

# 琉球大学学術リポジトリ

## 何故今Grishamなのか?

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## Why Grisham Now ?

平 良 勝 明

The title may be quixotic. But what I have in mind is the ubiquitous presence John Grisham has established in the publishing industry. One after another his books have occupied best sellers spots on any prominent charts one can find in famous magazines such as The New York Times Weekly edition and more recently on many electronic magazines on the Internet. The essay I have started will look at the phenomenon in which our author crops up so expectedly and find any causes that may elucidate Grisham's popularity in the American publishing industry. As the style of my essay might have already indicated, my search does not necessarily restrict me within a tight-jacket format one might expect from a academic output. Rather, it comprehends every kind of avenues that promise to shed more light on the phenomenon I am tempted to call Grishamism. The keyword I have in mind is why Grisham now? It echoes word by word the title I chose for this essay. By what I mean by that is what appeals to the contemporary readers so much that they responds in such an overwhelmingly posit manner whenever Grisham's books are published. Unless there is some element that intrinsically appeals to the readers the author's popularity could not have been maintained so consistently. At least my hypothesis. And my objective is to analyze Grisham's works and find out the facets of his works to pinpoint the features that have made the author what he is in the American popular fiction industry. The preamble is becoming too long. Before I waste al the space without going into the main argument I have to begin what I set out to do.

One of the most salient features of Grisham's writing is his style. Like his predecessors, who include such prominent authors as John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway and F. Scot Fitzgerald, Grisham is interested in developing a style that captures the widest possible audience without becoming banal. One of the methods Gresham employs to achieve this end is to fill his fictional space with abundant humor interlaced with piquancy. In fact what runs throughout Grisham's oeuvre is humor, which is often incorporated in his writing merely obliquely, and the realistic detachment which Hemingway so successfully maintained throughout his output. Without much abstract generalization, I had better introduce the reader to concrete manifestations of the humor interwoven in realistic descriptions of the scenes that develop in Grisham's stories. Look at the following excerpts.

I ease into my chair, now having established that I am a quasi-legitimate person who's studying thick books in hopes of soon joining a noble profession. Surely, she's remotely impressed. I plunge into my studies, oblivious to her suffering.

Minutes pass. I flip a page and look at her at the same time. She's looking at me, and my heart skips a beat. I totally ignore her for as long as I can bear, then I look up. She's lost again, deep in her suffering. She squeezes the napkin. The tears stream down her cheeks.

My heart breaks just watching her suffer like this. I'd love to sit next to her, maybe place my arm around her, and talk about things. If she's married, then where the hell is her husband?

She glances my way, but I don't think she sees me. (*The Rainmaker*, p. 201)

Notice the flippant manner the protagonist involves the reader in the psychological manifestation he shamelessly makes. Obviously it is no secret that Rudy Baylor, protagonist of the story, is prone to tickle the reader's funny bone every time he has the slightest chance of drawing snickers from the reader. The tone is decidedly casual and deliberately low brow. Before the reader knows what is happening, he is sucked into the fictional world the author establishes. Who else eases into a chair but a sassy bloke who does not mind offending all too finicky readers. Needless to say before such punctilious readership even lay hands on Grisham's books they should have had seconds thoughts about paying for the author's works. In that sense, the initial expression is neither daring nor completely unexpected. It is rather a well calculated gambit to establish the right kind of tone Grisham exactly wants. The smoothness with which the author lets the character, Rudy Baylor, slide into the scene gives enough glimpse of the talent Grisham possesses to engage the reader in the way the audience is presumed to. But the character formed through the fertile imagination of a talented author assumes an independent life of his own and amuses the reader more than the author might have bargained for. Notice the facetious manner Baylor evokes a snigger from the reader. His humor is not a blatantly direct kind but something that arises as if it were a mere afterthought. But every perceptive reader is not going to miss the implications of the sublet remark, "a quasi-legitimate person who's studying thick books in hopes of soon joining a noble profession." The deprecatory remark of the supposedly sacred profession, although by now lawyers may not garner such respects as they used to in light of the Lewinsky case and the convoluted indictments and legal legerdemain consequent upon the former assistant's initial move, Rudy's oblique assessment of the profession nevertheless provokes a laugh from the tickled readers. The comment the author makes therefore is not only hilarious but in general pat. What I mean by the generality obviously is a moot point. But the fact that so many readers find vicarious pleasure by such a flippant reference to the legal profession certainly proves perspicuity of the author. Although, to be fair to that sacred profession, the explicit reference is to the status of the young protagonist of the story that he is yet to take the bar examination, the combination of the holy profession later in the sentence and the quasi-legitimacy is more than enough to evoke a familiar sentiment most people share in this litigious

age. This train is thought is actually encouraged as the author astutely throws in "thick books." In itself the entry of thick legal books crammed with precedents is innocuous enough. But the timing of the entry excludes the possibility of aleatory occurrence of the reference to the legal profession at this particular juncture in the story. It is not only relevant to the real politics but also apt in that it triggers the hilarious outburst of cathartic laughter the average Americans need to cope with the ludicrous litigation the real-life lawyers are so prone to be engaged in these days. The sublet expressions indeed tend to gather a wide range of emotional implications when Grisham creates an appealing hero. Appealing to the average readership, that is. Notice the ensuing lines. The author succeeds in conveying the protagonist's distraction by plunging him into rapt reading of the legal books while supposedly letting him remain oblivious to the woman near him. But the casual spilling of words betray Rudy. He cannot in fact ignore the woman. She is not only not blotted out of his conscious horizon while he pores over the thick legal books but also not reduced to an object of insignificant interest for Rudy. On the contrary, he is desperate to arouse the corresponding curiosity in the woman at the hospital. Otherwise why does he notice she is remotely impressed by him? This is in fact a skilful rendition of psychological subtlety the author demonstrates in an unobtrusive manner possible. The truth of the situation is immediately clarified, however. Rudy becomes restive soon after he sets out on a presumably momentous task. He flips pages and forgets what he has been about. He casts furtive glances at the woman. He betrays his mind has been on the woman the moment he saw her. With each move she makes his heart skips. Rudy tries his best to bury his face in the book that happens to be open. But his curiosity gets better of him and his eyes are inevitably on the woman in suffering. The sharpened observation of Rudy manifests through the imagination that runs wild as he steals views of the woman inexplicably in tears. By the end of the passage the author's purpose is adequately served. The mystery woman completely establishes her present in the story and there is another thread of line to follow for the readers. And the thread is potentially a romantic kind. A usual fare for popular fiction.

In this short excerpt then the reader is served all sorts of fictional fare that make his reading experience so much entertaining. Rather than generalizing his craftsmanship it may be better if I excerpted more of his passages and instantiated his authorial forte in imparting pleasure to the audiences worldwide. Let us take up another passage.

And I watch the clock. As ten approaches, I lose my edge and start gazing about. I try to remain calm and studious, but I find myself jumping whenever a new customer enters the grill. Two nurses are eating at one table, a lone technician reads a book at another.

She rolls in five minutes after the hour, the same elderly gent pushing her carefully to the spot she wants. She picks the same table as last night, and smiles at me as he maneuvers her chair. "Orange juice," she says. Her hair is still pulled back, but, if I'm not mistaken, she is wearing a trace of mascara and a bit of eyeliner. She's also wearing a pale red lipstick, and the effect is

dramatic. I was not aware last night that her face was completely clean. Tonight, with just a little makeup, she is exceptionally beautiful. Her eyes are clear, radiant, free of sadness. (*The Rainmaker*, p. 202)

Notice the pace at which the story progresses. Grisham in fact never allows the plot line to stagnate. That is evident in the almost staccato rhythm with which the author carries the reader along with the development of the story. No wonder that the overall impression some readers get is Grisham's "easy, fluid style," with which the author navigates through layers of plots in his works (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ISBN...20602/gatorbyte00A/3749-1195478-517188>) starting with the restless move of the protagonist, the author renders the simulacrum of the seamless reality in a breathlessly fast-clipped pulsation of sentences. It is as if Grisham is reluctant to give the reader a moment to take a breath to regain composure to reflect on his reading activity. The strategy employed here is obviously to avert the danger of allowing the reader time to withdraw into the mundane world that somehow has been successfully melded into the presumed reality, which is the space developing in the book the reader is holding in his hand. The line separating between the reality and the other reality (the one that reader willing contribute to its making through his reading) is ever so murky when the latter is developed by such a skilful craftsman as Grisham. Notice how universal, and of course mundane, is the sequence involved in the checking of the watch and the restlessness conveyed through casual remarks subsequent to the initial cue to grab the reader's attention to the restless nature of the scene. The protagonist's state of mind is translated by seemingly inconsequential details, which because of their very deceptively inconsequentiality exude implied sentiments more naturally and sometimes more forcibly. The author simply leaves the residue of echoes, as it were, to linger in the interstices of the reader's mind and lets them work themselves to form the exact effects they are intended to form. It does not take long, on close scrutiny, to find out that the oscillation between Rudy's effort to concentrate and his surrender to the distractions at the door draws the reader's attention more to the futility of his supposed duty and emphasizes the importance of the presence of the woman he is so distracted about. As Rudy becomes restless the exterior details intrudes on his ken whether he likes it or not. But the reader most certainly registers the state of his mind as these inconsequential bits of information comes to the fore. They are like the peripheral details that appear in movie scenes. They may not be important by themselves. But as they adumbrate the protagonists in the foreground they add subtle nuances to the total image and contribute in the end synergistic signification that would not be possible without them. The "lone technician" who thrusts his presence to the audience's view may not be essential in the scene but he certainly appends the texture that would not be possible without his gratuitous and yet still indispensable intrusion. It then turns out all the tangential details are a mere preamble to the appearance of the much awaited lady in a wheelchair. The momentum to go forward along the plot ever gathers its force and the readers are not at the mercy of the author. But

