

# 琉球大学学術リポジトリ

## Grishamの技法について

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## On Grishamism

平 良 勝 明

It may be interesting to look at the phenomenon involving a Mississippi writer named John Grisham that is raging in the publishing industry in America. His books are such business successes that each time the author publishes his agent can count on a substantial return in term of material reward. Since the author started writing stories while he was still in the Mississippi legislature, he has continued to enjoy success and popularity among the reading public. What is the secret to that? What appeals to the average reading audience? Such and others are the questions that launched my investigation of what I came to term Grishamism. They are simple and innocuous questions. But considering the invariable rate at which the author keeps producing novels, it may be fit to stop and analyze the secret to his popularity. Although my method is not going to be the one usually associated with methodical and rigorous academic type that reins the writer in certain boundaries, I see it better suited to delve the variegated depth and facets Grisham's works present to the audience. I will be phantasmagoric and responsive in my approach and will not hesitate to change my style and perspective in accordance with the material I treat. In a sense the approach therefore may not be consistent and at times may strike the reader rather whimsical, I deliberately chose it to well adapt to the changing tones of the author I am dealing with. without much more divagations I will plunge into the fictional entirety that is constituted by various elements that in turn make Grisham's works so appealing and amenable to the public.

I must point out first of all that what attracts Grisham to the reading audience is the authenticity that underlies the author's works. Needless to say no one elements can be isolated and say this is the cause of so many people get drawn to Grisham. It is always a combination of a number of factors working together in a certain manner that any single work comes to be accepted by the readers. But I have to isolate despite the impossibility I mentioned to present to the reader the why's and wherefore's of the author's appeal to his audience. I seemed to have digressed too much already. Let me go back to the question of authenticity in his writings. Without more generalization it may be much better if I just quoted a passage and gave the reader an opportunity to ponder what I mean. The following is from one of the authors recent publications, entitled *The Client*.

"We'll need local counsel, someone in Ord's office," Foltrigg said to Fink as if the decision had

already been made. Then he turned to the group. "I like the sound of this. Right now the kid and his lawyer are probably thinking it's all over. This will be a wake-up call. They'll know we're serious. They'll know they're headed for court. We'll make it plain to his lawyer that we'll not rest until we have the truth from the kid. I like this. Little downside risk. It'll take place three hundred miles from here, away from these morons with cameras we have around here. If we try it and fail, no big deal. No one will know. I like the idea of no cameras and no reporters." He paused as if deep in thought, the field marshal surveying the plains, deciding where to send his tanks. (p. 231)

The quote turned out to be rather lengthy. But in order to make my point it will be proven to have been necessary. As the reader may well have noticed by now, the talk is by a lawyer. It does not take even a perceptive reader to find out what Foltrigg is considering. It is a matter of winning or losing a legal battle. Although the actual confrontation may be still far away, the zeal and scheme with which Foltrigg meditates the strategy is quite vivid. Who would not hear the ominous tone that rumbles below the casual speech Foltrigg pretends to be making? In fact every single word he utters impacts on a nitty-gritty reality. Foltrigg's dictatorial tone even suggests the overwhelming power he usurps for himself. Usurpation or not, the fact emerges that he does wield the power every one is forced to kowtow to. The monotonous tone he generates seeps into the interstices of the fictional space and imparts the macho tone somehow reminiscent of Hemingway. Inserted into this literary and cultural context, Foltrigg's expectant remark—"I like the sound of this. Right now the kid and his lawyer are probably thinking it's all over. This will be a wake-up call."—instantaneously adumbrates the dreadful smile that comes across from the printed page to the reader. The reality impacted tone is further continued as the powerful man confirms what he intends to execute. It is not a mere empty threat that might scare some at first but not completely convince the audience when it is repeated. When even a powerful man fails to deliver on what he implicitly promises, first thing that stares the reader in the face is disappointment. No character can continually attract the audience beyond a certain point. Therefore, it is important that Foltrigg does not sound hollow. His confirmation is an absolute necessity to fill the fictional space with the authentic air that will never remind the reader of the status of the story they are reading. In other words, suspension of disbelief will never be broken by the words Foltrigg utters for the story of this kind to enjoy the hooked attention of the readers. But as with any Grisham books, the embedded humor is never far away when the menacing tone is employed so consistently. Grisham after all is a writer who will not miss an opportunity to enrich his stories with humor, wry or straight. It turns out that what he has been threatening to do is to force the truth out of the child. The reality indeed is stranger than fiction, or is it vice versa? But whatever is the case, his admission injects into the tense atmosphere the kind of expectant air which the audience intuitively feels when the ambiguous senses are interwoven with the remarks the characters make. Foltrigg at this juncture certainly

invites such interpretation by the reader. But no matter how much surprise element is infused not the scene those avid followers of Grisham are of course familiar with Grisham's legal humor. In a sense therefore, the sudden unexpected tack Foltrigg takes is no surprise at all. But at the same it is a surprise, the reader expectantly have waited for. It is the pleasure of consuming popular fiction. To be surprised by the expected. The audience are willing consumers who enjoyed to be surprised by the familiar. Whoever have seen movies made to the stereotypical plot line would understand what I am hinting at. The reason there are so many repeats and remakes of the old successful movies are because the audience desire to be pleased by the expected surprises. It is such a trite observation that I feel I am simply wasting my breath. But what is most surprising is the overall success with which Grisham executes the time honored strategy. The author completely turns the dreadful man into a function that potentially triggers humorous reactions from the reader. That is the effect of the unexpected/expected turnabout of the dreaded man. But the betrayal of the multifaceted character of Foltrigg does not necessarily put a sudden stop to his God Father-like ominous tone that has been underlying the character Foltrigg. Notice that the line "We'll make it plain to his lawyer that we'll not rest until we have the truth from the kid," essentially continues in the same ominous tone. Obviously the humorous side to the character is better kept to the side as much as possible to etch out the multifaceted entity of Foltrigg. The pretended latency of the humorous side to the character is vital, it turns out, to the survival of the character Foltrigg. He is enabled to maintain his tough image because he is allowed to retain the voice that comes across to the audience as tough and powerful. Foltrigg's other side, which elicits wry smiles and even laughs, is downplayed whenever the author has a chance. The multifaceted Foltrigg is therefore presented to the audience as he is, without one side particularly emphasized or sacrificed needlessly. The only objective for the author to achieve is to let the totality of the character of Foltrigg emerge from the macho tone he is prone to adopt. The layers that are woven into the story are there for the reader to decipher. It is hoped that in the process of comprehending the story all the implicit layers are to be perceived and delved by the reader's consciousness to establish the kind of communication only available within well written fiction.

I must analyze what is taking place in terms of the layers I mentioned in the ensuing part in the quoted passage. Foltrigg presents a brazen face he adamantly persists in wearing. He clings to tough words like morons and acts as casually as he can by dismissing the remote chance of failing in their plan as no big deal. But even in his macho image is hidden the possibility that he and the team represented by him is indeed on the wrong side by Foltrigg's evasion of cameras and public eyes. It is always a sign that if someone deliberately shies away from publicity he has some good reason to do so. Otherwise, his furtive act does make no sense. Especially in the fictional space deployed in Grisham's works, if someone acts for no reason at all, the integrity that arises from the tight knit plot and meaningful ordering of each element will suddenly cease to retain their

reason for being there. Then in this context why is Foltrigg shy of cameras? I am making a circular argument here. But it may be obvious by now that Foltrigg reveals his real being in spite of his pretension to being a tough guy because no macho guy who sputters words that constitute his being as such has the kind of weakness that makes that person vulnerable to publicity. Foltrigg's last comment annuls the validity of the cursory comment by the author, likening the powerful man to a field marshal. By then his status has become suspicious to say the least. The description concerning the tactician Foltrigg sounds pathetically hollow. Even the solid scenario that is suggested to follow is not enough to arouse awe in the audience. The revelatory cues woven into the passage bucks against the explicit signification that is embedded on the surface layer. As in reality what meets the eyes is not always the true state of affairs. Therefore, in a full circle Grisham's writing cries in the reader's ear what authenticity in fiction means. It is not necessarily the words or phrases that imitate the real speeches of people but more importantly the inherent tone and layered significations that vibrate with the true spirit of realism.

We will look at another passage in which Foltrigg exhibits more of his reality impacted mentality. There are so many candidates in *The Client* but I chose the following to argue my point.

Ah yes! The Roy Foltrigg special. Get the indictment, hold the press conference, beat the defendant to the ground with all sorts of threats, cut the deal, then quietly dismiss the indictment a year later. He'd done it a hundred times in seven years. He'd also eaten a few of his specials when the defendant and/or his lawyer refused to deal and insisted on a trial. When this happened Foltrigg was always too busy with more important prosecutions, and the file was thrown at one of the younger assistants, who invariably got his ass kicked. Invariably, Foltrigg placed the blame squarely on the assistant. He'd even fired one for losing the trial brought about by a Roy Foltrigg special. (pp. 232-233)

The spirit of the scheming Foltrigg is amply demonstrated by the excerpt. But as his inner self is being exposed by the descriptive passage, he begins to assume a different personality than he initially appeared. The person Foltrigg in other words is somehow diversified into an entity constituted by his personality and the stylistic specificity that is defined by the hints and nuances that emerge from the layered description of the character named Foltrigg. The attention of the reader invariably shifts to the multiplicity of the levels that come out of the printed surface. Then how the reader's consciousness integrates the totality he formulates from the story and invests it with some meaning. That is what I am interested in analyzing now. That is, the manner the printed words act on the readerly consciousness and initiate the complex process until the readerly consciousness comes to permeate the fictional space. Notice the facetious tone the passage starts. That is quite the opposite of the tone the previous passage started with. Although the present tone is presaged by the diversifying personality of Foltrigg, it nevertheless impresses the reader with the wide gamut the state prosecutor has run since his introduction to the audience. What then makes him so

