

## **Acts of Memory: Narratives of Trauma and 9/11 Politics in Michael Connelly's *City of Bones* (2002)**

**Christopher J. Davies**

### **Abstract**

Michael Connelly's 2002 crime novel, *City of Bones*, follows an investigation by LAPD Detective Harry Bosch into the unsolved murder of a 12 year old boy, registered missing in 1980. Bosch's investigation to uncover the circumstances that led to the boy's murder, and therein uncover the hidden identity of the killer, is transposed against 'the struggle everyone had to find meaning after such a catastrophic event, literally witnessed first-hand through television'<sup>1</sup>. An early entrant in what quickly blossomed into a rich tapestry of cultural material critically (and not so critically) engaged with the politics of 9/11 and the unfolding war on terror, *City of Bones* questions the extent to which an absolute truth can be arrived at in the narrativisation of a trauma by its immediate experiencers. Moreover, in a narrative of crime where the political imperatives of the LAPD consistently assert control over trauma's narrativising – a consequence of which is an unfolding sequence of further traumatic deaths – *City of Bones* explores how the imperatives of a political hegemon may militate against trauma's abatement by hijacking post-trauma narrativisation to create a record of trauma that confers legitimacy upon the recurrence of violence as *the* response to trauma.

Read within the post 9/11 context into which the novel emerged, my paper contends that *City of Bones* offers an allegorical microcosm of the Bush administration's efforts to manage the narrativising of 9/11 into a position directly relational to the 9/11 attacks; a position from which revanchist counter-violence emerged as a legitimate response to the trauma of 9/11.

**Keywords:** 9/11, Post 9/11, terror war, trauma, mourning, ideology, *City of Bones*, Michael Connelly, Sigmund Freud, Pierre Janet, psychoanalysis, repetition compulsion, narrativising, crime, crime genre, neoconservative.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Connelly. *9/11, City of Bones, and Lost Light*. Interview by author. E-Mail Correspondence, March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

# **Acts of Memory: Narratives of Trauma and 9/11 Politics in Michael Connelly's *City of Bones* (2002)**

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## **Trauma and Narrative**

Michael Connelly's 2002 crime novel, *City of Bones*, is approached in this article as an example of what Jeffrey Melnick calls '9/11 culture', a 'complex vein of American political and cultural expressive practices'<sup>2</sup> that have marshalled the known referential frames of popular culture (here crime fiction genre) to re-engage the link between individual experience, history, politics, and a traumatic, destabilising present. Connelly's novel merges the conventions of crime genre narrative progression with psychoanalytical models of trauma, in a narrative of crime that telegraphs debates into the formation of the philosophical and political conditions under which the narrative of 9/11 trauma was being managed to support the waging of terror war.

Originally intended for an early 2002 publication, Connelly held *City of Bones* from publication until April 2002 in order to, as Connelly says, 'infiltrate it with 9/11'<sup>3</sup>, weaving the impact of an event that 'touched every person in the country at least psychologically'<sup>4</sup> into the outlook of its characters, and therefore ensuring the novel's relevancy for a post 9/11 audience<sup>5</sup>. Emerging within the context of the invasion of Afghanistan which comprised the first phase of the overt military response to 9/11 under the auspices of the U.S. led 'War on Terror', *City of Bones* revolves around Detective Harry Bosch's criminal investigation into the death of 12-year-old Arthur Delacroix, whose bones have been unearthed by a dog-walker in Laurel Canyon on New Year's Day 2002, twenty-two years post-mortem. A series of violent and harrowing deaths, which traumatise the novel's protagonists, follow in the wake of the discovery of the boy's remains. The fallout from trauma consequently induces a series

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<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Melnick, *9/11 Culture: America under Construction*. (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 1

<sup>3</sup> Connelly, *9/11, City of Bones, and Lost Light*.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> In an interview with this author, Connelly explained that as his novels are set contemporaneously to the time of their publication he did not want to publish a novel set in 2002 that bore no mention or feeling of the changes that 9/11 induced. Moreover, Connelly explained that the literary response to 9/11 had lagged behind that of the crime genre, whose practitioners offered an immediacy of response that was more timely and had greater significance for healing and self-examination.

of repetitions of violence; a traumatic feedback loop which returns the characters to the founding incident of trauma, whilst compelling yet more trauma in its wake.

Psychoanalytic and historiographical theories of trauma, in the months after 9/11, quickly became an established paradigm through which 9/11 and the subsequent 'war on terror' received critical engagement. Trauma offered a theoretical framework not only for cultural critics and political commentators exploring the significance and ramifications of 9/11 as a moment in U.S. political and military history<sup>6</sup>, but strands of criticism evaluating both 9/11's representation and resonance in popular culture across a range of media and genres<sup>7</sup>, and the manner in which the narrative of 9/11 was being framed by the Bush administration in conjunction with a complicit media corpus to suit neoconservative ideology that would ultimately find expression militarily in the war on terror<sup>8</sup>.