again, that is not to say Grisham is blatantly straightforward. If he is straightforward, he is in a way one perceives the real world. Through hints and indirection. The overall pattern and salvageable intents and portents emerge meaningful only later as the reader's mind incessantly work on the initial impression. In the fictional world of John Grisham, however, the patterns and encoded significations are arranged in a manner that the readers decode them almost simultaneously as the story evolves. So there is not a noticeable lapse between the moment of contact with the written words on the part of the reader and the self-extraction of messages that occur right before the eyes of the reader as he reads the story. Notice the accumulation of small details that insinuate into the reader's consciousness. They are mostly glimpsed images of the woman. But they form a sensualized totality when they come out pulsing from the surface of the written page. They are intended to be so. But the trick Grisham uses to a good effect is that he simply and casually drops each descriptive words that pertain to the woman in the wheel chair. The smile she sends to Rudy, the "orange juice" he hears coming out of the dainty mouth of the woman, "a pale red lipstick," "a trace of mascara and a bit of eyeliner." They are all calculated to evoke the kind of sensation Rudy is filled with at the moment and the author at the same time wants the reader to experience simultaneously. The cultural connotations are rife as well. The battered woman, who showed herself so pitifully to Rudy before, now emerges dressed up and quite feminized to obviously attract Rudy, or at least to show herself in the light she would like to appear with full consciousness of an opposite sex gazing at her. Or is it only in the mind of Rudy that she appears transformed into a beauty in distress? But whatever the case, Grisham's fast-paced juxtaposition of the sensuous details cannot leave the reader in the dark as to what is transpiring implicitly between the two. No wonder the *USA Today* commented that the "pace is fast" (<http://www.usatoday.com/life/enter/books/leb3.htm> ). The book is not only fast-paced but it succeeds in arousing the exact set of emotions as Grisham loads each detail in the scene with cultural implications that any average reader is expected to intuit. What is remarkable indeed about his works is the facility with which the author enables the reader to delve the undertone of his stories. And Grisham inserts only enough cultural implications so that the average reader expends only minimum energy to decode his "messages." That is why I referred to his loaded words as self-extracting.

It may be amply clear that Grisham effectively implicates each word in many layers of signifying processes. It is time to quote another passage and further demonstrate the workings of the author's talent. The next quote is again from the same book.

I follow her [Dot] through the dark den and into a short hallway. Donny Ray's door is closed, and there's a NO SMOKING sign on it. She taps lightly and we enter. The room is neat and tidy, with an antiseptic smell to it. A fan blows from the corner. The screened window is open. A television is elevated to the foot of his bed, and next to it, close to his pillow, is a small table

covered with bottles of fluids and pills.

Donny Ray lies stiff as a board with a sheet tucked tightly under his frail body. He smiles broadly when he sees me, and pats a spot next to him. This is where I sit. Dot assumes a position on the other side. (p. 278)

As the other passages I already quoted, the descriptive scene moves as smoothly as a stream. One noticed in fact one of the most conspicuous stylistic feature of Grisham's as somehow reminiscent of a movie script (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ISBN...20602/gatorbyte00A/3749-1195478-517188> ). The comment is not meant to belittle the pace at which the author carries the readers forward along the story. But rather to commend the crisp and brisk rhythm with which the author keeps the plot from becoming stagnant. Although the comment is essentially on the nature of the dialogue Grisham enlivens his stories, it seems to be relevant to the overall quality of the author's works. Notice how bare indeed his sentences are. There is barely no element that does not contribute to the flow of the story. Grisham lops off all extraneous words that merely bloat up the sentences and distract the reader from reaching the level at which all layers of signficatory implications become a meaningful whole. But the bareness of the style does not preclude certain characteristic from emerging from the texture of the passage. One thing that immediately strikes the reader is the masculine ring that pervades the story. The tone is "hard-boiled" in a sense that it is resonant with the style Hemingway employed with great success early in the century. The conversationless passage brings to the invalid's room more directly. If that is what the reader wants Grisham then succeeds in delivering it. But he accomplishes more than that. Along the way the minimal description heightens the sense of desolation the big insurance company helped to bring about to the Rays. The scant words all the more emphasizes the relevant social issue the capitalized announcement posted on the door. As the two walk toward the bedroom where Ray lies bed ridden the "NO SMOKING" glares at the reader as well as at Dot and Rudy. When they entered the room the evidence of the havoc tobacco industry wrought is revealed more than abundantly. What the two and the reader by implication find is an emaciated man who musters all his energy to welcome Rudy and Dot. But his deteriorating condition is obvious as the dying man only manages to pat on the spot where Rudy is to sit and talk about the strategy to bring down the evil insurance company which is directly responsible for the invalid's suffering. With the sudden introduction of Billy Ray in such a deplorable state, the impression Grisham conveys cannot fail to impinge on the social issues that are indeed relevant to reality. Although Grisham's style is admittedly bare and stripped of elements that might give more depth to his stories, they do not forgo real life ramifications that actually confront people on a daily basis. In fact Grisham admits his concern with social issues in an interview with Jesse Kornbluth posted on the Web: "I prefer to tackle issues— death penalty, tobacco litigation, insurance abuse..." (<http://www.bookpage.com/9702bp/grisham/grishaminterview.html> ). Although he immediately

after that adds that following through those issues may not be “always possible every time out,” the piquancy that comes out from the bare description of the leukemia patient proves his social conscience is given free rein to in this particular scene.

Grisham’s style exemplified here may be bare but that does not necessarily exclude all the elements that create the right ambience for the family tragedy. As the two trudge down the hallway, it is dark. Admittedly so, because the gloom is the inevitable result of the unfair practice Great Benefit Life Insurance is engage in. The company refused to respond to the family’s claim on a flimsy pretext that the patient’s condition is deemed pre-existent. Since such preexistent illness, according to the company, exonerate it from its responsibility to make the payment Dot Ray’s claim is null and invalid. That is the sophistic argument with which the company meets the plaintiff as the issue is fought at the court of law subsequently in the story. In each word Grisham employs in this short passage, it is obvious where his sympathy lies. Despite the smell of antiseptic and other signs of desperate illness the patient before the two is suffering, the room is kept tidy. The simple description like that is meant to taken by the reader as a key to the manner the confrontation between the two parties of the litigation that will eventually develops into a full-blown battle between the company and the Ray’s and their lawyer. The secret force that will manifest as a driving force to compel the downtrodden to confront the giant of the insurance industry is therefore carefully woven into the seemingly innocuous passage. The reader is in a sense asked to decipher the messages layered in Grisham’s fast paced story. The stark contrast of the tidiness the poor family maintains in the saddest of the rooms to the ominous reality that looms in the whole scene is one example of the force and skill the author demonstrates in the story. Reading such a passage who would not be tempted to listen to the Rays and Rudy as their representative, rather than to the company who hires attorneys who spin out legal legerdemain as fast as the company forks over retainers. One of the few things that exhibits life is the fan. But notice how effectively it exudes life. It simply “blows from the corner.” By the seemingly careless selection of the verb Grisham manages to imbue the scene with the indomitable spirit Ray exemplifies by his valiant challenge to the big insurance firm. The force the simple word conveys is calculated to impart a heavy lumbering and yet reality-touched tone that resonates with the idea Grisham expresses in one of his interviews online. He admits that one reason he is drawn to Steinbeck, especially his *The Grapes of Wrath*, is because “it had a lot to do with the way I viewed humanity and the struggles of little people against big people” (<http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/gri0int-2>).

The battle between the Rays and Great Benefit Life Insurance is not the only social issue involved in the story. There is another that plays on the side line but occasionally gathers momentum as Rudy is romantically drawn to Kelly. Although there are some readers who found Grisham’ weaving of subplots extraneous and distracting, others perceive a integrative skill at work here as each plot is tightly knit to the main story line. And most of all they praise Grisham’s

restraint by pointing out that the author lets “the reader know just enough information about a topic to pique their interest, and of knowing when not to push the topic in the reader’s face” (<http://www.esquare.com/1100/BookReview/>). That is enough preamble. I will quote a passage where wife abuse is taken up as a specific topic to propel the story. Such a passage inevitably involves Kelly, now the object of Rudy’s romantic love.

“Pretty bad break, huh?” I ask, nodding at her leg.

“It’s my ankle. They put a pin in it.”

“How’d it happen?” This is the obvious next question, and I assumed the answer would be perfectly easy for her.

It’s not. She hesitates, and the eyes instantly water. “A domestic accident,” she says as if she’s rehearsed this vague explanation.

What the hell does that mean? A domestic accident? Did she fall down the stairs?

“Oh,” I say as if everything’s perfectly clear. I’m worried about the wrists because they’re both bandaged, not plastered. They do not appear to be broken or sprained. Lacerated, perhaps.

