

BESTSELLERS

ORIGINAL FICTION

- (9) 2 The Cat's Table, Michael Ondaatje (McClelland & Stewart).
- (1) 9 A Dance with Dragons, George R.R. Martin (Bantam).
- (-) 1 A Trick of the Light, Louise Penny (Minotaur).
- (3) 13 State of Wonder, Ann Patchett (Harper).
- (5) 63 Secret Daughter, Shilpi Somaya Gowda (William Morrow).
- (4) 3 Flash and Bones, Kathy Reichs (Scribner).
- (8) 9 The Hypnotist, Lars Kepler (McClelland & Stewart).
- (6) 3 The Omen Machine, Terry Goodkind (Doubleday Canada).
- (-) 20 The Land of Painted Caves, Jean M. Auel (Crown).
- (-) 1 The Sense of an Ending, Julian Barnes (Random House Canada).

ORIGINAL NONFICTION

- (2) 9 A Stolen Life: A Memoir, Jaycee Dugard (Simon & Schuster).
- (3) 23 Bossypants, Tina Fey (Little, Brown).
- (1) 5 After America: Get Ready for Armageddon (Regnery Publishing).
- (4) 16 In The Garden of Beasts, Erik Larson (Crown).
- (10) 9 Unbroken, Lisa Hillenbrand (Random House).
- (6) 19 From This Moment On, Shania Twain (Atria).
- (5) 23 Heaven is for Real, Todd Burpo (Thomas Nelson).
- (8) 18 Does the Noise in My Head Bother You? Steven Tyler (Ecco).
- (-) 1 Arguably, Essays by Christopher Hitchens, (Signal M&S).
- (7) 2 In My Time, Dick Cheney (Threshold Editions).

REPRINT FICTION

- (1) 22 The Help, Kathryn Stockett (Berkley).
- (-) 1 The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest, Stieg Larsson (Penguin).
- (2) 21 A Game of Thrones, George R.R. Martin. (Bantam).
- (6) 6 One Day, David Nicholls (Vintage).
- (9) 11 A Storm of Swords, George R.R. Martin (Bantam).
- (5) 77 Sarah's Key, Tatiana de Rosnay (St. Martin's Griffin).
- (8) 17 A Clash of Kings, George R.R. Martin (Bantam).
- (3) 9 Room, Emma Donoghue (Harper Collins).
- (7) 9 A Feast for Crows, George R.R. Martin (Bantam).
- (-) 1 The Reversal, Michael Connolly (Grand Central).

REPRINT NONFICTION

- (1) 14 Outliers, Malcolm Gladwell (Little, Brown).
- (2) 278 The Glass Castle: A Memoir, Jeanette Walls (Scribner).
- (3) 19 Life, Keith Richards and James Fox (Back Bay Books).
- (5) 26 The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, Rebecca Skloot (Broadway).
- (4) 4 The Memory Palace: A Memoir, Mira Bartok (Free Press).
- (7) 4 Unbearable Lightness: A Story of Loss and Gain, Portia de Rossi (Simon & Schuster).
- (6) 2 The Emperor of all Maladies: A Biography of Cancer, Siddhartha Mukherjee (Scribner).
- (-) 1 Moneyball, Michael Lewis (Norton).
- (-) 19 Born to Run, Christopher McDougall (Vintage).
- (10) 19 The Tiger, John Vaillant (Vintage Canada).

SPECIAL INTEREST

- (1) 12 Go The F**k to Sleep, Adam Mansbach (Akashic).
- (3) 71 The Book of Awesome, Neil Pasricha (Berkley).
- (5) 4 The Wealthy Barber Returns, Dave Chilton. (FAC).
- (2) 27 The 17 Day Diet, Mike Moreno (Free Press).
- (4) 76 The Happiness Project, Gretchen Rubin (HarperCollins).
- (-) 3 Prime Time, Jane Fonda (Random House).
- (-) 27 The 4-Hour Body, Timothy Ferriss (Crown).
- (-) 20 The Dukan Diet, Pierre Dukan (Random House Canada).
- (5) 19 Inside a Dog, Alexandra Horowitz (Scribner).
- (-) 1 Chef Michael Smith's Kitchen: 100 of my Favourite Easy Recipes (Penguin Canada).

(1) = Book's position last week
2 = Number of weeks on the list
Torstar News Service

Dark secret at heart of coming-of-age tale

Author Irma Voth unveils an unfamiliar world

GORDON HOUSER

Canadian writer Miriam Toews has a unique writing style that resembles J.D. Salinger.