light-weight, as it were, by the first introductory characterization in this passage? First of all, the manner in which his mental path is depicted. It makes a neat contrast to the ponderous and somewhat ominously suggestive tone Foltrigg adopts in the beginning of the previous passage. The banal colloquial ring to the initiating line, "Ah yes! The Roy Foltrigg special," potentially throws the reader off his feet for its suggested comedic implications. The facile reference to the *modus operandi* Foltrigg employs, the Roy Foltrigg special, reverses the image Foltrigg so valiantly etched on the reader's mind. The banality of his character intensifies as the passage proceeds. The staccato rendition of his mental plan increases the rate at which his image being reversed in the reader's mind. There is inherently ridiculous about the character who sputters the vulgar desire in such bare terms. His character formulates by itself in the fictional space and congeals, as it were, as something completely independent of the images that have prevailed preceding this particular passage. At this point, readerly consciousness is completely unwilling to retain the erstwhile formulated personality that was Foltrigg and utterly willing to define him as the rapacious opportunist which each packet of information seems to corroborate. As the reader's eyes skim over the printed surface, Foltrigg dissipates his endearing qualities to the audience and begins to embody everything antiheroic which the reader loves to hate. The enjoyment the reader derives from the adumbration of this kind of entity is certainly facilitated by the language the author lets the character speak or at least attributes to the very same character. Notice how masculine and reality impacted the line in question sounds. It may be worth quoting the line again to give the reader an opportunity to appreciate the skill with which the author inserts it at this juncture. "Get the indictment, hold the press conference, beat the defendant to the ground with all sorts of threats, cut the deal, then quietly dismiss the indictment a year later." With this outburst from Foltrigg (although the words do not actually originate from the powerful man, they are related to him via the description the author deftly makes redound to the character anyway) the character he has established as the redoubtable, tough guy, gangsterish entity collapses and is replaced smoothly by a personality who is susceptible to all the impurities life is made of. Why not? The collapse of the image is in fact to the definite advantage of the story as it becomes implicated in real life, the process of which most readers find intriguing because it is one of the reasons why they started their reading expedition in the first place. The characters have to redound to reality. Otherwise, the experience the readers undergo is invalidated by the mere fact that the journey through Grisham's story would alienate them instead of increasing their understanding of what real life has to offer. In this context, Foltrigg merely satisfies the audience with his quixotic multifacetedness. His sudden comedic turn therefore only enriches the story rather than disappoints the readers with its bathetic potential. The trite observation by the narrator that follows only provides more piquancy to the story because the process, as I mentioned already, only allows the reader more opportunities to get implicated in real life while floating through the fictional space.

I fear I have befuddled the reader by too much abstraction. Therefore, it is time to go back to the passage and see what I can do to enhance his understanding through close analysis. The tone that jumps out of the line, "He'd done it a hundred times in seven years," is almost jocular. The allusion to the illegal tactic Foltrigg employed is almost surreptitiously made by the narrator who wants to be cooperative with the audience as much as possible. With explicit statement of Foltrigg's underhand tactic, the author remind the reader what kind of person the audience should expect. Foltrigg's boasting may not be vain, although a bit exaggerated, when the author suggests the innumerable threats he has made before to win out the legal battle. If everything fails, Foltrigg at least can ensure a quiet dismissal of the case. That in turn guarantees to prevent the litigation from backfiring. At least Foltrigg can generate a pyrrhic victory if not an outright one when things threaten to go out of hand. Then in this tactician the macho image and the comedic personality of the powerful attorney merge to form a complex character that he is. No simplistic entity would satisfy a sophisticated audience. The author knows how to accomplish that feat from his long standing interaction with his reading consumers he has had so much success with. but even such a tenacious fighter has to suffer the indignity of losing a battle. When such occasion arises he would rather leave the battlefield and let others swallow the humiliating terms from the opponent. He is a fighter but he understands what a powerful general like him should act like when the ultimatum was presented to him. No, not resolve to meet the inevitable but think of some good excuse to make himself scarce from the scene of the hubbubs. The funny thing is that he is so good that the author reminds the reader he leave the scene of the contention with the most discreet excuse as possible. He suddenly becomes too busy to attend to the contentious matter and locks himself in and keeps the jagged distractions out of his mind. The line is indeed a tour de force from the stylistic point of view. It is the tactic that reflects both the powerful attorney's but also the calculated plot advancement on the part of the author. Grisham impacts the signification that emerges from the funny line on two ontologically differentiated planes. While the tactic utilized at his particular juncture punctuates the line with the flip-flop characterization of the attorney one more time, it also helps entertain the audience with its sheer jocular. As I mentioned above, Grisham does not hesitate to seize the moment to insert multifarious levels of humorous sentiments into his stories. This is only one instance of that. The force that jumps out of the page with the occurrence of the line is indeed overwhelming with its sudden shift in tone. It is obviously separable from the tone that has been predominant preceding the line in question. Although the tone preceding the line is not completely unmixed with potential humor the particular line in question, "When this happened Foltrigg was always too busy with more important prosecutions, and the file was thrown at one of the younger assistants, who invariably got his ass kicked," definitely makes a break from the rest in terms of the level of hilarity that is calculated to be perceived by the readers. It is a moment equivalent to audience applause if the story is rendered live on stage. The audience is encouraged

to laugh and let the humor sink in till the story's essence is absorbed by his total consciousness. Note how colloquial the line sounds. The level of language shifts even to the most casual of the daily conversation even before the reader is aware of the change. But that is not to say the level I am referring to does not occur at other places at all. It does occur, but there is something different when the author combines the sentiment manifested at this particular place and the character interactions thrown in at this juncture. The comedic synergy arises from the nexus concretized in the line is more than the hilarity some less talented writer could muster to create. The indirection with which Foltrigg is supposed to excuse himself from the predicament and the manner with which he is visualized to blame his underlings for the debacle in his litigation are some elements that make it possible to the accrual of the culminating comedic energy. That at least is my surmise. But needless to say there is an element, or I should say, must be an element that cannot be so easy to be explained away to be the cause of the sheer delight the audience experience. The kind of quality that is beyond any calculations but arises from the depth of the writer's subconscious depth. That is as far as I can fathom as to the overall effects Grisham's work has on the average readership. Before I get carried away with manic adulation of the author, I had better refocus on the work I promised to undertake. More on the analyzable level, note the effect the combination of such a neutral sounding words like "important prosecutions" and the expressions that plummet in the opposite direction of banality like "his ass kicked." The wide gap the two cover is enough to push the reader from one extreme in sentiment to another while imparting, or rather, letting the reader experience the sentiment rife with cultural and sociological implications. It is up to the readers to absorb and perceive and activated the kind of significations hinted at by the author. The wonder of it is that connections are usually easily made and the entirety of the rich reading experience is felt and undertaken by the readers. But at close scrutiny, this particular line is not devoid of the intermediate level that bridges the two extreme states I mentioned. The act of throwing the files at the attorney's underlings seems to fulfill the role of preparing the reader what is to be expected while at the same time urging the reader to face the completely hilarious sequence that act causes. Again, the syntactic and semantic copula in the sentence seems to play the double edged role as I mentioned above. Everything implicated and embroiled in the story is not as simple as it meets the eyes of the readers. Not, at least, to be taken as they first strike the readerly consciousness initially. All the elements are to be implicated and embroiled in the story as its integral and organic constituents and then to be allowed to interact with each other until they emerge as something else than they seemed at first. All the elements are indeed involved in the process of synergistic evolution. The secret to Grisham's success partly arises from the manner in which the author keeps this process going. the multifarious personality of Foltrigg emerges further in the final lines in the passage, slightly emphasized on the ridiculous side. The last two lines make it definite that Foltrigg is not a character who assumes blames that easily. He is rather a person who avoids responsibility and the



consequences of any debacle he himself has caused with grace. He would rather shout at his underlings and throw anything he can lay hands on. The contrast of the character Foltrigg the grave and dreadful that has emerged initially in the passage to the one now jumping out at the readers is quite astounding while, as I mentioned above, the contrast is constantly hinted at throughout the passage that the readers expect the reversal of the personification of the character Foltrigg. But nevertheless the manifestation of this humorous side at this juncture still does evoke cathartic laughs. The momentum that has been building from the beginning of the passage, particularly from the part where his cringing nature becomes apparent, drives the reader along, engulfing him in the torrent of comedic energy until the reader reaches the end of the passage. The petulance that shoots out from the two sentences is indeed so risible that it becomes a fitting attribute of the supposedly powerful attorney contemplating the defeat of his opponent.

I have to move on. The next excerpt is from another of Grisham's legal thrillers. Patrick runs away with millions of money safely stashed away in offshore banks. He is eventually caught and tortured for the fortune he had run away with. the following scene is immediately after his initial brutal torture. He keeps his spirits up and fights the psychological assault of his enemies.

At six, he was awake when his doctor entered, smileless today, all business as he poked the wounds quickly, then declared, 'You're ready to go. They have good doctors waiting for you where you're going.' He scribbled in his chart and left without another word.

Thirty minutes later, Agent Brent Myers sauntered into the room with a nasty smile and a flash of the badge, as if he needed to practice its delivery. 'Good morning,' he said. Patrick didn't look at him, but said, 'Couldn't you knock first?'

'Sure, sorry. Look, Patrick, I just talked to your doc. Great news, man, you're going home. You'll be released tomorrow. I've got orders to bring you back. We'll leave in the morning. Your government is giving you a special flight back to Biloxi on a military plane. Isn't that exciting? And I'll be with you.' (*The Partner*, p. 105)

For a book that was basically written along the theme of the fun of getting out, this is a very strong passage (<http://www.usatoday.com/life/enter/books/leb674.htm>). But Grisham's usual flowing style prevails. Note the easy manner in which the author accomplishes the portrayal of the tension filled scene. At the same time he echoes the manner in which the actual character "saunters" into the chamber where Patrick is held and recuperating. Indeed, although I noted the heavy air that fills out the fictional space in this particular instance, the tone that emerges from the scene is mostly defined by the style Grisham adopts to convey the ambiance. The words Grisham uses scintillate, as it were, as they flash out as nonchalantly as they do calculatedly. That is, calculated from the author's standpoint. They are meant to be inconspicuous. But at the same time the reader feels the layers of sinifications that are woven into the words. The initial line in essence establishes the sort of cultural and sociological implications that are to be played out in the passage. What makes

the line all the more effective is the movement Agent Brent Myers exhibits as he flashes the badge in his pertinent manner. The contrast of the suffering man in the chamber to the sassy man who appreciates his position with the exuberance of a rookie soldier is indeed intensified by the series of words connotative of actions of some sort which the author compacts into the short sentence. Because of those words this scene is easily visualizable. That is exactly what the author wants. The vivid scene reminiscent of a movie evokes the immediacy of the confrontation between the two unequally placed characters. The protagonist in the process emerges as a pathetic figure whom the reader easily finds to be sympathized with in the story. Despite Patrick's past thefts to the amount of millions of dollars, the emotions his status evokes are definitely the kind unlikely in real life situation. But how does the reader account for the discrepancy in the author's works which are known to be famous for their impact on and relevant to it? The answer to that again redounds to the answer Grisham made to an interviewer on the electronic journal. One often wants to quit and simply run away from the place of usual activities ([http://www.bookpage.com/9702bp/grisham/grishaminterview\\_2.html](http://www.bookpage.com/9702bp/grisham/grishaminterview_2.html)). It is true that at least a modicum of suspension of disbelief is needed when reading any fiction. But in this case even such improbable and unpraiseworthy sentiments expressed through the thefts of millions by Patrick and the consequent pity he elicits from the readers is realistic in a sense that the fantasy is after all implicated in the reality Grisham formulates for himself and for the reading audience. Therefore, this story tries to escape from reality but at the same time pulls it toward itself while the escapade of Lanigan entails a torture and the imprisonment and interrogation. As the sequence of episodes take place the reader cannot help evoke the real life references to make the maximum sense out of the story. That is in other words what is readers are actually invited to accomplish. The story in the hands of the readers comes to make any sense only because the multilayers of ontological planes are brought into the reading experience. After all the reading experience is achieved with the participation of both the author and the reader and they are each active agents to activate all the potential significations that are inherent in the story.

