Discovering the law again

John Grisham, Ed Stevens, and the postmaterial lawyer

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Abstract
This paper uses three films adapted from the novels of John Grisham, The Firm, The Rainmaker, and A Time To Kill, as well as associated television series like Ed to map a vernacular theory of what I have termed the 'postmaterial' lawyer. Grisham's work has been the focus of much critique by legal scholars who suggest he hates lawyers, is critical of the concept of law, and provides 'outraddishly' happy endings. I will challenge these critiques and, in tracing the history of legal thrillers and trial movies, suggest that Grisham and the related texts' explorations of how a just practitioner can operate in an unjust system constitute a powerful interrogation of what law can be.

Wouldn't it be funny if I went to Harvard and you went to jail and we both ended up surrounded by crooks?

--Mitch McDeere (Tom Cruise, The Firm)

Introduction

Since Lawrence Friedman's (1989) call that 'explorations of legal and popular culture, and the way they interact, should be high on the list of scholarly activities' (p. 1606), there has been increasing academic interest in looking beyond law reports to consider law contextually as 'a consciousness that permeates American [and by implication the world's] culture' (Denvir, 1996, p. xiii). These studies of law and popular culture have predominantly been the work of legal scholarship', and therefore retain a positivist approach to law ('positivist' in the sense that 'law' is privileged and unquestioned and analyses are predicated on how popular culture represents the law rather than what popular culture can bring to the law). Most of this work falls into a small number of categories:
realist models (where representations of lawyers in the media are compared to ‘real’ life), studies of how film and television alter public perceptions of the law, and historical studies tracing changes in media representations of law. Redhead (1995) suggests two reasons for this uneasy relationship between law and popular culture. The first is that, because the study of law is traditionally a literary pursuit, while contemporary culture ‘is defined almost exclusively in visual terms’ (Goodrich, cited in Redhead, 1995, p. 79), legal scholars have difficulty understanding how filmic and televisual texts work. A second difficulty is that it remains ‘patently difficult to maintain expertise in both legal theory and cultural studies’ (Redhead, 1995, p. 30).

As a way around these theoretical problems, this article adopts McLaughlin’s (1996) idea of using popular culture as ‘vernacular theory’, that is, everyday activity that produces philosophy. In its suggestion that all people are engaged in theory of some kind, vernacular theory can in many ways be viewed as an outgrowth of fan theory and the work being done by audience theorists such as Jenkins (1992), McKinley (1997), and Hills (2002). It is also, in the way that it seeks to make sense of individual and social existence more broadly, one of Lyotard’s (1984) alternative knowledge structures, which differs from work being done in the academy only in terms of rigour and rhetorical style.

This article uses three films adapted from the novels of John Grisham, The Firm, The Rainmaker, and A Time To Kill, as well as associated television series like Ed to map a vernacular theory of what I have termed the ‘postmaterial’ lawyer. Grisham’s work has been the focus of much critique by legal scholars who suggest he hates lawyers, is critical of the concept of law, and provides ‘outlandishly’ happy endings. I will challenge these critiques and, in tracing the history of legal thrillers and trial movies, suggest that Grisham and the related texts’ explorations of how a just practitioner can operate in an unjust system constitute a powerful interrogation of what law can be.

The texts were selected on the basis of critical and commercial success, academic engagement, and their utility for thinking through how the law operates. In his writing on ‘Courtroom TV’ (a genre defined to include everything from L.A. Law to Court TV), cultural theorist Rushkoff (1994) suggests that these ‘popular cultural forums’ offer a ‘conceptual interface between the order of our laws and the chaos of our world’ (p. 51), making them ‘the place for us to evaluate our rules and customs’, because lawyers, unlike detectives or policemen, are well-suited for open discussion of such issues as they are nominated as ‘our culture’s best professional debaters’ (p. 52). There is evidence from John
Grisham Online (n.d.) that fans do use his books as a way of thinking about the law. Furthermore, Bulletin journalist Diana Bagnall (2001) is quick to note that the ‘myth of the lone, idealistic David taking on huge, multi-layered corporate Goliaths has become part of our popular culture, thanks to books and movies such as A Civil Action, Erin Brockovich and The Rainmaker’ (p. 26), while The Australian journalist Susan Kurosawa (2002) admits that everything she knows about the US justice system comes from television.

