

Jack McEvoy: From His Rise to Fame to the End of His Game

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Abstract

This work examines the journalist Jack McEvoy as he appears in four of author Michael Connelly's novels, but he is the main protagonist in only two: *The Poet*¹ and *The Scarecrow*.² In these two novels, McEvoy's circumstances change but he maintains some of the same journalistic characteristics. For this paper, McEvoy's circumstances and characteristics will be compared with other images of the journalist in popular culture to determine what role McEvoy plays in the journalist's image as a whole.

Introduction

Jack McEvoy never wanted to be a reporter.

“I wanted to be a writer, ended up in the newspaper business.”³

But that didn’t stop him from being a damn good one.

His writing skills, determination and uncanny ability to find things most people would miss, including cops,⁴ make him good at what he does. It also doesn’t hurt that he will do nearly anything to get a good story.

McEvoy is Michael Connelly’s⁵ fictional protagonist, who appears in four of Connelly’s novels.⁶ However, McEvoy plays the lead character in two of them.⁷ In both *The Poet and The Scarecrow*, McEvoy finds himself in a similar situation: hunting down a serial killer who has eluded the cops and the FBI. The characteristics mentioned earlier⁸ resurface in both of the novels, making his character generally consistent. What changes, however, is his situation in life and the state of journalism.

These changes are an important reflection on the state of the media, particularly newspapers. They also reflect the adaptations journalists have had to make to technology. The journalist in *The Poet*, first published in 1996, is technologically much different from the journalist in *The Scarecrow*, published in 2009. Likewise, journalism has drastically changed. And this is all because of the Internet, or at least that’s what the novels have the reader believe.

To understand why all of these changes are important, McEvoy must be examined more closely. His characteristics and skills as a reporter in the first novel need to be compared with those in the second novel. McEvoy must be taken apart to look at how exactly journalism has fallen apart.

The best way to do this is to start from the very beginning.

Who Is Jack McEvoy?

Jack McEvoy was born on May 21, 1961,⁹ to Millie and Tom McEvoy. He grew up with his identical twin brother, Sean, and an older sister, Sarah, in Denver, Colorado. The McEvoy family was a normal family. They went on trips. The kids went to school. The parents worked. But it all unraveled when a tragedy took Sarah's life.

When Jack and Sean were kids, the family went to Bear Lake, a park near Denver. It was winter, and the lake was frozen. Jack's parents were getting lunch ready, and Sarah was watching Jack and Sean. Jack decided to run onto the ice, and Sarah went after him. Before she could get to him, she fell through the ice. Jack and Sean, who had watched the episode, began screaming. But by the time anyone was able to get to Sarah it was too late. She had drowned. Sean had covered up for Jack, telling their parents that they had both run onto the frozen lake. That was one of the best things Sean had done for Jack.¹⁰ After Sarah's death, the family stayed together, but there was tension. Jack thought his parents never quite forgave him for what had happened.

The brothers grew up and moved on. Jack traveled for a few years, living in New York and Paris, before going to college.¹¹ Sean went into the service before pursuing police work.¹² Eventually, Sean ended up as a homicide detective in the Denver Police Department, wanting to one day be chief of police.¹³ Jack also ended up back in Denver as a reporter for *The Rocky Mountain News*. He had worked his way up from a rewriter and daily reporter to a homicide reporter without deadlines.¹⁴

At the beginning of *The Poet*, Jack is confronted with the death of his brother. Sean had been working on a case about a brutally murdered university student named

Theresa Lofton. After many dead ends, the case had begun to take its toll on Sean and he started seeing a psychiatrist. Not long after that he was found dead in a parking lot at Bear Lake with a single bullet wound to the head. His death was ruled a suicide and the case was closed with little investigation.

Upon learning this, Jack took a few weeks off from work to collect himself. When he returned to work, he knew what his next story would be.¹⁵ He wanted to write about his brother, focusing on cop suicides. His editor, Greg Glenn, after some hesitation bought the idea, and let him run with it. Jack went through other newspaper stories on cop suicides, and managed to get the files on Sean's case as well as Lofton's. While doing research, he discovered something odd.¹⁶

The year before in Chicago another homicide cop had committed suicide, and the cop's last words were from Edgar Allan Poe's story "The Fall of the House of Usher." Roderick Usher was the name of the last person to have seen Sean alive. Jack gave the connection a shot, and then looked up the words Sean had written on the windshield of his car: "Out of Space. Out of Time." Sure enough those were from Poe too. The link made him think his brother hadn't committed suicide, and he took his ideas to the cops. They didn't look too kindly on him.¹⁷ But eventually he convinced them to reopen the case. He then traveled to Chicago, and persuaded the cops there to reopen their file.

After that, the ball was rolling. Jack had alerted the authorities to a serial killer they had missed, and the FBI was brought in because the murders occurred across state lines. Throughout all of this, though, Jack tried to stay ahead of the game. He wanted to be the first to break the story, because he thought it was his story.¹⁸ To keep it his, he negotiated with the FBI, and got them to agree to let him be involved in the

investigation.¹⁹ He also negotiated a contract with them, granting him the right to break the story. The agent assigned to work with him was Rachel Walling, a gifted and beautiful profiler.²⁰ Throughout the novel, their relationship grows, and within a short period of time they become intimate.²¹

As the novel continues to progress, they discover the identity of the serial killer, who baits homicide cops by brutally killing children or people who have contact with children. A trap is then set up in Los Angeles. The killer, nicknamed the Poet because of the references he uses to Poe, has made his way to L.A. and finds himself in need of a camera.²² The FBI finds out where he has ordered the camera he needs and have set up shop.

An agent is assigned to pose as an employee at the camera store while Rachel and Jack wait outside with other agents. They have been sitting outside for hours and nothing has happened. So, Jack decides to get some coffee. He buys some extra cups and heads into the camera shop to see if any of them want any. Just as he is about to leave the shop, the killer shows up. Before they can arrest the Poet, he figures out what is going on and he shoots and kills the FBI agent working behind the counter. Jack tries to talk to the Poet and eventually manages to get the gun from him. A struggle ensues, and he finds himself wrestling with the killer. To save himself, Jack fires the gun, shooting the Poet who dies shortly afterward.