But enough of abstractions. Let us go back to the actual words the characters actually speak. The snickering mood the agent exudes evokes a terse reply. The sentiment conveyed by Lanigan is so true to life, that is apt, that the reader wonders how the author achieves that without expending a plethora of expletives. Lanigan expresses his irritation in four words: "Couldn't you knock first?" What better separates the two in the given situation than the utterance of the simple rhetorical question? The tension is prolonged by the manifestation of irritation. What is surprising and convincing at the same time is the courage with which the locked up Lanigan faces his tormentor. Despite his weaker condition he maintains the rebellious spirit and never allows his enemy to cajole him into blabbering the secret they are after. But the defiance coming from a man who underwent plastic surgery and excruciating weight reduction to execute and follow through the

plan he meticulously made renders the scene completely plausible. But the strong voice the reader hears arising from the convalescent man is so vivid and authentic that no wonder some detractors of Grisham described his story as a mere script. That is in a way a compliment. Any comment like the spheres Grisham implicates in his stories cuts both ways. Nothing is what it appears to the eyes of the observer. Once the reader identifies with the injured man, the force with which Lanigan meets his unwelcome guest guides the audience along and helps them to be carried along with the momentum. That is why the remark the uninvited makes sounds so irritable to the average reader. Who would not be forced to take a position on the side of Lagnan once the reader signs that implicit compact that they will be together in sentiments and the treatment Lagnan is receiving is recognized unjust? Because of the sympathy the author evokes from the reader, the reader is helped to imagine the evil face of Myers poking in Lanigan's. Note the savage humiliation the agent is trying to inflict by the arrogant remark, "Look, Patrick, I just talked to your doc." Especially the remark coming from a man whom Lanigan perceives as his enemy and would rather have nothing to do with. Private talk is the last thing he has in mind. That is why the psychological damage Myers is seeking is potentially all the more devastating. On close analysis Myers is in fact trying to pull Lanigan in a subordinating relationship. Myers baits Lanigan with the talk the injured man least likes. Since defiance is the only weapon Lanigan possesses under the circumstances, he has no choice but fight back verbally, if not physically. But by being contentious he is merely playing along with Myers. The hateful image of Myers instantly emerges from the exchange. The dichotomy between the vulnerable but likable victim and the haughty predatory tormentor becomes adumbrated in the reader's mind throughout the passage. That is the economy of Grisham's description. The combination of few words and clarity of outlines makes Grisham's style as befitting in this case as anywhere else.

Since I found Grisham's newest story on the Internet, let me refer to it while I analyze the finer workings of his authorial strategy. The book is entitled *The Street Lawyer* and conveniently listed on the CNN page (<http://www.cnn.com/books/beginnings/9803/06/index.html>), although only the beginning part. The first impression one gets from reading the work is the rhythm and the flippant undertone that make the author's work so appealing to the readers. Note how straightforward the author carries the ethos of the scene across to the reader. But the straightforwardness with which the whole scene is depicted is of a kind that is not verbally completely undisguised. That is, when the author is engaged in depiction of any psychological and scenic subtleties he has this penchant of resorting to the subtlest means possible to convey the impression of directness. You might get befuddled by my explanation but let me encapsulate the concept as connotative immediacy. While the images that finally form in the reader's mind is clear and layered with social and cultural implications, the paths the initial signifying seeds take are devious and never straightforward on close analysis. How do I account for the first line then in

the light of this connotative immediacy? Not to make my already convoluted explication more convoluted, I will answer that in the following manner. needles to say the first line is a kind of gambit. The author leaves it there for the reader to gobble at. If the reader fails to act on cue, then the author is prepared for that contingency by the mechanism that automatically executes by the hint given at the end of the sentence. The presence the I feels initially remains an unknown entity the protagonist cares least to define what it is. But because of the presence's unknown status, the reader is unwittingly drawn into the world that is developing before his consciousness. Whether the reader takes the cure offered or not then depends not only his willingness but the implicit mechanism that is embedded in the introduction passage. As good a novelist as Grisham, the author makes sure that the gambit works foolproof. The unknown presence is made to demonstrate the magic it holds by the ensuing sentences that function within the context of connotative immediacy.

The man with the rubber boots stepped into the elevator behind me, but I didn't see him at first. I smelled him though--the pungent odor of smoke and cheap wine and life on the street without soap. We were alone as we moved upward, and when I finally glanced over I saw the boots, black and dirty and much too large. A frayed and tattered trench coat fell to his knees. Under it, layers of foul clothing bunched around his midsection, so that he appeared stocky, almost fat. But it wasn't from being well fed; in the wintertime in D.C., the street people wear everything they own, or so it seems. (*The Street Lawyer*, <http://www.cnn.com/books/beginnings/9803/06/index.html> )

The invisibility is answered by the distinct smell the unknown presence possesses. The reader at this point is immediately struck by the oddity of the situation. Why does the protagonist/narrator have to take note of the smell and not the actual shape of the presence, unless the presence has some special meaning for him ( that is both for the protagonist and the reader) and for the story as a whole? why not the easy and possibly more shorthand depiction through visual observation? The gambit certainly works in this context. The average reader is surely thrilled to find out what is happening both on the verbal and subverbal levels. The only thing the reader can do of course is to read on. The reader indeed soon finds out why the smell holds such importance and the visible presence to be casually averted. The presence reeks of dirt and grime and sweat associated with street life. The image finally materializes in the reader's consciousness. Only that the concreteness belatedly materialized becomes enriched with the subtle implications generated by the discreet and strategic manipulation of the verbal nuances that turn every which way the narrative impulse pulls. What makes the first two combination of corresponding sentences so admirably funny and successful is the skewed correspondence each makes to the other. The wryly humorous sequel to the visual adumbration made in the initial part of the passage is indeed tour de force only skilful writers like Grisham are capable of. By the time the truth of the visual and olfactory

strategy deployed in this particular segment of the excerpt the dammed up energy of the audience finds its source in the uncontrollable laughter which is likely to force itself out before the rational check of the readerly consciousness scrutinizes what is actually happening. by then the author has accomplished his objective. He has pulled the reader's attention inward into the fictional world that is about to unleash the authorial force of a mature story teller with his years of experience behind him. Aside from the mastery exemplification of the author's sills, what is surprising is the inconspicuousness with which Grisham brings the unwary audience into his world. All the mechanism, including the subtle transition from the visual to the olfactory, that is embedded in the given passage is accomplished before the reader becomes aware of the behind the scene trick, as it were, the author employs to bring about the effect that eventually emerges from the use of it. Because of this inconspicuous deployment of the authorial strategy the effect that eventually arises is given a significance that exceeds the mere significance if it appeared independent of the context in which it appears. The trick not only waylays the reader before he becomes prepared for the outcome of the trap the author prepares for him, and thus increasing the hilarity level implicit in the lines involved in the deployment, but also deftly advances the story as inconspicuously as possible in the direction the author wants it in light of the plot he will delineate in the coming pages. In a sense, the author gathers momentum by synergizing all the forces each word and phrase contributes to the story. From the beginning his story promises to be a teleologically propelling one which at the least, the reader intuitively, will keep the plot from stagnating and cloying at the same time. But the interesting thing about the way the author develops the story is that the olfactory perception of the presence the protagonist is with is followed up by another visual observation. So, the initial visual is in a sense bridged by the olfactory adumbration, which again is sequenced by another visual observation. The three parts sequence then seems to describe an arc, which the reader finds himself to have been expecting to happen in order to appreciate the presence accompanying the narrative consciousness like a shadow. At this point then the reader naturally focuses on the visual rendition and complementation of the presence, who after all has only partially been conveyed to the readerly consciousness. What does the reader find here then? Every bit of information is the hard life the presence obviously leads on the street. Ill-fitting boots, a tattered coat pitifully falling to the man's knees. What proof does the reader need to construe the kind of person this presence the protagonist refers to? The pleasure of reading Grisham's works is that he reinforces the reader's impressions without much intruding into the imaginative conciseness of the reader over much. But that does not necessarily mean he shies away from representing the readerly consciousness. On the contrary, all the conveyances of the impression the author/ narrator makes are invariably to the point that the reader is enabled to relax and allowed to leisurely follow the trajectory of the story as it develops on the inscribed surface of the pages. But what could possibly detract from the reader's independent construal of significations is cleverly averted by the discreet portrayal of sympathetic

sentiments the author renders. In fact Grisham's authorial strength lies in the controlled manner in which he generates the humor and rhythm that underlie the authors works. But before I got carried away by the generalizing fever let me go back to the passage in question. As I read it over again, I cannot help admiring the acuity with which the author describes the presence the protagonist is not being paired with inexorably. The sorry state the street prowler is in, that is the impression the preceding lines indicate, is vividly conveyed by the bunched together undershirt and others he is wearing beneath the dowdy overcoat, which he most likely has picked up at some charitable institution or at places most happy souls do not frequent. But the bunched up look his midriff presents is so true to life that the reader immediately identifies the type. The type who carries everything he owns on his body and wears every rag he could lay hands on because of the desperate cold he is in. It turns out that the bunched look he presents is not due to the belly fed on fat-rich, insalubrious food, but rather the result of the necessity the meteorological condition of the DC area has forced him to. By the time the readerly consciousness has reached the end of the passage the author's view becomes inflected by the hint of sympathy the protagonist/ narrator leaves by his minute observation of the unknown presence besides him. But the author does not let the narrator indulge in a sympathetic reverie too long. That would surely bog down the story which has been flowing at a flippantly smooth rate to the delight of the audience. The final reminder of the reality with the detached tone refocuses the reader's attention on the actual scene that is developing in the story. After all the shadowy company the ragtag man is keeping the protagonist still remains a mystery. He is still a cipher, an unknown. The nonchalance with which the narrator adds the final qualifier throws the reader once again into the reality which never go as predicted. That is why the mystery that is kept dangling throughout the passage is an important element in developing the story.

The mystery gradually clarifies, however. The man turns out to be black.

