

Corpus Delectable

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

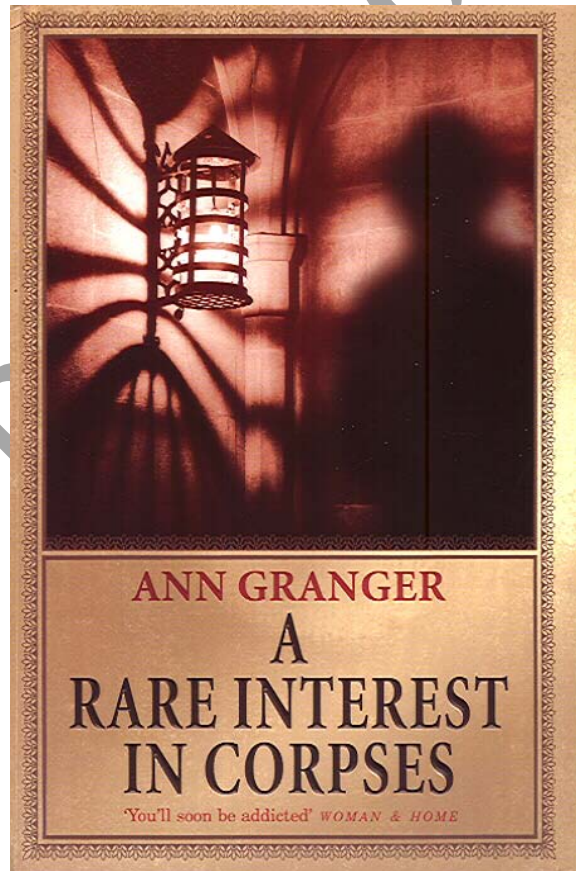
Paralleling the rise of professional police forces and the development of the forensic sciences, mystery and crime fiction really came into its own in the late nineteenth century. The stories of Arthur Conan Doyle, first published in *The Strand* magazine, introduced to the public the inimitable Sherlock Holmes and his erstwhile biographer, Dr. Watson. These tales retain their popularity today, featuring as they do a central puzzle to be solved, set in the turbulent times of the Victorian era, and populated by colourful, even eccentric, characters. Small wonder, then, that a number of talented contemporary writers have turned their hands to writing neo-Victorian tales of murder and intrigue.

One of the newest lights on this scene—though no stranger to mystery readers—is Ann Granger. Her twenty-second novel sets out in a fresh direction, one which will appeal to her legions of readers, as she explores the fertile fields of the Victorian world.

Ann Granger

After being frustrated in her early ambition to become a veterinary surgeon, Ann Hulme (her real name) attended London University where she read Modern Languages, intending on a literary career. However, in need of money after graduating, she took a job working in British embassies in Zagreb, Belgrade, Prague and Vienna. It was whilst working in the British government's Prague embassy that Ann met her husband, who worked for the Foreign Office, and they married, living first in Zambia and then in Germany. Eventually they returned to

England, where Ann resumed her interest in writing, and has written crime fiction ever since. Ann and her husband make their home near Oxford.



Ann drew on her experience in the diplomatic world for her first novel, *Say It With Poison*, published in 1991. The story centers on Meredith Mitchell, who (not surprisingly) embarks on a career in the British diplomatic service and has spent many years abroad, most recently in Yugoslavia. On her return to England Mitchell is joined by Chief Inspector (in later books Superintendent) Alan Markby, a divorced policeman working from the

fictitious town of Bamford, somewhere in the Cotswolds. The two meet when the police investigate a death in a small village near Bamford where Mitchell is staying. *Say It With Poison* has been followed by fourteen other novels in the *Mitchell and Markby Mysteries to date*.

Ann has also written the *Fran Varady series*, six novels centering on a part-time actress and spunky private eye in inner-city London, who, together with her boyfriend Ganesh, comes to the aid of the poor and the dispossessed.

Today, Ann insists there is nothing she'd rather be doing for a living than write, not even looking after sick animals.

A Rare Interest in Corpses **(Headline, 2006)**

London, 1864: Elizabeth Martin, the daughter of a country doctor of modest means who has recently died, has journeyed from Derbyshire to become a companion to her godfather's widow, Mrs. Julia Parry. Her arrival is not without incident, however, as she is witness to the removal of a body from amongst the ruins of a slum development being razed to make way for a new railway terminus. Settling into her new home, she is introduced to other members of Mrs. Parry's social circle, including Dr. Tibbitt, an elderly clergyman of fixed opinions, a younger, more agreeable gentleman, Mr. Frank Carterton, who is Mrs. Parry's nephew, and to members of the household staff, including the butler Simms, and his wife, the cook-housekeeper, Mrs. Parry's personal maid, Nugent, and Bessie, the scullery-maid.

Lizzie has joined Mrs. Parry to fill the void created by the sudden disappearance of her previous companion, Maddie Hexham. When it transpires that the body found in the rubble of the slums was, in fact, Maddie's, Lizzie is understandably curious. Fortu-

nately, an avenue of enquiry is open to her: the Scotland Yard Inspector in charge of the case is none other than Ben Ross, a childhood acquaintance who, like Lizzie, has journeyed to London to better his prospects.

Whilst the police search the murder scene, all work is halted, and the railway is understandably anxious for them to conclude their investigations so that work can begin anew. Learning of Lizzie's friendship with Inspector Ross, Mrs. Parry suggests that perhaps she can urge him to conclude his work and release the site. But Lizzie is understandably reluctant to intervene, and questions her employer's motives when she discovers that not only did Mrs. Parry own the house where the body was discovered, but also has shares in the railway company which bought the site for its terminus! Her suspicions pull her into a vortex of events which places her own life in jeopardy.

A consummate storyteller

Ann Granger is a consummate storyteller, with a fine ear for language and a trained eye for the sights and happenings which go into her books. In *A Rare Interest in Corpses* she expertly transports the reader back in time, revealing a series of tableaux documenting the misery of a coal-miner's life, the prospects of orphans left to the public purse, the squalor of Limehouse, and the social stratifications of life among the gentry, both above and below stairs — all in the service of a cracking good plot. It makes for engrossing reading.

Although originally intended as a one-off, or "standalone" as it is known in publishing circles, there has already been a demand for a sequel, and Ann is currently at work on a second novel featuring Ben Ross and Lizzie Martin, titled *A Mortal Curiosity*. Readers can hope there are many more to follow.