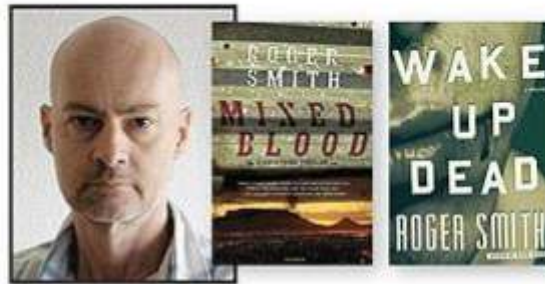


**Why do you think there is now such an outpouring of new crime fiction writing from South Africa?**

In South Africa, authors from all cultural backgrounds are increasingly drawn to crime fiction, writing in English, Afrikaans, and Zulu, and new writers are on the bookshelves each year. During the apartheid era, if you were a writer you risked irrelevancy if you wrote about anything that didn't in some way deal with the policy that made South Africa a pariah state. Thankfully apartheid is long gone, but in the last decade and a half South Africa has become plagued by crime—violent crime in particular.... Good crime fiction should be entertaining, but it should also take the moral temperature of the society it reflects. And South Africa is one sick puppy.



**Many of these books are quite dark and violent. Are these accurate portrayals of South African society?**

There has long been a culture of violence in South Africa. Violence played a major role in African tribal society, in white colonialism, in the apartheid government's brutal repression, and in the liberation struggle against apartheid. Now it is a feature of our criminal culture. Every South African has had direct experience of violent crime. I have been robbed at knife point. Not long ago, my 70-year-old mother was mugged and assaulted by two men in broad daylight on a leafy Cape Town street. Friends of mine have been shot in carjackings and home invasions. My partner works at a Cape Town hospital counseling infants and children who have been raped and physically abused. All of this has found its way into my books, *Mixed Blood* and *Wake Up Dead*. Writing crime fiction seems to be the only sane response to living in one of the most corrupt and violent countries in the world.

**What authors influenced your writing?**

Two writers stand out for me: Richard Stark (Donald E. Westlake) and Elmore Leonard. I first read Stark's Parker series as an impressionable teen and just loved his lean writing, accelerated pace, and amoral universe. Shortly afterward, I discovered Leonard and couldn't get enough of his speedy, multiviewpoint thrillers. His brilliant dialog, sick and nasty villains, not-too-good good guys, and great female characters ensure that a new Leonard is always at the top of my reading pile. Other American crime writers who influenced me are the three Jameses: Ellroy (particularly the way he tears his characters from the pages of postwar American history), Sallis (a brilliant stylist with an ear for hard urban poetry), and Thompson (whose hard-boiled classics taught me that characters don't have to be likable, but they better be interesting).

**What is your next book about?**

I completed my third thriller, *Dust Devils*, late last year. It's a stand-alone thriller, but it brings back Disaster Zondi, a character familiar to readers of *Mixed Blood*. Again, this is a multiviewpoint story, a bloody road trip across the starkly beautiful South African landscape—from wealthy, Eurocentric Cape Town to the depths of a Zulu tribal valley, where AIDS, savage feuds, and poverty have left the population decimated. My agent is busy negotiating the U.S. deal for *Dust Devils*, so I can't say more right now!—Wilda Williams