

>> Each year thousands of book lovers of all ages visit the nation's capital to celebrate the joys of reading and lifelong literacy at the Library of Congress National Book Festival co-chaired in 2009 by President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama. Now in its ninth year, this free event, held Saturday, September 26th, on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., will spark reader's passion for learning as they interact with the nation's bestselling authors, illustrators and poets. Even if you can't attend in person you can still participate online. These podcast interviews with well-known authors and other materials are available through the National Book Festival website at [www.loc.gov/bookfest](http://www.loc.gov/bookfest). It's now my pleasure of talking with bestselling author Michael Connelly. Mr. Connelly is perhaps best known for the Harry Bosch series which includes his award winning novel, *The Black Echo*. His book, *Blood Work*, was adapted into a film starring and directed by Clint Eastwood. Mr. Connelly has been further distinguished with every major award given to mystery writers included an Edgar Award, Anthony Award and Macavity Award. Mr. Connelly's latest book, *Scarecrow*, was released this past May and *Nine Dragons* debuts this fall. Mr. Connelly, thank you so much for talking with me.

>> Thanks for having me on.

>> Appreciate it. Now before I launch into your vocation, I had a question about an avocation here, I understand that you're going to be starring as yourself in the season premiere episode of ABC TV series *Castle* on the 21st of September. Is that correct?

>> Yeah. I don't know if I'd call it an avocation though. [laughter]

>> Well who knows?

>> A side track I think.

>> What's that all about?

>> Well *Castle* is a show about Richard Castle who is a crime novelist and on occasion he plays [inaudible] with other crime novelists. And what this show tries to do is have real writers so it kind of bridges the world between Castle, Rick Castle, a fictional guy, with some real writers. So I'm in the poker scene for the season premiere.

>> Is it fun to play yourself in a fictional setting, I guess?

>> Yeah it was an interesting experience. I was pretty nervous about it going into it but then they did a good job of you know making me feel comfortable and I only had three different lines or I only spoke at three different times so it went pretty easy.

>> Now let me ask about the *Scarecrow*, which is set amidst the wreckage, I guess you could say, of American newspapers. As a former journalist yourself, what do you think about the current state of print journalism?

>> Well I mean it was the reason I wrote the book. It's very disappointing to see this. You know I recognize that society changes and

we're in the midst of that kind of change where more and more people are getting their news from the internet, TV and so forth and it's not like I'm decrying that. But at the same time I think something is going to be lost if newspapers in each community are kind of a community temple and they're not going to be fully replaced so it's disappointing on that level. It's disappointing on the level that I did that for a level for 15 years and so I hate to think of it going by the wayside.

>> Now I understand you had to pull back the novel twice in response to I guess some late breaking events that rocked the newspaper industry. Talk about that a little bit.

>> Well I mean one of things, I mean coming from the world of journalism to the world of fiction, one of the things I've always tried to bring forward or with me was [inaudible], was trying to be accurate about things, trying to be real. And my books are very contemporary. They're usually set in the months that they are published. And so I was writing a book last fall and that was going to be set in May of 2009 and so you know I was writing about the crumbling newspaper business and I turned the book in back in November and the business continued to crumble in some significant ways. I had mentioned the Rocky Mountain News because the character in the book had worked there at a time and then that folded in I think it was February.

>> Yeah.

>> And so I had to call up and say has the book been printed yet, because that was only two months before it was going to be out, I think. And luckily I was able to pull it back and make some changes. It was kind of a tight thing. You couldn't really break any pages but I could go in there and make the book more accurate.

>> Now the new book, *Nine Dragons*, takes the popular Harry Bosch character to Hong Kong. How does he get there and why?