He was black and aging--his beard and hair were half-gray and hadn't been washed or cut in years. He looked straight ahead through thick sunglasses, thoroughly ignoring me, and making me wonder for a second why, exactly, I was inspecting him. He didn't belong. It was not his building, not his elevator, not a place he could afford. The lawyers on all eight floors worked for my firm at hourly rates that still seemed obscene to me, even after seven years. (*The Street Lawyer*, <http://www.cnn.com/books/beginnings/9803/06/index.html> )

Another expected piece of information. At his point the reader nods in agreement. Who else is poor and dowdy in Washington D.C. but a poor, uneducated black? The author clearly plays along with the reader' expectations and at the same time facilitates the communication that impinges on the common assumptions about the racial stereotyping. The unkempt hair and dirty beard quickly comes to the reader's mind and the author delineates the qualities the audience expects from such blacks hinted at in the passage. In a way, Grisham's realism is inexorable to the extent that the every detail described is true so photographically in and out. That is not only on the physical

rendition of the objects described but also the psychological depth he delves. The black man here suddenly manifested as a real person emerges as a product of the sordid metropolis that is Washington D.C. for the black population. After all it is one of the least favorable area to inhabit according to a poll. While it is supposed to stand for the symbol and epitome of the United States because of its status, it presents a obverse side by the slums that have evolved around the Capitol. It is the dichotomy and ambivalence that Grisham indeed exploits as a short hand to evoke the kind of image he wants to utilize in this story. The reader is by now gripped by the interest generated by the utilization of the cultural shortcut. The signifiatory plenitude laid out by the author is only to be salvaged and construed by the audience. Indeed the reading pleasure of Grisham's works is bi-directional. Although the author supplies ample opportunities for the reader to mull over, the provision of those opportunities and the insights the author provides into the story are not meant to dictate the manner the reader is make out the story. The significations that are possibly derived from the story are left to the audience to decipher as they are encouraged to bring their cultural and experiential accumulations in the act of consuming the novel. Splicing the reader's experience alone with the story that is developing demonstrates the accuracy of the observation the narrator makes in the passage. The decisive, harsh remark, "He didn't belong," is a conclusion most people are avers to arriving at but inwardly concur on without any objection. A shabbily dressed black man reeking of the streets he has been prowling would strike any middle class America, especially if the target group is white, as an unwanted element in the given setup. The reaction an average person intended for such reading would be identical to the one manifested by the narrator. The man does not belong there. Therefore, the sympathy aroused by the behavior of the protagonist draws the audience even closer to the side of the author/narrator. At the same time the story being developed acquires the authenticity the reader has begun to accept as reality. The snobbish sentiment exhibited by the protagonist therefore comes all the more alive because of the sympathy now established between the two parties who are nevertheless ontologically placed on different planes. The ego protecting instinct exemplified by the narrator in the line, "It was not his building, not his elevator, not a place he could afford," sounds so true to life, although it may send the reader squirming into the corner of the room with unease. Reality after all is not often easy to swallow. But what brings the reader back to the fictional world of Grisham is the authenticity they cannot help agreeing with the author. What is portrayed in the story is the life the reader is living. As simple as that. If it is the life he is inexorably involved in and he cannot escape from then he might as well enjoy and stick to, at least to the end if no other reason than finding out what will happen to the characters involved. That is the privilege of a reader. That is when the reader perceives the distance between him and the world lying on a different ontological plane, bound between two covers and filled with inscribed pages in between. So, the reader enjoys a special place vis-a-vis the book he holds in his hands. While he recognizes the authenticity contained in the book,

identifying with the characters and identifying the scenes in there as part of his own life, the reader carries at the same time the detached sense of apartness from the world in the book. It is exactly this distance in identify that increases the incisiveness of the comment the narrator makes in the line "The lawyers on all eight floors worked for my firm at hourly rates that still seemed obscene to me, even after seven years." The flippancy with which the narrator conveys the sentiment makes the line even more amenable to the reader with its concomitant hilarity. Needless to say, the semantic momentum that arises from the comment is well-calculated by the author. But what makes the line so alive is the synergy between the reading audience and the narrator/author. I should have said the distance that is implicitly recognized by the two parties. Unless the distance is calculated into the picture, the impact the line holds would not materialize when presented to the audience at this particular juncture. The "obscenity" of the pay attorneys receive would not come out as magnified as it is without the implicit distance between the two parties. The humor, a wry one at that, is translated into a laugh because there is a consciousness at the receiving end to transform the cue given by the author into something concrete and experiential. For the whole process to take place there needs to be a middle ground where the chemical reactions to occur, as it were.

As the interactive relations are recognized to exist between the two parties, now the message implicit in the writing becomes all the clearer. In this light the visual and olfactory renditions attempted by the author become easily fused into the psychological manifestation that is to follow in the next passage.

Just another street bum in from the cold. Happened all the time in downtown Washington. But we had security guards to deal with the riffraff. We stopped at six, and I noticed for the first time that he had not pushed a button, had not selected a floor. He was following me. I made a quick exit, and as I stepped into the splendid marble foyer of Drake & Sweeney I glanced over my shoulder just long enough to see him standing in the elevator, looking at nothing, still ignoring me.

Note how faithfully the narrator reflects the thought pattern of an average reader in this passage. That alone is enough to draw the readers all the more strongly into the world being developed at the hands of the author. The first association the protagonist makes is just as expected that the man near him is one of them as opposed to one of them. It is the dichotomy most people are tempted to make, especially when the person near one looks so shabby and emits such an unpleasant odor. If the person is an intruder and manifestly unwelcome to the place, the next thought that emerges in the consciousness of the average readers is why has he come to bother them? Why not get rid of the guy, if that is what takes to remove the unpleasant person? Indeed, the protagonist's mind works in that exact train. But before the inevitable conclusion becomes clear in his mind, he has to admit the frequency with which such vagrants stray into the holy building where the protagonist and his associates work. That once gain establishes the polarity of the population, as instantiated between the narrator and the black man here in this scene. The view the narrator takes toward the man,



“Just another street bum in from the cold,” expressly indicates this relationship. It is the theme of the haves and have-nots that very soon manifests as the undercurrent of the story. Since the duality is going to become an important element of the story, Grisham cannot let it escape the reader’s attention so carelessly. The author has to reiterate and etch it into the consciousness of the reading audience. But at this point, he takes a strategy of empathetic correspondence between the narrator and the readers. That is, the author lets the protagonist authentically echo the sentiments presumed to be shared by the majority of the population in the given circumstance. The author in doing so virtually eliminates the distance that the reader was made to exist between him and the world being developed by the inscribed pages. The process known as suspension of disbelief in a vulgar terminology is being effected before the reader has barely enough time to absorb the full implications of the authorial strategy. At this stage, what is occurring in the fictional world becomes a virtual world, to which the reader easily transports himself through empathetic correspondence. Because of this authorial strategy the statement made in the narrator’s conscious world sounds like the one made vicariously by the reader’s alter ego. The reaction to the “riffraff” of a black man is then identical to the one that would be manifested by the reader himself. There is no spatial and temporal divergence between the conscious reactions of the two ontologically divergent egos. Another authenticity that strikes the reader is the eye movement of the narrator. When faced with a stranger, and the stranger happens to be quite out of place, a natural reaction one manifests would be to pretend to stay aloof from the situation as much as possible while in fact keeping an eye on that person who is causing that uneasiness. The narrator follows the stranger every single second to find out what caused such a man to audaciously barge into a sacred legal firm. Simultaneously, as the empathetic correspondence dictates, the eyes of the readerly consciousness closely follow the movements of the man, hoping that something dramatic, or at least interesting, to happen. As if as an afterthought, which is ironic because the reader recognizes that the narrator could not have been oblivious to what the black man was up to, the protagonist finds out that the man has not pushed the floor button. Or could the protagonist have been so absorbed with the thought of riding the elevator with a stranger that he has momentarily forgotten what the man has been engaged in? In either case, the special status of the man jumps to the foreground. The presence, now known as a black stranger grips the attentions of the reader and the narrator and would not allow them to relax. Now the focus is on the reason why the man has not selected any particular floor of the building. Is it a mere coincidence that the stranger is with the narrator? If so, how would such a masterful story teller explain the introduction of a mystery man without eliciting disapproval from his audience? All conflicting thoughts emerge in the readerly consciousness. But all seem to lead to only one conclusion that the man indeed holds some key function in the story. The reader merely holds his breath and prays that something happens. He is now on the edge of the chair and hungrily takes in what ever develops through the pages. Then as

expected and hoped for by the reader, the man exhibits more inexplicable behavior as he simply stares from the deep inside the elevator car at the plush and the most expensive foyer of Drake & Sweeney. The narrator admits that he has entertained an idea that the man has been following him as the narrator unconsciously did the black man from the corner of his eye himself. Now the concern of all the parties involved, including the readers who are supposed to play a primary role as a willing participant in the mysterious story that is unfolding before his eyes, is what the man is up to. The narrator/ author certainly succeeded in keeping the reader hooked to the scene in this respect. Grisham makes the reader want more in this very powerfully propelled story. What does the man mean just by standing in the elevator and looking at nothing, to the extent that he gives the impression that even the narrator does not enter his ken? In order to seek for the answer to that the reader has no choice but get involved in the complicated story that is being woven by the impeccable threads of the author's fictional talent.

The next description of the receptionist restores the flippant tone that has been running underneath the surface tension dominated by the mysterious man.

Madam Devier, one of our very resilient receptionists, greeted me with her typical look of disdain.

"Watch the elevator," I said.

"Why?"

"Street bum. You may want to call security."

"Those people," she said in her affected French accent.

"Get some disinfectant too."

I walked away, wrestling my overcoat off my shoulders, forgetting the man with the rubber boots. I had nonstop meetings throughout the afternoon, important conferences with important people. I turned the corner and was about to say something to Polly, my receptionist, when I heard the first shot.

