

THE TROUBLE WITH HARRY

HARRY BOSCH
IS BACK
...
AND
WITH A
BADGE!

*In *The Closers*,*
Michael Connelly
gives himself
and his
angst-fueled
LAPD detective
a fresh start
tackling
stale cases.

by
Cheryl Solimini



This article appeared in *Mystery Scene Magazine*,
Summer Issue #90, 2005. Used by permission.
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Michael Connelly makes no bones about his admiration for Raymond Chandler and Ross Macdonald—The Masters, he calls them. And his own creation, Los Angeles detective Hieronymous “Harry” Bosch, owes more than a little to the anti-heroes crafted by these fellow crime writers. Yet it wasn’t until starting *Lost Light* (2003), his 13th book and the ninth starring Harry, that Connelly realized he was finally, truly following in his predecessors’ footsteps. Having had Bosch quit the LAPD at the conclusion of *City of Bones* (2002), Connelly was about to set his man out on his own as a licensed investigator. “I thought, I’ve come all this way and now I’m about to write a private-eye novel, something like what The Masters had done that had inspired me. So I just decided to go into first person, like those classics.”

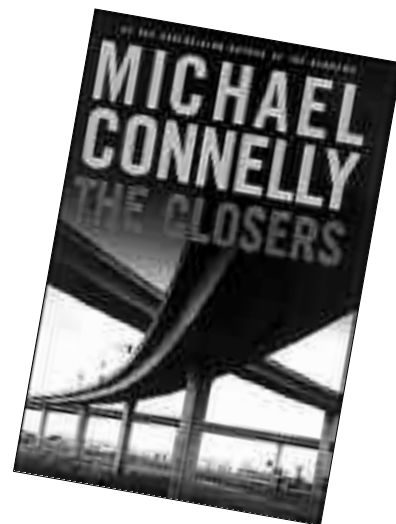
The shift to “I, Harry” from his usual third-person narrative proved to be disconcerting for Connelly. “I think part of what makes Harry intriguing is that you don’t always know what he’s feeling or what he’s thinking,” he observes. “You see the world through his eyes and through his dialogue, but I can always hold stuff back. When I switched to first person, it felt like I was cheating if I didn’t tell the reader everything Harry knew when he knew it.”

Connelly discovered something else as he plotted out Harry’s second outing as a PI in last year’s *The Narrows*. That book played like an All-Stars game, bringing in Bosch, FBI profiler Terry McCaleb from *Blood Work* (1998) and *A Darkness More Than Night* (2001), and prime characters from *The Poet* (1996), tying up the very loose end of that stand-alone novel. It’s as if Connelly were clearing the decks for Harry’s next rise from the ashes. Yet Connelly says this was not deliberate, as he rarely plans too far ahead. Instead, the motivation came from his own dilemmas as a writer. “With Harry as a private operator, outside the system, I thought, ‘This will get old fast—I can’t have him doing this book after book.’” Keeping Harry fresh is a priority. “I’m always looking for ways that I will be excited and plugged in for the time it takes to write a whole book. I’m always thinking in terms of shaking things up.”

Luckily, Harry had friends in high places: He had recently been invited back on the force by the real LAPD Chief, William J. Bratton. “Harry in the last novel was like over 900 Los Angeles police officers who were so frustrated with conditions in this

*“We’re the closers.
We close the cases
nobody has been able to.
The police chief and
the guy who runs the
[Open-Unsolved Unit]
think it’s the most
important place to be
in the department.
Because it’s the place where we don’t forget.
A city that forgets its victims isn’t a city anymore.
It’s a place that’s lost.”*

—Harry Bosch in an “interview” with Michael Connelly
at www.michaelconnelly.com



department that they left,” Bratton said in a speech to graduating cadets, with Connelly as a guest of honor. “I’m trying to encourage Mr. Connelly to encourage Detective Bosch to return to the department in the next novel, as a sign of faith in the reorganization of the organization.”

Now, faced with an uncertain future for Harry, Connelly e-mailed Chief Bratton, “Could Harry Bosch come back?”

Yes, replied Bratton.

“It turned out that there is a real program that reinstates cops if they reapply within three years of their retirement, and Harry was right at that three-year point,” says Connelly. “It was like serendipity. It fit perfectly and realistically—perhaps too realistically. Maybe people will read this next book and think it’s not possible.”

But it is. So with the release in May of *The Closers*, Harry’s 11th case, it was farewell to the first-person PI and welcome home to the LAPD and the Bosch that Connelly and his fans know best. Yet it is a different Harry, with a different assignment: Turning up the heat on cold cases in the department’s new Open-Unsolved Squad.