>> About the middle third of the book is set in Hong Kong and so you know if you're able to write, if you're lucky enough to be able to write several books in a series, as I've been very fortunate to have that opportunity, you can always every now and then, or maybe one time, do the old classic fish out of water story where you take him away from the environment that he's known for or readers are comfortable with. So I wanted to take him to an exotic place where he would kind of feel not at home at all. And I kind of set this up a few books ago where I had his ex-wife and his daughter move to Hong Kong so he had someone in Hong Kong, a reason to go there. And in the middle of a case in Los Angeles he finds out that his daughter did not come home from school, or actually going to a mall after school, she's 13 years old, and so she's missing. And so he kind of drops everything in LA, goes to Hong Kong to solve that, or to find her, and to figure out if it has anything to do with what he's doing in Los Angeles.

>> Now I actually know the answer to this but what is the origin of the title, *Nine Dragons*?

>> Kowloon is a big part of Hong Kong, a big section. It's across the harbor from central Hong Kong and that means Nine Dragons. And that was from, got its name from a legend about an Emperor who was chased into the mountains, that would later become Hong Kong, to hide and decided he'd, and there were eight mountain peaks that were around Hong Kong, and so he decided to call it whatever eight dragons means. But then they reminded him that the Emperor is always a dragon so you would need a ninth dragon so they called it Kowloon which means Nine Dragons and the book takes place there.

>> Great. I want to ask about Harry Bosch, how do you think he's evolved from where he started out and where he is now, I guess?

>> Well I mean I've been very lucky. Like I told you, the books are very contemporary. They're written for the time they're published. The first Harry Bosch came out 17 years ago. So like anybody, you change over 17 years and hopefully I've shown that in Harry. I think on a, you know, the biggest change in that whole 17 year period is when we find out he had a child because Harry was always kind of a loner by design. He felt he had this mission of seeking out evil people and to do that he had to be invulnerable. He couldn't have anything close to him so that he could be gotten to. And then he found out that he had a daughter. And so that really changed him, changed the series, it made him vulnerable and in Nine Dragons that's where that's really explored.

>> Now you named Harry after the 15th century Dutch painter, Hieronymus Bosch, why is that? Were there parallels between the two that you saw?

>> Well you're always looking for metaphors and a name is important, especially if you can use it to kind of brush on some character, to say something about the guy you're going to be writing about. And it's a bit obscure but you know Hieronymus Bosch, the painter, his work is about a world gone wrong and chaos. And descriptions you could give his paintings you could also certainly give to a crime or a crime scene and so I kind of drew that connection. I think there's a lot in the paintings, especially his masterpiece called, The Garden of Earthly Delight, that lend itself to Los Angeles possibly being a garden of earthly delight with all its good and bad things going on.

>> A critic wrote that you bring to your work authentic characters, realistic dialogue and knowing details. Is there a secret to that? Is it research?

>> I guess so. I mean it's not really a secret. I mean I think every writer wants to you know accurately bring the world that they're writing about through the reader. If you question how do you go about doing that? Everyone knows you've got to do it. And I think maybe my training as a journalist kind of prepared me for it so I think I have a good ear. I mean when you're a journalist you never are given enough space to write the story you want to write so you want it to be concise and you learn to listen for dialogue that carries information. It's just not fluff. And I think that's what I've taken over into my novels.

>> Hemingway, of course another journalist turned writer, he said write what you know, do you agree with that?

>> Yeah I do but you also write what you don't ever want to know. You explore things that are, especially if you're a crime novelist like me, you know you do research. I spend a lot of time [inaudible]. I explore crimes that are pretty horrific. You know I'm looking for things to write about. Looking for points of inspiration. And you know in the process of doing that for about 20 years now, I've been, you know, in research or investigated some stuff that's pretty awful, stuff that I don't want to know. So it's a little bit of a mixture of both.

>> Along those same lines we've talked about your fiction, you have a nonfiction book called Crime Beat that details a lot of your time spent as a crime reporter. Is there any one story or experience that stands out in your mind as especially memorable?

