

Magpie Murders by Anthony Horowitz

Author Bio:

Birth—April 5, 1955

- Where—Stanmore, Middlesex, UK
- Education—University of York
- Awards—Lancashire Children's Book of the Year Award
- Currently—lives in London, England

Anthony Horowitz, OBE is a prolific English novelist and screenwriter specialising in mystery and suspense. His work for children and teenagers includes The Diamond Brothers series, the Alex Rider series, and The Power of Five series (aka The Gatekeepers). His work for adults includes the novel and play *Mindgame* (2001) and two Sherlock Holmes novels, *The House of Silk* (2011) and *Moriarty* (2014). He has also written extensively for television, contributing numerous scripts to ITV's Agatha Christie's Poirot and Midsomer Murders. He was the creator and principal writer of the three ITV series—*Foyle's War*, *Collision* and *Injustice*.

Personal life

Horowitz was born in Stanmore, Middlesex, into a wealthy Jewish family, and in his early years lived an upper-middle class lifestyle. As an overweight and unhappy child, Horowitz enjoyed reading books from his father's library. At the age of eight, Horowitz was sent to the boarding school Orley Farm in Harrow, Middlesex. There, he entertained his peers by telling them the stories he had read. Overall, however, Horowitz described his time in the school as "a brutal experience," recalling that he was often beaten by the headmaster. At age 13 he went on to Rugby School and discovered a love for writing.

Horowitz adored his mother, who introduced him to Frankenstein and Dracula. She also gave him a human skull for his 13th birthday. Horowitz said in an interview that it reminds him to get to the end of each story since he will soon look like the skull. From the age of eight, he knew he wanted to be a writer, realizing "the only time when I'm totally happy is when I'm writing." He graduated from the University of York with a lower second class degree in English literature and art history in 1977.

Horowitz's father was associated with some of the politicians in the "circle" of prime minister Harold Wilson, including Eric Miller. Facing bankruptcy, he moved his assets into Swiss numbered bank accounts. He died from cancer when his son Anthony was 22, and the family was never able to track down the missing money despite years of trying.

Horowitz now lives in Central London with his wife Jill Green. They have two sons whom he credits with much of his success in writing. They help him, he says, with ideas and research. He is a patron of child protection charity Kidscape.

Early writing

Horowitz published his first children's book, *The Sinister Secret of Frederick K Bower* in 1979 and, in 1981, a second, *Misha, the Magician and the Mysterious Amulet*. In 1983 he released the first of the Pentagram series, *The Devil's Door-Bell*, which was followed by three more in the series until the final in 1986.

In between his novels, Horowitz worked with Richard Carpenter on the Robin of Sherwood television series, writing five episodes of the third season. He also novelized three of Carpenter's episodes as a children's book under the title *Robin Sherwood: The Hooded Man* (1986). In addition, he created *Crossbow* (1987), a half-hour action adventure series loosely based on William Tell.

Starting in 1988, Horowitz published two Groosham Grange novels, partially based on his boarding school years. The first won the 1989 Lancashire Children's Book of the Year Award.

The major release in his early career was *The Falcon's Malteser* (1986), which became the first in the eight-book Diamond Brothers series. The book was filmed for television in 1989 as *Just Ask for Diamond*. The

series' final installment was issued in 2008.

Midcareer writing

Horowitz wrote numerous stand alone novels in the 1990s, but in 2000 he began the Alex Rider novels—about a 14-year-old boy becoming a spy for the British Secret Service branch MI6. The series is comprised of nine books (a tenth is connected but not part of it) with the final installment released in 2011.

Another series, *The Power of Five* (The Gatekeepers in the U.S.) began in 2005 with *Raven's Gate*—"Alex Rider with witches and devils," Horowitz called it. Five books in all were published by 2012

Horowitz also turned to playwrighting with *Mindgame*, which opened Off Broadway in 2009 at the Soho Playhouse in New York City. The production starred Keith Carradine, Lee Godart, and Kathleen McNenny; it was the New York stage directorial debut for Ken Russell

The estate of Arthur Conan Doyle selected Horowitz as the writer of a new Sherlock Holmes novel, the first such effort to receive an official endorsement. The resulting book, *The House of Silk*, came out in 2011, followed by *Moriarty* in 2014.

Horowitz was appointed Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the 2014 New Year Honours for services to literature.

TV and film

Horowitz's association with televised murder mysteries began with the adaptation of several Hercule Poirot stories for ITV's popular Agatha Christie's Poirot series during the 1990s.

Starting in 1997, he wrote the majority of the episodes in the early series of *Midsomer Murders*. In 2001, he created a drama anthology series of his own for the BBC, *Murder in Mind*, an occasional series which deals with a different set of characters and a different murder every one-hour episode.

He is also less-favourably known for the creation of two short-lived and sometimes derided science-fiction shows, *Crime Traveller* (1997) for BBC One and *The Vanishing Man* (pilot 1996, series 1998) for ITV. The successful 2002 launch of the detective series *Foyle's War*, set during the Second World War, helped to restore his reputation as one of Britain's foremost writers of popular drama.