Once all of the commotion dies down and the FBI interviews him, Jack finds a moment to call his editor, and his editor tells him something he doesn't want to hear.

“You're not covering the story anymore. You killed the guy who killed your brother. You killed the Poet. The story's about you now. You can't write it.”²³

Jack is not happy, and begrudgingly agrees to be interviewed by the reporter assigned to cover his story. While brooding in his room, Jack decides to go through his files again, and he discovers something. The person he has killed is not the only person involved in the killings. There is someone else, and they are on the inside. But, before he can get to the other killer, he is captured.

The room is dark and the drugs the second killer injected into Jack are making him fade fast. Before the killer could do his job, Rachel bursts in and shoots. The killer manages to get away before the authorities could find out the extent of his injuries. Jack's involvement in the story has made him a celebrity, and he is asked to appear on television shows to tell his ordeal. At the end of the book, he is on leave from *The Rocky Mountain News*. He is on leave to write a book. He can finally write his story.²⁴ But not everything turns out so well. His relationship with Rachel ends on a sour note, and they decide that it's best not to see each other any more.

After he writes his book, Jack continues to ride the coattails of fame a little longer. Before landing a job at *The Los Angeles Times* Jack works freelance for *The New Times*, a tabloid-type paper based in Los Angeles, as well as *Vanity Fair*. While he is freelancing, Jack appears briefly in *A Darkness More Than Night*.²⁵ His interactions in the novel are restricted primarily to brief exchanges with Terry McCaleb, a criminal profiler, and Harry Bosch, a detective. In the exchanges, Jack attempts to get information on a case he is working on, but McCaleb and Bosch brush him off, finding him mostly a nuisance. Jack is even referred to as "a coyote that had been waiting in a cave for his unsuspecting prey."²⁶

Jack also makes an appearance in Connelly's *The Brass Verdict*.²⁷ This time McEvoy is portrayed trying to work Mickey Haller, a defense attorney, into an interview about a case. As in the previous novel, Haller sees Jack as a nuisance. Haller even calls Jack a liar.²⁸ Again, Jack is seen as stalking Haller to get an interview, and Haller wants nothing to do with him.²⁹

Connelly's *The Scarecrow* starts not long after *The Brass Verdict* ends. At this point, Jack has worked at *The Los Angeles Times* for seven years,³⁰ and his fame has all but disappeared, making him long for his former days of glory.³¹ He has just been laid off by assistant managing editor, Richard Kramer, and he is very depressed. The paper has given him two weeks, and he now finds himself with the weekend off³² to contemplate his fate.

So, what does he do next? He drowns his sorrows with booze.

"Oh man. We gotta get drunk tonight."

"I am, that's for sure."³³

But before he can get out the Spring Street doors,³⁴ he receives a phone call from the grandmother of a young man named Alonzo Wilson, who had been charged with the recent brutal killing of a woman. Jack had written a story a few days before on the murder and arrest. The grandmother proceeded to yell at Jack and tell him he had gotten the story wrong. She insisted that her grandson was innocent. Jack didn't take notes during the phone call, and dismissed her story as soon as he hung up with her. He and Larry then went to a local bar.

After his weekend bender, he returned to work to train the reporter replacing him. Angela Cook is fresh out of journalism school,³⁵ and she is a mojo reporter,³⁶ a mobile

journalist who can file text, photos and video from the field.³⁷ She is enthusiastic and quickly catches on.

Jack had decided over the weekend that he wanted to go out with a bang, and to pursue the possible lead he had on Alonzo Wilson's case.³⁸ This made working with Angela a little more bearable. It was the ultimate adios: write a story that would win awards. *The Times* would look foolish laying off a journalist who had won recent accolades.

Jack manages to find Alonzo's grandmother and goes to meet her.³⁹ Things don't go too well, but he does get her to agree to help him. He also talks to Alonzo's lawyer and is able to get Alonzo's confession. When he finally gets a chance to look over the 900 plus page document, he realizes Alonzo never confessed to the murder. While that doesn't necessarily prove Alonzo's innocence, it does cast some doubt into the case against him. This doubt increases Jack's interest in the case.

He tells Angela of his plans and continues with his research. The next morning Jack gets to the office and finds out the police department is holding a press conference about Alonzo's case. Angela is already there, but Jack tells her that he wants to cover it because it is about Alonzo. He gets to the conference and Angela is sitting toward the front with her laptop, filing short pieces for the online edition of *The Times*. When Jack returns to the office from the conference he finds out that Angela has beaten him in more ways than one.⁴⁰ She had already started writing the story for the press conference, and Alan Prendergrast, the editor who oversaw the police and court reporters, had already spoken to her about something else. Angela wanted in on Jack's story and had proposed a two-part profile: the first part on the victim and the second on Alonzo.

“Look, Angela, I don’t like how you did this, but I admire how you just go after what you want. All the best reporters I have known are that way. And I have to say your idea of doing the double-profile of both killer and victim is the better way to go.”⁴¹

Jack and Angela then get to work on their prospective stories. As he discovered during his work on the Poet case, Jack finds a connection investigators had missed in Alonzo’s case. The murder is eerily similar to a murder in Las Vegas. This discovery excites him, and he boards a plane to Las Vegas after sending an e-mail to Prendergrast to let him know. He also calls Rachel Walling, his old flame from *The Poet*, on his way to try to get the FBI involved. But she dismisses his story.

In Vegas, he discovers that the murders are connected, and the murderer nearly catches him. Strange things also have been happening. Jack’s credit cards no longer work, and someone drains his bank account of its money. Angela, who stayed in L.A., has disappeared. Jack’s life is also in danger. Rachel shows up at just the right time, though, and saves Jack from the killer. Angela is not so lucky.