“It’s a long story,” she mumbles between sips, and looks away. (p. 204)

The brief encounter certainly take an ominous tone as the conversation inevitably turns to the cast and bruises Kelly is wearing. Initially as a terse macho attorney aspirant Rudy tries to make light of the apparent battery Kelley had suffered. The tone is consistent with the one pervading the book as a whole. The Hemingwayan machismo is in fact the appealing quality of the young man to the reader throughout the book. This time there is no reason why he should take a different tack. But the deliberate understatement Rudy employs brings more attention to the seriousness of the scars that show on the woman’s body. Characterized as a sardonic hero by the USA Today’s online book review, Rudy is depicted as a type who cannot brook facile display of his softer sentiments (<http://www.usatoday.com/life/enter/books/leb3600.htm>). But on this occasion even he cannot help exhibiting tenderness at the sight of the poor woman who he recognizes has suffered more than her share. Kelly reciprocates in the same tone. But her pathetic attempt at being indifferent to her condition only increases the pathos the reader feels toward her. She has suffered so much that it has become almost a reflexive response on the part of the young sufferer to belittle her injury. At least that is a possibility which crosses the reader’s mind as he reads on while two play at being unaffected by the terrible tragedy that happened to one of the parties. The damage done to her is just minor because she needed only a pin to be inserted in her body to straighten out the bone that was broken. Who would take her word for it? That is, who would fail to perceive the gravity of the violence inflicted upon the woman? Not many. It is exactly the degree of sympathetic sentiment Grisham arouses in the readers which is surprising and at the same time expected from a craftsman of his caliber. But with so much economy of words and predictability! When the exact sentiment arises at the calculated moment in the story, the reader feels the propulsive momentum that

carries him onward along the story. It is more than the suspension of disbelief that the author triggers in a passage like this but the total immersion of the reader's consciousness in the world developed right before his eyes that the author causes that is indeed amazing. A simple question is expected to induce a simple answer. But it is at this juncture that both the interlocutor and the reader is encountered with a brutal reality face to face. Somehow the more or less intangible reality becomes suddenly transformed into a ugly blood and flesh affair that is shot through by gores and physical abuse. The narration, or the conversation in this particular instance, breaks out of the boundaries the hard-boiled talk tries to impose on the conversation. The topic suddenly introduced by the appearance of the woman with her injuries is not the kind that can be contained by the mere superficiality such talk can reach. This sudden breakage of machismo modesty is initiated by an ugly social issue that is relevant to contemporary society. Even Rudy's sassy talk cannot avert the devastating implications from emerging from the scene. The woman's reticence only magnifies the seriousness of the insidious problem which hers is only a manifestation of hundreds of thousands of actual cases that are happening every day. Rudy astutely notes that the parts that are bandaged rather than plastered are potentially more serious. That is another suggestion that domestic violence manifests in damages in a variety of forms. It can not only be broken bones but also lacerations that will stay without completely healing, even if the victims survive. Kelly's careful choice of the word, "domestic accident," only adds to the irony of the situation. Although it must have been the husband who is to blame for the disastrous result, she is still trying to tone down the violence her husband wielded against her. The ludicrous line of argument induces wry humor from Rudy. The response he makes is the kind that provokes laughs from the readers. Needless to say the question, obviously the one that only occurs in his consciousness, is meant to be rhetorical. But the outburst the audience perceives renders the spillage of Rudy's thought a cue for them to partake the genuine humor the author intends the audience to accept. The gravity of the problem Kelly manifests is revealed through the loaded answer she makes at the end of the passage. It is a long story.

The socially relevant topic turns out to include more relevant stories which contemporary American society is much plagued with. the cause of the wife beating introduced here is so familiar nowadays that most average reader will be struck with the aptness of the topic brought out in this particular juncture. The following is the passage that develops the preliminary talk quoted above.

"What does your husband do?"

"Drives forklift. Drinks a lot. He's a washed-up jock who still dreams of playing major league baseball."

I didn't ask for all this. I take it he was a high school athletic stud, she was the cutest cheerleader, the perfect all-American couple, Mr. and Miss Podunk High, most handsome, most beautiful,

most athletic, most likely to succeed until they get caught one night without a condom. Disaster strikes. For some reason they decide against an abortion. Maybe they finish high school, maybe they don't. Disgraced, they flee Podunk for the anonymity of the big city. After the miscarriage, the romance wears off and they wake up to the reality that life has arrived.

He still dreams of fame and fortune in the big leagues. She longs for the careless years so recently gone, and dreams of the college she'll never see. (p. 206)

As adumbrated, Kelly's husband is in an unexciting job of driving a forklift. Nothing wrong in itself except that he is found to be addicted to alcohol. A sinister announcement turns into a full-blown tragedy of a man whose dream forever remains out of reach. Possibly a popular and promising high school athlete who yearns to become a professional ballplayer but whose talent is not quite adequate to play in the major league. The story sounds too familiar that every reader might be tempted to grin at the affability of the man who takes his frustration on his own poor wife while keeping his vain dream of reaching the long-term goal. But life does not leave anyone as they are forever. In the meantime all sorts of contingencies happen and circumstances shape themselves to threaten realization of the dream one keeps alive. He loses every chance to remove himself from the groove he is in. The carrot of a dream he keeps dangling before him prevents the decisive move to make a fresh start. If that is indeed happened to the man involved in the story he sounds too familiar to be much suspected he is in fact otherwise. The use of a stereotype of a failure in life facilitates the transmission of the message or the image that is common in actual life, so that the author is enabled to establish the kind of communication he wants with the reader. Although there is a report made public recently that teenage pregnancy is on the decline for the past several years, it is certainly a serious social issue that handicaps young parents from achieving their full potential in education and work. But once again if we focus our attention on the manner the social implications are conveyed we notice the unsentimental style the author employs to seemingly just skim over the potentially grave subject. As mentioned before one thing Grisham avoids is letting his story stagnate over one particular topic, however a long attention it seems to deserve. The reader is allowed to delve the depth of the social implications but the story is set in a way that he has to go along with the flow of the story first. All the relevant information and encrypted cultural, social messages are to be processed by the reader's consciousness as the plot remains in motion and as it constantly develops. Then what drives the propulsive force ever forward? It is again the terseness of Grisham's expressions and the ubiquitous humor that bubbles out no matter what the particular subject being touched upon at a given moment. Enough of generalizations. I think I had better analyze the above excerpt to demonstrate what I mean.

The first question is a simple initiator that breaks ice that has been between the two. It is a casual initiator as well, which is usually the way Grisham brings out plethora of information that gives depth to his stories. The person asked is thus not required to provide her private secret. But

that is what the interlocutor receives rather unexpectedly, but for the readers completely expectedly. The distance created by the divergent positions between the reader and the narrator prepares the audience for the implicit humor the casual style triggers. The blasé manner with which Kelly introduces her husband even forces the corner of the reader's mouth to curl. The contrast of a "washed-up" jock and a man who thought he could have made it to the major league is not only humorous but even ludicrous in its suggestion of the vast space the man has covered over the passage of time. And Grisham lets Kelly put it in the simplest a manner possible without any show of emotions. But that lack of theatrics enhances the force the possible suggestion of the profound tragedy she is going through. At this point all the biographical background hypothetically formulated by the narrator/protagonist becomes almost redundant as the reader feels it is indeed the path the woman's husband has followed so far. But being reminded in the explicit written on the page accelerates the associations the author intended the reader to make. The associations are once again the kind that is based on the real life phenomenon surrounding the domestic environment in contemporary American society. Rudy's amateurish reconstruction of the past that lies behind the woman's life becomes in a way pat because that is indeed the way most American talk shows deal with the daily troubles various families encounter and interested in watching being enacted on national television. Therefore, Rudy exemplifies a typical mindset that is perfectly expected in the pop culture context Grisham is working. Conversely, the expectations the audience have of the genre of books the author writes facilitate the communication with the widest and deepest layers of understanding going along with it. Seeing most sentences appearing in the excerpt are short, minimal chunks syntactically only enough to convey simplest of the messages, it is rather surprising that the author manages to pack so much extra linguistic significance in them. But that is again another instantiation of the author's uncommon skill to establish the right kind of communication with his readers. Who could miss the humor and the subtle nuances contained in the humorous sounding word like Podunk High? That is, as long as the reader poring over the pages are immersed in the culture Grisham assumes the background of the audience his works. Because of the humor that so unobtrusively exudes from his works, the pathos that Kelly's unfulfilled dream of attending college evokes comes out all the more piquantly. Obviously what makes pathos or humor more effective is the addition of the opposite sentiment and the two combined present them in the same breath or even simultaneously. That is exactly the case as the final sentence rings in the reader's ear with the knell of a lugubrious bell in the distance. Although the hypothetical statement made by Rudy continues considerably in this short passage, the impact the final sentence packs reaches out to the audience because of the bridge the author helps the audience to build with the reality.

Now it is time to move on to other books to cull examples that show Grisham's skill in establishing communication with his audience. I choose one of his first books that caught reader's attention. The book entitled *A Time to Kill* is filled with social implications. Because it is

implicated in the racial relations between whites and blacks in a small town in Mississippi, the book can be considered Grisham response to the real life situation in the South. He in fact admits in an interview online that he “wrote only after witnessing a trial” (<http://www.bookpage.com/9702bp/grisham/grishaminterview.html>). The story is about a 10-year-old black girl raped by two white men. Enraged by the inhuman crime committed by the two youths, the girl's father takes the law into his own hands and goes out and shoots them in broad daylight. The story is devoted to the subsequent trial that takes place. The legal scenes the book contains are as characteristic of the author as the pace at which the story develops. But the humor which later manifests as the main ingredient in Grisham's story seems to be lacking, or at least not so manifestly interwoven in the story. In that sense it is neither typical nor indicative of what is to follow in the author's career. But at least the first story Grisham wrote presages the litigious angle the author will pursue in his career. So I think it apt to choose passages from the scenes involving the trial, or at least after Carl Lee began to receive Jake Brigance's legal assistance.

