

# The world at your doorstep

## *international crime fiction*

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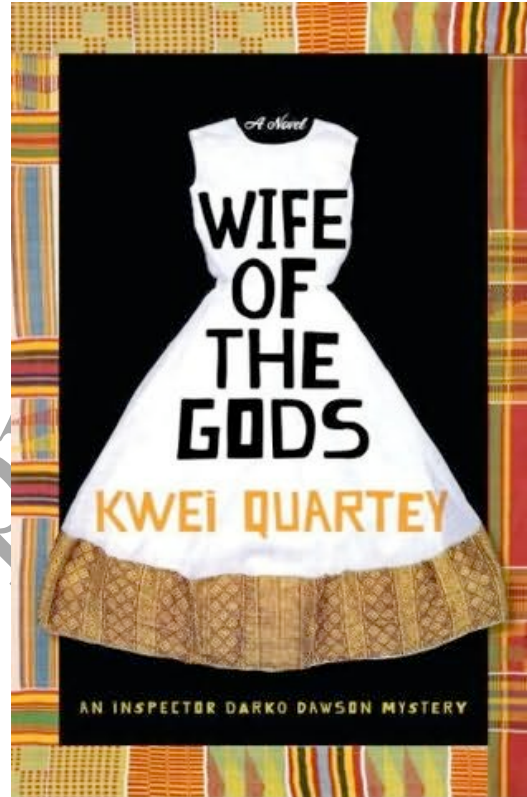
### *Suspended Sentences*

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by Jim Napier

Partly due to readers (and my own) preferences, and partly to the dearth of good translations, the vast majority of my reviews feature works written originally in English. In a way, that's as should be, for much superb crime fiction has flowed from the pens of such gifted writers as Conan Doyle, Christie, Hammett, and Chandler, or their successors, such as today's Ian Rankin, P.D. James, Michael Connelly, and Robert B. Parker.

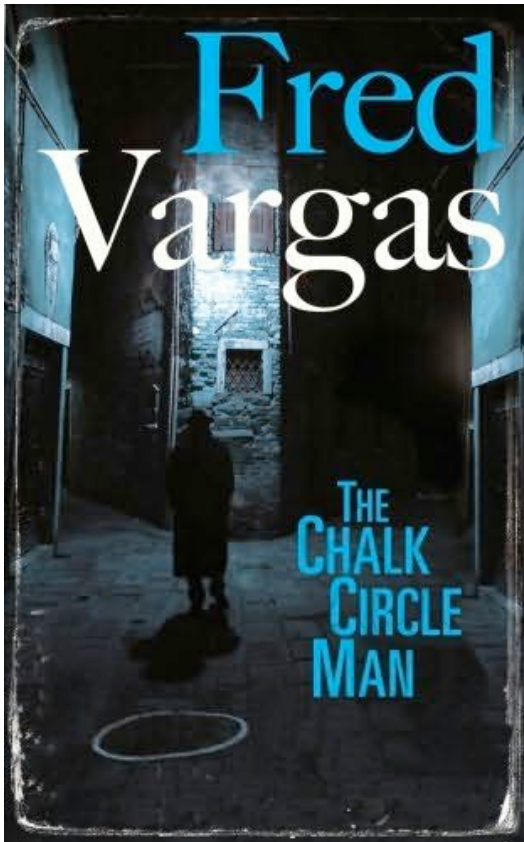
Much, but not all. The fact remains that there are many talented writers of crime fiction who set their tales beyond English-speaking shores, and once in awhile it's well worth having a look at them. This week's picks showcase a few of the many crime writers, some established, others less-well-known, who offer a welcome change of pace, taking us to exotic, perhaps unknown lands, all under the guise of a good read. For good measure, I've thrown in a couple of works originally published in English, but featuring unfamiliar settings. So sit back and enjoy a sampler of tales from around the world that both entertain and inform. And if you discover a new author to your liking, that you'd like to explore in more depth, well, that's a good thing, right?