Rachel and Jack return to L.A. and discover Angela’s body planted in Jack’s house. Jack is subsequently questioned before returning to work. Also like the Poet case, Jack returns to the newsroom to find out he has been taken off the story. Larry Bernard, one of the reporters saved from the ax so far, has been assigned to write it. Left to brood about losing another story, Jack again makes a discovery while diving into his files. He realizes what, besides the killer, connects the two victims. He boards a plane for Phoenix, Arizona, but not before he tells Rachel about his discovery.

A data storage center in Arizona hosts thousands of websites. Among those websites are the law firms representing the two victims in cases pending before their

deaths.⁴² Jack gets to Arizona and persuades Rachel that it's a good idea to pose as prospective clients of the data storage center.⁴³ They both enter the storage center to conduct the ruse. Conveniently, the company's CEO, who was supposed to meet with them, was out of the office. They also found another employee had jumped ship, leaving so quickly he left important things behind.⁴⁴ Jack and Rachel suspect the CEO and the employee who jumped ship are the killers they are looking for, and they alert the FBI of their findings.

The investigation into the pair of killers goes smoothly, almost too smoothly. The FBI finds material in their homes linking them to the crimes. After a job well done, Jack and Rachel head back to their hotel. Jack is supposed to fly back to L.A. while Rachel is assigned to stay in Arizona with the other investigators. That night Jack talks to Rachel about the investigation, gleaning as much information he can before she tells him she is ready for some food and bed. Jack hangs up with her just as room service arrives at Rachel's door. He hangs up and smiles, picking up a bottle of wine and a corkscrew in the process. He is still in Phoenix.

On his way to Rachel's room, he spots a hotel service person lying on the floor in the stairwell. Immediately, he becomes concerned for Rachel. As he rushes down the hallway, he manages to call 911. He notices that the door to Rachel's room is open, and he shoves his way into the room only to find it empty and some blood on a pillow.

Jack spots a suspicious person at the end of the hall with an unusually heavy laundry basket and runs after him. The suspect boards the elevator right before Jack could get in. He thinks fast and manages to beat the person to the hotel's kitchen where he foils the plan and saves Rachel. After Jack sees that Rachel is okay, he runs after the killer and

eventually catches him in the stairwell. As he did with the first killer in the previous book, Jack distracts the murderer with words, asking him question after question. They struggle, and before the police and FBI can arrive Jack gets the upper hand, and pushes the killer over the side of the stairs, and he falls to his death.

Again, Jack finds himself a part of the story, and again he has killed the man he was after. This time, though, he sees he is really close to the story and is not surprised when he is taken off of it. He then returns to L.A. Because of his work on the case, the paper offers him his job back.⁴⁵ But Jack turns the offer down. He already has a book deal, and he has been asked by the editor of the *velvetcoffin.com* to write for their new investigative section.⁴⁶ Kramer asks Jack to leave the office immediately.

On his way out the door, Dorothy Fowler, the city editor, asks him to come to her office. As he stands there talking to her, he notices something. There is a picture from *The Wizard of Oz* on her wall. The Scarecrow's costume looks eerily similar to the way the murdered women were asphyxiated. Jack does a quick Google search of the Scarecrow, and his suspicions are confirmed. Jack also finds other connections the Scarecrow has to the case. In that instant of revelation, he realizes that the two men they thought were behind the murders were just fall guys. The real killer is still in the data center, and Rachel is in the data center with him.

Jack flies to Phoenix and meets with Rachel to talk about his discovery. He convinces her, and then they go back to the data center to get the real mastermind behind the killings. But the Scarecrow has already managed to trap two FBI agents in an enclosed room that can only be opened biometrically by the killer's hand. He is about ready to kill them by sending carbon dioxide gas into the room. Jack follows a hunch that

leads him to the killer. They struggle, and just before Jack's life is ended, Rachel shows up and shoots the killer. She doesn't quite kill him, who barely clings to life. They manage to get the other agents out in the nick of time.

When Jack finally gets home, he ends up in the same situation he was in at the end of the previous book - with one notable exception. He has his book deal and has begun writing. But this time he is not alone. He has Rachel there to comfort him.

What Happened to Journalism?

An insightful description of journalism's evolution lies within the pages of *The Scarecrow*.

They [The Red Wind] used to put the front pages of the A section, Metro and Sports over the urinals in the men's restroom. Now they had flat-screen plasma TVs tune to Fox and CNN and Bloomberg. Each screen adding insult to injury, a reminder that our business was dying.⁴⁷

While this situation may not mean all that much to the average person, it means everything to Jack. *The Los Angeles Times* and print news in general has been replaced by technology. Just as the TV screens replaced the men's restroom readings, the Internet has begun to take over the print edition of the paper. Jack sees the newspaper and himself as a dying breed. As he is training Angela on the police beat, he puts it this way.

"I would miss Parker Center precisely because I was like Parker Center. Antiquated and obsolete."⁴⁸

Younger reporters, like Angela who could do it all, were infiltrating the newsroom, leaving the older reporters in their wake. But is the decline of the newsroom and newspaper really only because of the Internet?

Many experts attribute the decline of traditional media, such as newspapers and magazines, at least in part to a drop in advertising revenue. The downturn in the economy

started the spiral, because companies no longer had the disposable income to purchase advertising space and many companies disappeared altogether. Another contributing factor was the loss of the classified section of the paper, a big source of income for papers. The classifieds had moved online to websites like Craig's List or Monster.com. And still another factor is decreased budgets at the papers. Without as much money to spend, newspapers cut staff and circulation, creating in many cases newspapers with barely there content.⁴⁹

The Scarecrow paints a very vivid and grim picture of the state of the news media. Real reporters, the journalists who had worked in the profession for years, were being laid off by the hundreds. Papers were downsizing all over the country. Perhaps the most notable example of this downsizing was the closing of the *The Rocky Mountain News*, the newspaper Jack worked for in *The Poet*. While *The Scarecrow* was in pre-press for publication, the paper shut its doors, and Connelly had to make changes to the book accordingly.⁵⁰

After word gets around that Jack has been laid off from *The L.A. Times*, an old *Rocky* co-worker gives him a call. Van Jackson had lost his job with the close of that paper, and he still couldn't find another. He called Jack to lend him words of encouragement. This is part of the voice message he left.