Madam Devier was standing behind her desk, petrified, staring into the barrel of an awfully long handgun held by our pal the street bum. Since I was the first one to come to her aid, he politely aimed it at me, and I too became rigid. (*The Street Lawyer*, <http://www.cnn.com/books/beginnings/9803/06/index.html> )

Notice even the name suggests a full layer of cultural implications. Madam Devier, whenever read by those who are soaked in the Southern culture, cannot fail to evoke the thick connotative melange of implications derived from the historico-cultural entity that is the south. The essence that makes the south what it is. The name Devier evokes that kind of semantic crux where all that is the southern experience immediately opens out and jumps out at the reader. In the simultaneity of the semantic manifestation enabled by the name the reader even feels the subtle humor that inevitably comes out from the inscribed page where the name occurs. The humorous potential is in fact corroborated by the sassy manner she is supposed to exhibit by the clever narration purportedly

attributed to the protagonist. She is not a simple receptionist but one of those very “resilient receptionists.” Why does she have to be one of those? Because she is a woman who will not easily succumb to pressure and leave her pride behind even for the sake of pleasing her bosses. In other words she is a typical southern lady who has abundantly tasted what the worldly wisdom has to offer. She does not hesitate to put up a little fight in order to protect her position, even with her boss. That attitude in turn earns her not a little respect from her superiors, who are supposed to be using her as merely one of those qualified for the position. Note how she greets the protagonist, “with her typical look of disdain.” The funny part is that the protagonist is used to her reaction and immediately proceeds to the next issue. That is, remind her of the stranger out in the elevator. But the haughty manner of the receptionist does not change so soon. Her response is a “mere why?” It takes the next line before she shifts gears and engages him in the real conversation. The humor that arises from the dialogue is that she utters words with emotions not apt for the lady for which she affects herself to be. And she forces out the bitter words with a phony French accent, an attempt to be true to her name, as it were. The scene is a tour de force by the author to evoke the kind of atmosphere fit for the redoubtable law office. Indeed the receptionist is a perfect embodiment of the snobbish and mechanical environment that shuns the kind of population represented by the intruding stranger. The forcefulness with which the receptionist remarks the words indicates the aversion and distance she and others in the office keeps for and from the common rabble who simply happen to be placed disadvantageously. The prejudice manifested by the receptionist is found to be shared by the protagonist as well. As if to echo her sentiment, he orders, “Get some disinfectant too.” So, in their minds the strange black man is on the level of a vermin who has indeed not needs to be in their office. The sooner he is rid of, the better. In order to achieve that end, the means chosen does not matter. The polarization instantiated by the sentiment cannot be resolved. The chasm between the two is as unbridgeable as a geographic one the size of the Grand Canyon. But what they forget is the ultimate origin of the polarization. The source of the barrier does not actually reside in any naturalized force as they seem to consider but in their conciseness. But of course the author does not engage in such philosophical argument. He treasures the rhythm of the story too much to get it stagnate over such ponderous subject. He opts for a humorous sequel to the potentially heavy subject instead. In fact the humorous layer is already laid in when the narrator/protagonist utters the “disinfectant.” By bringing the stranger to the level of a vermin, the author accomplishes what the old Russian formalist used to term defamiliarization, or at least a variety of it. Since the two objects are so dissimilar and a human cannot literally be reduced to a vermin, the audience immediately reasons that what the author intends them to comprehend from the comparison is the qualities that are unique to the environment and the profession. In fact this line of logic is suggested by the haughty manner of the receptionist, who does not mind being chastised by her superiors if she can maintain her oversize pride. If the

profession and the environment encourages such irrational self-aggrandizement, then the reader is certainly entitled to construe the situation in the manner that point to the humorous resolution to the story. The polarization between the protagonist and the black stranger prepares the reader for the momentous incident that is immediately to follow. While the image of the dirty rubber bootied man sticks to his consciousness he is occupied with the meeting with important people. The swing in the tone that materializes with the gunshot facilitates the bathetic interpretation because of the style Grisham meticulously employs throughout the whole story. Then the actual description of the consequences of the gunshot develop. The haughty receptionist with the semi aristocratic blood emerges frozen. The barrel of the gun pointed duly at her proud self. She is not after all beyond fear. When life is at stake, and her own life at that, she automatically reduces herself into mere nothing as she conceived the black stranger to have been. The protagonist, now that the tables turned, renders the stranger as his pal. Obviously the term is ambivalent, which soon turns out to be not the gunman's favorite. But from the point of view of the protagonist and the receptionist, that too is a great compromise from the haughty position they have assumed towards the man. In the sudden reversal of fate can be found seeds of humor. The verbal clowning becomes all the more prominent as the protagonist finds every opportunity to become ambivalently humorous. That is one way to cope with the situation, for sure, by making himself humble. But another interpretation would be that the addition of the verbal jocularity adds more rhythm and depth to the scene that has been mostly determined by the static mystery manifested by the mental interaction between the two parties, although the reaction on the part of the black stranger has been a mere supposition by the protagonist. Note how effectively the instances of such expressions as "awfully long handgun," "our pal the street bum," "he politely aimed it," and "I too became rigid" exude the hilarious atmosphere right after such a serious incident. There are many reasons of course for the way these components work the way they do. For instance, the implicit understatement the first expression, especially due to the first qualifier, suggests also plunges the reader into the comedic overdrive because of the plethora of implications the word "awfully" evokes. The dam of tensions has broken after a stretch of suggestive lines concerning the mystery man and his effect on the firm. Now the audience is ready to take their cue and smirk. The potentially equalizing "pal" also functions as a laughter-triggering cue. Since their relationship has been defined by the polarity the protagonist himself has been so adamant about maintaining, the sudden reversal in his attitude is very likely to appear self-debasement on the part of the narrator/protagonist. Nothing is more comedic than the fall of a overbearing confident man from his eminent position to the bottom of the social scale even beneath that of a street bum. When that transformation takes place in a matter of seconds, the flip-flop he engages in to save his skin must surely appear risible. After all in this case the distance between the two ontologically differentiated world is as evident to the audience as the nagging shadow of the black man has been to the protagonist. In his safe haven, as it were, the

reader can appreciate the subtle nuances play out in the fictional world of John Grisham. Subtlety in fact is one of the hallmarks of Grishamism. Note how the nonchalant appendage of "our" to "pal" changes the semantic shade of the expression and demands the reader's comedic reaction for the propulsion of the story. Since the word is added so subtly the reader cannot help but comply with the implicit demand placed on him. He simply feels his mouth crack open and gulp in the humorous effluvia that is filled in by the author's dexterous hand. The similar thing happens when politely shifts the reader's conciseness focus away from the grave matter at hand to the hilarious obsequiousness the protagonist suddenly exhibits. The cringing manner this terms expresses is enough to split the sides of the reader by the sudden evocation of the scene in vivo. The adumbration of the actual living image is so masterly that the reader moves swiftly from one fictional frame, as it were, to another, as if he were watching the actual scene developing right before his eyes. The expression, "he politely aimed it," is more than adequately responded to in sentiment by the "I too became rigid." The stiffness implicit in the word "rigid" unleashes the whole gamut of associations in the reader's mind that extends from the legs shaking like a leaf to a body which suffered from rigor mortis and thus incapable of responding as heroically as the protagonist wishes. But what makes Grisham's works so successful is that every minor detail functions to entertain the audience. All the Grishamism that is incorporated in his works, implicitly as well as overtly, is attuned to deploy to its fullest potential when it is acted upon by the readerly consciousness.

The heroism associated with movie scenes in fact is soon corroborated. The protagonist immediately throws up his hands in the air as those stereotypical characters do in many action filled movies. But the humor contained in the line is that instead of obtaining a opportunity to show up his heroism, he is reduced to exhibit the negative role of cringing before a fearful opponent. But that is fine with the author who is pulling strings behind the scene, as it were. The overall effect he manages to pack in the setup is the laughable reactions of the figures involved at the moment. As the tables have already turned his meek plea not to shoot is cursorily responded to by a mere "Shut up."

"Don't shoot," I said, hands in the air. I'd seen enough movies to know precisely what to do.

"Shut up," he mumbled, with a great deal of composure.

The irony that is obvious to any reader is the composure that the gunman shows as opposed to the panicked response all the others make. The entire scene in fact is reminiscent of the Shakespearean reversal of the fortune. Those who have been on top suddenly undergo a plunge in their fortune and find themselves barely hanging from the wheel while those who have been downtrodden who barely have received any attention except for the negative kind shoots up the arc and now stand triumphant over the ex rulers. In the case of the Classic tragedies of course the grave tone would not allow the lightweight manners of the eminent figures. But in this Grishamian comedy the reversal of fortune is exactly the source of comedy. The characters' roles are reversed and they do

not hesitate to exaggerate their roles for the benefit of the readers. Needless to say the Classical comedy does have this kind of slapstick absurdities but the elements dealt with are from the start the kind which are immediately recognized as comedic. But in the case of the present story, the threatening mystery that impends throughout the introductory part of the story leaves the possibility open in which way the story develops. Now the die was cast with the firing of the gunshot, the reader is allowed to prefigure the course the story is to take for the first time since the inception of the narrative. Now the ice was broken, the reader wholeheartedly take in the humor that is implicit in every line the author throws in his well-calculated work. Now he fully comprehends why the protagonist hears the receding voices in the hallway. It is his friends in need. They are scattering like flies at the face of an imminent danger. They are indeed not friends in need. Again what comes out of the short passage is the indirect allusion to the human nature. Faced with danger even trusted ones rather choose to save their skin than face the danger and exposing to a potential life and death situation. Uttered so matter-of-factly the tone unfailingly imparts to the audience the expected result of a hero in dire need of help. Help simply does not arrive. So the implicit comedy is fully played out in this scene. Since the tension tends to stretch the comedic potential to its fullest, as in the case of someone just escaping from a predicament might be tempted to breathe a sigh of relief, the reader is allowed to absorb the hilarity at his own leisurely pace.

There were voices in the hallway behind me. Someone yelled, "He's got a gun!" And then the voices disappeared into the background, growing fainter and fainter as my colleagues hit the back door. I could almost see them jumping out the windows. To my immediate left was a heavy wooden door that led to a large conference room, which at that moment happened to be filled with eight lawyers from our litigation section. Eight hardnosed and fearless litigators who spent their hours chewing up people. The toughest was a scrappy little torpedo named Rafter, and as he yanked open the door saying "What the hell?" the barrel swung from me to him, and the man with the rubber boots had exactly what he wanted. (*The Street Lawyer*, <http://www.cnn.com/books/beginnings/9803/06/index.html> )