The Evolution of the Legal Thriller

It is tempting to think that the legal thriller is a new invention and that before the novels of John Grisham and Scott Turow the lawyer was relegated to a bit part, used only for satire or comedy—as, for example, in Dickens's Bleak House (1853). But, while it is true to say that it is only since the 1980s that the legal thriller has developed from a sub-genre of crime fiction to a genre in its own right, what we can now identify as a legal thriller has been in existence for over a century (Robson, 1995).

Nevins (1995) regards Melville Davison Post as 'the [20th] century's first important writer of stories about lawyers and the law' (p. 1), and Post's first work, 'The Corpus Delicti' (1896), features attorney Randolph Mason (clearly a popular surname amongst attorneys) showing a client how to murder someone, admit to it in court, and still get away with it.10

What is a relatively new phenomenon is the legal thriller as bestseller, perhaps best exemplified by three novels, Tom Wolfe's The Bonfire of the Vanities (1983), Scott Turow's Presumed Innocent (1987), and John Grisham's The Firm (1991), which, not so coincidentally, all became big Hollywood films (big in the scale of budget and star: Tom Hanks, Harrison Ford, and Tom Cruise respectively). Despite Wolfe's bestselling Bonfire, it is Turow's Presumed Innocent that is generally credited with starting the current boom in legal thriller writing11. As a courtroom lawyer writing about courtroom lawyers, he claimed to offer a 'proctologist's view' of his profession, an idea that was replicated by fellow lawyers-cum-novelists like Grisham (debuting with A Time To Kill in 1989).12

These texts can be classified as legal thrillers because the tension comes not from the relationship between the lawyer and criminal, but rather the relationship between the lawyer and the legal system of which they are a part. This is evident as far back as Post's 'The Life Tenant' (1907), wherein Randolph Mason demonstrates how justice can be attained through the 'quirks and glitches in the legal system' (Pringle,
1997, p. 17), or in any number of Perry Mason thrillers, where Mason often has to work against his role in the legal system, to be detective rather than lawyer and prove the innocence of his client (as in The Case of the Velvet Claws (1933)). Even in Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird (1960), Atticus Finch's struggle to exonerate Tom Robinson is framed as a struggle by a moral lawyer against a flawed and bigoted justice system.

As such, the lawyer takes his place beside the superhero, the private detective, the unorthodox policeman, and the embittered loner, characters like Batman, Phillip Marlowe, Harry Callaghan, and Rambo, in the romantic tradition of the individual hero, suspicious of bureaucracy and always facing overwhelming odds. This may in part arise from two of the legal thriller's antecedents—the gothic novel, which provides a sense of massive disorder (relocated in the legal thriller to the overwhelming odds presented by the legal system itself), and cowboy fiction, which similarly focuses on individuals brought in to right wrongs (Rader & Zettler, 1988).

John Grisham's The Firm continues this trend. Here, the distinction is drawn between the corrupt Memphis-based tax law firm of Bendini, Lambert, and Locke and the idealistic Harvard law graduate, Mitch McDeere. Indeed, Firm establishes the pattern for the majority of Grisham's texts, wherein he sets up systems of law that are inherently flawed and incapable of achieving justice, and then demonstrates how, in spite of that system, the protagonist is still capable of achieving a 'just result': gaining a fair trial (Time), exposing the guilty party (Firm), or winning some form of 'restitution' for a client (Rainmaker).

Grisham's distrust of 'big corporations', be it Bendini, Lambert, and Locke laundering money for the Mob in Firm or the corrupt General Benefit Life Insurance Company and their law firm in Rainmaker, seems in part a product of his origins as a street lawyer representing 'people, never banks or insurance companies or big corporations' (Grisham, 1989 [Author's Note]) and in part descended from the paranoid law thrillers of the 1970s. Olsen (1998) sees this as a point of connection between Grisham and at least two of the directors on his films: Rainmaker's Coppola having made the conspiratorial The Conversation (1974), and Firm's Pollack the equally paranoid Three Days of the Condor (1975). The parallel extends to the casting of the corrupt lawyers in each film, Hal Holbrook's appearance as Royce McKnight depending in part on recognition of his conspiratorial turns in films such as Capricorn One (1978) and The Star Chamber (1983).
While Grisham may be bringing the paranoia of 1970s and 1980s lawyer fiction into the 1990s, it does seem a sweeping generalisation when writers accuse Grisham of ‘hating’ lawyers\textsuperscript{16}, for it is the legal system that the Grisham films criticise, not the individual lawyers themselves. Abby McDeere (Jeanne Tripplehorn) makes the point in Firm that, even at his lowest point, McDeere’s mentor, Avery Tolar (Gene Hackman), was ‘pretty decent’ even though he was ‘corrupt and ruined and so unhappy’, the implication being that it is the system that has corrupted Tolar, the system that has ruined him. Time’s great street lawyer, the alcoholic Lucien Wilbanks (Donald Sutherland), is another example. As such, the Grisham films are symptomatic of a trend Asimow (2001) identifies in legal films, including Philadelphia and The Devil’s Advocate, toward vilifying the law firm rather than the individual lawyer per se.

