

*If you ask me...***Andrew Taylor**
*Award-winning crime writer**Interview Mike White*

I decided I wanted to be a writer when I was about ten, partly because I thought it would be an easy road to wealth and fame (I was innocent then). I wanted to tell stories - it could have been through screenplays as easily as novels, and in fact I wrote several plays in my teens. But finally, in my late 20s, my wife encouraged me to take it seriously and really give it a go. I had a moment of truth when I realised that if I didn't start now, right that moment, I never would. So I started in my lunch break and wrote what turned into the first six pages of my first novel, 'Caroline Minuscule'.

I spend far too much time not actually writing. But if I'm writing a first draft I make it a rule to do something every day, even if it's only a single line. It keeps the story on the boil. And I count words - I set myself a rough weekly target. Sometimes I even achieve it. I dictate first drafts nowadays, because of RSI. At present I'm spending most of my time in 1786 with a book called 'The Anatomy of Ghosts', which is set in Cambridge University and features a ghost and several corpses.

I've frequently been tempted to commit crimes in real life, but in practice the only ones I've committed are minor ones, I'm afraid.

When my own life finds its way into my books, it's more like osmotic seepage than conscious self-inclusion. I think writers of fiction inevitably recycle bits of their own experience - we have to make the stories out of something. And sometimes you can use fiction as a way of working out what you think about something, of processing it. Or even as a way of getting even. (In one of my earlier books, I'm afraid I murdered a publisher.) But I never set out to describe someone or something precisely.

My books generally start with two or three ideas I want to explore further - which may be setting, character, theme, or even a title that seems bursting with possibilities. I wish I could be a planner - it would make life so much simpler. Even when I write novels with a whodunnit structure, I frequently change the intended murderer as I go along, sometimes more than once.

I rarely see moral issues in black and white, so most of my characters tend to be shades of grey. But some, I think, have an essential decency despite their flaws. Writing dark characters comes easily. And perhaps there's always something cathartic about writing fiction.



PIC : CAROLINE SILVERWOOD TAYLOR

"WRITING DARK CHARACTERS COMES EASILY. AND PERHAPS THERE'S ALWAYS SOMETHING CATHARTIC ABOUT WRITING FICTION."

My new book 'Bleeding Heart Square' had three starting points for me - the real-life Moat Farm Murder of 1899, a classic late Victorian case with which my granny's family had a peripheral connection. I relocated it to the 1930s because I had been researching the British Union of Fascists, and become amazed by how significant they were in the 1930s. The third factor was a publishing lunch (see - they do have a vital role to play!) in a restaurant in (the real) Bleeding Heart Yard in London. It seemed the perfect setting for the sort of crime novel that I wanted to write, and it even provided the title.

I certainly don't set out to allow other writers to influence my work, though I was struck how many reviewers found echoes of both Dickens and Patrick Hamilton in that book.

Though 'BHS' explores violence against women, the rise of fascism, class differences and the subjugation of the poor, I try not to bore the reader with slabs of research or a polemic. It's the classic formula: show, don't tell. I just keep my fingers crossed, encourage the characters to get on with the story, see what happens...

ANDREW TAYLOR WILL BE SPEAKING AT CRIMEFEST, BRISTOL, WHICH RUNS FROM 14-17 MAY. SEE BOOKS DIARY FROM P.82 FOR DETAILS.

FFI: WWW.CRIMEFEST.COM, WWW.LYDMOUTH.CO.UK, WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=TWYDAMEERVO

CRIME PAYS!

Fancy going to Crimefest (14-17 May) with unlimited access to all the blood-spattered events, talks and workshops? The first reader to email editor@venue.co.uk with the subject header 'Crimefest' scoops a free pass.