Serendipity and realism, as well as strong

writing, are the hallmarks of Connelly’s rise as a surefire best-seller of gritty police procedurals. While a college student in Florida, Connelly found his interest in fiction-writing ignited by Chandler and switched to newspaper journalism to walk the crime beat. Six years covering Fort Lauderdale, which during his tenure claimed the title “murder capital of America,” brought him recognition in his field and fodder for two novels featuring a South Florida private eye who helped track down runaways from the North. Connelly never tried to publish them. “I looked at one of them about a year ago, for the first time in 15 years, and my instinct was right,” he says wryly.

Then came the offer to join *The Los Angeles Times* in 1987. “The three biggest influences on me were Chandler, Ross Macdonald and Joseph Wambaugh, who all wrote about LA. So now I’m asked, ‘Do you want to come to the place your Masters wrote about?’ That was a no-brainer.”

As his still-good luck would have it, Connelly landed in the City of Angels on the same day a daring and ingenious bank heist hit the papers: The perpetrators had tunneled under the streets to penetrate the high-

A
**MICHAEL
CONNELLY**
Reading List

**THE HARRY BOSCH
NOVELS**

The Black Echo (1992)
The Black Ice (1993)
The Concrete Blonde (1994)
The Last Coyote (1995)
Trunk Music (1996)
Angels Flight (1998)
A Darkness More Than Night (2000)
City Of Bones (2002)
Lost Light (2003)
The Narrows (2004)
The Closers (2005)

OTHER NOVELS

The Poet (1995)
Blood Work (1998)
Void Moon (1999)
Chasing The Dime (2002)
The Lincoln Lawyer (2005)

OTHER

The Best American Mystery Stories
2003 (2003) (with Otto Penzler)

Murder in Vegas: New Crime Tales
of Gambling and Desperation (2005)

NONFICTION

Crime Beat: Selected Journalism (2005)
A collection of crime stories from
Connelly's days as a journalist.
Limited release.

WEBSITE

www.michaelconnelly.com

security vault. A newcomer, Connelly did not cover the original story, but later met the detective who was still working on the case, two years later. "As a reporter, I had access to the investigation."

And Connelly already knew quite a bit about going underground: An employee of his father, who was a Florida developer and a builder, had been a "tunnel rat" during the Vietnam War and sparked the teen-age Connelly's now long-time interest in this military specialty. "He didn't tell any stories about it, but he had a beard because of the scars on his face," recalls Connelly. "By not telling me, it fired my imagination about how awful this kind of job would be in a war. I read some books and saw a 60 Minutes segment on these guys."

Jump a decade or so, and journalist Connelly finds that most detectives he talks to at crime scenes are Vietnam vets. "It was a natural progression, to come back from the military service and go into the police service," he notes.

Connelly put all these elements together in his first published novel, *The Black Echo* (1992), with a detective protagonist, an ex-tunnel rat himself, that fit the profile. "I wanted my fiction to reflect the real life, that's why I made Harry Bosch a smoker, I made him a Viet vet. He's a composite of all the detectives I knew." And Connelly's own ingenious plot won that year's Edgar Award for Best First Novel from the Mystery Writers of America.

Also with that debut arrived an angst-driven antihero with staying power. "He is a character that has been forged in the fires of bad times and of our failed institutions," says Connelly of his creation. "He grew up in an orphanage and then went in the military and then in the police department. From all that, he believes that he has a skill, a grace, an ability to find the worst people on the planet, those who take others' lives."

But such responsibility never sits lightly on Harry's shoulders. "You build character through obstacles, how they overcome them," explains Connelly. "So I've built Harry Bosch with obstacles on all levels—his love life, his relationship with authority, everywhere. He would not have lasted 11 books if he was a guy who at the end of the day just opened the door and said, 'Honey I'm home!'" For that matter, Harry's earthquake-challenged home hangs off the edge of a cliff too.

Millions of readers would have it no other way. Harry's tortured history continued in the next novel *The Black Ice* (1993), which reveals the identity of his

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father and a half-brother. *The Concrete Blonde* (1994) has Harry face the possibility that he may have killed an innocent man. In *The Last Coyote* (1995), Harry, suspended from the force for assaulting a superior officer, resolves the long-ago murder of his mother, a call girl with higher ambitions. Even after Bosch marries in *Trunk Music* (1997), it's not surprising that by *Angels Flight* (1999) his wife has packed her bags.