She combines a comic narrative with an incisive exploration of dysfunctional relationships. Both in her award-winning *A Complicated Kindness* and in her new novel *Irma Voth* she looks at a father-daughter relationship in a religious context that is strict, even abusive.

The eponymous narrator in this new work is 19 and lives in a rural Mennonite community in Mexico.

She has married a Mexican named Jorge, an outsider to her white, Low German-speaking group. Normally the people are "sorted like buttons," expected "to stay where we're put."

Irma gives a quick and dirty history of Mennonite beginnings in 16th-century Europe and how certain of them moved "all around the world in colonies looking for freedom and isolation and peace and opportunities to sell cheese."

Jorge and Irma live in a small house owned by her father. Jorge leaves her until she learns "how to be a better wife" and goes to Mexico City, where he gets involved with drug dealers.



Meanwhile, a film crew shows up to shoot a movie set among these Old Colony Mennonites. Diego, the director, learns that Irma knows several languages and asks her to translate for his lead actress, who speaks only German.

Toews' comic gifts shine as she satirizes filmmakers. Various things go wrong, and the crew isn't getting paid. Irma translates for Marijke, the German actress, giving her nonsensical lines rather than what Diego wants her to say.

Irma, having grown up in an isolated setting, is at sea when trying to figure out these people. She writes, "I knew more about the social significance of birdsong, I realized, than I did about human interaction."



Miriam Toews, author of *Irma Voth*, in the offices of her publisher.

Irma's father is opposed to the film. He tells other Mennonites that "Diego (is) stealing their women and perverting the will of God." When he learns not only that Irma is working for the film but that her 13-year-old sister, Aggie, has dropped out of school and is hanging out with the film crew and staying with Irma, he tries to force Aggie back home.

The father's religion is more a patina of his abuse than at the root of it. At the same time, Toews provides some sympathetic notes that make the father a more rounded character. Irma remarks that her father "lost his family when he was a little kid," and he expresses sorrow over some of his violent actions.

Toews' ability to combine such harsh actions and characters with

a comic narrative is remarkable — and at times jarring.

The novel's pace is quick and light, moving from one short scene to another.

Suspense builds as Irma and Aggie flee with their baby sister to Mexico City and depend on the kindness of strangers.

Like many such coming-of-age narratives, Irma Voth reveals a deep, dark secret, a trauma that helps explain some of a character's actions.

Toews pulls this off well enough and brings her fast-paced narrative to a cautious, if hopeful resolution.

Toews is a fine writer and a pleasure to read. She writes about a world most people are unfamiliar with.

Wichita Eagle

CANADIAN MYSTERIES

Artist gets a deadly review in Penny's latest

DON GRAVES

Artist Clara Morrow finally has her one-woman show at a Montreal gallery. As an artist who has experienced opening nights in both an orchestra pit and a gallery, I found the description of Clara's preview full of pastoral tableaux and tiny daggers. The doubt, political pandering and nervous joy registers in the gut and lingers there.

The eloquent writing in **A Trick Of The Light** is a shade darker and more compact than in her previous novels. It's in the shadows where the web of tension lies, along with imagery that the dialogue so powerfully provokes.

A Trick Of The Light is a traditional police procedural inside a work of fiction of considerable depth and nuance. How do past actions fuel attempts to purge them from our souls? How can the ultimate crime take decades to fester? And how can forgiveness become a lifelong pursuit with many detours?

An artist/critic and former friend of Clara's is found murdered in Clara's back yard. Detective Gamache, who is there to celebrate, must solve the murder. And the web of life, which author Louise Penny is so intimately adept at exposing, marshals us through the investigation to the resolution.

A Trick Of The Light is about life, made up of lots of light and a whole lot of dark. But there's no trick about Penny's skill to shape the shadows.

The private sleuthing team of Rachel and Franklin are back with a new adventure set in the coastal islands of British Columbia.

Authors Duncan and Szanto succeed in presenting a seamless and well-written story about how deeply seeded hurt can fester into revenge that, in turn, can inflict pain far beyond the intended target. Family loyalties come under the microscope as the detecting duo uncover how allegiance can go astray, especially in the high stress world of competitive figure skating. The dialogue is convincing and the action fits comfortably into the bucolic coastal setting.

Never Hug A Mugger On Quadra Island is a satisfying read with insight into the fabric that binds and threatens a family.