This ‘world-view’ is perhaps best expressed in The Rainmaker. The film opens with Rudy’s voiceover, ‘My father hated lawyers . . .’, over images of the Statue of Justice, Rudy in the library, and Rudy at university. The voiceover continues, establishing that the Civil Rights lawyers in the 1950s and 1960s made him want to be a lawyer because of the ‘amazing uses they found for the law. They did what a lot of people thought was impossible, they gave lawyers a good name’. The words construct Rudy as an idealist, while the underlying images provide an image of ‘the law’ that Rudy will yearn for throughout the film\textsuperscript{17}.

The images abruptly change when the voiceover moves onto Rudy’s efforts to find a job. ‘There are too many lawyers in Memphis’, Rudy tells us, over stills of hoardings and offices, ‘This city’s infested with them’. And the title The Rainmaker comes up over a tank filled with sharks. The opening images of ‘the law’, Rudy’s hopes of shining ‘the blinding light of justice into every dark corner’, have been replaced by images of ‘the system’, sharks circling in a tank, belonging to Rudy’s future employer, ‘Bruiser’ Stone (Mickey Rourke).

The voiceover resumes with Rudy telling us a series of lawyer jokes: ‘How do you know when a lawyer is lying? His lips are moving. What’s the difference between a hooker and a lawyer? The hooker will stop screwing you after you’re dead’. He goes on to explain that: ‘Everybody loves lawyer jokes, especially lawyers. They’re even sort of proud of it. Why do you suppose that is?’. The lawyers Rudy encounters over the course of the film in many ways embody these lawyer jokes, like the ‘paralawyer’ Deck Shifflett (Danny DeVito) who has failed the bar six times, solicits business in hospitals, and thinks ‘there’s nothing more thrilling than nailing an insurance company’, or General Benefit Life
Insurance Co.’s unscrupulous and unfeeling attorney Leo F. Drummond (Jon Voight). These are the products of the legal system who take pride in lawyer jokes because it is what they have become, what the system has made them.

The film concludes with a voiceover from Rudy that brings us full circle. Watching Deck Shifflett as he leaves for another attempt at the bar, Rudy tells us: ‘Every lawyer, at least once, in every case, feels himself crossing a line he doesn’t really mean to cross. It just happens. And if you cross it enough times it disappears forever. And then you’re nothing but another lawyer joke. Just another shark in the dirty water’. It is the practice of law that corrupts, that produces the ‘corrupt and ruined and so unhappy’ men like Avery Tolar and Lucien Wilbanks. To escape this, Rudy is going to teach, to return to those images at the start of the film and thus escape the vicious circle of shark images that the film sets up. Rudy wants to return to a pure form of law outside the legal system. A postmaterial law.\(^{18}\)

I call it ‘postmaterial’ because it is pursued on a mostly pro bono basis\(^{19}\) and always seems to transcend the system, the practice, of law depicted in these texts. Furthermore, the distinction between this ideal and other conceptions of law is always made in material terms, as when Deck Shifflett (the name itself rife with connotations of shiftiness) juxtaposes law school with ‘real life’, a system that requires ambulance chasing. ‘You see in law school they don’t teach you what you need to know. It’s all theories and lofty notions … Learn quick [or] you’ll starve.’ The greatest fear of Grisham’s protagonists, then, is giving up on their ideal of law and giving in to the material—in Coppola’s words, ‘selling out’. So, even at the end of Firm, his life in danger and his career over, Mitch McDeere won’t ‘sell out’ to the authorities. When a government agent (Ed Harris) asks what he’s left with, Mitch replies: ‘I won my life back’, and for a Grisham protagonist, that seems enough. The alternative is becoming like the hooker in the lawyer joke Rudy describes, offering just another service and going to any lengths to see that it is done.