"I've gotta tell you the truth, man. There's nothing out there. I'm just about ready to start selling cars, but all the car dealers are in the toilet, too."⁵¹

The Los Angeles Times continues to suffer from revenue losses, doing another round of layoffs as recently as December of 2009. Fortunately for Jack, his celebrity status doesn't make him in need of work at the end of *The Scarecrow*. If only all reporters

could be so lucky. The Internet may have run Jack over,⁵² but he had managed to find a way to get back up. In the end, he even embraced it when he took the job with the *velvetcoffin.com*.⁵³ Not many 30 club members had that luxury.

In *The Poet*, technology is markedly dated and there is no sign newspapers are struggling.⁵⁴ *The Rocky Mountain News* in fact seems to thrive.

Jack has a laptop in the novel, but it doesn't have wireless. He repeatedly has to connect the equipment to a phone line to get any network capability, and then he has to wait around for the network to connect. Stories in the newsroom are transferred electronically, however.⁵⁵ There are no flash drives,⁵⁶ no digital video recorders,⁵⁷ and no web updates for stories. Some newspapers didn't even have websites let alone web updates.

Perhaps the most telling detail about technology in *The Poet* is that the killer Jack killed was tracked down because the equipment he was using was expensive and not widely available. The killer was using a digital camera, which only a few stores carried and sold and even fewer companies made. He had to special order it from a store in Los Angeles, and since only two stores carried the camera, the FBI was easily able to find out if any recent orders were taken.

Thus, in the first novel, technology helped Jack, but hurt the Poet. In *The Scarecrow*, it was the opposite. Technology had hurt Jack, but helped the Scarecrow.⁵⁸

The Stereotypical Journalist

I dwelt alone

In a world of moan

And my soul was a stagnant tide.”⁵⁹

The concept of loneliness resurfaces frequently in both novels. Jack has no personal life – save for his encounters with Rachel. He has a handful of friends from the office with whom he barely interacts. And that’s about it.

Before his brother’s death, he and Jack had had a falling out with him, and Jack had minimal contact with his parents and sister-in-law. Jack’s family and Sean are barely mentioned in *The Scarecrow*.

Perhaps the image that recurs the most is Jack alone with his computer.⁶⁰ When he is home alone he puts his computer on the dining room table, eating there while working: “It beats sitting at the table alone and thinking about how I’d been eating alone for more years than I cared to remember.”⁶¹

The idea of the journalist as loner whose best friend is his typewriter – or, now, laptop - appears in other images of the journalist in novels. For example, Jack McMorrow, the fictional creation of Gerry Boyle in his eight-novel Jack McMorrow Mystery series, spends many nights by himself typing.⁶² Brian Keyes, a journalist in Carl Hiaasen’s novels, also spends nights alone.⁶³ Keyes, however, has left journalism to become a detective.⁶⁴

Both McMorrow⁶⁵ and McEvoy also like to drink. In Hiaasen’s novels, however, the journalists do not drink as much. While McMorrow may be borderline alcoholic,⁶⁶ McEvoy is more of a casual drinker. But he is not above using alcohol to take the edge off.⁶⁷ When McEvoy is laid off from *The L.A. Times*, the first thing he thinks of doing is drinking, and he manages to remain drunk all weekend.⁶⁸ Even Rachel has a similar experience. She is forced to resign from the FBI after having used an FBI jet without

authorization to get Jack.⁶⁹ As soon as she and Jack get to the hotel room in Phoenix, she wants to “raid the mini bar.”⁷⁰

In *The Poet*, however, McEvoy’s drinking isn’t quite as prominent.

Another repetitive theme in Connelly’s novels is the idea that Jack will do anything to get the story, and when he doesn’t get the story or loses it he gets angry and depressed.⁷¹ Jack also tends to become childish.

For example, in *The Poet*, Jack negotiates a deal with the FBI to be the first reporter to break the story about the serial killer they are investigating. But Jack learns that someone has leaked information to a reporter. Michael Warren⁷² publishes a piece in *The Los Angeles Times* that connects the murders before Jack even knows the piece is going to run. As Jack flies to Los Angeles to investigate a break in the Poet case, he decides to give Warren a call.

“You fucking asshole! It was my story.”

“The story belongs to whoever writes it, Jack. Remember that . . . You want to go up against me, that’s fine. Then write the fuckin’ story instead of calling me up and whining about it . . . I’m right here and I’ll see you on the front page.”⁷³

The journalist’s ultimate battle is on the front page. Whoever can get that front-page story and write it better than anyone else gets all the glory, and when journalists work hard, they will do anything for that coveted spot.

Jack got cheated out of other front-page stories as well. But he lost these stories because he became too involved with the subjects he was covering.⁷⁴ He went too far to get the stories, and became a part of them as a consequence.

To get the good stories, Jack does a lot of research, reading through hundreds of pages of documents if needed.⁷⁵ He also knows how to work the people he interviews, including police. He sees getting information as a game.⁷⁶ Jack McMorrow also possesses the same tenacity and skill set. He can work a source with the best of them.⁷⁷

These portrayals also fall in line with the image of the male reporter in the movies and television.

Joe Saltzman puts that image this way.

Most male reporters in the movies and television are, like those in the audience, flawed human beings. They are not all good and not all bad but simply trying to get the story at all costs. They may lie or cheat or act more like detectives than reporters, but they are usually forgiven their trespasses because the end result favors the public rather than themselves.⁷⁸

McEvoy does lie⁷⁹ and acts like a detective⁸⁰ to get the story. But despite all of Jack's questionable decisions, he still comes across as a good reporter. And even when he does appear to be motivated by things other than the public interest,⁸¹ he ultimately pursues the truth at all costs.

Jack's commitment to his work makes it hard for him to have a relationship. In *The Poet*, there is no indication Jack has had any meaningful relationship for many years. At least, that is, until Rachel comes along. But even that relationship was rocky at best. They sleep together a few times, and clearly express they have feelings for each other. That is the extent of it, though. Because of their responsibilities to their jobs, they must end it. At the end of the novel, Jack feels more alone than ever.

I've waited to hear from her [Rachel] but there has been no word. I don't think there will be now and I don't think I'll be going to Italy as she once suggested. At night, the ghost that haunts me the most is the thing inside of me that led me to doubt the very thing I wanted most.⁸²

At the start of *The Scarecrow*, Jack's relationship status is just as bleak. He has been married and divorced since he started at *The Los Angeles Times*, and he has few true friends and little contact with his family. By the end of the novel, however, his relationship luck has changed, and he and Rachel end up together despite both of their initial misgivings.⁸³

Carl Hiaasen's reporters have just as bleak social lives as Jack.⁸⁴ Brian Keyes blames his social life on his work.⁸⁵ Jack McMorrow in Boyle's novels does manage to have a relationship. However, McMorrow's relationship raises some issues because his partner is a social worker, and some people wonder if confidentiality is compromised.⁸⁶

Connelly's novels also have a few other intriguing journalistic images: the image of the editor and the television reporter.

Both images are not even remotely favorable.

The editors who appear in Connelly's two novels are only concerned about getting the great story.⁸⁷ They don't care about the cost of the story, and their reporters, Jack included, don't look on them favorably. Greg Glenn, the city editor in *The Poet*, favors a good read over facts.⁸⁸ His top priority is to kick the ass of any other competing paper.⁸⁹ In *The Scarecrow*, Alan Prendergrast, the editor in charge of police and crime reporters, always seems to make deals behind Jack's back.⁹⁰ Jack is old news and Prendergrast wants to see that Angela is happy.⁹¹

Television reporters make a few appearances in both novels. Every time a TV reporter appears, however, Jack makes a disparaging remark about him or her. For example, while Jack is working with the FBI on the Poet investigation, the local news station gets wind of the fact the FBI is in town. A news van shows up outside, and a young, blonde reporter proceeds to shove a microphone into the investigators' faces.⁹² Jack has this to tell Rachel about the incident.

“I’m getting there. But I’m hoping she’s like most TV reporters.”

“And how are they?”

“Sourceless and senseless. If she is, then I’ll be okay.”⁹³

In *The Scarecrow*, Angela is at the police station and notices television crews. Angela is worried they might be a threat. But Jack’s take is completely different.⁹⁴ Jack refers to television reporters as following yesterday’s news or press conferences. They never have a real scoop on anything.

Ethics and Investigation

The Society of Professional Journalists structured its Code of Ethics into four main components.⁹⁵ While Jack probably violates every component at some point in the novels, his most grievous violations fall under the guide to “act independently.”

“Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public’s right to know.”⁹⁶

Jack is not “free of obligation” because he becomes too invested in his stories. He has multiple conflicts of interest. Right off the bat in *The Poet*, Jack decides to write about his brother’s death. Jack should not have been allowed to pursue the story in the first place, because he had a stake in the story’s outcome and knew the victim. Yet, his editor, Greg Glenn, allows him to do it anyway. While pursuing that story, he meets an FBI agent on the case and sleeps with her. Sleeping with a source would damage his credibility. Yet, on his side, the publication does nothing to reprimand Jack for his actions. Rachel, on the other hand, ends up losing her position as FBI profiler and is sent to South Dakota for a few years.⁹⁷ Even though Jack is sleeping with a source and knows one of the victims in the case, Jack still is allowed to pursue the story. It isn’t until he

kills one of the suspected killers that the conflict of interest seems important to his editors.

Jack's situation in *The Scarecrow* is similar to what happens to him in *The Poet*. Again he sleeps with a source, and again he kills one of the suspects in the case. He is, however, taken off the story much sooner this time, but his removal still has nothing to do with his relationship with Rachel. This time one of the victims happens to be found dead under Jack's bed.

In addition to conflicts of interest, Jack doesn't always treat his sources with respect.⁹⁸ This is especially evident in *The Scarecrow*. For example, he originally intends to use Alonzo's story as a means to get on the front page of *The L.A. Times*. Jack has fallen victim to the knowledge gap theory,⁹⁹ a communication theory that suggests people from different socioeconomic backgrounds have different levels of knowledge. Those differing levels of knowledge result in communication problems. Jack believes he is smarter than Alonzo and his grandmother and knows he can take advantage of their socioeconomic status to sell a story. He doesn't think either the grandmother or Alonzo has sufficient knowledge to realize they are being manipulated.

In the end, though, his conscience gets the better of him, and he decides to find out all he can about Alonzo so he can write the story that will set him free. Jack has become invested again in the public interest.

His conscience also makes him change his mind on a few questionable decisions in *The Poet*. Jack travels to Chicago to investigate one of the murders. He visits the place where the body of a young boy was found.¹⁰⁰ At the spot, flowers and notes memorialize the young victim. Jack sees a photo of the boy at the site and decides to take it because he

thinks he can use it to run with a story.¹⁰¹ Before leaving Chicago, however, he decides that his actions may not have been the most respectful. So, he returns the photo.¹⁰²

Jack finds himself confronted with this type of ethical dilemma on more than one occasion. In *The Scarecrow*, Jack returns to his house after Angela's body has been removed and the house has been thoroughly examined. He walks into his bedroom, looks at where the bed had been and Angela had been found, and feels no sadness or guilt.¹⁰³ As he goes to where his computer was, his demeanor changes, and the sadness overcomes him.¹⁰⁴

But even with these ethical lapses, Jack always manages to turn around and save the day.

Fame

Jack McEvoy never quite manages to reach to the top in *The Scarecrow* or *The Poet*. But the reader knows he is headed there. At the end of *The Poet*, McEvoy is already a celebrity journalist. People know him as the man who killed a suspect in that sensational serial killer case. He had a book deal, and was going to get a big payout.¹⁰⁵ However, his true 15 minutes came in the time following the book.