The End Of The Line is a whopping good tale of adventure and murder in the frozen tundra of

western Canada in the winter of 1883. Add a stalwart hero-veteran from the North-West Mounted Police, a two-fisted climax and a carefully researched and seamlessly integrated story of one of Canada's most famous nationhood achievements, the laying of the CPR rail line, and you get a riveting and winning history mystery.

The End Of The Line scores on all points: historical framework, dialogue that reveals feeling and supports action, vivid description that is essential to the plot, a mystery with means, motive and opportunity and a deductive force at work long before the days of high-end forensics.

This first-rate series will continue in 2012 with another tale rich in Canadian fabric, the Louis Riel mystic. If you're a fan of the history-mystery, this is a series not to be missed.

A meth lab is uncovered in the

basement of a home used as a day-care centre. This decoy costs a priest his life, and the owner her trust in people and the health of her children.

Brusque, no-nonsense dialogue bristles with close-to-the-line action that feels authentic and fuels the juices.

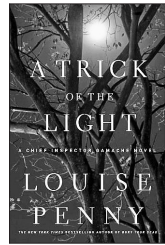
Dead Ends is the fifth Jack Taggart, Mountie, novel, each one more powerful than the last and each one carrying an abrupt and sometimes searing message of how easy it is in Canada for the law to protect the criminal and punish the victim ... twice.

But there's no preaching. There is action-packed, logical plotting that leads to a climax that does a 180-degree turn on where you think you're headed.

Bring on number six in what is one of the best hard-nosed series in Canada.

Don Graves is a freelance writer living in Burlington. d.graves@cogeco.ca

FOUR GOOD MYSTERIES FOR FALL READING



A Trick Of The Light, by Louise Penny
Minotaur Books, \$27.99



Never Hug A Mugger On Quadra Island, by Sandy Duncan and George Szanto
Touchwood Editions, \$26.95



The End Of The Line, by Stephen Legault
Touchwood Editions, \$18.95



Dead Ends, by Don Easton
Dundurn, \$11.99

Author picks up Robert B. Parker but can't run with him

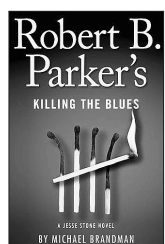
BRUCE DESILVA

The late Robert B. Parker once said readers liked his books "for the same reason they like certain songs."

They may say they like the characters and the plots, he said, but "I think what appeals to readers — and I don't think they know it — is the way the language works. It's an esthetic experience for them."

Parker died at his writing desk in January, 2010, but his most popular characters — Spenser, a Boston private eye, and Jesse Stone, the police chief of mythical Paradise, Mass. — live on.

Ace Atkins, one of the best crime novelists around, has signed on to continue the Spenser series. Michael Brandman, the Hollywood producer and screen-



Robert B. Parker's Killing The Blues, by Michael Brandman
Putnam, \$30

writer who worked on the made-for-TV Jesse Stone movies starring Tom Selleck, has taken on the task of continuing the Stone novels.

Brandman's Robert B. Parker's *Killing The Blues* shows just how difficult it is to follow in the master's footsteps. Brandman fashioned a solid plot about a murdered car-theft ring that sets up shop in Paradise. And he spiced his yarn with two compelling subplots: In one, Jesse cracks down on

bullying at the local high school. In the other, he is stalked by a psychopath from his past.

But the prose, which was always the greatest appeal of Parker's work, doesn't measure up.

Brandman tries to mimic the ironic patter between Stone and other familiar characters including Stone's subordinate, Suitcase Simpson, and the state police homicide commander, Captain Healey. Sometimes it works, but too often the dialogue falls flat.

He also tries to imitate Parker's breezy style, characterized by crisp, short sentences that jitterbugged across the page in a cadence you could dance to. Sometimes he pulls it off, but often Brandman's short sentences plod along with the monotony of a metronome.

It's hard to blame Brandman. Copying a master is never easy. Parker, one of the greatest crime-fiction stylists of the last 40 years, provided his own proof. When he attempted to mimic the great Raymond Chandler, completing the latter's unfinished novel, *Poodle Springs* (1989), and then writing *Perchance To Dream*, a sequel to Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1991), he was only partially successful.

Like Chandler, Parker was too much of an original to be replaced.

Still, fans of the Jesse Stone novels may be willing to overlook Brandman's lapses for the chance to follow the continuing adventures of the tough but vulnerable Paradise police chief.

Bruce DeSilva is the author of *Rogue Island*.
The Associated Press