One of the novel's key traumatising incidents occurs approximately at the novel's mid-point. In an underground car-park, during the apprehension of Johnny Stokes, a childhood friend of the dead child, Bosch's lover and colleague, Julia Brasher, shoots herself in the shoulder in a botched attempt to frame Stokes and allow her to kill

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<sup>6</sup> For relevant analysis see:

Douglas Kellner, *From 9/11 to Terror War: The Dangers of the Bush Legacy*. (Oxford, UK: Roman and Littlefield, 2003).;

Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*. (London, UK & New York, NY: Verso Books, 2004).;

Melvin Gurtov, *Superpower on Crusade: The Bush Doctrine in US Foreign Policy*. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reiner, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> For relevant analysis see:

Amy Reynolds and Brooke Barnett, "America under Attack: CNN's Verbal and Visual Framing of September 11." in *Media Representations of September 11*, eds Steven Chernak et al. (Westport, CN & London, UK: Praeger, 2003), 85-101.;

Fritz Breithaupt, "Rituals of Trauma: How the Media Fabricated September 11." in *Media Representations of September 11*, eds Steven Chernak et al. (Westport, CN & London, UK: Praeger, 2003), 67-83.;

Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*. (New Brunswick, New Jersey, & London: Rutgers University Press, 2005).;

Kristian Versluys, *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).;

Richard Gray, "Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis." *American Literary History* 21-1 (2009): 128-151.;

Richard Gray, *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11*. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> For relevant analysis see:

Robert W. McChesney, "September 11 and the Structural Limitations of US Journalism." in *Journalism after September 11*, eds Barbie Zelizer et al. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 104-113.;

David L. Altheide and Jennifer N. Grimes. "War Programming: The Propaganda Project and the Iraq War." *The Sociological Quarterly* 46-4 (2005): 617-643.;

David L. Altheide, *Terror, Post 9/11, and the Media*. (New York, N.Y.: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009).

David L. Altheide, "Fear, Terrorism, and Popular Culture." in *Reframing 9/11: Film, Popular Culture and the "War on Terror"*, eds Jeff Birkenstein et al. (London, UK & New York, NY: Continuum, 2010), 11-23.

Lisa Finnegan, *No Questions Asked: News Coverage Since 9/11*. (Westport, CN & London, UK: Praeger, 2007).

him in retaliation. The bullet however ricochets off the bone and into her heart, killing her. Subsequent contesting of the narrative of Brasher's death is both evocative of what Connelly describes as 'the struggle everyone had to find meaning after such a catastrophic event, literally witnessed first-hand through television'<sup>9</sup>, and simultaneously an allegorical microcosm of the Bush administration's efforts to manage the narrativising of 9/11 into a position directly relational to the 9/11 attacks<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, it offers an interrogation of how situating (and maintaining) the traumatic wounds of 9/11 as the emotional centre of the narrative afforded the means for neoconservative ideology to hijack trauma's disruption of memory making process, establishing hegemony over narrative in order to posit violence as a legitimate response to that wounding.

Witnessed by Bosch, the scene of Brasher's death is littered with experiential touchstones that correspond to psychoanalytic descriptions of the manner in which traumas are experienced<sup>11</sup>. Connelly describes how Bosch's ability to see the traumatic act is compromised at the point of inception. Having had a cleaning agent sprayed in his eyes by Stokes, Bosch's vision is 'blurred at the edges'<sup>12</sup>, reducing the visibility in an already darkened underground car park further. Brasher's flashlight lies on the floor, illuminating Stokes but leaving Brasher only dimly lit. In the moment of Brasher's weapon discharging, 'things seemed to slow down'<sup>13</sup>, and Bosch is blinded for a second time as the muzzle flash suddenly introduces an extreme of light into the scene, accompanied by a 'shattering blast'<sup>14</sup> distorting Bosch's hearing as 'the echo reverberated through the concrete structure, obscuring its origin'<sup>15</sup>. The entire sensory information appellant to the experience is fragmented as it reaches Bosch's psyche.

In the first instant Bosch is unable even to properly register the incident, confused as to where the shot came from as Brasher is on the ground and Stokes has his back to her. Brasher's voice, her ability to speak to the experience of her trauma and relay it to Bosch, is taken away in the moment of the gunshot, chemical shock rendering her able to speak only single words, before the paramedic's oxygen mask clamps down over her face, silencing her again. The whole incident has occurred for Bosch as a series 'of fleeting images, the percussion of blows, sounds, and movements of the body - disconnected, cacophonous'<sup>16</sup>; experiences both heightened and dampened

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<sup>9</sup> Connelly, *9/11, City of Bones, and Lost Light*.