Even Connelly's Bosch-free novels are inspired by this brooding protagonist. "Every book I write is part of the series, even if Harry isn't in it," says Connelly. "My goal as a writer is to keep Bosch going as long as I can, as long as the series is valid and fresh. How do you do that? I have no idea. But one of my guesses is not to write about him all the time. For a while there it looked like it would be every other novel, but that wasn't the plan. When I come to end of a Bosch book, I trust my instinct as to whether I should dive right

back into another one, or do something under the umbrella of crime fiction that's different or is little bit challenging. So I've done a heist novel (*Void Moon, 2000*.—*ed.*). *Chasing the Dime* is kind of an Everyman novel, just a guy caught up in circumstances. Before *The Poet*, I had never written in first person and I wanted to write about a journalist."

For Connelly, though, the key moment in the series so far is when Bosch discovers he has a daughter, at the end of *Lost Light*. "He purposely builds his life so he's bullet-proof, nothing should be able to get to him, and now in the space of a page he suddenly finds out he's a father and he knows all that is now gone," he says. "That changes his whole outlook on life and changes his theories as well. Learning that he's a parent has made him vulnerable but it has also made him the happiest he's ever been."

With *The Closers*, Harry gets his second chance with the LAPD through the Open-Unsolved Squad, a move, Connelly says, that will bring Bosch closer to fulfilling his mission in life. "The lesson he learned after quitting the police department was 'If you can't beat em, join em.' This opportunity of working on old cases strikes home with him, with his history, and he feels he's in the right place at the right time."

For Harry, "There's nothing worse than a case that has been sitting in a drawer, gathering dust for 20 years," adds Connelly. "There's such a sad echo that comes from that. He feels that if he can pull that dusty file out of the drawer, open it and make sense of it and find the bad person, he's achieving something, even if it might affect only a few people."

Connelly's move back to Florida a few years ago also gave him a different perspective. Though he still returns frequently to California to research and soak up atmosphere, "I think that this invigorates me as a writer about LA, because I am writing more from memory." Harry's new assignment, too, "renews the series a bit, and I'm open to using these cases to take him wherever I want to take him."

That road will wind through Los Angeles's past as well as Harry's. But don't expect Bosch to travel too far back in time—to, say, clearing up who killed the Black Dahlia, the young woman gruesomely murdered in 1947, an unsolved case that has since fascinated crime writers such as James Ellroy. "It would be wonderful for Harry, but there's not a great percentage in that," explains Connelly. "The farther back you go, the more you're

stretching believability for him to solve crimes."

Instead, Bosch will draw from cases of the late 1960s on. "For my purposes, this period has a rich social history I can play with," explains Connelly. It also includes the early '70s, Harry's rookie years. In fact, *The Closers* references a killing Bosch discovered on his second day as a patrolman. (That case was solved in a short story Connelly wrote as a bonus feature of his Web site that was e-mailed to subscribers on the same day *The Closers* arrived in bookstores.)

Harry's latest investigation goes back to the death of a teen-age girl in 1988, right before the brutal beating of Rodney King by LAPD officers and pent-up racial tension was unleashed around the city. Naturally, his digging leads Bosch to clash with higher-ups who may have covered up the real motive for the crime at the time.

Though Connelly obviously doesn't always portrays cops and their superiors as the good guys, he gets few complaints from the men and women in blue. "Those who read crime fiction gravitate to this guy trying to do the best work he can under very

difficult circumstances in a very political institution. That kind of wins the day for me with cops. They see something about themselves in Harry Bosch or hope that, under the same circumstances, they will be able to act the way he did or say what he said."

In turn, Connelly goes right to real-life sources for Harry's actions as well, penetrating the inner workings of the LAPD. This was not often easy in his years on the crime beat while writing the first four Bosch books. "It wasn't about Harry—it was me," says Connelly, who covered the riots in the Rodney King aftermath. "The LAPD rank and file often blamed the *LA Times* for their bad image. Even though I was able to build sources over the years, there was still always a level of separation. I could be the enemy at any time." Interestingly, that changed after he went to fiction full time. "I thought I needed that press pass, but once I quit the paper, my access improved and therefore relations improved. The cops would tell me anecdotal stories that might not be the best police work, but were funny



Wendy Merritts

THE AVILA ADOBE

From Chapter 21 of *The Closers*

Rider made a move to turn down Arcadia but Bosch pointed toward the old pueblo, the place where the City Of Angels was founded. He wanted to take the long way and walk through.