Rudy’s narration reveals an uneasy dichotomy at the heart of these texts, a yearning for both a positivist modernity, in the sense that the law (i.e., the court) is ultimately capable of providing a remedy for anything, and natural law, that the law and those practising it must still be moral. There is then an attempt to resolve this dichotomy by locating justice as the aim of the individual (a ‘natural’ lawyer, if you will) rather than the institution (the ‘positivist/modern’ legal system), each text making a clear demarcation between the system as a corrupt or chaotic entity and the lawyer or lawyer-surrogate as just, even bordering on heroic\(^{20}\). On
film, this is most often framed in the image of the young attorney (Matt Damon, Tom Cruise, Matthew McConaughey), alone, facing a phalanx of older men, in one moment equating youth with idealism and age with corruption and setting them at odds with each other, the (young) loner against the (old) system.\(^{27}\)

**Passion**

Another major misreading of Grisham is the charge that Grisham is critical of 'the law'.\(^{22}\) Again, this is clearly not the case, for in all three films it is the lawyer's great passion for the law, rather than the legal system, that is rewarded with a just result. Even when things are at their bleakest, Mitch McDeere comforts his wife, saying 'If we follow the law it might just save us', and then again at the end (having turned the firm over to the authorities for overbilling their clients), McDeere says that 'I discovered the law again. You actually made me think about it. I managed to get through three years of law school without doing that'. Similarly, at the end of *Rainmaker*, Rudy says 'I still love law. I'll always love it'. And in *Time*, Jake Brigance sacrifices everything to defend Hailey. His marriage is on the rocks, his career is in tatters, and his house has been burnt down. As his assistant Ethel Twitty (Brenda Fricker) puts it, 'You wagered all our lives on this'.\(^{23}\) In each case, the law remains very much an ideal, something, in its connection to fairness and justice, almost akin to equity.

The Grisham films can be contextualised in the development of the American criminal-trial film. Rafter (2001) identifies the search for justice as a crucial object of most of the criminal-trial films, marked out by a 'justice figure ... a hero who tries to move man-made law ever closer to the ideal (immutable natural law) until it matches the justice template' (p. 10). Most films therefore revolve around the tension between 'law and justice' (a twist on the old natural law/legal positivism debate), but, as demonstrated by the above texts and following in the tradition of the legal thriller, they often cast the onus of finding justice onto the individual lawyer, 'the justice figure', with the institution being depicted as 'instrumental in the obstruction of justice' (Greenfield, 2001, p. 39).

Rafter (2001) suggests 1980 as an important point of divergence in criminal trial films: prior to 1980, the trial scene was the site of the closing of the gap between law and justice; after 1980, things become more ambiguous. She breaks this down into three periods: 1930 to the mid-1950s, when filmmakers experimented with depictions of law on film; mid-1950s through the 1960s, when the heroic tradition of the lawyer
took over; and the 1970s to 2000, a period that saw the importance of the trial diminish in films, to be replaced by a sense of cynicism and disenchantment with the system that is taken up in the Grisham films.

Robson (1996) notes that, while Grisham’s texts cover a range of themes, including the courtroom format, the work of corporate and criminal lawyers, and legal education (p. 205), they can broadly be divided into two narrative types, ‘chase’ stories and ‘issue’ stories (pp. 206–207). The courtroom-based ‘issue’ stories treat the trial process with a healthy degree of cynicism, as when Jake Brigance in Time carefully selects a jury to ensure some prospect of success. ‘Colour the jury box’, he tells his client, Carl Lee Hailey (Samuel L. Jackson), ‘Pick the jury right and you’ll walk’. The ‘chase’ films reflect a complete disenchantment with the system by disengaging from it altogether, as when Mitch McDeere must flee the enforcers of Bendini, Lambert, and Locke in Firm or when Rudy Baylor is forced to rely on his physicality, rather than the law, to protect Kelly Riker (Claire Danes) from her abusive husband in Rainmaker.