<sup>10</sup> See Butler, *Precarious Life*.

<sup>11</sup> For relevant discussion see:

Roberta Culbertson, "Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-Establishing the Self." *New Literary History* 26-1 (1995): 169-195;

Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*. (Abingdon, UK/New York, NY: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Michael Connelly, *City of Bones*. (London, UK and New York, NY: Orion, 2002), 238.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*: 242

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>16</sup> Culbertson, "Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling", 174.

simultaneously as the 'cells are suffused with the active power of adrenalin, or coated with the anaesthetising numbness of noradrenalin'<sup>17</sup>. The traumatic experience of the shooting constitutes for Bosch a signal event (or limit event), a point at which the ongoing narrative is breached, suspended by trauma, and a point at which the status quo of lived reality is overwhelmed.

A traumatic event, as Cathy Caruth notes, is one 'experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the [...] repetitive action of the survivor'<sup>18</sup>. Trauma's primary experience then, is in effect the experience of *not* knowing at the moment of inception, which has instituted a psychical repression; a forgetting simultaneous to experiencing, which renders the experience of trauma as a gap in experience. Repression, in the Freudian conception, accounts for the manner in which normal processes of memory registration, creation, and recall are bypassed to instead register below the conscious level, embedding deep in the psyche and held in abeyance away from any direct and immediate referential processing<sup>19</sup>. Withholding experience, repression is a means of 'manage[ing] the unbounded psychic energy that comes from an external traumatic impact, expelling painful and unpleasurable memories and affects from the conscious system'<sup>20</sup> leaving them inhabiting the subconscious as 'an unforgettable if not always remembered reference-point'<sup>21</sup>. In repression's resistance to allowing the conscious mind access to the experience, the possibility for assimilating, processing and working through the experience, and therefore negating the trauma, is deferred.

In the aftermath of the shooting, as Bosch tries to explain the incident to Detective Gilmore of the Officer Involved Shooting division (OIS) of Internal Affairs, Bosch finds that 'the images of what he had seen kept replaying in his mind'<sup>22</sup> - a traumatic repetition returning the event to him in a fragmentary loop of those 'fleeting images [...], disconnected, cacophonous'<sup>23</sup>. As Bosch's experiences suggests, for the psyche, trauma is an event caught between two competing acts of memory existing in tension: 'Repression', and the repetition compulsion<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Cathy Caruth. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. (Baltimore, MD & London, UK: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 3-4.

<sup>19</sup> For Freud's explanations see:

Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. C. J. M. Hubback. (London & Vienna: The international Psychoanalytical Press, 1922).

<sup>20</sup> Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, 48.

<sup>21</sup> Geoffrey H. Hartman, "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies." *New Literary History* 26 (1995):540.

<sup>22</sup> Connelly, *City of Bones*, 260.

<sup>23</sup> Culbertson, "Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling", 174

<sup>24</sup> For Freud's theorizing see:

Sigmund Freud, *Studies in Hysteria - 1895*, trans. A. A. Brill. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1937).; and Freud, *Pleasure Principle*.

It is in the repetition compulsion – flashbacks, recurring dreams, anxieties and a host of associated symptoms – in which traumatic memory is later made available to the conscious mind. Fragmentary, disembodied shards of memory and experience return against the will of the subject, experienced anew in the present, as if the subject were back there in the past, as the trauma demands understanding and witness, compelling its remembering. A cycle of re-experiencing the trauma ensues, returning the debilitating anxiety of the experience, with no avenue of resolution as remembering and forgetting are locked in an impasse. It is these conflicting acts of memory, the ‘forgetting’ of repression in the moment of experience, and the ‘remembering’ of after the fact repetition, around which trauma’s registry and recall oscillates.

Bosch makes the supposition that she must have shot herself ‘because there was no one else there but her, me and Stokes. I didn’t shoot her and Stokes didn’t shoot her’<sup>25</sup>, but is unable to provide any actual memory evidence to support it. Questioned as to how Brasher could possibly shoot herself in the left shoulder holstering a gun on her right hip, Bosch concedes ‘I don’t know. [...] I only know what I saw. I told you what I saw’<sup>26</sup>. Bosch cannot translate the reality, the *truth* of the experience, to language in a way that will reveal a definitive narrative, because the *truth* of the experience for Bosch was the experience of *not* knowing. The trauma experience of Brasher’s demise was the experience of uncertainty; of poor light, compromised senses, and sudden unexpected shocks, of which the visual evidence of a gun discharging, the hand that held it, and the circumstances of its discharge were withheld from its living witnesses by the experiential circumstances of its registry.