The Honorable Omar Noose had not always been so honorable. Before he became the circuit judge for the Twenty-second Judicial district, he was a lawyer with meager talent and few clients, but he was a politician of formidable skills. Five terms in the Mississippi Legislature had corrupted him and taught him the art of political swindling and manipulation. Senator Noose prospered handsomely as chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, and few people in Van Buren County questioned how he and his family lived so affluently on his legislative salary of seven thousand dollars a year. (*A Time to Kill*, p. 125)

Although I noted the lack of humor in this particular story, I meant humor in relative terms. Obviously the first thing that strikes the reader is the flippancy with which the author treats the corruption of the former senator in Mississippi. If we let the personal corruption be reflected on the legislative level, the humorous/satirical exposure of the senator's abuse of his power becomes one instance of Grisham's perceptive comment on the possible reality that prevails in political scenes across the nation. Simple repetition of the word “honorable” starts off a potentially very serious subject in a humorous manner which the reader immediately perceives as the hallmark of Grisham. Why does the usage evoke a sardonic laugh from the reader? It may be because of the follow up in the following sentence. The author's qualification of Noose's talent completely negate the protocol of the polite society where people tend to mince words. But frank and it turns out quite honest to the point that the statement made comes out ridiculous. The audience inevitably catches the drift of the narration. That is where they are confirmed of their instinct that the judge treated by the narrator is indeed a risible figure as he was made out to be. The description is not mere exaggeration but an honest exposition of bare facts. That is what is so unexpected and catches the audience off guard and in the end caused such hilarity. Notice too the well-balanced parallelism in structure between the first and the second sentences and the dead pan assumption of an objective

reporter by the narrator/ protagonist, our Jake Brigance. Jake points out that “was a lawyer with meager talent and few clients, but he was a politician of formidable skills.” The reader cannot help admiring the aptness of each component in this sentence. The neat juxtaposition of meager talent and few clients propels the reader to desire what is implied by the “formidable skills” at the end. By now he is full of expectations to be pleasantly surprised by the wit that has been abundantly exhibited by the author. There is in fact no space to pause. The reader’s eyes hurry to trace the trajectory of the narrator’s statement. The suggested hyperbole at the end of the sentence, “a politician of formidable skills,” raise the reader’s expectations all the more. What follows is neither less surprising nor more expected. Noose is skillful because he has learned a very valuable lesson. According to Brigance, “Five terms in the Mississippi Legislature had corrupted him and taught him the art of political swindling and manipulation.” What is more ridiculous than that? But that is exactly what the audience find most true to life and outrageous, thus funny. And the author knows how they react to the passage. Then why the passage emerges so alive and full of satirical humor even if the audience find it is a calculated ploy the author employs to get the message of a kind across? That is the magic of the talented author we have been dealing with. He completely drags the reader into his fictional world and lets them breathe the air and live in it during the course of the story and even if they are both conscious of the real world they are in, holding the book they browse through, they are carried along with the plot without any resistance and doubt as to the reality of the fictional truth. Yes, the facticity of the printed medium remains as such, an artifice, but the audience willingly surrender, even with the consciousness of being involved with the artifice, to the evolving reality Grisham creates. That is why it is so funny and authentic about the sentiments expressed through his characters and the situations he portrays. Even the sentiment, ludicrous as it is, that the real skills that mean anything in the real world are duplicity and prevarication as they obliterate the distinctions between truth and falsity, authenticity and duplication. But is it really what only prevails in the political world? Could there not be a possibility that the reader laughs at themselves when they visualize a man being satirized so completely as it were out in the open? At their own venality? That every man who wants to live like the handful of millionaires who fulfill the dream of living on an inexhaustible financial resources? The unconscious yearning an average person has may not be so explicitly implicated in the reading process but the search for the cause of hilarity may land one on the subliminal mechanism involved. But I think I had better rein my flighty imagination in and focus on the particular instantiation of corruption Noose manifests. What clinches the joke at the expense of the former Senator is the indirection that directs the reader nevertheless directly to the imbalance between the affluent living Noose’s family managed and the actual salary they were supposed to have received. Because of the indirection the reader’s imagination is activated and the crafty political sense the man cultivated comes vividly personified in the figure of the senator before the

reader's eyes. A supposedly powerful man amassing a fortune at the expense of the public is ludicrous and laughable to say the least. The author itches to say Noose stole money but he leaves the reader take his cue and finish the thought. The restraint Grisham displays here has a lot to do with the wit and humor that come across from his stories with so much life.

The judge who will preside over the trial over the Carl Lee case is none other than Noose with his variegated history. But as the narrator admits he has learned a lesson and became installed in a position where corruption does not mean much. But as the course of the trial indicates he contributes not a little to a quirky drama that will be played out in the story. Although the author does not intend to convey the oblique process the trial takes in a little Mississippi town, the impression the reader gets is none other than that. There is no fair trial in the strictest sense. In that sense, a comment on the story that it is about "uncertain justice in a small southern town" remains apt although in a quite unexpected manner (<http://www.texan.com/talkndog/grisham.htm>). But because of the judge's apparent biased approach to the case the story develops an element that enriches it with humor and liveliness. Enough of a preamble again. I had better plunge into a concrete example where we can appreciate the skill of the author to tickle the readers with so much pleasure.

Noose caught his breath. "Do you understand the charge against you?"

"Yes."

"Do you understand that if convicted you could be put to death in the gas chamber at the state penitentiary at Parchman?"

"Yes."

"Do you wish to plead guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty." (*A Time to Kill*, p. 159)

The scene from a pretrial hearing in which the judge and the accused face at each other. The judge rather sympathetically informs about the situation and the consequences of the trial. In this short excerpt once again what strikes the reader is the terseness with which the author manages to convey the atmosphere of the court. Although, as I mentioned just above it is merely a pretrial what will follow determines the fate of the person being present. In that sense, it is as serious as the final sentencing. But notice the way the two parties, especially the one defending his position, conduct themselves so matter-of-factly. The exchange is carried out as if Carl Lee's life or death is a matter that does not come into the picture regardless of the consequences of the trial. Carl Lee remains calm and returns his answers in the simplest manner possible. Mere sporadic answers turn out to be the exact kind that will accelerate the flow of the story and keep the reader skimming over the scenes that will come up, building up even more momentum. It so transpires that the short answers Carl Lee supplies to the judge is backed by his confidence of the outcome that will result from his trial. The confidence is of course generated by the sympathy the judge exhibits toward his attorney

Brigance, and in turn toward Lee himself. In the lingering friendliness the tone of the questions the judge utters indicates to the reader of the possible turn of events the trial will take. In that sense, there is not an element of surprise and tension one might expect from, for example, a pure mystery or murder story. Needless to say, *A Time to Kill*, despite its initial grim start, is not a story filled with unidirectional and teleologically oriented episodes unadulterated with humor. On the contrary the story rives its depth and charm from the way the author weaves human elements into the story. The short exchange I just quoted is only one example of that. In fact, the sympathy the judge feels toward the defendant manifests shortly after the cursory and perfunctory exchange between the two. Although the judge's understanding for the accused only shows in the form humorously pleasing to the audience. Let me quote the relevant passage then.

"Mr. Hailey," Noose squeaked, "your trial is set for Monday, July 22. All pretrial motions and matters must be filed by June 24, and disposed of by July 8."

Carl Lee and Jake nodded.

"Anything further?"

"Yes, Your Honor," Buckley boomed loud enough for the reporters in the rotunda. "The State opposes any request for bail by this defendant."

Jake gripped his fists and wanted to scream. "Your Honor, the defendant has not yet asked for bail. Mr. Buckley, as usual, is confused about the procedure. He cannot oppose a request until it is made. He should've learned that in law school."

Buckley was stung, but continued. "Your Honor, Mr. Brigance always requests bail, and I'm sure he'll request it today. The state will oppose any such request."

"Well, why don't you wait until he makes his request?"

Noose asked the D.A. with a touch of irritation.

"Very well," Buckley said. His face had reddened and he glared at Jake.

"Do you plan to request bail?" Noose asked.

"I had planned to at the proper time, but before I got a chance Mr. Buckley intervened with his theatrics...." (*A Time to Kill*, pp. 159-160)

The quote became longer than I had planned. But the sentiment each player in the trial expresses will become even plainer. Notice the relationship among the three parties concerned in the game. (Although I term the trial a game, it is not intended to belittle the procedure involved in it. The term is rather intended to focus more attention on the inherent humor the author throws in the entire story.) one party, represented by Buckley, is dead serious about the trial and intent on convicting the man accused of shooting down two innocent guards. On the other hand, Jake tries his best to lighten the tension his opponent's words tend to create. Jake is more like a easy going onlooker than a party directly concerned with the trial. In that sense, his laid-back stance is infectious to the reader, who inevitably warms to the defense attorney mostly on account of his common folk attitude.