Bosch studied the mud-walled structure behind the musician and wondered if Don Francisco Avila had any idea what he was helping to set in motion when he staked his claim to the spot in 1818. A city would grow tall and wide from this spot. A city as great as any other. And just as mean. A destination city, a city of invention and re-invention. A place where the dream seemed as easy to reach as the sign they put up on the hill, but a place where the reality was always something different. The road to that sign on the hill had a locked gate across it.



Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516) *Garden of Earthly Delights*. Hell (right wing) c. 1500 Museo del Prado, Madrid

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

As most fans know, Michael Connelly deliberately named his fictional detective after the real Hieronymus Bosch, the 15-century Dutch painter whose “nightmarish landscape of predators and victims” could be mistaken for modern-day Los Angeles. But Connelly may have to rethink Bosch’s nickname. “I shortened it to ‘Harry’ because I thought that’s what his mother would have called him. But on a book tour to Holland a while ago, several journalists told me that I should have called him ‘Jerry.’ Over there, Hieronymus is the Latin form of the name ‘Jerome.’ ”

or were very symptomatic of what the life is like. I grew to regret that I stayed in journalism so long!”

Harry’s career change can be traced to one insider fan, Tim Marcia, a Hollywood homicide detective who offered Connelly

help early in the series. “Now we’re pretty close friends,” says Connelly. “I followed him when he transferred to the cold case squad after it was formed about three years ago. That’s when I first started thinking that might be a good place to put Harry.”

The others on the Open-Unsolved team have also welcomed Connelly with open arms and a seat at their squadroom sessions. He appreciated their insight. “They don’t want to criticize fellow cops, but they’re kind of surprised when they open an old murder book [the notes on a case, which can run hundreds of pages] and find some avenue of investigation that is so obvious but that didn’t occur to the detectives back then.” The changes in science, especially new technology such as DNA databanks, helps, but Connelly credits the improved skills, greater sophistication and higher education among today’s detectives with boosting the chances that the LAPD will finally close the murder books on many of these haunting cases.

It wasn’t until he began selecting pieces for *Crime Beat* (2005), a collection of his journalism, that Connelly was reminded of his own former specialization in crimes of the past. “When I was reporter, I was always going backward and looking for old cases that weren’t solved, writing updates on the investigation or about the family of the victim,” he says. Connelly learned that the detectives call this lingering, ever-expanding impact on everyone connected to past violence as “the ripple effect” and that became the tragic theme of *The Closers*. “The real cop who runs the real cold case squad gave me the speech he would give to anyone assigned to that unit and I put it almost word for word into the book,” he reveals.

Now that Harry has settled in, Connelly decided to tackle another self-imposed challenge: a legal thriller. He must have cleared that hurdle cleanly, because this April the movie rights to *The Lincoln Lawyer*, to be published in October, were bought for seven figures.

No, Harry’s not in it. But true to his own ripple effect, Connelly introduces readers to Bosch’s half-brother, Mickey Haller Jr., an ethically uncertain attorney “The book sets the stage for these two meeting someday—not in the new Bosch book I’m now writing, but farther down the line.”

As Harry often says, “Everybody counts or nobody counts.” So what counts for Connelly? “It’s not the crime, it’s not who did it, it’s not the prime answer at the end, but what the character finds out about himself

or herself, through all stages,” he muses. “That’s the thing that pulls me through when I begin with that blank screen. The excitement is not about getting to that thrilling climax but taking these characters on that journey, and seeing how they handle it, how they grow or not grow.”

For now, Harry’s passage seems a bit smoother. Parenthood has softened some of his rougher edges. His new job, in a squad united by a passion for the work, has renewed his sense of purpose. Can it be that Bosch will mellow? Why, *The Closers* even ties up with a twist that has Harry himself feeling justice may be served after all.

Not to worry. “You know that can’t last for long,” says Michael Connelly. ✦

A former features editor of Mary Higgins Clark Mystery Magazine and a frequent contributor to Family Circle, Cheryl Solimini has just written her first mystery novel, Across the River. <csol@earthlink.net>



Wendy Werris

UNION STATION CLOCK TOWER

From Chapter 21 of *The Closers*

They crossed the street to the train station, its clock tower rising in front of the them.

Union Station was designed to mirror the city it served and the way in which it was supposed to work. It was a melting pot of architectural styles—Spanish Colonial, Mission, Streamline Moderne, Art Deco, Southwestern and Moorish design flourishes among them. But unlike the rest of the city where the pot more often than not boiled over, the styles at the train station blended smoothly into something unique, something beautiful. Bosch loved it for that.