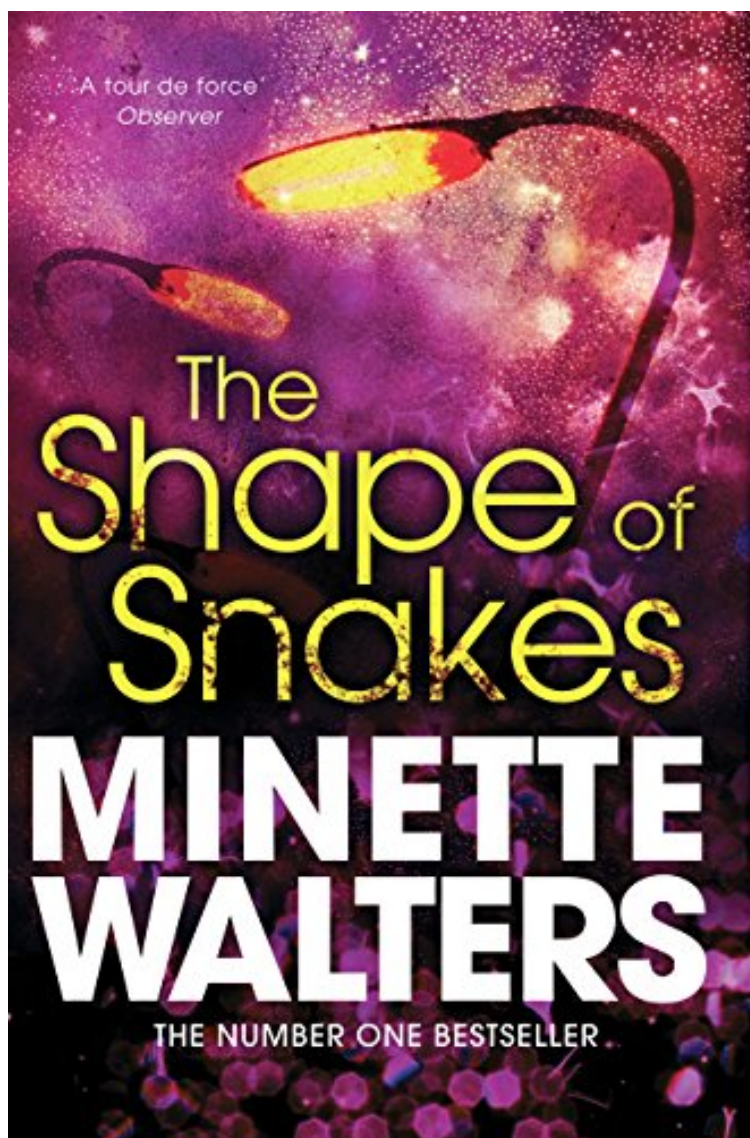


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## The Shape of Snakes (English Edition)



*Par Minette Walters*  
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### Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurNovember 1978. Britain is on strike. The dead lie unburied, rubbish piles in the streets - and somewhere is West London a black woman dies in a rain-soaked gutter. Her passing would have gone unmourned but for the young woman who finds her and who believes - apparently against reason - that Annie was murdered. But whatever the truth about Annie - whether she was as mad as her neighbours claimed, whether she lived in squalor as the police said - something passed between her and Mrs Ranelagh in the moment of death which binds this one woman to her cause for the next twenty years. But why is Mrs Ranelagh so convinced it was murder when by her own account Annie died without speaking? And why would any woman spend twenty painstaking years uncovering the truth - unless her reasons are personal . . . ?  
Minette Walters is as much exterminator as novelist. With uncomfortable accuracy, her

novels bring to the surface those creepy, crawly parts of the human psyche that most of us would rather keep hidden. Articulate, clever, and acutely observant, she eschews the standard trappings of psychological suspense and presents characters both vulnerable and deeply unpleasant. Twenty years ago, M. Ranelagh found her Graham Road neighbor dying in a gutter. "Mad Annie" Butts, long persecuted for being black and for suffering from Tourette's syndrome, had had her skull shattered. So deeply did Annie's death--ruled an accident--affect M. that she has spent the last two decades secretly amassing proof that it was murder, and that the murderer lived in Graham Road. Her collection of evidence faithfully teases out the serpentine deceptions--and self-deceptions--woven into Annie's death; husband Sam, neighbors, friends, family, police, all are grist for the mill of M.'s occasionally unscrupulous research: I suppose everyone has a pet subject that triggers their anger--with me it was my mother's wicked talent for stirring, with Sam it was his fear of Mad Annie and everything her death represented: the mask of respectability that overlaid the hatreds and the lies.

He always hoped, I think, in a rather free interpretation of the karma principle, that if he refused to look beneath a surface then the surface was the reality. But he could never rid himself of the fear that he was wrong. Although M.'s investigations focus on her neighbors (who range from eccentric to downright evil), they reveal just as much about her. Crafty, manipulative, and seething with rage, she carefully constructs her revenge on an unidentified murderer--and, one suspects, on the frustrations and limitations that define her own life. *The Shape of Snakes* is both a gripping thriller and a stunning novel. Don't be surprised if it works its way into your library of favorites. --Kelly Flynn  
From Publishers Weekly  
For 20 years Mrs. Ranelagh has quietly collected evidence about the suspicious death of her neighbor, a black woman known as "Mad Annie," whose body was found in the gutter one evening. London police concluded that Annie was hit by a passing truck. But Ranelagh now armed with letters, statements and testimonials from both official and nonofficial sources is convinced she was beaten to death in a fury of racial hatred. Moreover, she suspects that one of her neighbors, or even her husband, Sam, may have been the killer. From such an intriguingly simple setup springs another searingly narrated psychological drama by Edgar-winner Walters in which manners and other forms of propriety slowly give way to raw, ugly emotion. Ranelagh, the story's narrator, is a middle-aged woman whose restrained public persona masks a bitter, unsparing nature driven by a life of disappointment and futility. She herself was scarred by Annie's death, terrorized in the months following for being a "nigger lover" and publicly doubting the police version. Not only does she want to find out who killed Annie, she wants personal revenge. One by one, she confronts her old neighbors a disparate cast of losers and social climbers now spread across the London area. Ranelagh's search, however, turns into not only a quest for justice but an agonizing odyssey that forces to the surface painful truths about herself and her family. Keeping track of all the players can be a challenge. Yet Walters (*The Sculptress*; *The Ice House*) has again created a consuming main character in Ranelagh and a tightly coiled plot that whiplashes with cruel efficiency. (July) Forecast: Walters has been likened to Ruth Rendell and P.D. James, and the comparison is appropriate. Though she doesn't yet have their name recognition, an author tour will help build her profile, as should excellent word of mouth. Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc.