

Serial Killer Stalks Cops

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

In recent weeks we have looked at an Anne Perry mystery set in Victorian London and a Yorkshire mystery by Canadian author Peter Robinson. This week I want to share with you a suspense thriller by the gifted American author, Michael Connelly.

Michael Connelly

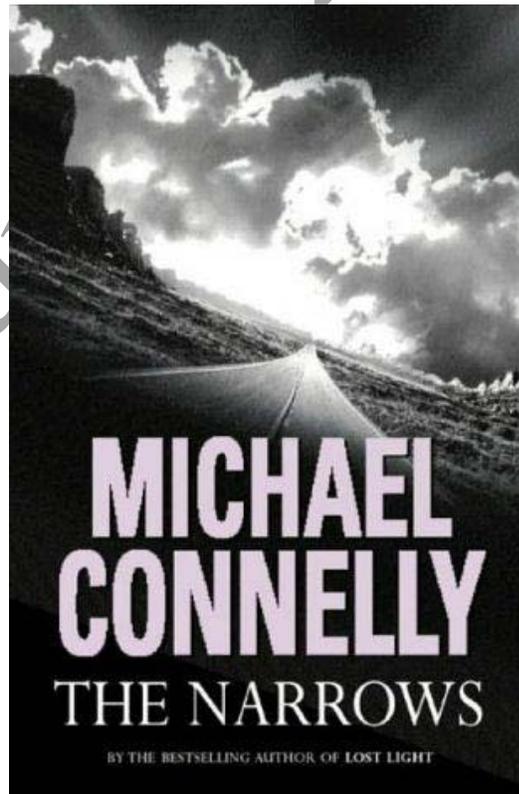
A former crime reporter in Florida and Los Angeles, Michael Connelly occupies center stage among the current writers of suspense thrillers. His Harry Bosch series now runs to 13 books which have been translated into 31 languages, and he has won virtually every international crime fiction award going. He was president of the Mystery Writers of America in 2003 and 2004, and his previous novel, *Blood Work*, was made into a film starring Clint Eastwood, that has helped Connelly to attract a global following. He is an unabashed fan of the novels of Raymond Chandler, and a great deal of Chandler's dark world informs his writing.

The Narrows

(Warner Books, 2004)

Harry (short for Hieronymus) Bosch is a former cop with the Los Angeles Police Department, who quit to become a private Investigator. A retired FBI agent's widow has asked him to look into her husband's death from an apparent heart attack; his medication had been tampered with. Checking his files reveals that he and his family had been the victim of a stalker, and Harry

pursues the possibility that the former agent's death was connected to one of his earlier investigations. The case leads Harry to Las Vegas, where his young daughter lives with his ex-wife, and Harry struggles to get to know his daughter while pursuing leads to his friend's death in the seamy underbelly of the City Built On Sin.



Meanwhile, FBI agent Rachel Walling is facing problems of her own. Five years earlier FBI agent Robert Backus, Walling's former mentor at the Bureau, went over to the dark side, turning from crime-solver to serial killer. Fellow FBI agents had been among his victims, each body accompanied by bits of poetry.

The embarrassment of the FBI had been compounded when agent Walling had slept with a reporter, who broke the story of the rogue agent, and she had been sent to a field office in South Dakota as punishment.

Based on badly decomposed human remains, "The Poet," had been presumed dead; but similar crimes begin occurring in Amsterdam, and the case is reopened. When a Global Positioning System recorder is anonymously sent to the FBI, identifying the locations of half a dozen bodies buried in the Mojave Desert, and Backus's fingerprint is found on a battery inside the device, there can be no doubt: Robert Backus is very much alive, still killing, and taunting his pursuers. Agent Walling is recalled to the case to help, though her superior makes it clear that she is there as a source of information only, and not as an agent.

Meanwhile, Harry's own investigation leads him to the burial site identified on the GPS reader. The FBI dismisses any connection between the two cases, and both he and agent Walling are warned off the Backus case. They join forces, unaware that all the time Backus has been following agent Walling, looking to exact his revenge.

A fast-paced thriller

All reviewers have their personal preferences, and I am no exception. I like a good puzzle, one that challenges the reader, with multiple suspects and lots of misleading clues, or red herrings. This is a tradition that started with Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie, and is carried forward today by such well-established writers as Colin Dexter (The *Inspector Morse* series) and Elizabeth

George (The Inspector Lynley series). An essential element of such works is what's called a limited point of view: readers are not privy to all information as the story unfolds: they are challenged to solve the puzzle for themselves. How the story plays out after the 'who' (or 'how') is determined is of relatively minor importance.

The Narrows, then, is not a mystery, but is nonetheless a work of crime fiction. The reader is given access to multiple points of view, including Harry's, Rachel Walling's, and the killer's perspective. We know 'whodunnit' from the very early pages, so the suspense, for the reader, is simply what will happen next, and how, if at all, the killer will be caught.

It is, however, a great read. With flawed characters, crisp dialogue, fast-paced action, and an atmosphere taut with tension, *The Narrows* keeps the reader's attention from beginning to end, and looking forward to the next in this series. Readers seeking suspense, ingenious plotting, and fast-paced action will enjoy this book.

Jim Napier can be reached at jim.napier52@gmail.com