Uneasy resolutions

The third deficiency in critiques of Grisham’s texts is the constant assertion that his conclusions, to use Olsen (1998) as an example, provide ‘an outlandishly unambiguous triumph of good guys over bad guys’28. This is simply not true. The victories of the protagonists of the Grisham films are, at best, small moments of courtroom catharsis that cannot be sustained in the outside world. Rainmaker’s Baylor wins his case, but the insurance company is bankrupted and there will be no payout for the victims. Time’s Jake Brigance gets his acquittal, but has lost almost everything else in the process. Firm’s McDeere gets the firm on overbilling, but there is still a court case to come and he will forever be looking over his shoulder for reprisals.

To date, what I have termed the postmaterial ideal of law that McDeere, Brigance, and Baylor cling to has been a Romantic notion in the sense that it is based on a ‘subjective idealism’, one of the themes of Romanticism identified by de Man (1983). But when this ideal fails to be realised, when the intense ideological longing for a positivist resolution that Rafter (2001) identifies as emerging from the trial film (p. 24) fails to eventuate, then a second theme of Romanticism comes into play, the ‘return to a certain form of naturalism after the forced abstraction of the Enlightenment’ (de Man, 1983, p. 198).
This is imported into the legal thriller as the protagonist’s final flight from the modern legal system ('the forced abstraction of the Enlightenment') to some other more 'natural' state at the end of each film. Rudy announces his intention to teach law, rather than 'practice it out here in the real world', retreating to the safer world of academia as he 'need(s) time to work it out'. McDeere leaves Memphis, with his wife, for Boston, to raise a family and start 'a very small unknown law firm ... with a lot of potential', always in fear of reprisals for what he has done. Even Brigance's joining with Hailey's family gathering at the end of Time is perhaps emblematic of his own ostracism from the 'white' world; having sacrificed everything to win the acquittal, he leaves that world (of the law) to be part of Hailey's (family). We can argue that this is the protagonist's 'natural' state because, as Diggs (1996) notes, the Grisham protagonists, Capra-like, 'emerge from outside the metropolis, only to face the ridicule of the power elite' (p. 73). It therefore seems right somehow, even natural, for them to go back 'outside the metropolis' once their job is done.

This idea of the flight of the lawyer is repeated in a number of legal television dramas in which the lawyer or lawyer-surrogate character (often a judge) leaves the big city to go to a small town where they either feel closer to or rediscover the spirit of the law. Postmaterial law is therefore descriptive of both an ideal of law that transcends the materially driven legal system and a romantic ideal of leaving the industrial/commercial/material world of the city to return to nature.

A case study of the eponymous Ed (2001–ongoing) identifies the common themes of this genre. On the same day that Ed Stevens (Tom Cavanagh) is fired from his New York law firm for placing a comma in the wrong place on a contract (costing them $1.6 million), he finds his wife in bed with the mailman. Ed leaves New York, literally regressing to childhood by returning to his childhood home of Stuckeyville, moving in with his best friend (now married) and amorously pursuing the high-school girl of his dreams, Carol Vessey (Julie Bowen), even going so far as to buy the local bowling alley to impress her. In an effort to drum up business at 'StuckeyBowl', Ed offers free legal advice for three games of bowling. Appearing in court for the first time (he was only ever a back-of-office clerk in his old firm), Ed rediscovers his love for the law and opens a law office in his bowling alley, becoming the world's first 'bowling-alley lawyer'.

In later episodes, Ed's parents criticise him for leaving the city, and the potential for a big case that could take him all the way to the Supreme Court almost convinces him to throw it in, but ultimately Ed is
'one of you. Born in Stuckeyville', and always ends up fighting for the locals (more often than not, against big business), while building a kind of 'pseudo-family' of friends around him. To make the romantic parallel even clearer, Ed quotes from Thoreau's *Walden* at one point.

With their often rural settings, postmaterial-lawyer series depend on the contrast Williams (1973) identifies in *The Country and the City*, the 'contrast of the country with the city and the court: here nature, there worldliness' 27. For Williams, the contrast 'crystallised' with the city of Rome, 'the point where the city could be seen as an independent organism'. Williams quotes Roman satirist Juvenal here when he asks 'What can I do in Rome? I never learnt to lie' (p. 46), which is itself reflective of the paranoia with which Grisham imbues his legal system and big business as a whole.

This conception of the city also fits with the way Mandel (1984) describes the rise of the detective novel as a mirror turned on 'the growing, explosive contradiction between individual needs or passions and mechanically imposed patterns of social conformism' (p. 135). Bourgeois society, Mandel argues, is primarily a criminal society. Through Grisham, that society is reduced to, in Robson's (1996) terms, 'corrupt officials, rotten institutions and financially determined justice' (p. 215), leaving Grisham's idealists no choice but to flee.

