

# Anthony Bidulka

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**Len Wanner: Do you think crime fiction deserves more critical attention and what do you imagine would be the benefit?**

**Anthony Bidulka:** I tend to think that anything demanding the interest of any group, or sub-group, is very significant indeed and deserves attention. Certainly there is a history of genre fiction and literary fiction existing in a we/they environment. There are critics who have made careers of important analysis of one but not the other. Although some may see Crime Fiction as being created and consumed purely for the simple enjoyment of it, I suspect that for both the creator and consumer, the truth is something considerably more complex. However, we are generally not in a mindset as a people to look at Crime Fiction in this way. And so, something may be lost without that critical attention to shine a light in these nooks and crannies. If critical attention is meant to be tied to good writing, and good writing is writing infused with meaning and forethought and consideration for the human condition – which is very often the case with Crime Fiction - then indeed, the literary world is lesser without it. Pen is not put to paper without some idea, point of view, agenda, as the fuel. The complete dizzying number of permutations of all crime writers and all possible reasons that made them so, creates an abundance ripe for harvest by critical review and interpretation.

**LW: Are you concerned with the social structures that facilitate criminal behaviour in the sense that you wish to reveal them by dramatising individual crimes?**

**AB:** By dramatising individual crime, the writer is immediately making comment on social structure. Writing crime as I do, I am often dealing with the human condition. Human condition is influenced by social structure, and the legal, religious, political, cultural mores that cocoon it. In particular with my novels, I seek to highlight, in subtle ways, the world as it is experienced for people born homosexual. Sometimes that involves crime.

**LW: At a time when ‘due process of law’ can no longer be taken for granted, do you think we read crime novels for their promise of an ‘ersatz justice’?**

**AB:** Even more than that, we read crime novels to see the full circle of crime, justice, and punishment - or redemption - as we have been raised to expect it to happen. People are drawn to witnessing crime through crime novels in much the same way they are drawn to observe – sometimes almost dispassionately – the after-effects of an accidents. But even in the case of the latter, there is no endgame satisfaction. Did the victim survive? Did they perish? How did it affect the family? Whose fault was the accident? Did someone go to jail? With crime novels there is the ultimate satisfaction - admittedly not always - of being privy to the full circle of crime, from commitment to the final hand of justice. Very satisfying.

**LW: Does the crime novel offer a version of social development that readers may use to counterpoint reality and draw their own critical conclusions?**

**AB:** Hopefully so. This may be another example of the benefits of greater critical attention on Crime Fiction which you mention earlier. Critical analysis guides readers to identify these counterpoints which may not be readily available to them given their current life experiences. Crime fiction can be a reflection of social development, or simply an author's interpretation, or even an author's prediction (or hopeful thinking?) In my own writing, I present a world which is slightly skewed from the real one. Which is better? Who decides?

**LW: Do you think we read Crime Fiction as a guide to modern life; is the detective a role model for the compromises we make every day to survive the modern world?**

**AB:** No. I think detectives are admired or pitied, looked upon as curiosities or heroes, of endless interest to many, but rarely as role models. The compromises made by detectives often don't resemble those of readers in a modern world. Their compromises often involve life and death decisions, justice and injustice, evil battling good, in a big and heady way. Some of the most popular detectives in Crime Fiction today live in worlds or realities that bear little resemblance to our own. Instead, might they be our ultimate models for escapism from the everyday lives we must survive?

**LW: Do we read and do you write crime novels because this genre doesn't hesitate to postulate the extremes we as human beings are capable of?**

**AB:** Absolutely. The tongue-in-cheek rule of thumb in Crime Writing is: never kill a pet, but all other forms of violence and mayhem are fair game. From the darkest noir to the lightest cozy, success of the genre depends on the worst humans can do to one another. Once again, the reading of...and perhaps the writing of... allows a type of voyeurism that titillates and horrifies at a safe distance. While the worst of the worst is happening to someone on the page, the reader can sit there and feel a bit safer and whisper to themselves: 'at least it's not me'. And ultimately, as we discussed earlier, the triumph of justice will be theirs to share.

**LW: Whose work do you read for answers to the 'big questions'?**

**AB:** Although I'd be tempted to answer with someone like Barry Eisler and his Rain series, instead I will say Alexander McCall Smith's No. 1 Ladies Detective Series. There is a simplicity, humility and humanity in those stories that, even though they take place in the scrubland of Botswana, speaks loudly to the human condition and who we all are - or should be? - as people.

**LW: What do you make of Noir?**

**AB:** I rarely read noir. I prefer darkness to sneak up upon me when I least expect it - in writing that is.