



## Peter Robinson

**Cold Is the Grave**  
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**Q: How did you make the jump from poetry and literature to crime fiction? What drew you to the genre, and what keeps you there?**

A: For years I wrote only poetry and studied literature in general. In the late seventies and early eighties, I found myself dissatisfied with the direction in which poetry was going and became more interested in its formal structures. The next thing I knew I was tending towards narrative verse, so it wasn't such a great leap to prose fiction. Crime fiction was immediately attractive because of its formal and structured nature, though I have tried to move away from some of the stricter requirements since then—and that's probably what keeps me there, the feeling that you can push at the boundaries, go further with each book. It was also interesting to me because it seemed to provide a way for a writer both to tell a good story and say something about society and human nature, and that's something else that keeps it fresh for me. The writers who first drew me to the genre were Raymond Chandler, Georges Simenon and Ross Macdonald.

**Q: Where do your ideas come from? Specifically, how did you develop *Cold is the Grave*?**

A: Ideas come from all over the place, and *Cold is the Grave* has several sources. First, when I was writing *Blood at the Root*, I did a lot of research over the Internet and was amazed and appalled at the number of Neo-Nazi Web sites. The same can be said for sex sites. Not appalling, as I don't find nudity or depictions of the sex act at all appalling, the way as I do racism and holocaust denial, but there are certainly plenty of them, and they are easy to find. Many of them are amateur, and I just wondered, "What if a father saw a photo of his runaway teenage daughter naked on one of these sites?" It seemed like a good starting point. The second stage was, "Who could the father be?" In the previous few books, I had outlined a conflict between Banks and his boss, Chief Constable Riddle. Riddle was still pretty much a one-dimensional character to me—the tyrannical boss—so I knew I either had to develop him, dissect him and find out what makes him tick, or simply dump him. I chose the former, and *Cold is the Grave* is as much an exploration of Riddle, his background and his family as anything else. Thirdly, I wanted some sort of organized crime that avoided the usual clichés of drugs, prostitution and gambling, so when I read a series of articles in the newspapers about huge smuggling and bootlegging operations, that seemed tailor-made for my needs.

**Q: Tell us about Banks. Is there a person or persons who inspired him? How much is Alan Banks like Peter Robinson and vice versa?**

A: If I told you, you wouldn't believe me! I made Banks up out of nowhere—I didn't know any policemen at the time—and named him after an old school friend I haven't seen for years. Certainly his fictional models would include detectives such as Maigret and Wexford, though I have tried to make Banks a bit more modern and open to new ideas. There's definitely a bit of the rebel and the Don Quixote in him—he kicks against the pricks and tilts at windmills—and perhaps some of that comes from me. We're not really alike, though we share some tastes in music and agree on a number of political issues. We also share the same working-class background, and I think our lives followed a similar course until our late teens when I went into university and a career in literature, teaching and writing, and Banks joined the police. Since then we have diverged, but our paths cross once in a while. I can't say too much about him as I find he is constantly evolving, and I'm still discovering new things about him, which helps to keep the series fresh for me.

**Q: Your novels are very detailed, and the police procedure seems quite realistic and believable. Describe your research process.**

A: Creating the illusion of believability is one of the chief tasks of the novelist. Outlining the actual methods one takes to achieve it doesn't really help to explain it at all. What do I do? I ask questions, read books, surf the 'net. Over the years I have got to know a few police detectives, and they are only too willing to answer my questions—it just takes them a while sometimes, if I don't get them in the pub and buy them a few pints! I don't like to get hung up on research and police procedure. It's more important for me to get under the skin of the characters and pay attention to the human stuff. Usually, it's a matter of my wanting to do a certain thing and asking if there's any way I can get away with it, make it believable. There usually is, even if it means giving Banks a temporary promotion so that he can believably head a certain investigation, as I have had to do in the book I'm working on now.

