

Canadian Writer with a Global Audience

by Jim Napier

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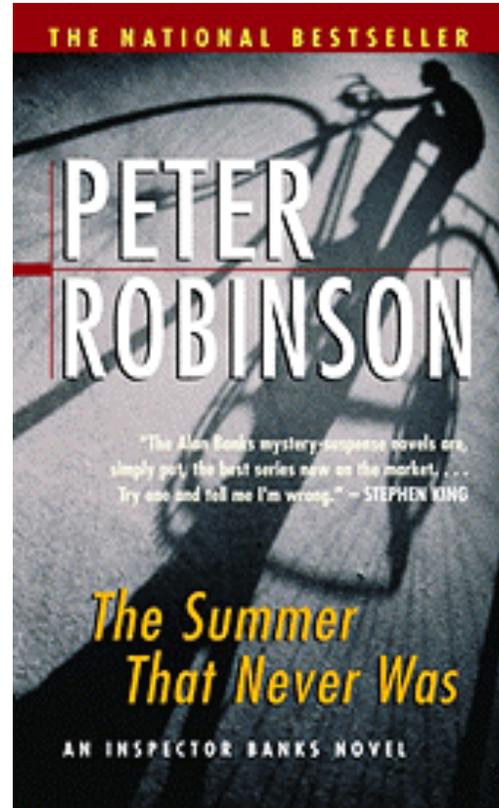
In the previous review we looked at what's known as a 'Hist-Mist', or historical mystery, written by British author Anne Perry. This week I want to share with you a police procedural, written by Canadian Peter Robinson.

The Genre

A procedural is just what one might think: a team of investigators come together to solve a crime. These are not amateurs, or even private investigators, but full-time police specialists, with the full resources of contemporary forensic science at their disposal. One only has to think of DNA testing, criminal profiling, and police computer databases to realize that the opportunities for even gifted investigators outside the force to solve a complex case are extremely limited. And readers as well, fascinated by state-of-the-art investigative techniques, demand to be let into the picture, and see for themselves just how such cases are solved.

Peter Robinson

Peter Robinson was born in Castleford, Yorkshire, in 1950. After completing an undergraduate degree in England he moved to Canada, where he completed a Masters and a Ph.D. in English Literature. Since publishing his first novel, *Gallows View*, in 1987, Peter has gone on to write twelve other Inspector Banks novels set in Yorkshire England, to increasing critical and popular acclaim,



and his books have won or have been nominated for many international awards.

A Past President of the Crime Writers of Canada, Peter lives in Toronto and teaches writing at the University of Toronto School of Continuing Studies.

The Summer That Never Was (McClelland & Stewart, 2003)

Chief Inspector Alan Banks is vacationing in Greece when an item in an

English newspaper catches his eye: the body of a youth, Graham Marshall, has been discovered by workers building a new shopping center in Cambridgeshire. Banks' mind flashes back to his own days as a youth as he realizes that the victim is none other than one of his closest friends, who disappeared without a trace on a summer's day in 1965. Although the case is not on his own turf, Banks cuts short his holiday and returns to England to help solve the case. He is bearing a special burden, for he has information which he withheld from police many years ago, and which, he fears, might have prevented his friend's death.

Back in England Banks discovers that his presence is less than welcome. The investigating officer, Detective Inspector Annie Cabbot, is a former lover, and her boss, Detective Superintendent Shaw, one of the original investigators in his friend's disappearance, makes it clear that Bank's help is neither needed nor welcome. Returning to his childhood home also rekindles old tensions, and Banks must come to terms with his parent's disappointment in his choice of careers, and the resentment of his childhood friends that Banks has somehow joined 'the enemy.'

Keeping his distance, Banks focuses on his own duties. But when a second youth disappears on his own patch, and is ultimately found dead, Banks is led to ponder just what circumstances could lead two boys from very different backgrounds to each die violently and well before their time. The investigation unearths a wealth of hidden secrets, and thus possible motives, dating back decades, and Banks must sift through these to avenge his friend's death. What he finds causes him to rethink just who he – and they – really were.

One of his best

DCI Alan Banks is an anti-hero, in the sense that he is a fallible, even flawed, person; but he is engaging as well, as he struggles to come to terms with his own failings and those of the world around him. The secondary characters are believable and interesting, the setting and atmosphere are convincingly portrayed, and the dialogue is never dull, carrying the reader forward at a brisk pace. I read this work in record time, not because it was unchallenging, but because it held me in its grip. If you like well-plotted, convincing tales that center on interesting characters in believable relationships, you will enjoy the entire Inspector Banks series. Peter Robinson is a fine writer, and this is one of his best.

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