Even his implicit effort to turn the questioning into a travesty elicits only smiles from the audience. What is supposed to be a serious question by the state attorney becomes something that is not proper to ask at the given moment. In other words, Buckley is successfully transformed into a clown while Jake remains a guy who personifies common sense. So, even before the trial starts the outcome is being adumbrated by the parrying between the two attorneys. The judge and Carl Lee only add flavors to the smart talk the two attorneys exchange. Needless to say the audience becomes a willing participant during the whole pretrial. They are willing to laugh at the faux pas Buckley makes every time he utters any words. When he broaches the subject of bail, he does not simply say it but booms loud enough for all the reporters in the rotunda can hear. What does the passage indicate? Even the author is on the side of the defendant. The one-sided trial shifts the audience's attention away from the outcome of the trial over to the process of it. That is exactly the moments the reader is made to appreciate the scintillating repartees the author lets the participants to make. Who would boom out a simple question like the one Buckley is made to ask unless he risks being shown in an unfavorable light? That is what is taking place in this scene. The calm man with everything under control as opposed to the overconfident but completely ridiculous attorney. The relationship shown here is not a little surprising in fact if we consider the fact that Jake is still an inexperienced attorney only with a short period of practice while Buckley is known to be a man who has gone through numerous years of renowned trials. But that is what makes the story all the more laughable and fun to read for the readers. Fiction after all is the stuff dreams are made of. But Grisham successfully suspends the audience's disbelief and keeps the audience hooked to his story from the beginning to the end. How he accomplishes the feat is demonstrated in this short passage. The implicit emotional tides that occur between the parties at present are one example of the life Grisham generates through his skilful management of the plot. Buckley ridiculously enough booms out the question everyone can hear but the sassy riposte only awaits him in the next sentence. The audience cannot fail to respond to the comedic tableau that emerges from the deployment of the time-honored situation. Buckley is a stooge who becomes a butt of Jake's and audience's ridicule. He has already shown himself to be a gauche clown of an attorney despite his reputed impressive accomplishment. It is as if everyone is in collusion to trap Buckley in an awkward moment. Notice the judge's reminder that follows Jake's remark. It is like a salvo in support of the defense attorney. That despite his supposed neutrality on the case. But the snub the judge gives to the prosecuting attorney is exactly the kind the audience expects to be materialized. The reddening face of Buckley is a pleasant reward for the reader who has waited the renowned attorney to make a blunder for the whole world to see. They essentially recognize that justice lies with Carl Lee. It is as if they have already made a judgement and found Carl Lee not guilty. The space Grisham creates is after all a world that is not entirely real but not unreal either. It is a space where all the contractions are resolved and what is moral and justice prevails. That is what the audience is

enabled to experience in the scene the author humorously evolves. The audience is then a willing participant in a play where the state attorney with all his might and reputation is made to bear the brunt of ridicule simply because he happens to be on the other side of a man who is sentimentally favored by the protagonist, representing an average Joe. The final comment coming out of the mouth of a rookie attorney, "He should've learned that in law school," is indeed a fine punch line the audience savors very much. The fact that even judge becomes an accomplice to Jake, whether or not involuntarily, is not a point. The result remains the same. Buckley knows he is fighting with everyone against him as long as the story lasts. Judge's line with full of sarcasm neatly chimes in tone with the Jake's response he makes upon judge's perfunctory questioning. While judge's admonishment marks the start of the turning tide for Buckley Jake's offhand remark signifies the victory that is inevitably to come to him. A vindication of justice in a sense from the audience's perspective. But the fun has just started with all the theatrics to be displayed in the course of the trial, as Jake's remark implies.

The reality impacted topics incorporated in the story are not all so grave as the racial issue which is directly implicated in the Carl Lee case. In fact, the novel, whose origin is traced from the brutal rape in DeSoto Country in Mississippi ([http://www.msstate.edu/grisham/We\\_knew.html](http://www.msstate.edu/grisham/We_knew.html)), is rife with subjects that are as mundane as the money that keeps the young lawyer's household economy running. The next excerpt I quote allows the reader to get a glimpse of this mundane layer at which the novel establishes firmer contact with the average citizens of the country in a way. The scene is where Jake asks for money to keep him financially afloat. It turns out that Carl Lee is not only deficient in funds but virtually destitute. Therefore, in order to continue the fight with the attorney of Buckley's caliber Jake has to find some source of money and secure a loan.

Jake finished a rib and mopped his face.

"Say, Stan, speaking of loans, I need to borrow five thousand for ninety days, unsecured."

"Who said anything about loans?"

"You said something about banks."

"I thought we were condemning Buckley. I was enjoying it."

"You shouldn't criticize, Stan. It's an easy habit to acquire and an impossible one to break. It robs your soul of character."

"I'm terribly sorry. How can you ever forgive me?"

"About the loan?"

"Okay. Why do you need it?"

"Why is that relevant?"

"What do you mean, 'Why is that relevant?'"

"Look Stan, all you should worry about is whether or not I can repay the money in ninety days."

"Okay. Can you repay the money in ninety days?"

“Good question. Of course I can.”

The banker smiled. “Hailey’s got you bogged down, huh?”

The lawyer smiled. “Yeah,” he admitted. “It’s hard to concentrate on anything else. The trial is three weeks from Monday, and until then I won’t concentrate on anything else.”

“How much will you make off this case?”

“Nine hundred minus ten thousand.” (*A Time to Kill*, pp. 256-257)

It is hard to miss the ingenious move the author makes from the first descriptive line to the dialog that proceeds. The potentially humorous mopping move the protagonist exhibits is indeed enough to suggest a awkward request he is about to make to his friend. Although I have noted this point repeatedly, what distinguishes Grisham from other less successful writers today is his uncanny ability to see the right moment to throw in casual but significant indicators which the reader is expected to take his cue from. The occurrence of words mostly are so instantaneous and momentary, as it were, that unless the reader is attuned to the tone the author employs the significance of those indicators could easily be lost. But the tenuous contact the author establishes invariably succeeds because of the calculations he makes before inserting those seemingly insignificant indicators. They are transitory and ephemeral but they are self activating in that as long as there is a readerly presence and the reader is immersed in the cultural codes on which Grisham stories are based, the meanings packed in those words come bursting out of the shells they are wrapped in. Although the whole process may sound contradictory it tends to work in practice. And I might add, what contributes to the zest the story imparts is generated not a small part by the seemingly tenuous contact those indicators make with the readers on one level and the tremendous horizon of signification they in fact open up to the readerly consciousness on another. In the casual move therefore the multiplicity of meanings are thrown in, rendering the transition from it to the other sentences inordinately humorous as well as meaningful. At the same time the humor implicit in the initiating sentence prepares the reader (possibly negatively) for the offhand remark Rudy makes in the following dialogue. If the reader is not ready for the remark to come, Stan is certainly not. He pretends he is completely lost in the subject Rudy relentlessly pursues. Stan’s strategy is to divert Rudy to the gigantic presence of Buckley. What is more suitable than to talk about a renowned lawyer, especially when the newspaper is magnifying the scale of the lawsuit. Stan naturally assumes that is the topic the young man is intent upon discussing. But he is rather unpleasantly disappointed when he finds out that Rudy is in need of money. That is not what he wants to hear. Besides when the case is so largely written about in national newspapers, what a letdown it must be for his friends to hear the participating lawyer’s financial predicament. He might as well have surrendered to the well-established prosecuting attorney than show a mere token resistance. The result would merely be bathetic. Despite the implicit bathetic touch, or because of it, the dialogue moves extremely briskly. The concomitant

humor renders the passage quite lively as if the two were discussing an issue much more buoyant than a financial viability of a fledgling lawyer. In fact without the humor inherent in the dialogue the brazen request of the young attorney to borrow money unsecured might strike the reader a bit too obtuse. The casual tone Rudy assumes would become too unpleasant to tickle the audience with the hilarity Rudy tries to arouse. The sassy riposte Rudy makes would not sound as pleasant as it does not. So, in a sense even the sociologically impacted subjects are subsumed under the rhythm and tone that are the hallmarks of Grisham. They not only save the story from becoming stagnant but also allows it to delve in an indirect way the difficult social issues that are glaring the county in the eyes on a day-to-day basis. No wonder there are divergent opinions as to the seriousness of the Grisham's attitude that manifest in his works. The answer lies neither with the one or the other. But rather in the area that comprehends the two views, somewhere in the meddle. But before I get bogged down myself in the futile argument of whether he should be considered a socially conscious writer or rather more entertainment oriented writer, I should direct the reader's attention to his masterful craftsmanship as a writer who manages to produce such predictably readable books. But before I move on to the next feature of the author, I have to point out the techniques involved in bringing out the effect the author does in the latter half of the passage. Stan finally corners the young lawyer into admitting something is not going well. Then Rudy bites his lips, in a manner, and confesses there is something that is lacking in his fight with the bigshot attorney. The way Rudy takes time before coming to full terms with the humiliation proves the degree of financial predicament he is experiencing. But Stan has finally come this far and he is not about to retreat without Rudy's secret. It turns out he is as desperate as the man behind bars. Only if Carl Lee made the payment that is due Rudy would not have been reduced to such a disadvantage position. A position that would put anyone into despair. But the tone that comes out of the passage is definitely not that of despair. The cornered attorney stands his ground and charges back with enough composure to spit out dictating terms. Rudy in essence prohibits Stan from setting any conditions for the loan he will make out to him. Their positions are reversed. That is the kind of situation that arises from the ubiquitous humor that resides in the story. All the unnatural outcomes are naturalized by the techniques and the inherent tones the author inserts and builds in to annul the disbelief that might arise from the story.

Enough of *A Time to Kill* for the moment. I will now look at the passages from *The Runaway Jury* to demonstrate multifaceted talent of Grisham.

Stella's mouth dropped open and her jaw quivered. Gray smoke leaked from her nostrils. "Are you gonna tell the Judge?" she asked, holding her breath. It was a question she and Cal had fought over.

"No."

"Why not?" asked Poodle, only mildly curious.

“I don’t know for certain, okay. I mean, I’m sure I was followed, but I don’t know for sure who it was. What am I supposed to tell the Judge?”

“Tell him you were followed,” said Jerry.

“Why would they follow you?” asked Angel.

“Same reason they’re following all of us.”

“I don’t believe that,” Poodle said.

