

THE PELICAN BRIEF by John Grisham

I. Biographical Insights

John Grisham was born on February 8 1955 in the town of Jonesboro, Arkansas. His father was an emigrant construction worker so the family moved a lot. In 1967 they came to Southhaven, a little town outside Memphis. John got an undergraduate degree in accounting at the Mississippi State University and after that he went to Lawschool at OLE Miss and graduated from the University of Mississippi in 1981. After his graduation he returned to Southhaven to work as a lawyer. He got himself a small office where he practiced criminal law. John was also politically engaged and in 1983 he won the election the Mississippi House of Representatives. He now started to work on his first book, "A Time to Kill" which he later finished in 1987. This book was based on his own experience as a small-town lawyer but it wasn't a hit (it is today). John Grisham continued to practice law and he also started writing his second book, "The Firm, ." His luck changed one day in 1990 when Paramount Pictures paid him \$600,000 for the rights to his new book and this happened even before a publisher accepted it. The Firm was published in 1991 and stayed on the best-sellers lists for nearly a year. In 1992 his third book, The Pelican Brief was published and it became an enormous success. At the same time "A Time to Kill" was republished and this time it became a best-selling book. In 1993 "The Client" was published and "The Chamber" came the year after that. His two most recent books are "The Runaway Jury" (1996) and "The Partner" (1997). All of his books are or will be movies, five of them already are (The Client, The Pelican Brief, The Firm, A Time to Kill and The Chamber). In 1990 he gave up his job as a lawyer and resigned his seat in the state Legislature to write books. Today he lives in Charlottesville, Virginia with his wife Renee and his two kids Ty and Shea. Apart from writing books John also coaches his son's Little League team. He also has a small farm in Oxford, Mississippi.

II. Characters

In the novel The Pelican Brief a young female Law Student named Darby Shaw writes a brief describing a theory she has on the murder of two Supreme Court Justices. It was a legal shot in the dark for Darby, a brilliant guess. To Washington it was the one thorn that was sticking in their back. Suddenly Darby witnessed a murder intended for her. Darby was chased into hiding out in little motels in big cities. She had no one to trust. She decided to go to the one person who she would have control over, Grey Grantham, ambitious reporter willing to do anything for a news break bigger than any front page article before. Together they uncovered a sneaky cover-up, made by the most prestigious men in the country.

Darby Shaw is the main character in the novel. Darby moves the entire plot, by being the instigator of the entire plot. By writing the brief Darby caused herself to be followed, stalked, and wanted for dead. Darby was a young woman, completely in love with her Law Professor. The first major conflict Darby experienced in the novel was the death of her lover, her Law Professor, which was intended for her. Throughout the novel her struggle with guilt and pain is omnipresent, as well as her fear. When she had nowhere else to run, she contacted Gray Grantham, he was her last hope, it helped her struggle with guilt and pain to become less dramatic. Her relationship of trust and dependence with Gray, eventually led her to fall in love with him. The love between Darby and Gray developed throughout the novel, without the love relationship, I doubt Gray would have risked his life the many times that he did.

III. Representative Passage on Imagery and Figurative Language.

"A dozen cruise ships of all sizes sat perfectly still in the shimmering

water. They stretched in a careless formation almost to the horizon. In the foreground, near the pier, a hundred sailboats dotted the harbor and seemed to keep the bulky tourist ships at bay. The water under the sailboats was a clear, soft blue, and as smooth as glass. It gently curled around Hassel Island, and grew darker until it was indigo and then violet as it touched the horizon. A perfect row of cumulus clouds marked the line where the water met the sky.

Her watch was in a bag, and she had no plans to wear it for at least six months. But she glanced at her wrist anyway. The window opened with a strain, and the sounds of the shopping district echoed through the streets. The warmth filtered in like a sauna." THE PELICAN BRIEF Chapter 45, page 432.

In the passage above, John Grisham makes the reader feel as if they are sitting on a hillside watching the busy piers of a small tourist-infested Caribbean island. John Grisham's use of colors, textures, sounds and feelings emphasize on his ability at writing. The last sentence "The warmth filtered in like a sauna." Is one of the similes used in the novel. His description of the humid air where Darby Shaw was sitting is almost present where the reader is sitting.

IV. Symbolism/Allusion

The Pelican Brief is a story about a major government cover-up. Any symbolism is pretty much represented by what they actual symbol is. One symbol that was throughout the novel was Darby Shaw's hair. Her hair represented her physical and mental state of mind. When her life began to be threatened she cut her hair several times, and colored it several different times throughout the novel. In the end of the novel when she was safe, there was one sentence that represents her feelings : "After 8 days on the beach her body was brown, and her hair was returning to its original color. Maybe she hadn't ruined it after all."

In The Pelican Brief Gray Grantham was a reporter for the Washington Post, an existing newspaper. A quote representing this "Is this Gray Grantham with the Washington Post?" Several times during the novel there were references to law books, buildings in New Orleans, Washington, the Caribbean, movies and also references to existing laws. Another Allusion is a reference to the movie Three Days of the Condor.

"His favorite movie was Three Days of the Condor. He watched it four times before he figured out who was killing whom and why. He could have killed Redford."

V. Representative Passage on Tone and Author's Philosophy.

"The President glanced at him. Perfect black suit, white shirt, red silk tie, a bit too much grease on the hair above the ears. He was sick of him, but he'd get over it when the crisis passed and he could get back to golf and Coal could sweat the details. He told himself he had that kind of energy and stamina when he was only thirty-seven, but he knew better." THE PELICAN BRIEF Chapter 16 page 139.

John Grisham, in this passage, seemed to have a resentful attitude to politicians. His philosophy about them is they are more interested in golf than a major government crisis, and choose to let others worry about it. John would like politicians to care more, he would like them to stop being so "political". John Grisham is a man that gets things done, and he doesn't let anyone worry about his problems. In this passage he is describing the opposite of himself.

VI. Evaluation.

The Pelican Brief was an influence in my life. The book made you think about who you can and can't trust, and also showed some skills of being sneaky. I think John Grisham's goal while writing this novel was to strike suspense, fear, happiness, and enjoyment into the hearts of those who read his novel. I know I experienced all those while reading the novel. The topics in the novel are

government conspiracy, without thinking about the topic, the reader wouldn't understand the novel. John Grisham's books are hard to follow if you don't pay attention, and when a reader does, they are hooked. John Grisham has a way of tricking the reader with suspense to stay up late reading, to finish the book, and learn the truth.