Note how the entire sequence is tied together in a tumblingly fast pace, at which the reader is given barely enough time paradoxically enough, to ponder to see into the hands of the author. Grisham merely writes that the voices get "fainter and fainter." What makes the line so effective, needless to say, is because the description is experientially so true. But what the author accomplishes more than the mere surface signification indicates is that the line suggests the scampering bunch who are running for their life. The hilarity arises from the suggested image that is so vivid that the reader barely needs any film rendition of the story, although Grisham's stories are mostly turned into films. That is merely to say that his stories are well suited to being turned into a script. Some hinted the inherent inferiority of the writer's stories because of that fact. But the other side of the coin is that his stories can be made into successful audio-visual versions is that his stories are inherently filled

with life and action. That in this age of popular entertainment is itself a guarantee for success. The associates are not only running away from the scene of the gunfire but they are presumed to have hit the back door in their desperate effort to secure their safety. The bathetic suggestion of well-dressed, cool-headed lawyers forgetting themselves is enough to rouse laughter of derision. But that is just an instantiation of basic human nature. As Shakespeare astutely observed one of the most salient feature of man is frailty. Grisham essentially recognizes that by the tone he adopts in the scene. They are not hitting the back door because that is mostly the most unpardonable act, but because that act, as I mentioned above, suggests the discrepancy between how they are supposed to act and how they actually do act, thus foregrounding the comedic element under the unlikeliest circumstances. But grasping the moment and rendering the effect that arises is due to the skills of an author like Grisham. Turning such delicate moments into an opportunity to generate empathic humor from the audience is a tour de force for which Grisham deserves praises. The author in fact makes sure the audience reads exactly in the manner the author intends by adding the next line. The associates are visualized to be running out the back door but possibly “jumping out the windows.” The movement allowed by the tone Grisham adopts is suddenly given a momentum with the helter-skelter images incorporated in the scene. The opposition between what things should be and what they actually are is further contrasted by the observation the protagonist makes on the lawyers who work there. They are not regular weak-kneed litigators but “Eight hardnosed and fearless litigators who spent their hours chewing up people.” The image the narrator alludes to is the exact contrast to what he has just imagined they, or at least some of them, would logically act under the circumstances. The contrast is brought to the reader's attention before suddenly it is given a skewered emphasis by the response the gunman makes to the inadvertent entry into the theater of action. The line full of life and vigor indeed jumps out of the page and plays itself out fully. The reader only stand quiet and takes in what the images offer. One of the litigator is a “scrappy little torpedo.” What do the average readers make of it? Needless to say the surface meaning passes through the readerly consciousness as smoothly as any other images but what stays is the humor and the life the author embeds in the word. Why is it so rife with the dynamic force that carries the readers long? That is not easy to answer but one factor would be the way the author employs the words. They tend to be daily colloquial nouns which under other conditions would be just one of the words without much distinction. But since Grisham throws them in his work in such delicately strategic manner that they accrue special significance which the readers are granted to work on to weave out the meaningful sequence. In fact when comedic sequence happens it is usually constituted by a number of words and phrases that keep the audience held at that comedic level. Notice the occurrence of sharp-edged, vivid words and phrases such as “litigators who spent their hours chewing up people,” “a scrappy little torpedo,” and “the barrel swung from me to him.” They each contributes to the humorous tone and would not leave the reader somnolent while he sits

deep in the comfort of his chair. The action filled paragraph is propelled to the next sequence upon the sassy comment by the narrator. The line is indeed a natural culmination of the paragraph the reader has expectantly waited to materialize. The cockiness and motion the line contains just spills out with the reader's eye contact with the line as he hurries on to the next paragraph. Then recklessly enough, Rafter dares to suggest to put the gun down. Needless to say, that elicits a violent reaction from the gunman. A shot is fired and that effectively quiets him down prematurely. In Grishamese, the shot reduces Rafter "to a mere mortal." What he had imagined himself to be shattered instantly as the violent blast echoes throughout the reception area. But notice the smartly managed expression I just brought your attention to. The fact that Rafter, putatively the bravest man around, is suddenly caught in the middle of his heroic remark and reminded of his mortality is so beautifully captured by the author. That in itself is something the reader should appreciate as he continues his odyssey through this indisputably the well-narrated story of Grisham's. The dead-pan tone that arises from the neutral style the author employs increases the implicit humor and perfectly conveys the verbal nuances the author indeed wants the reader to absorb. The amazing thing is that the author maintains that comedic level without actually resorting to slapstick descriptions. Note how he follows up the line I quoted with further nonchalant comments that yet arouse sly yet uncontrollable laughter from the reading audience.

"Put that gun down," Rafter ordered from the doorway, and a split second later another shot rang through the reception area, a shot that went into the ceiling somewhere well above Rafter's head and reduced him to a mere mortal. Turning the gun back to me, he nodded, and I complied, entering the conference room behind Rafter. The last thing I saw on the outside was Madam Devier shaking at her desk, terror-stricken, headset around her neck, high heels parked neatly next to her wastebasket. (*The Street Lawyer*, <http://www.cnn.com/books/beginnings/9803/06/index.html> )

It turns out that the proud receptionist with the Frenchfied name stands shaking like a leaf. That itself is no special moment. But when the situation is rendered by the skilful hand of the author it turns into something more than the situational logic seems to warrant. The line in other words generates the contrastive hilarity that comes out of the momentary triumphal glory the receptionist enjoyed in her encounter with her boss on his entry into the building. The reader in fact is encouraged to connect the two moments. But the fact presents immediately to the reader's eyes that even without encouragement, the contrast between the two moments jumps out and etches into the readerly consciousness indelibly. The funniness does not end there. The receptionist becomes reduced to a butt of ridicule as she remains standing with the headphones around her neck and high heels "parked neatly next to her wastebasket." She does not deserve such harsh treatment at the hand of the author. But on close analysis, she is merely a sign which turns out to be a good candidate to represent the poplar opposite quality to what the gunman stands for. While she enjoys



a leisurely life in the law office, flaunting her indomitable spirit and chatting with her bosses on equal terms, the man with gun man is portrayed to be the downtrodden, homeless vagrant, possibly holding the bottom of the social rung. The showy receptionist merely fits in the type that glaringly contrasts with the tough life of the gunman. Therefore, as she stands frozen in the most ridiculous manner possible, even with her heels neatly “parked” near the waste basket, the carnivalesque reversal neatly constitutes the tableau of the topsy-turvy world that even momentarily becomes effectuated by the sudden event.

The momentum of the carnivalesque sweep continues and carries the reader on along the line of the story. The gunman closes the door behind him and locks eight litigators in a conference room. But as the gun does so, even his gun assumes a life of its own. It does not simply move or sway in the gunman’s hand. It waves through the air, demanding the admiration of the all parties concerned. Why does the gun suddenly assume such vigorous life of its won? It does not take long before the reader figures out the strategy the author adopts here. Every single move and every thing in the scene is objectified and turned into an opportunity for the reader to focus on and absorb their comedic possibility. Needless to say, they do not become objectified on their own. They are in fact invested with the life through the dexterous description of the author. It is in other words the verbal stringing that gives life to the whole situation. In ordinary circumstances no one would be tempted to admire the gun held in the threatening hand of a potentially mad man. But the way the words are strung together dictates the manner the story is read. The tone the author manages to create through this strategy is the kind which no reader will fail to properly discern and splice with his reading experience. As I mentioned, all the words that precede and proceed from any particular line tend to determine the direction in which the reader is expected to follow the story in its full defoliation. With that in mind let us pursue our further analysis of the authorial strategy at work in this particular passage.

The man with the rubber boots slammed the door behind me, and slowly waved the gun through the air so that all eight litigators could admire it. It seemed to be working fine; the smell of its discharge was more noticeable than the odor of its owner. The room was dominated by a long table, covered with documents and papers that only seconds ago seemed terribly important. A row of windows overlooked a parking lot. Two doors led to the hallway. (*The Street Lawyer*, <http://www.cnn.com/books/beginnings/9803/06/index.html> )

Notice the detached tone the narrator adopts in this scene. He has the cool to observe that the waving of the gun through the air not only sends shivers through the manly spines of the eight litigators but also quite effective in keeping them in order. The mere remark, “It seemed to be working fine,” is so aptly thrown in that the reader has to titter because of the visual image the line imparts. But at the same time the ridiculousness of the comment, coming from the party who is possibly in imminent danger of losing their life, does not fail to fetch a wry smile from the reader.

The audacity of the narrator and the suggestion of the comedic defoliation that is to come is enough to keep the reader entertained, even for the moment. And the olfactory impression the narrator registers. It echoes back to the inception of the story. The smell once again defines the man rather than the visual image of the man. The strong smell the man has naturally accumulated through his long and arduous life on the street is now blotted out by the even stinging smell of the sulfur floating around the gun. But how deftly the author depicts the gunshot. It comprehends the vast layer of implications by substituting the usual order of description with a shortcut that is intuitive yet clever. In this case, however, Grisham does not persist in the olfactory line. He immediately switches to the visual rendition of the situation. The visual image of the room is a nondescript one. Yet, through the eyes of a protagonist under enormous pressure, all the objects become defamiliarized and assume the shades that transform them into something other than what they usually signify. The description becomes a trip for the reader into another dimension. But in its truthfulness it convinces even the most skeptical reader of the narrative mastery the author exhibits in this story. The casual dismissal of the documents which a moment ago “seemed terribly important,” throws realism into what is now turning out to be a fast-paced serio-comedy. The reversal of fortune, the kind the protagonist is experiencing, indeed does transform the values of each and every single object he possesses. No reader can argue with that. But from the author’s point of view, what is more important than just merely giving the surface layer a façade of realism is the momentary break that allows the reader to appreciate the contrast between various levels of significations the author weaves in this complex yet entertaining narrative. This moment of reality impacted break is even necessary to let all the gamut of implications sink in. that is part of the reason why the ensuing sentences are so effectively simple and visual at the same time.

Then suddenly the reality impacted voice resounds in the room temporarily lightened by the comedic interlude played out by the eight litigators, especially by the narrator/protagonist. The line is effective for the obvious reason that the reader hears the cue from the author that the story has arrived at a new phase. This interlacing of multiple levels of tone is constantly evoked as the reader is about to become attuned to one dominant tone for the scene being developed for the given moment. The author in fact does not allow the reader to relax in one specific frame of mind. Grisham knows that is one way to send the readers down to boredom. Instead, the author insists that his audience be treated to multiple voices given out in an infinitely variegated shades. This passage an example of that authorial strategy. the gunman is in charge again. Not only in the sense that he keeps the litigators in check with his menacing gun held in his hand but also in terms of the overall tone he adopts to dominate the scene as it evolves before the reader’s eyes. But as soon as the serious, reality impacted tone set in, the comedic strain crawls back in. Notice the potentially hilarious touch as the narrator exhibits his meek side and depicts the entire sequence from the point when the gunman points the gun at his head to the moment when he as well as the rest of the

litigators stars retreating to the wall and up to the point when all sorts of unimaginable situations arise in the narrator's mind. The quick transition, at least in the protagonist consciousness, from one state, in which he can feel relatively secure about the condition they are in, to the gruel possibilities about what might happen to them as indeed have transpired at post offices and schools involving disgruntled employees and students. The pace with which the whole sequence flows is so natural that the reader barely knows what is actually taking place. Needless to say, the surface significations do fly out of the printed pages. but what I am referring to here is the hidden mechanism the author is fully in control of and he calculates to hide from her reader's eyes. Structurally speaking then, two things are occurring simultaneously. I should say two levels of signification are spliced together and at the same time synergistically effloresce as something more than the sum of the two. They become more than what the two merely added together would accomplish. On one level once again is the reality charge statements that constantly remind of what actually do happen and did happen in the world around the protagonist. On another level is the carnivalesque suggestions impacted by skilful use of verbal implications. Note how casual dropping of seemingly insignificant words play such important roles in the passage. As the reader quickly glance over the surface of the inscribed page, he could as well perceive the grave tone that runs through the passage. But that is not the only element that the author wants the reader to absorb. That is not the only effect the author wants to generate through this particular work. That is just a part of the story and taking in an incomplete entity is sometimes not absorbing the right thing. Partial reading in other words changes the corpus/work in such a manner that that particular reading becomes invalid. In order to appreciate Grisham's work fully and sufficiently the reader needs to decode the layers of encoding and organize a whole of which parts act freely on each other. That is the sufficient reading of *The Street Lawyer*. Then going back to the splicing of the two levels of signification, I suggests the reader to pay particular attention to the words I pointed out. I see a comedic operation in the use of the expression "using the gun as a very effective prop." The expression immediately suggests some implement such as cane which should be quite distant in imagery to formulate the gravest image the other level try to send out tot he reader. But the two tones become inextricably spliced together by the fast tempo the author adopts to propel the reader onward along the plot that constantly evolves. The effect is that the reader surrenders himself and receives the comedic element unconditionally. The effect results as an afterthought while it takes place the moment it meets the reader's eye. It is a paradox but sometimes the reading process does not take place logically. Everything in fact becomes embroiled in the interaction between the readerly consciousness and the elements contained in the story. Then, the narrator comments rather inappropriately and from the other perspective aptly, the gunman places the gun "very near" his head. The gunman not merely places the gun near the protagonist's head but very nearly to it. The cool the narrator exhibits instantaneously reminds of the detachment both the reader and the party directly

involved possess. That is an open invitation to observe the scene not only from the reality impacted angle but also from another alternative one, which is an angle only those who are sure of their ontological vantage point can possess.