Stella certainly believed it, but if Nicholas, the ex-law student, planned to keep it from the Judge, then so did she.

“Why are they following us?” Angel asked again, nervously.

“Because it’s just what they do. The tobacco companies spent millions selling us, and now they’re spending even more to watch us.” (*The Runaway Jury*, p. 174)

the passage I quoted chances to continue the vein I thought I left off above. The implied issue woven into the conversation is the insidious force the tobacco industry holds in the United States. Being a writer who adheres to the anti-Tabasco ethos the author has in a way a vested interest when it comes to the argument concerning the big industry. It may be apt to refer to the interview conducted online in which Grisham admits his concern with three major social issues. Tobacco is specifically one of them. ([http://www.booksamillion.com/cat/id/grisham/interview\\_1.html?d=8563465313478](http://www.booksamillion.com/cat/id/grisham/interview_1.html?d=8563465313478) ) although not directly targeted at the tobacco industry, the first impression the reader gets is the blue smoke that leaks out of the mouth and nostrils of the woman seemingly standing stupefied. It may simply my overworked imagination but the anatomical parts that stare out from the passage seem to be intended to etch the kind of impression the author leave on the reader. The kind so grisly that the dark hands of the tobacco industry will loom large and menacing enough to scare any person with average intelligence into believing how large a monster they are dealing with. The talk relevantly enough turns to the insidious hand of the industry which relentlessly tightens its grip to keep the potential consumers under its control. But they are not sure if it is the imagination of the woman. As in real life, the culprit, or rather the suspect, remains elusive. The juries are there in the secluded place to deliberate the culpability of the industry. But can they really pinpoint the responsibility of a tobacco company when they have all the means to evade and contain? Even from the short passage the possible implications of the litigation that is taking place in reality reverberates with their ominous undertones. In this particular case, the woman suggests someone under the pay of the company shadowed her as if to let her realize the consequences of the litigation. If she is not paranoid and correct in her assumption that proves the far-reaching influences of the industry indeed. That is left to the members present to decide. If a tobacco company can remain invisible but still change the outcome of the verdict by merely suggesting their presence through an indirect means, then they can be truly said to pose a social threat that jeopardizes even the due

process of law. That is what worries the author. The message comes out clear from the passage. But as I have repeatedly said, that is not the unadulterated totality that constitutes Grisham's stories. If that is the case he may surely not be able to secure such a wide readership as he has been able to. What attracts the readers is in fact the charm that is only indirectly related to the sociological vein that emerges from his works. So, from now on, I will concentrate on the other features apart from the messages I have indicated. But whether those two features are completely separable is yet to be seen.

Now I would like to look at Grisham's anti-lawyer humor. As he practiced law himself, his special interest in litigation and the profession that is involved in the trade is quite prominent in his work. On one occasion when he was asked about the "most satisfying about the law," Grisham answered, a bit facetiously, "Getting out of it" (<http://www.bookpage.com/9702bp/grishma/grishmainterview.html> ). Although his humorous retort may not mean much, it at least indicates his relationship with the law he had practiced. His flippant attitude to the legal profession is reflected in the stories he creates. The following excerpt is intended to demonstrate the characteristics of the legal profession Grisham saw as common in the trade.

The video had been watched and studied by no fewer than two dozen lawyers and several jury experts and even two psychiatrists. Krigger was telling the truth, but the truth needed to be blurred at this point. This was a cross-examination, a crucial one, so to hell with the truth. The witness had to be discredited! (*The Runaway Jury*, p. 238)

The excerpt immediately draws the reader's attention to the validity of the truth the legal profession is interested in. It is by no means absolute, as the character in this instance suggests. So, what is the status of truth? How and who will decide it is nothing but the truth and fixable? Grisham casts great doubt on the process the truth is implicated. What probably drives him skeptical is the malleability of the truth. It can be rendered in any manner possible. What matters is the perspective and the sides each party takes. The truth therefore is just a material the parties concerned latch onto and process. In this case, the parties concerned are allotted a stance from which, only from that fixed position they can argue the use value of the truth. In order to transform what they call truth they watch the same video time and again until they come to the conclusion that the status of the truth is only that they agree to confer on it. But since they watch the video to shape the truth in their own image, as it were, the act of watching does not contribute to the configuration of the entity, or the conceptual status they term truth. The essence the concept constitutes remains murky. If we take a skeptical stance on the issue we might as well define the truth as nothing more than a slippery mass that changes its shape at every interpretation. As is iterated, "to hell with the truth." After all the parties in the scene are only engaged in cross-examination. What does the author mean by cross-examination? He obviously associates it with a

charade in which every one involved tries to pretend he or she is intent upon fixing the absolute truth. But the fact suggests, at least so does the author, that the court of law is at most a play in which each character plays his role and secures his existence in virtual reality by asserting his stance. In other words, their argument takes place independent of the real issues what the real people are concerned with. but after all what distinguishes the reality and non reality? Even that becomes a suspicious distinction when the dichotomy is introduced to the work Grisham develops here. So, the players are in a way justified for the topsy-turvy views they manifests in the story. If there is no absolute line that separates the two realities then what is the point in accusing or approving one over against another? Rather than taking a moral view then would it not be much better to appreciate the work in its entirety as a mere artifice to please the audience? That is, to sink oneself in the world to be carried along with the sheer pleasure that is in the story? That is what I am interested in and where my analysis will take me from now.

I will focus on the efficiency with which the author conveys the atmosphere packed in the story. Let us look at the following passage.

Abby finished the third briefcase and started on the stacks from the file cabinets. She quickly got the hang of the automatic feed, and after thirty minutes she moved with the efficient grace of a seasoned copy-room clerk. She fed copies and unstapled and restapled while the machine clicked rapidly and spat the reproductions through the collator. (*The Firm*, p. 346)

The scene is from another suspense story by Grisham in which the woman hurries to make copies to expose the irregular practices the law firm has been engaged in. What strikes the reader most about the description is the tight rhythm with which the tone is set. There is barely any word that is redundant to from the texture that is spread across the page to pull the reader into the world filled with tension. The woman is perfectly visualized through the perpetual staccato motion delineated through the juxtaposition of shorter words. The repeated use of the conjunction helps the story run smoothly and tugs the reader along. Although there may be a chance that such a coordinate copula threatens to bore the audience with its monotony, in this case Grisham demonstrates his skillfulness by a clever use of the word. He realizes the maximum utilization of the simple conjunction and prevents boredom and monotony from setting in. Along with the rhythm enters into the picture a life that of course is inseparable from the tone each word contributes. Notice how effective is the use of “fed,” “clicked” and “staple and restaple.” They give the impression as if the entire scene is charge with the air contagious to the reader for its liveliness. There is something about the word, “fed,” for instance. Is it the animated condition it evokes? Or something else the word helps the reader associate with it? The whole cogitation may be a useless enterprise but if I can find some answers to my simple question, well I might prove something. The masculine, hard-boiled tone is first set by the use of the word, or rather the series of words in the sentence, “She quickly got the hang of the automatic feed, and after thirty minutes she moved with the efficient grace of a seasoned

copy-room clerk.” Then what do we find in it that contributes to that effect? Is it the position where the words occur? Or the peculiar combination they are made to act with each other? On close scrutiny, the expression, “got the hang of the automatic fee,” is found to evoke the tight tone reminiscent of the style that shuns mere verbal embellishment. Even the sound associated with it rings more like a lively talk that is most likely employed in real life. So, first of all the passage selected exudes the conversational flair. It is not constituted by theatrical artificiality. If the scene is to be acted out, it will translate better into the movie rather than stage. The reason is simply because the passage requires the immediacy and reality cameras often are capable of rendering. Secondly, which is related to the reason given above, the passage involving the said words rings so real that they tend to disarm the audience and encourages them to enter the fictional world as if it is a naturalized version of reality. In other words, those words tend to reduce the distance and suspend, if I am allowed to use the trite expression, disbelief that usually accrues when the reader faces fiction. But who would use such expressions as “She quickly got the hang of the automatic feed, and after thirty minutes she moved with the efficient grace of a seasoned copy-room clerk,” unless one is reality impacted and exude the ambience associated with reality? Particularly the sassiness the last sentence conveys is enough to fetch a involuntary grin from the audience. It is that effective. The liveliness or the life each word packs is enough to persuade any glum reader to flap his hand in admiration for the author’s talent to let the heartbeat of the story keep running, as it were. We can almost hear the machine clicking and spitting out the copies as we roll our eyes over the line, “She fed copies and unstapled and restapled while the machine clicked rapidly and spat the reproductions through the collator.”

Indeed each word is invested with so much life in Grisham’s writing. I will quote the following and then comment on how his strategy works and how the effect comes across to the reader. The passage is again from the same story and one of the scenes that constitutes the dangerous copying episode involving the daring women.