No certain rendition can be gleaned from Bosch’s testimony because he experienced nothing – no actual ‘thing’, it was missed at inception. For Bosch, the trauma of Brasher’s death conforms to Caruth’s notion of traumatic aporia, where ‘the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur in an absolute inability to know it’<sup>27</sup>, producing the paradoxical situation in which the speaking of the trauma coheres as a reinforcement of a conception of trauma as unspeakable, an event ‘grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence’<sup>28</sup>.

In Freudian psychotherapy, the discordance of the remembering and forgetting dynamic of post trauma registry and recall may be managed through narrativisation, in which traumatic memory is transformed into narrative memory. In narrativising the gap in memory attendant to trauma’s remembering and forgetting dynamic can be bridged, reconnecting the historical event of the trauma, with the loss to conscious

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<sup>25</sup> Connelly, *City of Bones*, 258.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 91-92.

<sup>28</sup> Cathy Caruth, “Introduction,” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth. (Baltimore, MD & London, UK: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 7.

thought of the experience, and a present condition of existence *post* trauma; making the unknowable known and holistically integrating the trauma into an ongoing lived narrative shorn of returns to the violence of trauma. However, absolute truth arrived at through narrative is not a foregone conclusion, Freud acknowledging that as 'there are no indications of reality in the unconscious, [...] one cannot distinguish between truth and fiction that has been cathected with affect'<sup>29</sup>. Moreover, narrativising in an attempt to bridge the gap in memory attendant to trauma is vulnerable to suggestive direction – direct or indirect, from within and from without – as the narrativising process is so firmly grounded in the post. Reliant on after the fact editorialising on behalf of the traumatised, traumatic memories are left open to dislocation and reconfiguration, in which reality and fantasy may be blended together to form a hybrid traumatised reality<sup>30 31</sup>.

The trauma event of Brasher's death, in its paradoxical cacophony of sensory impacts, at the heart of which is an event that in its experiencing eludes direct experience and becomes 'no thing' to which one can speak, has the effect of making the narrative of Brasher's death one of multiple, fragmented narratives, founded on suppositions of what the sum of the memories available *could* add up to. Over the course of the OIS interview, as Gilmore finds the gaps in Bosch's narrative, four different narratives are proffered, 'collaps[ing] distinctions between knowledge, rumour and speculation'<sup>32</sup>: Brasher was disarmed and shot by Stokes; Brasher shot herself in a struggle with Stokes for control of her weapon; Brasher discharged her gun accidentally as she re-holstered it; and Brasher shot herself on purpose. This heterogeneity of narrative testifies to the manner in which trauma 'issues a challenge to the capacities of narrative knowledge'<sup>33</sup>, and which trauma 'In its shock impact [...] is

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<sup>29</sup> Freud, *Studies in Hysteria*, 264.

<sup>30</sup> See discussion in:

Pierre Janet, *The Mental State of Hystericals: A Study of Mental Stigmata and Mental Accidents*, trans. Eugene Rollin Corson (New York: Putnam, 1915).; and Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, 2008.

<sup>31</sup> The potential for the obscurement of truth through outside influence and environmental factors during the recall of traumatic memories, and their translation into narrative, is perhaps best highlighted in Pierre Janet's use of hypnotherapy in treating traumatic neuroses. Whilst Freud abandoned hypnosis for the very reason of wanting to limit (if not eliminate) the possibility of therapist/outside manipulation (direct or indirect) on patient narrativising, Janet's approach to trauma resolution relied on specific interjection of, and by, the psychotherapist. Resolution was to be attained through inducing hypnosis, placing the patient in a suggestive state, and from there assisting the traumatised in a narrativising of trauma that sought less to bring to the surface the traumatic memory in order to come to terms with it and work it through, than to erase its very existence. Janet's treatment involved narrativising to transform traumatic memory into narrative memory, but it was the manipulation of memories to create false narrative, recalling certain specific details accurately but obfuscating others until traumatic memory was replaced with a less shocking or painful version of the truth.

<sup>32</sup> Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, 79.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

anti-narrative, [yet] [...] also generates the manic production of retrospective narratives that seek to explicate the trauma'<sup>34</sup>.

### **Ideology and the Hijacking of Trauma Narrative**

As the interview progresses, Gilmore turns the conversation to a critical examination of the narratives Bosch has offered against Bosch's individual circumstances at the time of the shooting. Querying how reliable Bosch's vision could be in a dark garage just minutes after being blinded by cleaning fluid, Bosch's previous claim to "'Only know what I saw'"<sup>35</sup> is implicitly presented as a claim to have seen nothing, and therefore to be unable to "know" anything, as Bosch's previous statements make "seeing" and "knowing" dependent upon each other. Under the weight of Bosch's undeniably compromised physical condition, and having already planted the seed that an accidental shooting during a re-holstering of Brasher's gun doesn't match the physical evidence, the potential for the gun discharging during a struggle for control of the weapon (Bosch simply unable to discern the fine detail) has gained credence.

