

ON WRITING, WITH ANTHONY BIDULKA

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Anthony Bidulka is the author of *Flight of Aquavit* (Insomniac).

Originally published in 2004, *Flight of Aquavit* has recently been re-issued in response to the popularity of the Detective Russell Quant series. Quant is a gay private detective in Saskatoon and features in seven of Bidulka's books.

Anthony Bidulka talks with Open Book about Saskatoon, the re-issue experience and what's next for detective Quant.

Open Book:

Tell us about your book, *Flight of Aquavit*.

Anthony Bidulka:

Russell Quant – world-travelling, wine-swilling, wise-cracking, Canadian prairie, gay, private detective – replete with a Ukrainian mother who has come for Christmas with her cooking accouterments, pounds of butter and jars of farm-fresh cream, is warned off from a case before he even knows about it.

A successful local businessman, on stage and about to receive an award for his entrepreneurial and philanthropic accomplishments, receives a blackmail note. Someone calling themselves "Loverboy," is threatening to derail his superficially happy marriage by revealing his extramarital affairs ... with other men. With a client fearful of losing much more than his marriage, Russell Quant is tasked with the challenge of finding Loverboy, before the money is due.

OB:

What prompted the decision to publish a re-issue?

AB:

As the series has grown more and more successful with each new book – soon to be eight in the series – readership widened exponentially. It became apparent that many readers of the later books had not experienced *Flight of Aquavit* or the other earlier releases. This re-issue will meet that demand and introduce Russell Quant to a whole new generation of readers.

OB:

Looking at the book now, do you feel your style or approach has changed since writing *Flight of Aquavit*?

AB:

I would have to say no. Certainly in terms of practical process and the technical aspects of writing I have made some changes and, hopefully, improvements. People often ask if my latest book is my best. Although I do tend to feel my most recent writing is always my best effort, this doesn't mean I don't totally love my earlier books as well. Each is my favourite in its own way, and holds a special place in my heart. But, like any artist, you hope to continually cultivate your craft. That being said, I think my personal style, my voice as a writer, has remained consistent and very true to the series as I first created it.

OB:

What was the genesis of Detective Quant as a character?

AB:

When I made the decision to try my hand at writing mystery, I was very aware of the great many superb characters already out there. In creating Russell, I was searching for two things. First, I wanted to introduce readers to a detective they had never met before. Second, in the anticipation of a long-running series, I wanted to create a character who I could see myself spending a lot of time with over the next many years. In many ways, Russell Quant is the first of his kind. This, in part, is what makes him interesting not only to my readers, but to me as a writer.

Although many might think that his being gay is what sets him most apart, I have found that not to be the case. By far, the aspect of his character that readers seem most curious about is the fact that he is making his living as a detective in a small Canadian prairie city. Saskatoon is a place most people have never been to or even heard about. How does one live life as a detective in such a place? Saskatoon, in a way, has become an exotic, foreign destination in its own right. I'd think for any writer, having the opportunity to tell stories about such a character in such a place, would be a literary gift.

OB:

Who are some people who have deeply influenced (fellow writers or not) your writing life?

AB:

There are many writers, contemporary colleagues and literary giants, who have influenced me and continue to influence and inspire me. I have been a longtime fan of Robert B. Parker, Michael Nava, Sue Grafton, Kathy Reichs, Patricia Cornwell, Nelson DeMille, Ellen Hart, John Sandford, Louise Penny and Gail Bowen. I could go on and on.

I must say, however, that my deepest influences for what appears on my pages, comes from my daily life. From the people I meet. My travels around the world. Everything from what I have for dinner to how a shop clerk interacts with me to the smell of the wind in a foreign land has equal footing when it comes to what percolates in the back recesses of my mind and may someday appear in the fictional worlds I create.

OB:

Is there a book you've read recently that you wished you had written?

AB:

This is a complex question. Of course I have read books that I admire greatly, admire the talent of the writer who created it. Part of me might say to myself, if only...

But I know well enough, that it is only the supreme good fortune of the divine combination of that specific writer

with that specific idea, that specific voice, that specific style, that specific inspiration, that specific time in their lives devoted to putting pen to paper, that could result in that specific book. We, the readers, are simply the lucky benefactors of it, and it would be folly to think we could replicate it.

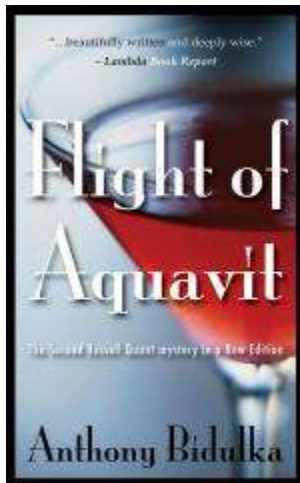
More often, when I read an excellent book, and thereafter witness the writer reaping the benefits, receiving the well-deserved kudos and boost to their career, I am thankful. This is not entirely selfless. Indeed I have a sense of pride for the success of any colleague who finds success in what can be a rather challenging career. But I also truly believe that what is good for one writer is good for us all. Anything that creates an atmosphere that makes reading cool, that generates more readers, can only be a good thing. A good book still only takes so long to read. Sooner or later they'll look around for other good books ... and maybe stumble onto mine?

OB:

What are you working on now?

AB:

I am working on the eighth Russell Quant novel, *Dos Equis*, due to be released Spring 2012. Over the course of this series, I have tried to give each book its own distinct spin, while still maintaining the familiar aspects that made the series popular in the first place. For instance, one of the books is spookier than the others, one is more of a comical romp, another is the most romantic of the bunch. I think of *Dos Equis* as my great caper book. All the familiar and beloved characters are back, but they are brought together in a way my readers have never seen before. There is considerable danger and a tragic death at the hand of one of the most evil characters I've written about, mixed in with the customary travel to an exotic, foreign location, lots of good food, fun and frivolity, and even a fairy tale love story. As always, I think it's the best Russell Quant tale to date!



Anthony Bidulka is an award-winning writer who, like his protagonist, lives a big life in a small city on the Canadian prairies. Please visit [his website](#).

For more information about *Flight of Aquavit* please visit the [Insomniac website](#).

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