At five-thirty the first flicker of sunrise rose in the east, and they forgot about being tired. Abby quickened her movements around the copier and hoped it would not burn up. Tammy rubbed the cramps in her calves and walked quickly back to the condo. It was either trip number fifty-one or fifty-two. She had lost count. It would be her last trip for a while. He was waiting. (*The Firm*, p. 347)

In mere few words Grisham evokes the sleepy yet bright beginning of another day. Notice the way the combination of words, “the first flicker of sunrise,” thrusts to the fore the sensuous feel the reader immediately associates with the day after a night spent vigorously on a work that must be completed by a set time. The lambent feel the flicker evokes almost brushes the reader’s cheek with its feathery sensuous implication. But what strikes the reader most is the pressure the tone underlying the passage reminds of. Despite the limited time she has the woman has to hurry and

finish the job she has started. The time that is clicking away reverberates in the whole scene and the reader hardly misses the ominous notes it makes. But at the same the sensuous texture the first introductory sentence adds stretches the soft, almost lazy feel through the scene. The reader is made at ease and ready to take whatever comes next. The ease momentarily felt by the audience is transformed into an objective distance with which the reader is enabled to view the transactions developed in the scene. Notice the relaxed ring the line, "Abby quickened her movements around the copier and hoped it would not burn up," carries. Particularly the expression Grisham uses to convey the incessantly work the machine has been doing, burning up, is loaded with a potential humor which the reader is directed to perceive. Its easygoing tone can be said to be mismatched with the tense atmosphere prevailing the scene. But Grisham is a writer who hardly forgoes a chance to weave humorous implications wherever he can, even though the scene might seem inappropriate for such implications. Because of the unexpected outcropping of the humor the tension is broken in a manner that the audience can fully appreciate the workings of the story in full objectivity. But the reader's composure and the toll the all night's work takes on the women concerned are two different things. Indeed, the woman rubs her calves, which are understandably stiff from the strenuous walking back and forth between the copier and the trunks, and reminds the reader of the actual energy spent on the moonshine. So, in this passage three different elements are at work simultaneously. One is the sensuous artistry of the novelist, second is the continuous humorous strain that runs through the story, and thirdly the manifested actual movements of the characters indicates. These elements are simultaneous in a sense that they are layered and spliced together so that the reader while he skims through the story has to let his consciousness feel the implications of the elements almost in a constant flow. Unless the reader is able to perform all the work indicated here, although they are hardly conscious, the full signification of the story will not emerge. What is he made to read into the line, "It was either trip number fifty-one or fifty-two," unless the exhaustion the all night work caused and by implication the magnitude of the work she is engaged in. Grisham's masculine style, by which I mean the economy with which the author is able to convey the full impact of social as well as cultural signifiatory plenitude, is enough to convince the reader the naturalness of all the descriptive words he employs. But they are hardly natural. They are only seemingly so. They are rather a result of long and arduous calculations the author makes before they are made to appear in printed form. In this passage, the long and exhausting night indicated by the penultimate sentence is almost reminiscent of Robert Frost for its languid sensuousness and modest indirection. The wistfulness that hovers in the air is indeed the work of an accomplished artist.

I might as well continue in the same vein and concentrate on Grisham's technical bravura. His expressions are in fact so alive that the reader is often assaulted with the pleasure of ripping his sides with laughter. And other times his tongue simply curls at the clever remarks the author keeps

spitting. The following example will demonstrate what I mean.

Lazarov entered the power office on the fourth floor and every head bowed. DeVasher faced him like a scared, whipped child. The partners studied their shoelaces and held their bowels.

“We can’t find him,” DeVasher said.

Lazarov was not one to scream and cuss. He took great pride in being cool under pressure.

“You mean he just got up and walked out of here?” he asked coolly.

There was no answer. None was needed.

“All right, DeVasher, this is the plan. Send every man you’ve got to the airport. Check with every airline. Where’s his car?”

“In the parking lot.”

“That’s great. He left here on foot. He walked out of your little fortress on foot. Joey’ll love this. Check with every rental-car company. Now, how many honorable partners do we have here.” (*The Firm*, pp. 427-428)

Almost immodestly the colorful humor comes jumping out of the text. As I have pointed out time and again, Grisham’s forte is his succinct conveyance of the nitty-gritty nuances of the real world exchanges. His style is direct but nevertheless packed with so much layered implications that the reader who appreciates the entirety of the author’s work is indeed happy to read through the journey of the heroes of Grisham’s works. In this scene every one in the law firm is reluctant to touch off an outburst of the powerful boss who however is renowned to be cool. Note how cringing every one remains before the appearance of the powerful man. The relationship is simply rendered by a terse “every head bowed.” What is more direct than the metonymic expression than that? Every partner is reduced to mere anatomical parts and the part that represents all the implicit and explicit sentiments is their bowed head. But who is going to miss the concomitant humor packed in the description? They are like small boys ready to undergo the wrath of their terrifying father. Indeed the image of Lazarov, not Lazarus, is that of an angry God who is ready strike dead anyone who goes against his will. Better remain docile and contrite for what he could not measure up to his expectations than keep one’s chin up and stare the master in the eyes. That is a guarantee to offend the all powerful Lazarov. But because of the sheepish demeanors they exhibit they are truly portrayed as comedic stooges whose talent only lies, perhaps not on the surface but when the exigency demands, in turning their tails between their legs and begging for forgiveness and perhaps crying many a mea culpa. In fact, DeVasher cowers like a whipped child, if not a whipped cow, and assumes a contrite posture every partner takes his cue from. Then the punch line follows. In its aptness it is so funny and apt that the reader inevitably cracks uproariously. The colorful line is enough to wake up a sleeping child, as it were. But what makes it so effective is the nonchalance with which the author carries off the feat. In itself, indeed, the line is not a showy demonstration of the author’s technical mastery. But the way it is put at this particular juncture without doubt reveals

the uncanny talent Grisham possesses. “The partners studied their shoelaces and held their bowels.” One indeed “studies his shoelaces” when he is suffered to undergo an awkward moment and he does hold his bowels when the worst is imminent. The trick lies in the carefree manner the author lays out the expressions loaded with comedic implications. Just imagining the boys bowed down and bracing themselves for the wrath of Father is enough to draw a smile from the reader. The image sticks even when the reader’s eyes constantly roll over the printed surface. The freshness of the situational impact is so great that the implicit humor lingers in the reader’s mind for the ensuing lines. Then the sheepish apology cum excuse spills out of DeVasher’s mouth. How he wishes to forgo the remark. He might as well bury himself in a hole than utter such a disappointing excuse. But the comedic momentum carries the reader forth and brings the reader face to face with the sarcastic commendation of the powerful man’s restraint. “Lazarov was not one to scream and cuss. He took great pride in being cool under pressure.” But no one is going to miss the smoldering anger that is barely contained in the bile of the boss. He is in fact ready to burst. But simply because of the reputation he has helped to spread he has to cover up his anger. At least that is the impression the reader is foisted to have. After all the man keeps his cool and makes an utterly commendable, although in fact totally ridiculous, observation, “You mean he just got up and walked out of here?” If the powerful man is calm he is simply pretending to be so and the furor he is feeling is draining him of all the power to explode. As it turns out, Lazarov’s question no question at all. It is a recapitulation of the white-hot sentiment he is barely able to contain within him. No one answers and “None was needed,” as the succinct line reveals. Then another comedic touch surfaces. Every make the boys make, they make blundering mistakes. They are not trustworthy adults. No wonder they are portrayed as mere boys. The answer they provide to the powerful man is that the fugitive left the car “in the parking lot.” Of course, no answer is more ludicrous than that. Who could walk all the way to the airport from the office? LaZarov implies. That is why the final addition of the honorable title to the partners rings so full of sarcasm, and to the reader comedic. With the explicit insertion of the topsy-turvy remark by the powerful man, the scene has run the gamut of heavenly wrath to comedic transformation of a feared man.

Grisham’s humor simply keeps gushing out. I will now quote a passage from another of his thriller, *The Pelican Brief*. Let us take a look at the following excerpt.

“Sorry I’m late,” he [Verheek] said as they shook hands. “I knew you’d appreciate the extra time alone with your Chivas.”

“You look tired,” Callahan said as he inspected him. Old and tired. Verheek was aging badly and gaining weight. His forehead had grown an inch since their last visit, and his pale skin highlighted the heavy circles under his eyes. “How much do you weigh?”

“None of your business,” he said, gulping the beer. “Where’s our table?”

"It's reserved for eight-thirty. I figured you would be at least ninety minutes late."

"Then I'm early."

"You could say that. Did you come from work?"

"I live at work now. The director wants no less than a hundred hours a week until something breaks. I told my wife I'd be home for Christmas."

"How is she?"

"Fine. A very patient lady. We get along much better when I live at he office." (*The Pelican Brief*, pp. 84-85)

Suddenly introduced, the reader might be flabbergasted at the level the real conversation is taking place. He might be assured that the conversation is between two old friends and between men who understand each other perfectly. But nevertheless the sassiness each exhibits is the kind that captures the reader's attention completely. As I indicated the real conversation seems to occur at a level well calculated by the author. That is somewhere lese than the printed surface, the level that directly meets the reader's eyes. Unless the level is simultaneously intuited by the reader with the moment of his visual and conscious contact with the inscribed surface of the pages, the entire synergistic impact of the story will not be shared by the readers. Although the point of contact between the level I'm referring to and the readerly consciousness may be tenuous, it is certainly there somewhere between the book and the reader. Therefore it is important to keep that focal point in mind when analyzing the way the passage, or for that matter the whole story, works. Now that said, let us consider what makes the dialogue as effective as it is? Look at the first line in the passage. The serio-comic nature of the conversation immediately strikes the reader. Who would so glibly turn the tables on the other party while he is definitely the party to blame for the tardy arrival? Verheek transforms by a subtle logic the inconvenience suffered by Callahan into the advantage the party seemingly inconvenienced should appreciate. What sort of ratiocination is involved here? Is it totally untrue? Is what Verheek claiming utterly false in light of what is presented to the audience? On cursory inspection of the printed evidence, Verheek's claim turns out legitimate. The belated arrival of Verheek is not only predicted by Callahan but it has been made the basis for Callahan to reserve the table for particular time they are dining. And Callahan finds his unexpected early arrival is something that interrupts his solitary meditation. So, the source of humor that oozes from the passage arises from the fact that Verheek apparently twists the situational logic that the reader perceives while he in reality astutely discerns the essential logic underlying the station. So, the kind of topsy-turvy remarks Verheek makes are found to be funny by the reader only because they are ultimately on the mark. Another element that contributes to the latent humor that is packed in the passage is the part Callahan plays in the dialogue. While Verheek assumes the role of a topsy-turvy logician who lets the reader see the other side of dialogic truth, Callahan is made to play a straight faced interlocutor who abides by the straight level conversational