"Up against the wall," he said, using the gun as a very effective prop. Then he placed it very near my head, and said, "Lock the doors." Which I did. Not a word from the eight litigators as they scrambled backward. Not a word from me as I quickly locked the doors, then looked at him for approval. For some reason, I kept thinking of the post office and all those horrible shootings--a disgruntled employee returns after lunch with an arsenal and wipes out fifteen of his co-workers. I thought of the playground massacres--and the slaughters at fast-food restaurants. And those victims were innocent children and otherwise decent citizens. We were a bunch of lawyers! (*The Street Lawyer*, <http://www.cnn.com/books/beginnings/9803/06/index.html> )

While the narrator suggests and encourages the reading that takes place on a purely narrative level, he cunningly scatters the pieces of information that are strictly reality impacted. For instance, the information concerning the postal worker taking the law in his own hands and shooting his way into the workplace to take revenge on his co-workers is something that actually happens and has happened increasingly in the recent years. Along with the information the sentiments attached to it is faithfully reproduced so that the average readers can share the input the author assumes is surely be interpreted in the manner he intends it to be. The same with the other piece of information supplied here. The random massacre of innocents who just happen to be in the path of a psychopath. The suggested gruesome consequences of the chance encounter has a familiar ring almost any average reader can identify. Therefore, as I mentioned, there are two strains of narrative line being developed in the story. But the noteworthy operation that stands out, at least to the watchful readers of Grishamism, is the subtlety as well as the dexterity with which the author splices the two together and let them effloresce before the reader's very eyes. The overall effect of the audience then is the organic unfolding of a story, as if the fictional contents exist there just to be culled and mulled over by the readers. It is like there is no distance, rather contradictorily to what I observed, between the world reified by the author's hands and the position the reader recognizes he takes as opposed to the work he holds in his hands. But no matter how small the distance between the reader and the fictional space becomes, even to the degree that it reaches the vanishing point of identity between the two, the readerly consciousness is constantly aware of the implicit ontological discrepancy between the two entities. That is why the proceeding line involving the lawyer joke becomes so effective. In other words, because the reader remains as an entity detached from the world defined by the fictional space, the point the author tries to send across the boundary duly finds its mark. Who would not find the last comment by the author/narrator hilarious? And the narrator's point is so well taken that the reader might be surprised to find the common sentiment deftly expressed in a nutshell. Indeed no lawyer is innocent nor have they claimed to be. But the

line arising in this particular place still elicits the laughs the author wants the reader to revel in. the skewed comment woven into the paragraph is meant to be activated by the reader and indeed to be laughed at. It is in this dedication to the readerly pleasure and entertainment that Grishamism manifests most saliently. The double layered joke at the sly and self-serving lawyers is indeed a narrative tour de force and yet such a truism.

The layered narrative inevitably gets jostled forward. The author does not want the plot to become helplessly mired in one momentary verbal efflorescence. The felicitous unfolding of the embedded significations has to give way to another pulse of narrative momentum. The reader then yields to the momentum unresistingly. The fact is it is so comforting to become attuned to the force that brings the story in the direction the author carries the momentum onward. So, while the reader often is given the leisurely temporal space to delve the depth of the pods of significations, the final say as to how to direct the way the story carries forward belongs to the author. He is in charge, in other words. The next paragraph marks the inception of another tone, which can be described as more grave for its ominous implications. The narrator hears the sounds all the objects in the rooms makes, except for the words, now coming from none of the mouths. A tense moment lasts. Simultaneously, the reader retreats back to the contemplative mode and furtively seeks the outcome, which threatens to erupt violently any minute. Could it be the execution that the gunman has in mind? If not why does he line up the eight litigators against the wall? The reader cannot wait to turn to the next scene to find out what the sequel to the deadly preparation. The gunman in the meantime proceeds with his ritual. It is as if he has planned the whole event with the expertly calm of a military commander. Because of that suggestion welling out of the inscribed surface of the pages, the reader tenses and braces for the worst. After all, the man in charge at this moment is a black man, purportedly a homeless vagrant who is desperate enough to commit the most atrocious act possible in D.C. Besides the momentary passing image the narrator experienced floating through his mind of a disgruntled postal worker strafing on his coworkers, is enough to prepare the reader for the inevitable outcome of the deadly ritual. The tension mounts and the reader cannot lay the book down.

Using a series of grunts and gun thrusts, he lined the eight litigators up against the wall, and when their positions suited him he turned his attention to me. What did he want? Could he ask questions? If so, he could get anything he damned well pleased. I couldn't see his eyes because of the sunglasses, but he could see mine. The gun was pointed at them. He removed his filthy trench coat, folded it as if it were new, and placed it in the center of the table. The smell that had bothered me in the elevator was back, but not important now. He stood at the end of the table and slowly removed the next layer--a bulky gray cardigan. Bulky for a reason. Under it, strapped to his waist, was a row of red sticks, which appeared to my untrained eye to be dynamite. Wires ran like colored spaghetti from the tops and bottoms of the sticks, and silver duct tape kept things

attached. (*The Street Lawyer*, <http://www.cnn.com/books/beginnings/9803/06/index.html> )

Obviously the same question bothers the party directly involved. The narrator duly expresses the concern. Then with the words the reader and the men in the fictional world identify in the sentiments. Both are worried and anxious about what is to come. But the difference is that they are ontologically dissimilarly placed. For that reason the reader is more anxious to see the eventuation of the implications of the ritual while the characters involved are kept dangling, as it were, by a thin thread to escape from the scene safe and sound as the revolving door sends them tumbling out to the next scene. So, the reader in a sense derives a vicarious pleasure at the cost of the dread the characters go through. It would be a perverted kind if they are positioned identically ontologically. But as I mentioned repeatedly, they are positioned differently while the two parties proportionately contribute to the realization and development of the story as it runs its course. The discrepant points each party holds, however, magnify not only the landscape that opens up in the space between the two that also opens up as the reader engages in the act of reading, but also gives an opportunity to the reader to enjoy what transpires in the fictional space vicariously at his own leisurely pace. It is this authorial capacity to allow this kind of readerly opportunity that is an eminent part of Grishamism. The author stints no effort to provide the reader with pleasures while activating the characters maximally. The readers decide for themselves what level of participation they want to commit themselves to as they revel in the exquisitely written story by a narrative master. While both parties wonder about the outcome of the deathly suspense, the narrator/author imparts a tone that is definitely comedic. Indeed there is always the strand that is contrary to the reality-impacted, grim one. It is this entwining of disparate tones that makes Grisham's style as it is. The straightforward presentation is one thing, but the complicated and complex texture that arises from the intricate pattern the author weaves definitely contributes to the pleasure the reader experiences as he hurries on to the ever evolving fictional next moment. Unless the story propels the reader forward and constantly keeps him in excited tension, the kind of popularity the author has been enjoying would have never materialized. It is thanks to Grisham's uncanny writerly serendipity, be it talent or skills or may be more appropriately both, that the intricate patterns and cultural significations generated through them are felt by the reader as pleasurable as he goes through the story. No matter what the cost, a writer like Grisham holds the concept of entertaining the audience his priority. Then the sudden opening up of a different dimension by the introduction of a multifaceted sentence (in terms of its signifiatory layeredness), "If so, he could get anything he damned well pleased," easily thrusts the reader into a realm in which he is allowed to take in the iridescent sentiments that include facetiousness and wry humor tinged with realistic desperation. Anyone who is able to place himself in that predicament easily understands the serious nature of the threat and thus the reaction the narrator/protagonist exhibits, although not necessarily the comedic ambiguity that the reader is allowed to perceive. This ambiguity is somehow resolved by

the shifting focus in the following sentence. The more or less narrowly focused sentence shifts the reader's attention to the inherent humor that has been suggested throughout the paragraph. The correspondence of the gunman's eyes to the narrator's cunningly drives the authorial strategy before the reader's readerly unconscious and before the trick is fully revealed the audience have taken their cue from the author and attuned themselves to the level at which now the story is operating. Just imagine the comedic possibility as the gunman peers through his sunglasses at the trembling victims and the narrator suddenly decides he is at the vagrant-turned dictator's mercy. Just a few minutes ago the well-to-do protagonist would not condescend to make a direct eye contact. But now he is even eager to catch a glimpse of the man's eyes behind the sunglasses. The tables have indeed been turned on him. The reversed positions are also indicated by the visibility of the other. While the gunman can peer through the tinted glasses at the protagonist the latter cannot, despite his eagerness to catch the gunman's eyes. But it turns out the visibility of the gunman is more represented by the view the protagonist has of the gun pointed directly at him. In other words, what he has been focusing on has been not the eyes but the menace symbolized by the gun, which the man with all the dynamite sticks attached to his body embody. What does the reader make of the skewed presentation, or representation of the relative positions each holds? That is immediately revealed by the following sentences that refer to the layered significations of the gunman. The trench coat, which the protagonist recognized as something part of the vagrant's tradition of keeping all their assets on their body turns out a cover, or layer, that keeps the true threat beneath it. The observation, of which lawyers are supposed to be quite adept, turns out as unreliable as the perspectives they take on any issue involving money. What matters most is the superficial impression any objects makes on them. But the olfactory issue arises again. As the man peels away his coat and displays before the trembling audience the dynamite on his body, the smell that impressed the protagonist so much just a few minutes ago strikes his nose again. But the humor dictates in this tense moment too. The reader, holding a ontological vantage point, seizes the impetus and retrieves the remnants of the initial scene he has kept in the corner of his mind and glues them together with the new development that suddenly pushed before his eyes. But the humorous strain wins over this time again. The smell does not matter as much as it used to. He is too preoccupied with staying alive that his mind focused on the gun, that which the narrator can see, than on the distinct odor streets dwellers accrue on them. Now, once again the humor arises from the combination of cockiness manifested by the protagonist even in the face of danger, with the truism that any average reader equipped with common sense can recognize. While a simple, unadulterated humor might cause the reader to loosen his face a little, this astute combination of the two disparate elements seizes the reader and triggers a response which the author calculates will cause the momentum to propel the audience to both simultaneously plunge further into the fray of the action and delve the depth of layered significations that occur at that particular moment. The

