

Torn from the headlines

Crime thriller draws on factual events

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

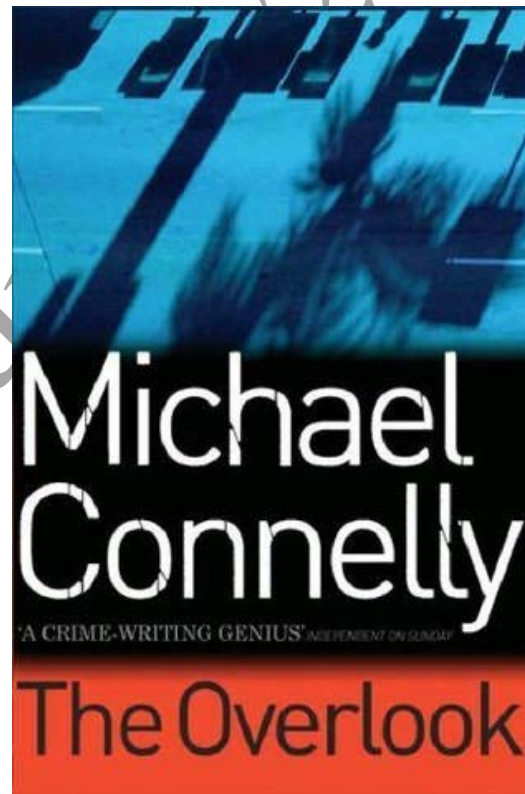
It is a truism that art reflects life. Charles Dickens' classic portrayals of Victorian life owe much of their appeal to the fact that he describes, with unflinching accuracy, the class-ridden society of his day. And in the 1950's the success of the TV series *Leave It to Beaver* was due in no small part to its faithful portrayal of suburban, middle-class (and all-white) America.

Today we live in perilous times, some distance removed from the secure existence of *Leave It to Beaver*. It is hard to pick up a newspaper today without reading of some new threat to our lives, from cancer-causing additives in our foods to terrorists bent on blowing up jet-fuel depots at New York's JFK Airport. This week's pick reflects the trend to weave current world events into compelling crime fiction, and offer an entertaining, if harrowing, ride for readers.

Michael Connelly

With eighteen novels under his belt to date, Michael Connelly has cemented his place among the leading US crime fiction writers of the past two decades. A former journalist on the police beat, Connelly moved to the Los Angeles *Times* after co-writing a magazine article which was shortlisted for a Pulitzer Prize. His first novel featuring LAPD detective Harry Bosch, *The Black Echo*, was published in 1992, and won the Edgar Award for Best First Novel

awarded by the Mystery Writers of America. Three more Bosch books followed over as many years: *The Black Ice*, *The Concrete Blonde*, and *The Last Coyote*. Several standalone novels were capped by 1998's *Blood Work*, which



was made into a film starring Clint Eastwood. This was followed by *Angels Flight*, the next installment in the Harry Bosch series, and *Void Moon*, another standalone thriller. In 2001 Connelly published two more tales in the Harry Bosch series, *A Darkness More Than Night* and *City of Bones*, teasing his readers with yet another standalone

thriller, *Chasing the Dime*. Connelly returned to Harry with *Lost Light*, published in 2003, and *The Narrows*, reviewed in these pages in July of 2005. 2006 saw the appearance of *Echo Park*. Connelly's latest entry in the highly successful Harry Bosch series, *The Overlook*, was released to much acclaim just last month.

Connelly served as President of the Mystery Writers of America in 2003 and 2004. He lives with his family in Florida.

The Overlook
(Little, Brown & Co., 2006)

Detective Harry (short for Hieronymus) Bosch has come out of retirement to work the Robbery Homicide Division of the LAPD. While breaking in a new partner, Ignacio Ferras, he is called to the Hollywood Hills: a body has been found on a scenic overlook on Mulholland Drive. The victim is a white male. He has been executed—shot twice in the back of the head at point-blank range.

What turns this into a far-from-routine homicide is that the victim, Dr. Stanley Kent, was a research physicist with access to much of the city's supply of radioactive cesium, used to treat cervical and ovarian cancer. The detectives visit the victim's home where they find his wife, naked and bound. She tells a harrowing tale of two armed men forcing their way into her home, stripping her, tying her up and photographing her, then leaving with a gun that her husband kept for protection. When a check reveals that thirty-two sources of the deadly substance have gone missing from a local laboratory, the case takes on a new urgency; the FBI is called in, and their lead investigator is Special Agent Rachel Walling, with whom Bosch has a past.

To the Feds, the case is not about the physical danger posed by a relatively small amount of cesium; it's about the state of fear the release of this news would cause in L.A. and around the country if the radioactive material is not found immediately. With national security at stake the local authorities are sidelined, but while Walling and her team chase the cesium Bosch focuses on the murder, believing it will lead him to the missing material. Before it is over, Bosch's quest will lead him to a celebrity stalker, a Syrian terrorist, and an itinerant dumpster-diver, and both Bosch's life and his partner's will hang in the balance.

***Twists and turns combined
with crisp dialogue***

Originally created as a sixteen-part serial for the *New York Times Magazine*, *The Overlook* has been substantially revised and expanded in its present form. It is vintage Michael Connelly, an action thriller based on a theme torn from the headlines. Bosch is an engaging protagonist, and his sparring with Special Agent Walling, both on a personal and a professional level, is convincingly portrayed. As always, Connelly is meticulous in his research (see the photo gallery on his website, www.michaelconnelly.com), and deftly intersperses just the right amount of jargon and procedural detail combined with crisp dialogue, fast-paced action, and enough twists and turns to keep the reader guessing until the very end. This is the twelfth novel featuring detective Harry Bosch, and a fine addition to the series.

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