As the details are hashed over, Gilmore attempts to lead Bosch into acknowledging the possibility that Brasher's death resulted from a struggle for control of her gun by attaching this possible confrontation to the list of things Bosch *missed* through his compromised vision: "'So you're saying you didn't see the struggle for control of Brasher's gun before the shot occurred.'"<sup>36</sup> The lack of credible recollection to prove this didn't happen conversely functions to bolster the viability of this version of the narrative. Implicit in Gilmore's statement is the suggestion that just because Bosch did not see a struggle for the gun, it does not mean that one did not take place. Questioning the reliability of all other scenarios depicted has closed down Bosch's heterogeneous trauma narrative. The result is a monoglossia derived from a heteroglossia, in the mode of neoconservative attempts to straight jacket the narrativising of 9/11 into simple binaries of good and evil, East and West, upon which longstanding neocon targets for American unilateralism could be appended as notional co-conspirators<sup>37</sup>. The struggle for the gun is effectively *City of Bones'* prescient allegory of the contest over Iraq's chemical weapons capabilities, both before and after 9/11, as neocon hawks sought reasons to unilaterally engage Saddam Hussein; just because it's not seen and no evidence is immediately apparent, doesn't mean it isn't there.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Connelly, *City of Bones*, 260.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid: 262.

<sup>37</sup> For relevant analysis see:  
Finnegan, *No Questions Asked*, 2007.

The back and forth between Bosch and Gilmore, with Bosch's narrative credibility slowly being chipped away and made subservient to Gilmore's account, illustrates the manner in which the narrative / anti-narrative dynamic of trauma provides the conditions in which an ideology may ape trauma's narrative confounding characteristics to assert an anti-narrative force. Ideology, in its conformity to a rigid set of principles or viewpoints (to the detriment of all others) echoes the description of trauma's effect on the psyche of inducing a 'narrowing of the field of consciousness'<sup>38</sup> around a fixed idea. This narrowing motivates the production of an exclusive narrative practice, closing out narrative avenues and contextual details which do not conform to the fixed ideas of the ideological frame. As Connelly concludes:

It was important for [...] the department to conclude that Brasher was shot during a struggle for control of her gun. It was heroic that way. And it was something the department public relations team could take advantage of and run with. There was nothing like the shooting of a good cop - a female rookie, no less - in the line of duty to help remind the public of all that was good and noble about their police department and all that was dangerous about the Police Officer's duty.<sup>39</sup>

The narrativising of Brasher's death has seen ideology stand in for trauma. Ideology takes over, exploiting trauma's production of gaps in memory that confound narrativising by stepping into those gaps, and expanding the narrative to form a bridge; a masquerade of truth. This faux bridging by necessity maintains and bolsters those gaps, in an attempt to instil selective forgetting in the face of trauma's command to remember; a command that manifested in that initial multiplicity of narrative. Forgotten is the uncomfortable, politically troubling version of Brasher's death, and remembered, and indeed intended to be returned to, is the version that establishes Brasher as the victim of a dangerous fight against those that would wield extremes of violence.

Within the fictive post 9/11 of the novel, LAPD press releases, graveside speeches, and newspaper obituaries for Brasher would, under the scenario described, channel the Bush administration's concerted mobilisation of the image and occasion of wounding to marshal public sentiment at the horror of the 9/11 attacks. Where Bush called for Americans to 'not forget this wound to our country'<sup>40</sup>, issuing reminders that 'in the ruins of two towers, at the western wall of the Pentagon, on a field in

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<sup>38</sup> Onno Van der Hart and Barbara Friedman, "A Reader's Guide to Pierre Janet: A Neglected Intellectual Heritage," *Dissociation* 2-1 (1989): 6.

<sup>39</sup> Connelly, *City of Bones*, 263-264.

<sup>40</sup> George, W. Bush, "Address to the Nation - Washington, DC, September 20, 2001," <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/09.20.01.html> (Accessed April 17<sup>th</sup> 2012)

Pennsylvania, this nation made a pledge<sup>41</sup>, in order that America's 9/11 wounds were foremost in the public imaginary whenever the administration attempted to establish a moral argument for terror war activity and policy, so in *City of Bones* functions the senseless death of a rookie female cop. Brasher's death then is *City of Bones*' 9/11 moment; offering the LAPD (standing in for neocon hawks) the tantalising possibility of a reference point for the scourge of contemporary crime, available for repeated application as an emotional fulcrum from which to leverage public and political support for violent and uncompromising prosecution of crime.