**Kwei Quartey**  
***Wife of the Gods***  
(Random House, 2009)

We begin our journey in Ketanu, a small village in southeast Ghana, where ex-pat and physician Kwei Quartey has set a lyrical tale of a teenager arrested for the murder of Gladys Mensah, a promising medical student whose lifeless body has been found in the forest. The case goes beyond the experience of the village police staff, and Detective Inspector Darko Dawson of the Ghana Police Service arrives from Accra to take

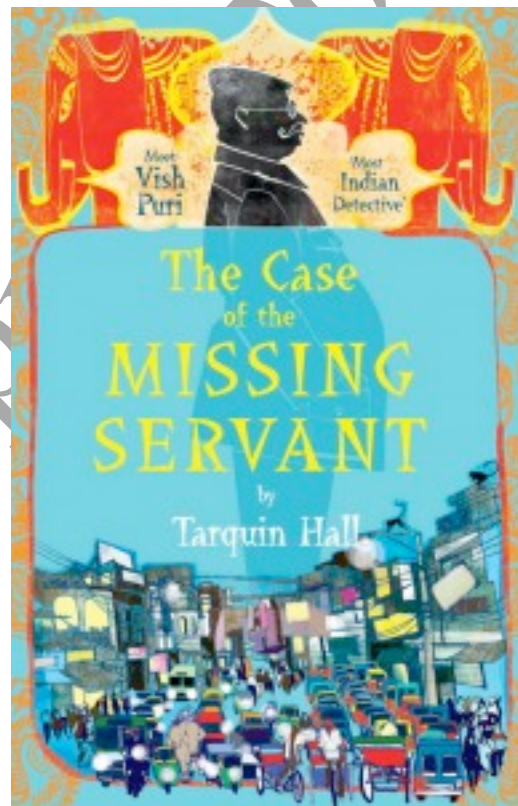
charge. Locals, including the village police inspector, are not happy about this turn of events, and Dawson finds himself in both a personal confrontation and a cultural clash between local traditions and urban mores. His inquiry will take him into the dark world of witchcraft, where he wrestles with crimes committed two decades earlier. Set against a labyrinth of long-held traditions, this is a lyrical and engrossing tale that will earn its debut author many fans.



**Fred Vargas**  
*The Chalk Circle Man*  
(Knopf, 2009)

Parisian-born Fred Vargas has established herself among the top tier of contemporary crime writers, winning the CWA's 2006 International Dagger for her novel *The Three Evangelists*. Her most recent work, *The Chalk Circle Man*, features a new entry on the crime-

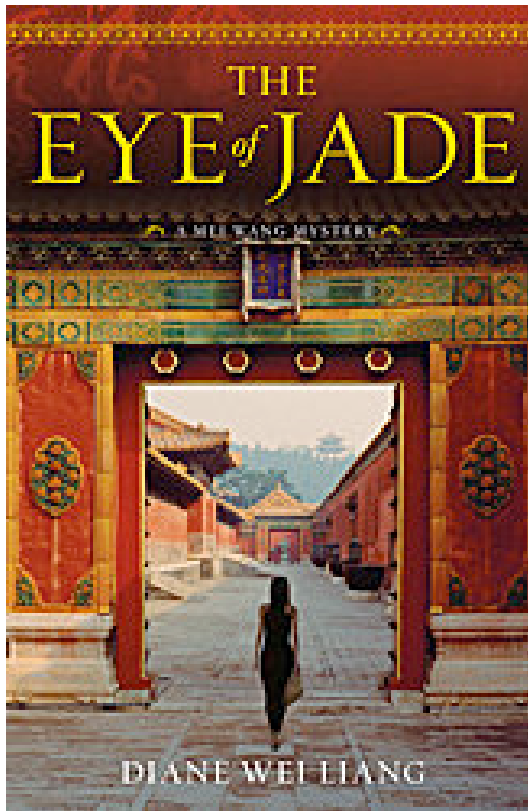
fighting scene, police detective Jean-Baptist Adamsberg, who undertakes the case of mysterious chalk circles that begin appearing in Paris, each containing a collection of bizarre objects. When the latest one contains the body of a woman whose throat has been slashed, Adamsberg applies his unorthodox methods to prevent other murders and bring the culprit to justice. Vargas is a born storyteller, noted for her engaging characters and highly original plots, and this tale will leave readers wanting more.