On the other hand, in *The Scarecrow*, Jack is clearly no longer famous. He is that guy who kind of looks familiar. Even worse, he is that guy who is painfully aware he only looks familiar.¹⁰⁶ He reached this point well before *The Scarecrow*. In *A Darkness More Than Night*, the first time he sees Terry McCaleb, McCaleb recognizes him. But McCaleb doesn't quite remember from where.¹⁰⁷ Jack has to introduce himself before any recognition registers.

By the end of *The Scarecrow*, Jack clearly has achieved some notoriety, but again his peak of fame from the Scarecrow case is likely to come well after the book ends. Despite the fact that the reader never quite sees Jack at the height of his celebrity, it is evident he wants to be there. In *The Poet*, he mentions multiple times that he wants to be a celebrity novelist. Early in the book, Jack tells Riley, Sean's widow, about their high school goals:

I remember when we graduated from high school we both pretty much knew what we wanted to do. I was going to write books and be famous or rich or both. Sean was going to be chief of detectives at DPD and solve all of the mysteries of the city... Neither of us quite made it. Sean was closest, though.¹⁰⁸

To some degree, Jack achieved his high school goal. But what drives a person to want to be famous in the first place?

One theory suggests that if people want to improve in their field they look to others to validate their work and worth.

“No matter the field, if we look to progress, we have to depend on people to say we are not only capable, but the exact person to fulfill a need,” said Bakari Akil II, a professor of communication, in an article for *Psychology Today*. “To go a step further, we need gatekeepers to say this.”¹⁰⁹

The ultimate validation, for some, is fame.

Jack clearly wanted that recognition, and he felt he needed it to achieve the level of success he wanted. He was motivated to do well by the thought that he may have that front-page story, get that Pulitzer, or write that amazing book. While he never gets the Pulitzer, he does write that book. Yet, even with the sense of accomplishment, there is a pull to get that recognition all over again.

Once a person achieves some level of celebrity, they aren't always prepared for what happens. Perhaps, more importantly, no one ever tells them what happens when they are no longer in the public eye. Jack's rise to fame in both novels does come at a price.

As he is on leave from *The Rocky Mountain News* to write his book, Jack is very aware of the fact the money he earned is blood money because of Sean's death.¹¹⁰ To live with that, he decides to give some of his royalties to Riley and Sean's child.

At the beginning of *The Scarecrow*, Jack remembers his golden days. He remembers when he had a best-selling book and was on television. But in his current situation he has lost his self-worth, becoming depressed. Depression is a common ailment among the famous, and even those who used to be famous.¹¹¹ He wanders around in a fog until he finds a purpose again. His journey from *The Poet* to *The Scarecrow* is the ultimate fall from the top.

Final Thoughts

Jack McEvoy is a hard-working reporter who spends more time with his computer than developing meaningful relationships. He knows how to play hardball to get his sources to tell him what he wants. Sometimes, he makes ethically questionable decisions, which include sleeping with a source. But those decisions don't get in the way of his work. Jack is always more concerned about telling the truth than what it costs to get it.

Connelly's protagonist shares characteristics with the image of male journalists in other novels. His devotion to the craft and loneliness are seen in Jack McMorrow from Gerry Boyle's novels and Brian Keyes from Carl Hiaasen's novels. Jack McEvoy and

Brian Keyes both have failed relationships. McMorrow and McEvoy know how to work sources.

But do people read these portrayals?

The Scarecrow debuted at No. six on *The New York Times* Paperback Mass-Market Fiction list.¹¹² Since then, it has made it up to the number two spot¹¹³ on the list, and on March 25, 2010 it sits in the No. 14 spot.¹¹⁴ This book has reached many readers, and many more people will continue to read it.

So, what does Connelly's image tell readers about journalists?

Readers see a man who has no life; who has been thrown away by his profession; who had fame and then lost it and then got it again; who compromises his values; who risks his life for his work; and who, most importantly, still manages to get the girl and succeed through it all.

Steve Weinberg puts his concerns with fictional portrayals of journalists like Jack this way:

In fact, I worry a lot about the unrealistic picture a nonjournalist must take away from these novels: according to most of them, we lack an ethical center, sleep regularly with sources, and solve so many crimes, especially murders, that it is a wonder the police have anything to do.¹¹⁵

Weinberg's description of fictional journalists fits Jack McEvoy nearly perfectly. Yet, he misses some important points. Images like Jack McEvoy, Jack McMorrow and Brian Keyes are not completely bad. They are hard workers who care immensely about the profession and finding the truth. And even though their personal glory sometimes gets the better of them, the hazards of the business bring them back to reality. Weinberg also fails to acknowledge one other vital component of the journalist's image. He doesn't take into account that no matter how negative the portrayal is it is still rooted in a little truth.

Some journalists do sleep with sources; some also are unethical.

However, readers may remember the bad images more than the good. If they do, those images would cloud their judgment of journalists and journalism as a whole. Social Judgment Theory¹¹⁶ states that when a person is presented with a statement or message about a particular subject, they make decisions about that subject based on what they already know. Thus, if a person only sees images similar to Jack McEvoy, they might assume all journalists sleep with their sources or drink and stay to themselves. They might not remember McEvoy's positive qualities.

So, while the images of the journalist in fiction definitely have both positive and negative characteristics, perhaps it's more important to keep in mind the lasting effects of these portrayals. Characters like McEvoy have tremendous staying power. They stick around not only on the page, but in the minds of the thousands of readers as well.

Endnotes

¹Michael Connelly, *The Poet* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1996).

²Michael Connelly, *The Scarecrow* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2010).

³Michael Connelly, *The Poet*, p. 17.

⁴Op. Cit., p. 92.

⁵Michael Connelly is a fiction crime writer who has written more than 20 novels. He has gained the most readership from his series on detective Hieronymus Bosch, penning 15 novels about the character. Before Connelly started writing novels, he worked as a journalist in Florida and Los Angeles, primarily covering the crime beat.

⁶McEvoy appears in *The Poet*, *The Scarecrow* and then briefly in *A Darkness More Than Night* and *The Brass Verdict*.

⁷*The Poet* and *The Scarecrow* are novels in which McEvoy is the main character. He only appears briefly in *A Darkness More Than Night* and *The Brass Verdict*.