He devised the 2009 ITV crime drama *Collision* and co-wrote the screenplay with Michael A. Walker. Horowitz is the writer of a feature film screenplay, *The Gathering*, released in 2003 and starring Christina Ricci. He wrote the screenplay for Alex Rider's first major motion picture, *Stormbreaker*. (From Wikipedia. Retrieved 12/1/2014.)

Discussion Questions:

GENERIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Mystery / Crime / Suspense Thrillers

1. Talk about the **characters**, both good and bad. Describe their personalities and motivations. Are they fully developed and emotionally complex? Or are they flat, one-dimensional heroes and villains?
2. What do you **know**...and when do you know it? At what point in the book do you begin to piece together what happened?
3. Good crime writers embed **hidden clues** in plain sight, slipping them in casually, almost in passing. Did you pick them out, or were you...clueless? Once you've finished the book, go back to locate the clues hidden in plain sight. How skillful was the author in burying them?

4. Good crime writers also tease us with **red-herrings**—false clues—to purposely lead readers astray? Does your author try to throw you off track? If so, were you tripped up?

5. Talk about the **twists & turns**—those surprising plot developments that throw everything you think you've figured out into disarray.

- a. Do they enhance the story, add complexity, and build suspense?
- b. Are they plausible or implausible?
- c. Do they feel forced and gratuitous—inserted merely to extend the story?

6. Does the author ratchet up the **suspense**? Did you find yourself anxious—quickly turning pages to learn what happened? At what point does the suspense start to build? Where does it climax...then perhaps start rising again?

7. A good **ending** is essential in any mystery or crime thriller: it should ease up on tension, answer questions, and tidy up loose ends. Does the ending accomplish those goals?

- a. Is the conclusion probable or believable?
- b. Is it organic, growing out of clues previously laid out by the author (*see Question 3*)?
- c. Or does the ending come out of the blue, feeling forced or tacked-on?
- d. Perhaps it's too predictable.
- e. Can you envision a different or better ending?

8. Are there certain **passages** in the book—ideas, descriptions, or dialogue—that you found interesting or revealing...or that somehow struck you? What lines, if any, made you stop and think?

9. Overall, does the book **satisfy**? Does it live up to the standards of a good crime story or suspense thriller? Why or why not?

(Generic Mystery Questions by LitLovers. Please feel free to use them, online or off, with attribution. Thanks.)

Reviews:

Each of the narratives...is engaging and fluid, each with its own charm, though Horowitz's joyful act of Christie ventriloquism is, in particular, spectacularly impressive.

Washington Post

An ingenious funhouse mirror of a novel sets a vintage "cozy" mystery inside a modern frame.

Wall Street Journal

Horowitz...has devised an ingenious whodunit within a whodunit, a metamystery with Agatha Christie roots.

Oprah Magazine

There's much to enjoy in Anthony Horowitz's spry, sardonic Magpie Murders.

Guardian (UK)

An ingenious novel-within-a-novel . . . part crime novel, part pastiche, this magnificent piece of crime fiction plays with the genre while also taking it seriously.
Sunday Times (UK)

Superbly written, with great suspects, a perfect period feel, and a cracking reveal at the end.
Spectator (UK)

Anthony Horowitz has devised a fiendish mystery within a mystery that will have you hooked from page one. We loved this Agatha Christie-esque crime novel.
Good Housekeeping (UK edition)

A stylish, multi-layered thriller—playful, ingenious and wonderfully entertaining.
Sunday Mirror (UK)

A compendium of dark delights.... A brilliant pastiche of the English village mystery and a hugely enjoyable tale of avarice and skullduggery in the world of publishing.
Irish Times

This can only be described as incredibly clever—but what else would you expect from Horowitz?
Glasgow Herald

(Starred review.) [A] tour de force that both honors and pokes fun at the genre....Horowitz throws in several wicked twists as the narrative builds to a highly satisfying explanation of the prologue.
Publishers Weekly

Agatha Christie fans will line up for this salute to Golden Age whodunits.
Library Journal

(Starred review.) A preternaturally brainy novel within a novel.... Fans who still mourn the passing of Agatha Christie, the model who's evoked here in dozens of telltale details, will welcome this wildly inventive homage/update/commentary as the most fiendishly clever puzzle—make that two puzzles—of the year.
Kirkus Reviews

Summary

This fiendishly brilliant, riveting thriller weaves a classic whodunit worthy of Agatha Christie into a chilling, ingeniously original modern-day mystery.

When editor Susan Ryeland is given the manuscript of Alan Conway's latest novel, she has no reason to think it will be much different from any of his others

After working with the bestselling crime writer for years, she's intimately familiar with his detective, Atticus Pünd, who solves mysteries disturbing sleepy English villages. An homage to queens of classic British crime such as Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers, Alan's traditional formula has proved hugely successful. So successful that Susan must continue to put up with his troubling behavior if she wants to keep her job.

Conway's latest tale has Atticus Pünd investigating a murder at Pye Hall, a local manor house. Yes, there are dead bodies and a host of intriguing suspects, but the more Susan reads, the more she's convinced that there is another story hidden in the pages of the manuscript: one of real-life jealousy, greed, ruthless ambition, and murder.

Masterful, clever, and relentlessly suspenseful, *Magpie Murders* is a deviously dark take on vintage English crime fiction in which the reader becomes the detective. (*From the publisher.*)