Williams (1973) makes the connection between 'the internal corruption of the city' and, among other things, 'the rise of the lawyer' (p. 47), but ultimately concludes that the contrast between the country and the city is a 'fiction ... to promote superficial comparisons and prevent real ones' (p. 54). The same problems that plague the city are present in the country. In this litigious world, there is ultimately no escape from the legal system. What the postmaterial lawyer can do is take solace in the words of *Time*'s Lucien Wilbanks when he tells Jake Brigance that while he 'can't offer you riches [he] can offer you a chance to save the world one case at a time'. In this way, there is no 'little guy' and no small case, for the cases are not judged on material gain, but on the possibility for a lawyer to be truly heroic. Returning to some sort of natural state, be it a law school (as in *Rainmaker*) or a small town (as in *Ed*), even if that escape is illusory, seems to be a necessary part of this process.

**Conclusion**

Critiques of John Grisham (be it his books or films) seem to be primarily concerned with his contempt for lawyers and the law and his penchant for positive resolutions. But close readings of these texts show that this is simply not the case. Grisham clearly distinguishes between his lawyer
characters and the legal system in which they work, the portrayal of characters like Lucien Wilbanks and Avery Tolar suggesting that it is the system that corrupts, not the lawyer that is inherently bad. Furthermore, Grisham sets the idea of law apart from the legal system, or, more particularly, the materiality of the legal system, an idealistic view of law that can only be held by those that the system has not already corrupted, the young lawyers like Mitch McDeere, Rudy Baylor, and Jack Brigance. Finally, Grisham’s conclusions demonstrate that this ideal of law cannot exist in the ‘real world’ these texts construct. His victories are limited to the courtroom, and, with judgements that are unable to be sustained in this ‘real world’, once the case is done, his practitioners leave the system in an attempt to move closer to their ideal of law.

Therefore, it is not just the ideal of law in these texts that is postmaterial, but the very lawyers themselves. In an online review of The Rainmaker, Miller (1997) suggests that the death of one of Rudy’s clients, Conny Ray Black (Johnny Whitworth), is a turning point in the film as

Abruptly anything Rudy can do to punish the insurance company nasties seems entirely beside the point, a matter of money and vengeance when everything that really matters is already gone. That’s what civil litigation and, for that matter, this kind of serviceable entertainment are about, really, making an equation between feeling and money that never quite adds up.

With a judgement that is unable to sustain itself outside the courtroom, and the corresponding revelation that the law’s material remedies are simply not enough, Rudy himself becomes postmaterial, like Jack Brigance, Mitch McDeere, and Ed Stevens, leaving the legal system behind him as he returns to a more ‘natural’ state, moving closer to his ideal of law. Common to all these examples is a betrayal by the ‘city’ (of which the legal system is a part), a regression to a ‘natural’ state (because of some childhood connection to the rural setting, such as Stuckeyville or law school), and a sense of building (or rebuilding) a family by learning how to be a better friend or a better husband, or by simply starting over.

Historically, both the legal thriller and the trial movie revolve around the tension between the individual practitioner and the system of which they’re a part. The Grisham films and texts that take a similar approach to thinking about the law and the legal system, such as Ed, can be used as tools to think about the law, to map a vernacular theory of how a postmaterial law might operate to resolve this tension by reconceiving ‘law’ as something that transcends the materiality of the legal system. As Lucien Wilbanks tells Jake Brigance on the eve of his defence of Hailey:
'You're an attorney. Be proud. Your job is to find justice—no matter how hard she hides from you', and while this may, at first glance, seem clichéd, it clearly enunciates the romantic ideal of postmaterial law at the heart of these texts, an idea of law that requires the lawyer to look outside the legal system or risk becoming just another lawyer joke.

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Notes


4. For example, a trio of articles in the ‘Law and Film’ special issue of the Journal of Law and Society (28(1), 2001) discusses the evolution of the courtroom film: Rafter’s ‘American Criminal Trial Films: An

5. Hereafter referred to as Firm, Rainmaker, and Time. While this paper recognises that these films are the product of a number of people, they will be referred to as 'Grisham films' for the sake of convenience.