logic. But the descriptive part that is supposedly occurring in his consciousness is bare of either perspective and because of that it enhances the embedded humor with its deadpan bare fact enumeration. In fact, the bare enumeration of observational facts are magically funny for their, paradoxically enough, discreet indirection. Callahan perceives Verheek's "forehead had grown an inch since their last visit, and his pale skin highlighted the heavy circles under his eyes." The method adopted by the author here is almost reminiscent of the close range view description Swift adopts in his *Gulliver's Travells* as the title hero takes in the views suddenly magnified by the relative size of his surroundings. Callahan registers the broadened forehead and heavy eyelids rather than the fat belly and hanging cheeks. It is as if the author allows the reader to get close to the characters to observe them through a magnifying lens. In this context, the simple and innocent question, "How much do you weigh?" sounds as intrusive as Verheek seems to take. No wonder the question elicits a blunt response in the following line. But Verheek is not a character who is prone to bearing grudge for a potentially offensive remark. He soon turns his ambivalent humor loose for the benefit of the readers. First, Verheek ignores the question and redirects the readers as well as Callahan's attention to what they are there for in the first place. And the suggestion of their table draws another piece of doltish remark from Callahan. Callahan's reference to Verheek's unexpected early appearance then indeed proves Verheek has been right throughout the conversation that his near punctuality caused disappointment in Callahan, although in a flip-flop sense. The humor interwoven in the short bluff answer Verheek makes in reply to Callahan's obtuse question develops into the full blown comedic interlude hinged on Verheek's talk on his work. To Callahan's urging with the simple question if he came straight from work, Verheek replies with a comedic touch that is enough to split the sides of the reader. The wit Verheek manifests is the essence of Grishamism. It is the kind that the reader unconsciously absorbs and when absorbed sets off a series of deep layered appreciation. Verheek not only works at his firm but he virtually lives there. The implicit thrust is of course the long hours he has to put in in order to complete the assignments his superiors impose on him. The nonchalant manner he drops the descriptively vivid word "live" immediately elicits the chain reaction in the readerly consciousness I have just described, culminating in the grin or possibly laughter while the reader flaps the book uncontrollably. The concomitant ludicrousness in the line, "I told my wife I'd be home for Christmas," rings so true in sentiment that the reader cannot help but agree with Verheek. The sarcasm inherent in the final line further continues the comic momentum because of its incisiveness. Because the sentiments expressed are so authentic under the given circumstances the wry wit contained almost jumps out at the reader. Who would have time if he works hours on end at the firm and barely has time to go back home to please his wife? The line rushes the reader onto the next passage.

She was wife number three in seventeen years.

“I’d like to meet her.”

“No, you wouldn’t. I married the first two for sex and they enjoyed it so much they shared it with others. I married this one for money and she’s not much to look at. You wouldn’t be impressed.” He emptied the bottle. “I doubt if I can hang on until she dies.”

“How old is she?”

“Don’t ask. I really love her, you know. Honest. But after two years I now realize we have nothing in common but an acute awareness of the stock market.” He looked at the bartender.

“Another beer, please.”

Callahan chuckled and sipped his drink. “How much is she worth?”

“Not nearly as much as I thought. I’m not sure really. Somewhere around five million, I think. She cleaned out husbands one and two, and I think she was attracted to me for the challenge of marrying just an average joe....” (*The Pelican Brief*, p. 85)

This is a passage that exemplifies the fine craftsmanship Grisham is prone to manifest in his works. Notice the light, flowing tone that immediately emerges from the depth of the passage. In fact the tone I just referred to does not reside so deep in the passage. It is at most lingering around the level where most average readers intuit without expending much effort. Before any rational analysis enters any one steeped in the culture Grisham takes for granted is likely to be rolling with laughter. Following from the previous quote, Verheek continues his sardonic tone. Although the tone may be sardonic, the truth that is contained in his remarks is indisputable. That fact renders his remarks all the more humorous. The wife he married turns out a third one in seventeen years. In the concrete numbers that surround the revelation of Verheek’s private information, there emerges an element that enhances the shapes that ultimately constitute the core of the character. That is to say, wrapped in the two sets of numbers the wife, who happens to be waiting patiently at home for her husband’s return, comes out more vividly than when merely portrayed by vague sets of peripherally descriptive words. The numbers appeal to the layer of readerly consciousness that is almost universal as well as primordial. The author intuitively understands it and intentionally intersperses the otherwise mundane piece of information with the bare, naked numbers. To the remark by Verheek, Callahan responds in the manner he has assumed since the scene started. In the most naïve and humorously objective manner. He simply asks if he could meet her. That is not a real question however. At least how it turns out. Callahan plays his role in this dialogue and urges Verheek to continue in the same vein and display his skewed humor for the benefit of the reader. As is evident, throughout the dialogue the reader is the party who benefits the most from the dialogue now gone overdrive by the clever calculations of the author. Verheek does not betray the reader’s expectations when it comes to providing the source of delight by his splurge on sassy. His answer to Callahan’s request is as expected as pleasurably twisted. The reason, he explains, for Callahan not wanting to meet his wife is because she is not much of a beauty. What splits the

reader's sides is the manner in which Verheek deduces and defines the person he lets topic of the dialogue to fall on. His argument goes as follows. The first two wives he married were physically so attractive that they enjoyed love making immensely. But at the same time, enjoying love making with Verheek was so torridly engrossing that the wives could not help sharing the pleasure with other men. And vice versa, because he, Verheek, enjoyed lovemaking, the reader is supposed to deduce the former wives' attractiveness, most likely their pulchritude. The suggestion is a cue given by the author for the reader to imagine the type of women Verheek married before. The type who does not mind spilling their charm by giving hints and eyes to men who happen to come by in their paths. The type of women who are generous in dispensing with their charms, as the poets of yore were wont to lament. In contrast, the current wife Verheek implies to have made a promise of at least joining for the Christmas to is a one with health and money but probably not much beauty. All because of the indirection through which Verheek describes his spouses, past and present, the women emerges with flesh and blood to the reader's eyes as if they were portrayed in the bluntest and transparentest of words possible. But the indirection functions as an enhancer to the humor that is potentially in the passage. In the process between the comprehension of the situation, with all the layers embedded in the passage, and the original adumbration of the wives resides the space where the reader grasps and processes the significative codes programmed by the author. The direct portrayal of the wives would certainly eliminate the chances for the reader to work on the implicit significations. The wry logic of Verheek is inevitably followed by the urging cum question by Callahan: "How old is she?" The innocent question readies the reader for another splurge on the sardonic commentary by Verheek. What clinches Verheek's observation about his wife is his conviction that they are only alike in their interest in money, or in his words stock market. There has been nothing, in other words, between them marginally resembling love. But Grisham does not lets Verheek confess so outrightly. That indirection again contributes enormously to the concomitant humor in the excerpt. The humor almost explodes in the face of the reader when his readerly consciousness is stimulated by the cue given by the author in the form of the indirection. The trick is indeed a tour de force by the author. That is part of the reason why he has been selling so consistently for the past ten years. And Grisham knows when not to push the strategy of indirection too much as he lets Verheek immediately turn Callahan as well as the reader's attention to reality, or to what made the two men gather at the place in the first lace. The author knows that he cannot gloat over his verbal panache too long without cloying the readers' appreciation for humor. Timing is everything for good stories, especially when the story depends on the situational energy that arises from interactions between characters. Note how nonchalantly the author makes the transition from the sassy humor to the deadpan descriptive copula. Being set up as such, the short interlude, as it were, when Verheek calls out his order to the waitress rings so rife with comic humor that there probably are not many readers who can resist the temptation to break into a grin. In fact

Callahna does the chuckling in lieu of the reader. But he is relentless when it comes to playing the absurdly serious and naïve interlocutor. Callahna's question, "How much is she worth?" elicits a predictable tone of reply. This time Verheek blatantly transforms his wife into a monetary value and in a tone rather self-deprecatory, he estimates the worth of his not so physically attractive wife at "five million." In itself the answer is loaded with sardonic realism. Who has not heard of men and women who killed their partners for the sake of the insurance they put on them? Of course he does not hint at such a gory possibility but the implication that comes out of his remark under the given context does certainly suggest that the relationship between the two is purely material, or typical of the moneyed class. And the fact that the current wife of Verheek's was not born into money but rather came about it by some unflattering manners adds to the sardonic humor that has been evident throughout the story. The final line completes the wry humor. Verheek is convinced of his unworthiness for such a competent woman, competent that is to amass an ill-gotten fortune. But the marriage, he analyzes, has been inevitable because the wife found the challenge of marrying a nonentity like him irresistible. The joke is non plus ultra. It is the culmination of Grisham's breezy prose. He has succeeded in weaving the active humor in the dialogue that is constantly shifting and in motion. In the scenes like these the author demonstrated his uncanny ability to splice disparate elements on multiple signficatory layers simultaneously and then present them interconnecting and interacting with each other within constantly flowing and transmogrifying configurations of his stories filled with tension and suspense.

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