exquisite strategy works because of the author's masterly of story telling. While the layers of signification are revealed the reader revels in the humor and at the same time proceeds to the next sentence. Nothing induces the author to let the story stagnate and consequently detracts from the enjoyment of the story. And duly the reader's eyes focus on the thing underneath the layers of clothing/significations as the gunman allows a glimpse of the grisly sticks. But the author must inevitably mix the tones, with a suggested emphasis on comedy. Before the narrator identifies the objects that cling to the gunman's body, he must humble himself and admit he is quite inexperienced in the art of detonation. For a proud lawyer to admit to his ignorance is in itself a great concession. This concession is seized as a material to foreground the potential risibility legal profession is susceptible to. What comes out of the scene is that the surface importance lawyers impart is only another layer of pretension. Any object is constituted of multiple layers of significations. What defines one entity is so much more complicated by the cultural detritus every individual unknowingly carries with him. The first impression the seemingly homeless black man makes can be as misleading as the impeccable efficiency the brisk manners of the legal firm initially indicate of the inherent qualities of the personnel who work there. The unmistakable truth comes out from under the coat of the black gunman. But what truth it is. It is simultaneously grim in its implications but also by the way it is presented is immediately infused with the inkling that the truth is not simply naked and unadulteratedly sharp-edged. With its potential power to blow the associates together with the gunman into pieces, the dynamite, the means to execute the deadly intent the gunman burst into the firm with, it nevertheless is endowed with such comedic nuances that the reader is soon egged into an interpretation based on the spaghettis growing out of the sticks. They indeed become the tendrils in which directions the reader traces the dividing significations that arise from the story now just shifting into overdrive mode. Notice how flimsily the sticks are attached to the body of the gunman compared to their implications to the associates now being taken hostage. A innocent piece of tape precariously keep them in place while the men lined up against the wall watch ghastly at the nonchalant, cool-headed gunman. The contrast is enough to let the comedic elements to arise in the instantaneous moments the reader spends passing over the sentence where the fictional space suddenly swells with the vivid activation of the characters in the readerly consciousness. Most likely the moment is indeed a passing one. But the laughter that uncontrollably arises from the scene is enough to keep the reader going forward to throw himself deeper into the world of Grishamism. The reader finds himself wallowing in the space where the facetious imperceptibly merges with the serious and the two combined synergistically evolve a space that is immeasurably pleasurable for him to experience.

After reminding the reader that the sticks involves two layers of signification, the author hurries on to the next phase of the narrator's mental ratiocination. Nothing prevents the author from presenting the maximum semes in the flowing time span that constantly rushes by the readerly



consciousness. As the two layers flickers, tempting the reader to grasp one or the other layers of the nuance, there follows the dominance of one layer, that is the grim and the reality-impacted. The reaction the protagonist manifests is exactly the kind the average consciousness manifests under the identical circumstances. The man wants to bolt and leave the heart-pulsing situation behind. Although the reader is repeatedly asked to identify with the characters, the privilege that results from the ontological detachment is only his. The men directly embroiled in the scene has only one wish. To get out of the mess and place himself in the same position as the ontologically advantaged readers. But the sooner the grim description is presented, the more abruptly the tone is diluted, or enriched, by the other layer.

My first instinct was to bolt, to lunge with arms and legs flapping and flailing for the door, and hope for luck, hope for a bad shot as I scrambled for the lock, then another bad shot as I fell through the doorway into the hallway. But my knees shook and my blood ran cold. There were gasps and slight moans from the eight against the wall, and this perturbed our captor. "Please be quiet," he said in the tone of a patient professor. His calmness unnerved me. (*The Street Lawyer*, <http://www.cnn.com/books/beginnings/9803/06/index.html> )

The reader is directed to focus on the ridiculous image that emerges from the "flapping and flailing" legs scampering towards the door. The effect is again based on the contrast. That is, the contrast between the serious, cool-headed stereotype of the lawyers and the possible ridiculous figures they would cut in case of a real emergency. The two images flash simultaneously and since one is equally balanced by the other they augment the effects of each other. The felicitous result of the augmentation is the added hilarity the readers perceive being achieved and activated in the little scene Grisham presents to their eyes. Then the author follows up the already hilarious frame with another potentially comedic comment. This time the effect arises from the understatement the author makes in conveying the separate signficatory layers. The narrator hopes for "a bad shot" as he rushes to the door. The sentiment expressed is of course true. No one wants to be picked out and being shot at, and worse, being actually hit. In that sense, the narrator simply expresses a vicarious sentiment every reader feels. But at the same time there is something else happening. it is not merely the kind that impinges upon the semantic element involved in the passage. But more like the kind that fuses the semantic implications with the verbal activation only good authors are capable of. Why does the reader find the lines in the sequence so funny? That is essentially the starting point to answer the mechanism of the fusion and the implications involved in it. It turns out that the effect once again is the product of the synergistic agreement among the layers and the elements the author embeds in the passage in question. The effect is partly due to understatement and self-activating images, which tend to present iridescent contrasts among complex layers of signfications. But most of all due to the inherent tone the passage maintains through the masterly control Grisham holds over the story. And all the elements are acted on by each other and act on

the other interactively as the multi-layered shades of significations unfold from the inscribed surface of the book, which is the avatar of Grishamism the reader is allowed to grab in his hands.

I can go on forever enumerating the prominent features of Grishamism found in *The Street Lawyer*. To be honest, there is no particular reason why I chose it out of so many masterpieces except that it happens to appear online, currently my favorite means to gather information. But the book, being the latest and promising to be another success, does manifest features that are common with other stories Grisham has published. Topically, it also showcases the development involving a lawyer. That is one of the many things Grisham indeed repeatedly employs story after story. In *The Rainmaker*, for instance, the author introduces a young attorney who “makes things happen by bringing in clients and big cases” (<http://www.lagunabeachca.com/rainmakr.htm> ). In fact, the lawyer-protagonist plays convincingly from the author’s first yet published book. It is a running theme, as it were, which he learned to manipulate from his experience as a State legislator. In a sense every aspect of his stories is derived from his lived-in experience of breathing the muggy and sultry air of the deep South. His very successful story *A Time to Kill*, for instance, was based on the brutal rape that took place in DeSoto County, although Grisham confesses that the story is actually constituted not simply of the incident that happened in DeSoto Country alone but many similar cases that happened and happen all over the nation ([http://www.msstate.edu/grishma/We\\_knew.html](http://www.msstate.edu/grishma/We_knew.html) ). The author’s Southern consciousness is indeed so deep-rooted that his initial aspirations as a starting author was to become the second Faulkner, the voice to represent the psyche of the Deep South. But as a sophisticated author he did not limit himself to one particular region. His most admired author remains to this day Steinbeck. As he admits, Grisham regards the Nobel prize winning author the most influential and whose style the fittest to be emulated to enrich his own writing. As quoted on the Mississippi University web site, Steinbeck’s “stark, realistic style” has become a standard for Grisham ([http://www.msstate.edu/grisham/We\\_knew.html](http://www.msstate.edu/grisham/We_knew.html) ). The exuberant humor that comes out of the printed pages of Grisham’s stories then partly arises filtered through Grisham’s emulation of the Nobel prize winner’s style. Being immersed in the legal world before Grisham entered the fray of the publishing world he is deeply aware of what the legal profession involves. It is not only the world of sophisticated arguments but also where money rules as the prime mover. Almost all of the lawyer-protagonists are more or less concerned with money and do not mind expression their desire for the grand dreams green bucks promise. Starting with Rudy Baylor, an upstart who takes up an opportunity to sue a mega-corporation for the possibility of winning a multimillion dollar case, to the daring abscondence of Patrick Lanigan with the millions he whisked out of the overseas account his law firm illegally kept. They are all the ramifications of money connections legal profession develops. In a sense, a comment by PW Review on *The Partner* is to the point. In deed “money rules” in Grisham’s world ([http://www.bookwire.com/PW/fiction/read.Review\\$3632](http://www.bookwire.com/PW/fiction/read.Review$3632) ). But what makes Grisham’s story so

relevant to reality and pleasurable to read is this implication of the source of capitalism and free world in the plot. Nothing after all impacts the reader's daily life more strongly than money. It is after all the very means by which the material manifestation of Grisham's intellectual and imaginative concealment is conveyed to and experienced by the reader. Why not praise the dominance of money in his stories then rather than frown upon it as a sign of gross materialism and cheap hackneyism some critics accuse the author of being prone to? Besides the ubiquitous money and lawyers Grisham introduces and spins out a common fantasy every reader at least once in their life wishes happened to themselves. In one story, the protagonist decides to drop out, that is out of sight, and leaves the familiar site of activity. The USA Today online edition refers to this when it comments that *The Partner* explores the universal fantasy of dropping out" (<http://www.usatoday.com/life/enter/books/leb674.htm> ). The author develops on the idea of voluntary disappearance and weaves a story that is full of quirky incidents only possible in fiction. But since the reader maintains his ontological detachment, the fantasy being embedded comes out nothing less than a pleasurable experience. But what pulls these elements together and constitutes them as one whole is the manner in which the author treats them on multiple of signifiatory levels. Then whatever the manifestations of these elements that cause immense pleasure for the reading audience, they are intricately spliced with the phenomenon, or a concept to be strict, which I termed Grishamism. Each incidence of nodes at which the reader is caused to grasp the totality of instantaneous signification that is embedded to be activated upon its contact with readerly consciousness effloresces because the author implicates the totality in the whole environment constituted by the reader and the inscribed pages the latter holds in his hands. As is amply clear by now, Grishamism is given a living space between the author and the audience by the dexterous operation the former executes to bring about the sphere in which one of the most pleasurable communications is initiated. Grishamism in a sense is then a virtual phenomenon but at the same time autoactivating once the space is taken for real, real as in reality-impacted, by readerly consciousness. With his ontological advantage, the reader can easily afford to grant that status. Because, after all, the gain is all his.

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