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## *Athenian Blues, Pol Koutsakis (Bitter Lemon Press)*

### **Summary**

Athenian Blues is the first novel in the Stratos Gazis crime series by Perth-based Greek screenwriter, novelist and playwright Pol Koutsakis. Stratos Gazis is a self-described 'undertaker' or fixer, a hitman whose moral compass points him toward ending the lives of those he feels truly deserve it. Prior to taking the life of a target Stratos spends time investigating them to make sure that they deserve it. He is highly efficient and well paid for the service he provides. Set against the economic and social ruin that has befallen Athens since the GFC, Stratos' new job becomes problematic when the woman who has approached him to murder her husband appears to be not all that she seems. A counter-offer, deceit and lies send Stratos into unknown territory as his moral code is challenged, putting him and his friends in grave danger.

### **About the author**

Pol Koutsakis is a gifted, bilingual polymath. By day a computer-engineering academic at Murdoch University in Perth, he is also one of Greece's best known and award winning young writers. In 2007 he won the National Award for Playwriting in Greece and in 2015 he won the Best Young Adult Novel Award. He has published many novels, including two in the Stratos Gazis series, out with Bitter Lemon Press.

### **Questions for discussion**

Discuss what the background descriptions of a decaying Athens contribute to the atmosphere of the novel. How do the social conditions of post-GFC Greece contribute to the crime noir staple representation of a 'fallen world'?

How do the contributing factors behind these same social conditions form part of Stratos' justifications for his profession and provide opportunity for him to ply his trade?

Is Stratos Gazis a moral or an amoral character? Do you find his justifications for the profession he has chosen convincing?

Crime noir novels often employ a flawed and conflicted protagonist. How does Stratos either conform to this archetype or confound it?

In what other ways does *Athenian Blues* either conform to the usual representation of character and setting in a crime noir narrative or work against the norm?

Stratos appears a very loyal friend to the three closest people in his life. What does this loyalty and respect say about him? Describe what each of Teri, Dragas and Maria bring to the narrative, in terms of the way they help characterise Stratos but also one another.

In crime noir novels the protagonist is often alone because this means that he/she doesn't have anything to lose, and is therefore less vulnerable. What do Stratos' friendships mean for the way that the novel unfolds?

What do you see as the similarities and differences between the Greek and Australian senses of humour, as illustrated in the novel?

Regular crime novels generally employ an investigative element post-crime. Stratos however does much of his investigating prior to committing a crime. What does this mean for the development of suspense in the novel?

### **If you liked this book, you may also like...**

*Baby Blue*, Pol Koutsakis, Bitter Lemon Press (The sequel to *Athenian Blues*)

*The Ruin*, Dervla McTiernan, (Harper Collins)

*Line of Sight*, *Zero at the Bone* (both Penguin), and *Old Scores* (Fremantle Press), David Whish-Wilson. The Frank Swann series.

*Prime Cut*, *Getting Warmer*, *Bad Seed*, and *Heaven Sent*, Alan Carter (Fremantle Press). The Cato Kwong series.

*The Windy Season*, Sam Carmody (Allen & Unwin)