



The Word Is Murder, by Anthony Horowitz
Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy, August 2020

August often is a fine month to relax beside a cool pool and dive into a brisk British murder mystery. During the summer of 2020, however, bibliophiles with limited pool access still could enjoy *The Word Is Murder*, Anthony Horowitz's page-turning whodunit, on their decks or patios.

Central to *The Word Is Murder* is a clever plot twist. Anthony Horowitz, a veteran mystery writer, inserts *himself* as a character into his own novel. As the story unfolds, erstwhile detective Daniel Hawthorne, now a consultant for London's Metropolitan Police, approaches the writer Horowitz with an unusual request. The ex-cop is short on cash— "there just aren't enough people getting murdered these days"—and he wants Horowitz to ghostwrite a case he is investigating and then split the book's profits.

Hawthorne explains the basic facts of the crime to the skeptical writer. Diana Cowper, a wealthy widow, had visited a funeral parlor to plan her own funeral, and six hours later she was murdered in her posh flat. Andrea, her Slovakian housecleaner, discovered the body two days later. Mrs. Cowper's movie star son Damian, her only survivor, was on location in Hollywood at the time of the murder.

Despite his misgivings, Horowitz agrees to partner with Hawthorne, who had been fired from the Met under dubious circumstances. Hawthorne may be rough around the edges, but the writer admires his uncanny detecting skills: "He had the same silken quality as a panther or a leopard. People lowered their guard when they were talking to him. They had no idea that he was only waiting for the right moment to dissect them."

Visiting the crime scene together, they gather clues and identify suspects. Funeral director Robert Cornwallis relays the requests Mrs. Cowper had made for her service, including which Beatles song, psalm, and poem she had chosen. Phone records and CCTV indicate that on the afternoon of her murder, Mrs. Cowper had

lunched with theatrical producer Raymond Clunes whose failed musical had cost her fifty thousand quid. Andrea the maid, during her interview, is not forthcoming about her criminal record. No detail escapes Hawthorne's attention. Even the whereabouts of Mrs. Cowper's missing Persian grey cat is deemed a clue.

When Hawthorne uncovers a shocking detail from the murdered matron's past, the case's resolution would seem to be a slam dunk. However, all bets are off when a suspect is murdered. Hawthorne must reshuffle the deck and solve the mystery before the killer strikes again.

For readers who enjoy *The Word Is Murder* there's good news. Anthony Horowitz and Daniel Hawthorne team up again in *The Sentence Is Death*, an equally satisfying summertime read.

(Note: *The Word Is Murder* and *The Sentence Is Death* are part of the Heritage Hills Library and Somers Library collections. For a list of new books at the Heritage Hills Library, please see page XX.)