⁸Writing skills, determination, and uncanny ability to find things other people would miss

⁹Michael Connelly, *The Poet*, p. 212

¹⁰ Op. Cit., p. 272.

¹¹ Op. Cit., p. 17.

¹² Op. Cit., p. 17.

¹³ Op. Cit., p. 99.

¹⁴ Op. Cit., p. 18.

¹⁵ Op. Cit., p. 22.

¹⁶ Op. Cit., p. 79.

¹⁷ Op. Cit., p. 92.

¹⁸ Op. Cit., p. 206.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Op. Cit., p. 182. Jack and Rachel meet on an elevator ride. He looks at her in the elevator and thinks she is attractive. They get off at the 12th floor together and Jack walks to his room. He opens the door and the next thing he knows she has him pinned to the bed as she announces she is an FBI agent and he is under arrest. She cuffs him and takes him by car to Quantico, FBI headquarters in Washington, D.C. On the way, however, something she says makes Jack wonder and he begins to question her. Eventually he figures out she is lying. She then admits it's all a scam, and he is not under arrest.

²¹ Op. Cit., p. 275. They make love on multiple occasions in the novel.

²² William Gladden, the killer, is a pedophile who makes his living by selling photos of children and his murder victims. He uses a digital camera, which is not sold by a lot of retailers in 1995. So, he has to special order it, and the FBI figures out his source.

²³ Michael Connelly, *The Poet*, p. 423.

²⁴ Op. Cit., p. 500.

²⁵ Michael Connelly, *A Darkness More Than Night* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2001).

²⁶ Op. Cit., p. 447.

²⁷ Michael Connelly, *The Brass Verdict* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2008).

²⁸ Op. Cit., p. 321. Haller is mad at Jack because Jack promised him a story would run by Sunday and it was now a Thursday. Jack has to explain it was the editor's fault. They pushed the story back. Haller doesn't buy it.

²⁹ Op. Cit., p. 523.

³⁰ Michael Connelly, *The Poet*, p. 113.

³¹ Michael Connelly, *The Scarecrow*, p. 74.

³² Op. Cit., p. 9. Jack is laid off on a Friday and has the weekend to ponder what to do next.

³³ Op. Cit., p. 11. Jack regales Larry Bernard, a fellow *L.A. Times* reporter with the day's events. Larry says the first sentence in the dialogue. Jack replies. They go to a bar called the Short Stop, and Jack drinks so much the bartender takes away his keys. He continues to drink throughout the weekend.

³⁴ *The Los Angeles Times* takes up one square block on Spring Street in downtown Los Angeles.

³⁵ Op. Cit., p. 13.

³⁶ A mojo refers to a young reporter who could do it all and had the drive to do it all as well. Jack is an oldjo.

³⁷ Michael Connelly, *The Scarecrow*, p. 21-22.

³⁸ Op. Cit., p. 71.

³⁹ Alonzo's grandmother, Wanda Sessums, lives in Rodia Gardens, a housing project in one of L.A.'s poorest neighborhoods.

⁴⁰ Michael Connelly, *The Scarecrow*, p. 119.

⁴¹ Op. Cit., p. 119-120.

⁴² Denise Babbit, the woman Alonzo was accused of killing, had a drug arrest the year before. Sharon Oglevy, the woman killed in the earlier case, was in the middle of a divorce.

⁴³ Michael Connelly, *The Scarecrow*, p. 353. Jack had been given a letter from the lawyer in the Las Vegas case, stating that he was working for the lawyer. This letter was supposed to allow Jack into the prison where the wrongfully accused man, Brian Oglevy, was being held so he could interview him. The killer foiled his plan before he could conduct the interview.

⁴⁴ Jack and Rachel see a box of items. In it are a few books, a set of keys, flash drives and a coffee mug with the requisite pen and pencils.

⁴⁵ Michael Connelly, *The Scarecrow*, p. 489-491.

⁴⁶ Op. Cit., p. 495. The velvetcoffin.com is modeled after LAObserved.com. The site's editor is also modeled after the real site's editor, Kevin Roderick. "Velvet coffin" is the nickname given to the *L.A. Times* in the 1970s, because it took such good care of its employees that no one ever left.

⁴⁷ Op. Cit., p. 299.

⁴⁸ Op. Cit., p. 101.

⁴⁹ Rick Edmonds, "Another Dismal Circulation Report Is On the Way," Poynter Online, 5 October 2009, <http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=123&aid=171113>.

⁵⁰ Michael Connelly, "The Scarecrow Interview with Michael Connelly," Site managed by Jane Davis, http://www.michaelconnelly.com/Book_Collection/Scarecrow/Interview/interview.html (accessed January 30, 2010).

⁵¹ Michael Connelly, *The Scarecrow*, p. 80.

⁵² Op. Cit., p. 374.

⁵³ Op. Cit., p. 495.

⁵⁴ This corresponds to the state of the news industry in the mid-90s. Things were still stable. The A-section was still tacked above the urinals in the men's room.

⁵⁵ Jack receives most of his research on the road when Laurie Prine, *The Rocky Mountain News*' librarian, would put the files into his basket.

⁵⁶ Michael Connelly, *The Scarecrow*, p. 87. Alonzo's lawyer hands Jack a flash drive that contains all of the important documents relating to Alonzo's case. The flash drive is a sign that Jack is now in the digital world.

⁵⁷ Michael Connelly, *The Scarecrow*, p. 83. Jack records his conversation with Alonzo's lawyer by using a microrecorder, making a point in his narrative to mention the equipment is about the size of a lighter.

⁵⁸ The Scarecrow used the information electronically stored in the data center to find his prey, and he used the Internet to find Angela and Jack.

⁵⁹ Michael Connelly, *The Poet*, p. 207. Jack came across these lines of poetry from Poe while researching the author and poet for his story on the serial killer. On this page, he

finds the words sticking in his mind after Rachel leaves him to get coffee during an FBI meeting.

⁶⁰ Michael Connelly, *The Poet*, p. 271.

⁶¹ Op. Cit., p. 70.