**Tarquin Hall**  
*The Case of the Missing Servant*  
(McClelland & Stewart, 2009)

Set in India, British journalist Tarquin Hall calls on his background for his debut fiction novel featuring private investigator Vish Puri. Something of an anachronism, Puri's idiosyncratic approach to crime-solving harkening back to the age of Sherlock Holmes, yet he

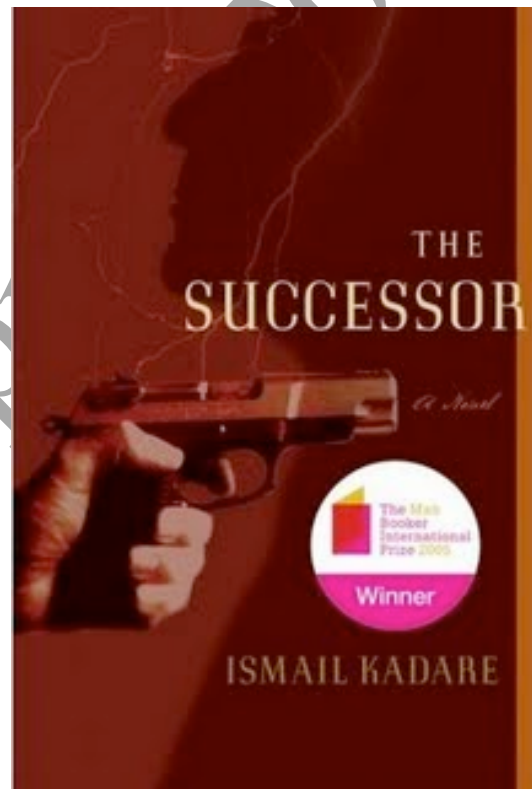
somehow manages to make his methods work. In this outing Puri takes on two cases: the first involves a background check for the father of a man who wants to marry his daughter; the second concerns the servant of a well-known Punjabi lawyer who disappeared several months earlier. A literate, flowing tale combining incisive humour and clever plotting against the rich, atmospheric background of modern-day India.



**Diane Wei Liang**  
*The Eye of Jade*  
(Simon & Schuster, 2008)

Diane Wei Liang was forced to leave China in the 1980s because of her involvement in the students' revolt that culminated in the massacre in Tiananmen Square. She draws upon her past for *The Eye of Jade*, the first in her series featuring the exploits of Mei Wang, a female private investigator living in Beijing. A close friend ap-

proaches Wang, asking her help in finding a Han dynasty artifact taken from a museum during the Cultural Revolution. Her investigation will lead Wang to revisit those dark days, with the rampages of the Red Guards and the labour camps spawned by that upheaval playing heavily upon her mind. Liang deftly contrasts China's communist past and its capitalist present to fashion a richly-layered tale that is at once a compelling mystery and a fascinating peek into a complex modern nation.



**Ismail Kadare**  
*The Successor*

(Bond Street Books/Doubleday, 2003)

Albanian poet and novelist Ismail Kadare, the 2005 winner of the Man Booker International Prize, also pens crime fiction. I would be remiss if I failed to mention that the controversial writer has been heavily criticized as a puppet of the former dictatorship in his

homeland; but whatever his personal and political merits, Kadare is a skilled wordsmith who draws upon his country's troubled past to create a well-crafted tale of political intrigue. *The Successor* is a fictional treatment of the death of Mehmet Shehu, who in real life was murdered on the night of December 13, 1981. For decades Shehu had been the heir apparent to Albania's Communist dictator Enver Hoxha, and Shehu's death raised many questions, not least of which is, did he commit suicide, or was he murdered? There is no shortage of possible villains, and Kadare skillfully explores these to create a political puzzle from the Bad Old Days of the Cold War.

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