6. The Film Database on Box Office Guru (http://www.boxofficeguru.com/film.htm) lists box-office takings (a cumulative total derived from both domestic (US) and international figures) for The Firm at USD253.8 million and A Time To Kill at USD115 million. The Rainmaker cumulative total was unavailable, but it made over USD45 million in its domestic (US) release. Grisham's first two novels achieved US paperback sales of USD12 million for The Firm and USD9 million for A Time To Kill (The Guardian, 1994, 30 May), coupled with international sales throughout Europe and an escalating set of payments for film rights: USD600,000 for The Firm, USD6 million for A Time To Kill, and, more recently, USD8 million for (the still to be released) The Runaway Jury (Halliwell 2001). Oscar nominations were received by Holly Hunter (Best Supporting Actress for The Firm) and John Voight (Best Supporting Actor for The Rainmaker).

7. By way of example, the database Lexis lists over 34 articles about John Grisham in law journals alone.

8. Owens (2001) lists a number of ways Grisham's books have been used in court.

9. This is also true in fiction. Popular legal-thriller writer Philip Friedman claims a legal context is functional as it allows him to deal with every societal issue because every societal issue shows up in the courtroom (Lawson, 1994).

10. Additional Post stories include The Life Tenant (1907), The Tenth Commandment (1912), and Naboth's Vineyard (1916).

11. Presumed Innocent sold more than 700,000 hardcover copies and was on the New York Times bestseller list for hardcover fiction for 44 weeks (Pringle, 1997, p. 18).

12. In his 'Author's Note' at the start of A Time To Kill, Grisham clarifies that this, his first book, was released with a limited print run in 1989. With the subsequent success of The Firm, the book was re-issued in 1992.

14. Baker and Nietzel (1995) also connect this idea of the heroic individual to American frontier heroes such as Natty Bumppo who similarly worked and lived alone (p. 7).

15. For a list of these, see Nevins (1995).


17. It is worth noting that, while Francis Ford Coppola wrote the screenplay of The Rainmaker, it was Apocalypse Now writer Michael Herr who penned the ‘narration’.

18. An instance of a law firm embodying the hooker joke is given in Grisham’s The Street Lawyer (1998) when the associates at Washington, DC, firm Drake and Sweeney are called ‘corporate whores’ (p. 198).

19. The only one of the Grisham protagonists to benefit financially in these three texts is Mitch McDeere in The Firm, and, even then, he uses the money not for himself but to help his brother establish a new life for himself.

20. Interestingly, The Firm (1991) is called Il Socio (The Partner) rather than Lo Studio in the Italian version (Robson, 1996, p. 218), thus changing the focus back to McDeere (or Tolar?), and clearly setting up this divide between Socio and Studio.

21. For example, Miller’s (1997) review of The Rainmaker lingers on the images of Rudy Baylor’s opponents as a ‘veritable catalog of white middle-aged terpitude [sic]’, Jon Voight with ‘a face like cured meat’, Dean Stockwell ‘hacking emphatically as a burned-out judge, and Roy Scheider as a CEO in a ‘powder blue suit’.


23. While outside the scope of this paper, it should be noted that two other Grisham lawyers certainly qualify as ‘postmaterial’, if only for the fact that they work pro bono: Adam Hall in The Chamber (1996) and Reggie Love in The Client (1994).

25. Other series drawn along similar lines include Sweet Justice (1994–1995), in which hot young city-based attorney Kate Delacroy (Melissa Gilbert) returns home to the South for her sister's engagement party and ends up staying to help civil-rights warrior Carrie Grace Battle (Cicely Tyson); Judging Amy (1999–ongoing), in which corporate lawyer Amy Gray (Amy Brenneman) moves from New York to Connecticut, following the collapse of her 10-year marriage, to take up a judgeship in Hartford County’s Juvenile Court and live with her mother, Maxine (Tyne Daly), young daughter in tow; and the Australian SeaChange (1998–2000), in which lawyer Laura Gibson (Sigrid Thornton) deals with being passed over for partnership, her son’s expulsion, and her husband’s infidelity with her sister and arrest for fraud by accepting a job as magistrate in the beach-side community of Pearl Bay, a place of which she has fond ten-year-old memories.

26. It is a common implication in these series that had the lawyer/lawyer-surrogate paid less attention to the law and spent more time with their spouses, then their spouses would not have strayed.

27. Williams is not referring to the 'law' court here, but it can be read as either in this instance.

REFERENCES