>> Well I mean I think the one that is most important was I got, through a lot of negotiation, attached to a homicide squad for a week. And I was there with them every day. I had a pager and when they got called out, I got called out. And I was able to really kind of fully immerse with them for a week and during that week they were quite busy. They had three different cases, three homicides came up. And so I saw a lot of stuff and this was, when was this? This was way back in the 80's, this was like 88, so here we are 21 years later and I still feed off of that in my fiction because I just saw the detail of the job, I saw their interaction with the job. I saw them you know calling home and saying I'm not going to make it. I'm chasing a case. You know I saw all aspects of the job that I've been using for you know two decades now.

>> Crime novels, a very, I guess you could say, rich genre of literature and of course the television airwaves are packed with, I guess you could say, procedurals. What do you think it is that you bring to the genre that really makes you stand out and has made you successful?

>> Well it's kind of a mystery. I think what every writer should do or does, what I try to do, is keep your head down and write a story that you would want to read and so that really means you write about a character you'd like to know about, maybe meet, maybe even be. And it really comes down to character and I think I've been able to write about you know this guy Harry Bosch, there was good and bad things about him but the overall picture of him somehow connects on an empathic level with a lot of readers. And you know did I sit down and have a checklist with empathic things? No, you know I just kind of wrote about a character that was of interest to me, as of things that are sympathetic about him. You know he turns people off in many ways as well, including me but I think that mix has made him realistic, like a real person. And I think you know a character like that will win the day for you almost every time.

>> Yeah. I've read that Raymond Chandler is a literary hero of yours. Why is that?

>> Yeah he's definitely the most inspirational literary figure in my world. And it's just because when I was a teenager and in college and so

forth I loved reading crime novels but I never thought about writing them until I read Chandlers. I just saw such an artistic component to what he was doing. There was things that were there that went beyond the puzzle of who did it and things like that. You know he was very evocative of this city, Los Angeles, and at the time I'd never even been here. And I just saw a higher gain there and it was inspiring. And pretty soon after that I decided I wanted to try and do it someday.

>> Yeah. You've obviously, you've created some other compelling characters beyond Harry. Is Harry your favorite? Do you have some other favorites that you've created?

>> Harry I'm sure is by far my favorite but in the last few years I've created a defense attorney named Mickey Haller who's actually related to Harry, they're half brothers. And he's like the flip side. You know Harry books them and this guy tries to free them. But he, like Harry, has some ideals that he believes in so he's not a weasel or anything like that but he is a complicated character and I've enjoyed writing about him. I've written two books about him. In Nine Dragons he appears for just one chapter but it's a very important chapter. He kind of steals the show for that period and so that's a sign that this character is important to me.

>> One of the great things, at least for me, about the National Book Festival, is to see, in particular, the young people that come out and they're inspired and they're rapt with attention. What kind of advice do you give, especially for young people, if they're interested in doing what you do?

>> Well it's kind of like what I said, you know, what Hemingway said, write what you know. I always say you know keep your head down and write a story for yourself. Don't you know lick your finger, hold it up into the wind to see which way the commercial winds of publishing you're going. If you do that then you're lost. I mean you really have to be inspired by something and you need to really want to tell a story to yourself, you know. It starts with you're writing for one person, yourself. And you know everyone has connections to the world so if you come up with something that you like, there's got to be other people that will like it and you just kind of go from there.

>> Well Michael Connelly, before I let you go let me ask you, are there any other projects, either book or film or TV that are coming up for you?

>> I guess I'm just going to launch my acting career. [laughter] You know I'm about to start writing a book and actually will have Harry Bosch and Mickey Haller in it and that will be out next year. I don't even have a title for it yet but I'm just starting that one now and that's really what's taking most of my attention at the moment.

>> Well Michael Connelly, thank you so much for your time today. We really appreciate it.

>> Thank you.

>> The current book is The Scarecrow and the upcoming book is Nine Dragons. That is Michael Connelly. We very much appreciate his time. And you'll be able to hear more from him at the National Book Festival. That's on Saturday, September 26th on the National Mall from 10:00 am to 5:30 pm. That's always free and open to the public. If you want more details and a complete list of participating authors, visit [www.loc.gov/bookfest](http://www.loc.gov/bookfest). From the Library of Congress this is Matt Raymond. Thank you so much for listening.