**Q: You have lived in Canada since 1974, yet you set these novels in England. Why? Do you find it difficult to write long distance?**

A: I still knew far more about England when I started playing with the idea of the series in the late seventies. I probably still do. I think the place where you spend your formative years—go to school, play, date your first girlfriend—is the place that continues to exert the greatest influence on you in later life. I also went to university in England and went through the whole "sixties" experience there. So it's where I grew up. Of course, the place has changed a lot since then, and I have to make more of an effort to keep up. I have to watch my language, too, as I've been here long enough to say "pants" instead of "trousers," and my English readers come down on me like a ton of bricks over things like that. I usually blame the copy editor! Also, the distance gives me a unique perspective I simply wouldn't have if I lived there—a certain degree of detachment towards the social structure—and perhaps even a sense of nostalgia that imbues the landscape descriptions. Of course, I also go back frequently and eavesdrop on conversations in pubs.

**Q: What's the writing process like for you? Do you get ideas fully formed, or do they take some time to germinate? When they come, do you immediately write the entire novel, or do you take your time getting it down on paper?**

A: I start when the pressure builds up to a certain point, but I have little idea of the plot beyond the identity of the victim and a circle of friends/enemies. Mostly, I depend on ideas coming as I write, rather than sitting back and waiting for them. It usually works, but it can be very frustrating at times! I've often wished I were the kind of writer who could sit down and produce a detailed outline, then fill in the dots, but that doesn't work for me.

**Q: Your plots are quite complex. How do you approach plotting a novel?**

A: Again, the plot develops organically as I write. I used to rush through a first draft and then rewrite and rewrite, but now, partly

because I'm comfortable working on a computer, I tend to go back more often and add layers and new details as I go, so that I end up with a draft far closer to the final one than I used to.

**Q: *Cold is the Grave* seems to be about coming to terms. Banks comes to terms with his marriage, some of the tragedies that have happened in his life and his children growing up. Yet at the very end, he realizes that the loss of innocence will never stop happening to him. How do you think this will affect his outlook on life?**

A: I'm not sure that he has come to terms with things as much as he has taken the first step: recognizing that there are things he has to come to terms with. That, I think, will be an ongoing process. The loss of innocence is unlikely to end for Banks. He's certainly got a bit gloomier lately, but then he still manages to have a bit of fun every now and then. His outlook on life hasn't changed that much, but it has become harder for him to cling onto his sense of compassion in the face of all he has had to deal with over the past three or four books.

**Q: What about Banks's relationship with Annie Cabbot? Does this have happily-ever-after potential for Banks?**

A: I don't think they'll ever live happily-ever-after together because they both want different things. Banks is recently separated and in some ways unconsciously looking for something to replace what he had. Annie isn't that replacement; she's her own person, and her renewed interest in her career is also becoming more important to her. On the other hand, they certainly have an attraction for one another that's hard to fight. Annie's still hanging on so far, and I can see her staying around Eastvale for some time yet, whether she's Banks's lover or not.

**Q: Without giving anything away, what's next for Alan Banks?**

A: Right now I'm finishing the next Banks novel. Called "Aftermath," it begins with the accidental capture of a serial killer and goes on to explore the effect on the community and investigates the role of his wife. There's a whole lot more going on, of course, but that's all I can say at the moment. Annie's in it, and Jenny Fuller plays a larger part than usual as consultant forensic psychologist.

**Q: What did you learn from writing this book?**

A: That it never gets any easier if you want to do a good job.

**Q: When you aren't writing crime fiction, what type of fiction do you write? Any plans to publish any non-Banks books in the future?**

A: I have written a couple of non-series suspense novels, neither of which has been published in the U.S.A: One - *Caedmon's Song* was about a woman avenging herself on the serial killer who maimed her, and the other *No Cure For Love* was set in L.A., featuring the Threat Management Unit of the L.A.P.D. and the hunt for the stalker of a British actress working in Hollywood. I don't have any plans to do anything else along those lines in the immediate future. As it turns out, I'm always working on a novel, but I do manage to find time for a few short stories, of which I have already published one collection, called *Not Safe After Dark*.

**Q: What's next for you as a writer?**

A: I've promised to write a couple of short stories for anthologies: one to do with the NFL, about which I know very little, and another to do with Shakespeare, about which I know a bit more.

**Q: Do you have a favorite among your novels?**

A: Probably *In A Dry Season* because I was able to do something different, bend the rules, and I really learned a lot from writing the Second World War scenes. I'm also especially fond of *Innocent Graves* because it took years to get it right.

**Q: One last question: Is Banks ever going to quit smoking?**

A: I quit over two years ago, so one day he'll catch up with me!