During Gilmore's interrogation Bosch recalls 'Brasher's questioning him a few nights earlier about a scar on his left shoulder. About being shot and what it had felt like'<sup>42</sup>. With a gunshot wound the mirror of his own, the possibility that Brasher inflicted the wound upon herself in a combination of criminal activity and thrill seeking belatedly dawns on Bosch during the interview, and is bolstered later as Bosch ruminates on Brasher's emotional damage from a prior love affair and the mementos around her home that testified to a life pursuing danger, including swimming with sharks and visiting live volcanoes.

An uncensored narrative in which Brasher deceitfully engineers a thrill-seeking scenario through which to justify an unlawful killing, invests the trauma of Brasher's death with the potential to destabilise existing ideological assumptions the LAPD holds and projects internally and externally; both in terms of the morality of its officers, and the ethicality of their conduct (and by extension the ethicality of the LAPD as a whole). Just as the post 9/11 'military-media complex'<sup>43</sup> was engaged in the 'pervasive communication [...] that danger and risk are central features of everyday life' after 9/11<sup>44</sup>, the crux of Gilmore's interview with Bosch has been to establish for LAPD Public Relations a narrative of Brasher as an undisputed victim of an everyday 'War on Crime' that the LAPD's officers are invested in, and from which they keep the citizenry safe at great personal cost to themselves. By extension, any action Brasher may have taken would be presented as performed in the execution of her duty to protect the citizenry and bring criminals to justice.

The establishment of Brasher within the narrative of crime solely as a victim works to suppress consideration of how that pre-trauma context of her life may have provided the impetus for her death. Instead, the locus of culpability remains trained on the spectre of inexplicable criminality. The avoidance of inconvenient or uncomfortable truths about the potential for hidden criminality in LAPD officers is the most politically beneficial aspect of the constraining of Brasher's narrative; it absolves the LAPD's pre-

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<sup>41</sup> George W. Bush, "State of the Union Address, Washington, DC, January 28, 2003," <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/1.28.03.responses.html> (Accessed July 5<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>42</sup> Connelly, *City of Bones*, 260.

<sup>43</sup> Altheide, "Fear, Terrorism", 16.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*: 11.

recruitment psychiatric screening processes of any culpability in Brasher's demise, and in turn prevents any associated scrutiny that Brasher may not be an isolated case. It is this thread that most overtly channels the critiques of narratives of 9/11 that fostered and maintained the myth that, as Douglas Kellner notes, pre-9/11 geopolitical contexts are irrelevant to the post 9/11 narrative, contributing to an 'impoverished understanding of the historical context of terrorism and war'<sup>45</sup>. The closing-off of Brasher's pre-trauma personal history from consideration within the narrative of her death functions in a manner akin to the 'stifl[ing of] any serious public discussion of how US foreign policy has helped to create a world in which such acts of terror are possible'<sup>46</sup>. As Fritz Breithaupt notes, 'Once one manages to position oneself as a "trauma" victim, one seems absolved from any possible involvement'<sup>47</sup> and the battle for narrative hegemony is already half won.

With the questions about Brasher's capacity for criminality clearly existing in Bosch's mind, the fact that Bosch failed to voice them when interviewed by Gilmore, and that the LAPD feels the need not merely to leave them unanswered, but altogether unspoken, not only conveys the potential and power of traumatic events (certainly within the context of this novel) to destabilise ideological assumptions – here about the morality and ethicality of the LAPD's member officers and management – but also the force with which ideology may exploit the conditions of trauma in order to rework, smooth out, and head-off any challenges to the hegemony of those assumptions. Under the twin onslaught of the gaps in memory attendant to trauma's modes of registry and recall, and the exploitation of those gaps by ideological imperatives to ratify a particular version of trauma narrative, truth in narrative becomes 'bound up within its crisis of truth'<sup>48</sup>.

Moreover, the attempts by Gilmore to manipulate the narrative of Brasher's death to paint her solely as a dedicated challenger of society's aggressors, ruthlessly cut down, carries a coding about what counts as acceptable violence that has a particularly post 9/11 relevance. Judith Butler describes how an alliance between government interests and certain facets of the media – what David Altheide refers to as the 'military-media complex'<sup>49</sup> – had established a consensus on what terms like terrorism would mean after 9/11. Violence named as terrorism was clearly distinguished from violence that might be sanctioned by the state through the declaration of war, by that very act of naming. In such scenarios, Butler tells us, a particular understanding of what constitutes justifiable violence emerges as a component part of the narrative frame, as it

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<sup>45</sup> Kellner, *From 9/11*, 69.

<sup>46</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, 3.

<sup>47</sup> Breithaupt, "Rituals of Trauma", 70.

<sup>48</sup> Caruth, "Introduction", 7.

<sup>49</sup> Altheide, "Fear, Terrorism", 16.

did with neocon narrativising of 9/11 and terror war<sup>50</sup>. In the LAPD's construction of Brasher the victim-cop, the emotional and philosophical ground is laid for the continuance of violence in the prosecution of criminals, and the veneration of those who would discharge the mandate of the state.