⁶² Joshua Talley, "The Stringer," *The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Student Research Papers*, December 2004,

<http://www.ijpc.org/IJPC%20Student%20Journal%20Josh%20Talley%20McMorrow.pdf>, p. 2 and 4.

⁶³ Cortney Fielding, "Seen Better Days: The Portrayal of Journalists in Carl Hiaasen Novels," *The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Student Research Papers*, July 2006, <http://www.ijpc.org/IJPC%20Student%20Journal%20-%20Cortney%20Fielding.pdf>, p. 5.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Op. Cit., p. 2, 10, 11, 14, 15, 20, 21, 27, and 29.

⁶⁶ Op. Cit., p. 21.

⁶⁷ Michael Connelly, *The Scarecrow*, p. 11.

⁶⁸ Op. Cit., p. 32.

⁶⁹ While Rachel did resign after a personnel hearing in Washington, D.C., and she joined Jack in Phoenix that same day, Rachel's resignation was never really official, and, after she and Jack found who they thought were the killers at Western Data, her status as an agent was reinstated.

⁷⁰ Op. Cit., p. 355.

⁷¹ Michael Connelly, *The Poet*, p. 352.

⁷² When Jack first encountered Warren, Warren was working for a law enforcement research department, working on a study about police suicides. Warren had recently left *The L.A. Times* where he worked as a reporter. While investigating the suicides, Warren agrees to be an anonymous source for Jack, giving him copies of files that help him with the case. Warren's boss finds out he leaked Jack the files, and Warren resigns, using Jack's story to get back with *The Times*.

⁷³ Michael Connelly, *The Poet*, p. 328.

⁷⁴ Different reporters were assigned to the Poet story after Jack killed one of the killers. In the Scarecrow story, another reporter was assigned when Jack found Angela dead under his bed and also when Jack killed one of the killers.

⁷⁵ Michael Connelly, *The Scarecrow*, p. 88.

⁷⁶ Op. Cit., p. 197.

⁷⁷ Joshua Talley, "The Stringer," p. 5.

⁷⁸ Joe Saltzman, "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: a Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media" (presentation, annual convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, San Antonio, TX, August 12, 2005), p. 36.

⁷⁹ In *The Scarecrow*, he lies his way into the building, posing as an employer for a Las Vegas law firm.

⁸⁰ Jack goes one step further than this, negotiating his way onto the FBI's investigative team in both novels.

⁸¹ Michael Connelly, *The Scarecrow*, p. 70. Sonny Lester, a photographer Jack takes with him on an interview, accuses Jack of using the person he spoke with for the sake of a story. While Jack admits he is right, once Jack finds out the truth, he pursues the story in the public interest.

⁸² Michael Connelly, *The Poet*, p. 500.

⁸³ Rachel had been married and divorced before the start of *The Poet*. Her relationships with men had gone just as poorly as Jack's relationships with women.

⁸⁴ Courtney Fielding, "Seen Better Days: Portrayals of Journalists in Carl Hiaasen Novels," p. 6.

⁸⁵ Op. Cit., p. 6.

⁸⁶ Op. Cit., p. 36.

⁸⁷ Greg Glenn in *The Poet* and Alan Prendergrast in *The Scarecrow* both are concerned more about the paper than the reporter.

⁸⁸ Michael Connelly, *The Poet*, p. 21.

⁸⁹ Op. Cit., p. 149.

⁹⁰ Michael Connelly, *The Scarecrow*, p. 138.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Op. Cit., p. 248.

⁹³ Op. Cit., p. 249.

⁹⁴ Michael Connelly, *The Scarecrow*, p. 95.

⁹⁵ "Code of Ethics," Society of Professional Journalists,

<http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Michael Connelly, *The Scarecrow*, p. 193.

⁹⁸ Society of Professional Journalists. Code of Ethics. Under the minimize harm heading, reporters should "treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect."

⁹⁹ "Knowledge Gap," University of Twente, 6 September 2004,

http://www.cw.utwente.nl/theorieenoverzicht/Theory%20clusters/Mass%20Media/knowledge_gadoc/.

¹⁰⁰ Bobby Smathers, a young boy, was brutally murdered. His death also led to the death of a homicide cop on the case.

¹⁰¹ Michael Connelly, *The Poet*, p. 111.

¹⁰² Op. Cit., p. 118.

¹⁰³ Michael Connelly, *The Scarecrow*, p. 319.

¹⁰⁴ Op. Cit., p. 322.

¹⁰⁵ Michael Connelly, *The Poet*, p. 500.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Connelly, *The Scarecrow*, p. 74.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Connelly, *A Darkness More Than Night*, p. 82.

¹⁰⁸ Michael Connelly, *The Poet*, p. 99.

¹⁰⁹ Bakari Akil II, "The Theory of Social Validation," Psychology Today, 13 September 2009, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/communication-central/200909/the-theory-social-validation>.

¹¹⁰ Michael Connelly, *The Poet*, p. 500.

¹¹¹ Mary Loftus, "The Other Side of Fame," *Psychology Today*, 1 May 1995, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/199505/the-other-side-fame>.

¹¹² "Paperback Mass-Market Fiction," *The New York Times*, 5 February 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/14/books/bestseller/bestpapermassfiction.html?ref=review>.

¹¹³ "Paperback Mass-Market Fiction," *The New York Times*, 19 February 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/28/books/bestseller/bestpapermassfiction.html?ref=review>.

¹¹⁴ "Paperback Mass-Market Fiction," *The New York Times*, 25 March 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/04/books/bestseller/bestpapermassfiction.html?ref=bestseller>.

¹¹⁵ Weinberg, Steve, "The Reporter in The Novel," *Columbia Journalism Review* 36, no. 4 (November 1997): 17-18. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*, EBSCOhost. (accessed February 13, 2010).

¹¹⁶ "Social Judgment Theory," University of Kentucky, 14 February 2001, <http://www.uky.edu/~drlane/capstone/persuasion/socjud.htm>.

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<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/04/books/bestseller/bestpapermassfiction.html?ref=bestseller>.

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