crewman has been killed during the theft, and Monk, badly in need of money, accepts the job with the goal not only of recovering the ivory, but of catching the person responsible for his death. Monk's wife, Hester, is a nurse who served in the Crimea with Florence Nightingale. On her return to London she set up a clinic in a former brothel, catering to women of the street who are destitute, ill, or in danger.

Monk is out of his element on the river, which is a subculture unto its own, populated by seamen and dock-workers, mudlarks and thieves. Too proud to call upon his friends in the River Police, Monk is forced to find new allies in his effort to solve his puzzle.

Things become even complicated when Louvain arrives at the door of Hester's clinic with a very ill woman and says he will pay handsomely for her care. Even more curiously, Louvain's sister shortly appears at the clinic, offering her services — an offer that Hester, being strapped for cash, cannot refuse.

When a patient is found suffocated, Hester must cope with the fact that there is a murderer in their midst. This proves to be the least of her worries, as the clinic falls under the threat of a terrible disease, necessitating quarantine and threatening to kill them all! The unraveling of these events leads back to Louvain and the dead seaman, Hodge, and Monk must solve the puzzle while

agonizing over the fate of his wife and the others imprisoned in the clinic.

***No one better***

There is no one better at capturing the atmosphere of Victorian London than Anne Perry. Her research is meticulous, and her writing flows seamlessly, whether she is describing the squalid, sordid world of the docks or the refined, always decorous manners of London's upper-class drawing rooms. Melding a good plot with a thoroughly convincing setting, Perry manages to inject some insightful social commentary into her stories as well. Anyone who likes period mysteries will find *The Shifting Tide* a riveting good read; if you have not happened across her books before, you will want to go back and read them all.

Jim Napier can be reached at  
[jim.napier52@gmail.com](mailto:jim.napier52@gmail.com)