Within the novel this ultimately results in the apparent execution of Johnny Stokes by Brasher's partner, Edgewood, who takes advantage of a scene of sensory confusion, similar to that in which Brasher died, to engage Stokes in a gunfight. Who fired first is a question left unresolved, but when the smoke clears the manner in which Stokes' body is presented has the distinct feel of staging to ensure he fits the template of legitimate threat; hands out front, one holding a gun. In his deceased state, 'covered with his own blood, entry wounds on his chest and right below his left eye'<sup>51</sup> and surrounded by the reek of burnt cordite, Stokes is arguably an even more ghoulish portrait of criminal alterity than Brasher's original attempt at framing him could ever have created; Stokes' bullet-ridden visage finding an easy reference in the demonic portraits Bush administration rhetoric would paint of Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters<sup>52</sup>. Importantly, Stokes now ably fulfils the role of aggressor that Brasher had attempted to fabricate. Having successfully completed the frame-up and retaliatory killing of Stokes that Brasher was attempting when she shot herself, Edgewood has bolstered the hegemony of a narrative of justifiable violence when it is directed against individuals the state names as aggressors.

Brasher's death is ultimately declared an accident during the re-holstering of her weapon. Bosch's insistence that Stokes didn't kill Brasher is conceded, but the version of her death that will reach the public will be a fabrication. With the internal investigation suspended Bosch finds himself reluctantly complicit in what amounts to an act of collective repression; directed by the state, the full breadth of trauma's narrative will be withheld not only from trauma's direct participants, but the wider public. Moreover, in the curtailing of his narrative, Bosch experiences a repetition of the psychological effects of the trauma experience as his voice is figuratively dissolved once again, curtailing the efforts to reclaim the voice that the trauma experience silenced by taking away his immediate access to the experience as it happened.

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<sup>50</sup> See discussion in:

Butler, *Prekarious Life*.

<sup>51</sup> Connelly, *City of Bones*, 398.

<sup>52</sup> For salient examples and discussion see:

George, W. Bush, "Address to the Nation - Washington, DC, September 20, 2001," <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/09.20.01.html> (Accessed April 17<sup>th</sup> 2012.);

Martin Amis, "Fear and Loathing." *The Guardian*, 18 September, 2001. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/18/september11.politicsphilosophyandsociety> (Accessed May 8<sup>th</sup> 2014).;

Jo Lampert, *Children's Fiction About 9/11: Ethnic, Heroic and National Identities*. (London : Routledge, 2009).

### **Failure of Narrative and Resistance in Failure**

Presenting Bosch fully aware of his subordinate position to a narrative hegemony foisted upon him by agents of the state, that awareness may be read as a deliberate prompt from Connelly to reconsider the extent to which a post 9/11 audience may themselves have become subordinate to control on the parameters of the nation's trauma narrative by a White House-Media alliance. Furthermore, emphasis on the character's awareness of the source of (and rationale behind) their manipulation, invites the reader to consider the extent to which, given over to such control, they may be unwittingly complicit in the realisation and dissemination of those particular identifiers for post 9/11 America - 'freedom, civilisation, innocence, resolve, victimhood, unity, and the pursuit of justice via legitimate war'<sup>53</sup> - that were being conveyed 'in the dominant media frame'<sup>54</sup>.

Despite these failures to achieve an inclusive narrativisation of trauma, *City of Bones* offers a resistance to the narrative hegemony that defeats its protagonist, and by extension proffers a means of resistance to narrative hegemony exerted by war on terror ideology for the immediate post 9/11 audience who received the novel upon its publication. With Stokes' death signalling the abrupt closure of the Delacroix case, and having been informed he is to be transferred to another department, Bosch begins packing up his desk. Bosch is halted in his packing by recognition of an unsettling duality that comes with carrying the LAPD badge: "He had always known that he would be lost without his job and his badge and his mission. In that moment he came to realise he could be just as lost with it all. In fact, he could be lost *because* of it"<sup>55</sup>.

In continuing to wear the badge of the LAPD, Bosch is complicit in the narrative hegemony cranked out by the LAPD PR machine. In the fictive world of the novel, it is the hegemony of the LAPD PR machine that bearing the badge makes Bosch complicit with; a realisation that prompts Bosch to retire rather than transfer to another department. In the real-world of the novel's publication it is the hegemony of neoconservative narrativising of 9/11 and terror war under the 'military-media complex'<sup>56</sup>.

Asking the desk-sergeant to call him a cab, Bosch exits the building before the desk-sergeant can finish replying: 'You might want to wait in-'<sup>57</sup>. With the abrupt termination of a voice, *City of Bones* returns, trauma-like, to Brasher's death; the prose replicating the abrupt loss of voice as the oxygen mask clamped down over her mouth, which had foreshadowed Bosch's own muzzling. Rather than signifying a loss of voice,

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<sup>53</sup> David Holloway, *9/11 and the War on Terror* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 62.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Connelly, *City of Bones*, 408.

<sup>56</sup> Altheide, "Fear, Terrorism", 16.

<sup>57</sup> Connelly, *City of Bones*, 409.

and therefore the triumph of narrative failure, it may be considered the discharging of a specific speech act on the part of Bosch. 'The door closed, cutting off the cop's voice'<sup>58</sup> signals Bosch, an agent of the state, disaffiliating himself from the voice of that state; a stripping away of the confines that the neocon-esque narrative machinations of the LAPD would confer upon Bosch.

There is a contempt in Bosch's dismissal of the cop's voice, suggesting the voice which the LAPD will allow to be heard has become so compromised in detail and integrity that it is no longer worth hearing. Instead, the novel suggests all that would be heard would be another act of memory issuing a command to forget in order to meet political imperatives favouring narrative's frustration. The badge, the signifier of the authority to both speak and be heard in the official record, for Bosch, is now 'the thing that drew the shroud of futility around him'<sup>59</sup>.

Relinquishing the badge, the symbol of his ability to speak "officially", serves as a rejection of the capacity of the LAPD to speak *for* him. It is an assertive counter 'movement from passivity to mastery'<sup>60</sup> over the inciting trauma which provoked narrativisation and, and the force of political interest that would pervert those processes for their own imperatives. To withdraw one's voice from the narrative hegemony, transforms silence into a speech act in and of itself. If the LAPD cannot speak for Bosch, and he no longer has to fill his mouth with the words assigned by those with the power to grant him the ability to speak, via the badge, Bosch has regained authority over his own voice. Ceding to anti-narrative by relinquishing the "official voice" of the badge is the only way in which, conceptually, the other narratives attendant to the trauma of Brasher's death can continue to exist, as Bosch is free to openly carry them with him.

The contempt for any continuance of the voice of the state by Bosch is mirrored in the novel's abrupt ending just four lines later with Bosch standing under a moonless sky, isolated and alone. The abrupt end, as the reader accompanies the character with whom they have been encouraged to align out into the dark away from the agents of the state, confers a sense of the novel figuratively "shrugging off" the constraints state agencies would impose upon narrative after 9/11. It is as if the novel must set itself apart from the confines of trauma narrativising that neocons were imparting on the post 9/11 arena the novel was to be received into, re-affirming the political subversions of Connelly's prose. In this way, *City of Bones* suggests to a post 9/11 audience, that silence, reformulated into a speech act becomes one means of 'opposing the single-mindedness of ideology and ideologically inspired terror'<sup>61</sup> that had become prevalent in 9/11 discourse.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid: 408.

<sup>60</sup> Peter Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot". *Yale French Studies* 55-6 (1997): 286.

<sup>61</sup> Versluys, *Out of the Blue*, 3.

*City of Bones* perhaps ultimately tells us then, that presented with a trauma as grand and seismic as 9/11, that 'reorients the culture and marks it in its deepest substratum'<sup>62</sup>, the only way in which we stand a chance of mastering the trauma, in a manner which avoids melancholic dead-ends which allow for trauma to be ideologically appropriated by war-mongers is, as Nancy K. Miller said in relation to the New York Times *Portraits of Grief*, to 'accede to the big through the little'<sup>63</sup>. If 'the only way to bring it to language is to think small, cutting it down to size'<sup>64</sup>, withdrawing the voice from the hegemonic chorus is a way to bring trauma to the small-scale personal level. Placed thusly into an arena where some element of personal control can be exercised, we may occupy a position from which we may more adequately 'insist upon the re-opening of that space of vulnerability and inter-dependency, against the cowboy mentality of the American republican imaginary'<sup>65</sup> that drives the war on terror's cycles of ever reciprocating violence in response to 9/11.

In the end, *City of Bones* tells us that resistance *is* available to war on terror narrativising of 9/11 trauma, but that it faces opposition which *may* be too much to overcome. And in the instances where it is overcome, that the victories are fleeting and small-scale, and likely requiring sacrifice (personally and professionally) on the part of its proponents. Resistance to the assertion of narrative heterogeneity is therefore still possible, if only on the small scale, personal level, of individual acts of disaffiliation from the hegemonic chorus, as exercised by Bosch in discarding the policeman's badge.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid: 12.

<sup>63</sup> Nancy K. Miller "'Portraits of Grief': Telling Details and the Testimony of Trauma." *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 14-3 (2003):122-123.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Angela McRobbie, "Vulnerability, Violence and (Cosmopolitan) Ethics: Butler's Precarious Life." *The British Journal of Sociology* 51-7 (2006): 79.

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