



Grisham's "A Time To Kill": Temporary Insanity And Psychological Theory To Seek Justice

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Abstract

In this study, the psychological effects of racial prejudice within the legal system are investigated. The novel "A Time to Kill" by John Grisham serves as a source of inspiration for this investigation. The study employs a rigorous literary analysis methodology to investigate how Attorney Jake Brigance strategically employs the concept of temporary insanity to navigate the intricate mechanisms of justice. More precisely, the study focuses on how Attorney Brigance takes advantage of that concept. The purpose of this analysis is to dissect the intricate relationship that exists between an individual's psyche and the prejudices that are prevalent in society by delving into the psychological motivations that drive the characters. The purpose of this research is to shed light on the psychological impact of racial prejudice in challenging legal scenarios by examining the emotions that are evoked in both the audience and the characters. These emotions influence decision-making processes and the outcomes of legal cases. This investigation contributes to a deeper understanding of societal issues and the intricate psychological dynamics that are inherent in navigating the legal system in the face of prejudice and injustice. The research paper aims to be accomplished by conducting a comprehensive examination of the psychological themes and legal aspects that are present in Grisham's work.

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INTRODUCTION

The study addresses racial injustice, the pursuit of justice in the face of institutionalized prejudice, and the difficulties associated with determining one's moral and legal responsibility. "There's a lot of autobiography in this book. I no longer practice law, but for ten years I did so in a very similar manner to Jake Brigance" (Grisham, 1992: xi) states as he creates Jake Brigance's character. Du Boris" (1903) the first African American

to earn a doctoral degree from Harvard University wrote, *"The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line"*. Wellman (1993) defines racism as *"culturally sanctioned beliefs, which, regardless of intentions involved, defend the advantages whites have because of the subordinated position of racial minorities"*. Racism is indeed a component of culture, no internal revolution can account for the need for racism to change and take on more nuanced forms. The face of the culture that tolerates racism is bloated and defaced by it. John Grisham's *"A Time to Kill"* is a significant piece of literature that delves into the complex relationship between justice and racial prejudice. The novel is set in a racially divided Southern town and follows Attorney Jake Brigance as he defends a black man accused of murdering two white assailants who attacked his daughter. Grisham skillfully intertwines a story that vividly portrays racial tensions and explores the psychological complexities of human behaviour in the legal field. Revenge has been a component of human behaviour since the dawn of humanity, as defined by psychology. Revenge is often motivated by a desire to achieve justice, leading us to feel the need to harm those who have wronged us. Brigance uses the concept of "temporary insanity" as a strategic tool to navigate the complex justice system, which tends to favour the privileged and powerful. In "Blunt Not the Heart, Enrage It": The Psychology of Revenge and Deterrence" Rose McDermott define revenge as *"In contrast to negative reciprocity, which is motivated by anger and holds the possibility of reconciliation and future cooperation, revenge is the emotionally mediated psychological motivation or desire to harm for its own sake, expressing a form of hatred"*. Although psychoanalysis is often linked with vengeance, it is also linked with racism.

"How do you feel about the nigger shootin' them boys like he did?"

"I don't blame him," inserted Lela

"Yeah, but you can't take the law into your own hands," explained Joe Frank to his wife... "what if it was your daughter, Will?" asked Lela (Grisham 322)

In the above quote, their conversation reveals that Joe, as a jury member, argues against Carl Lee, a Black man, on the grounds of racism, while Leela sympathises with Carl Lee, arguing that he should be found not guilty of insanity due to the injustices he endured as an African-American. The term "racism" refers to the attitude that one person is inherently inferior to another because of his or her race, ethnicity, national origin, language, or other defining characteristics. It compels one to evaluate people based on outward appearances rather than their real behaviours. Racism makes a person more likely to be seen as a criminal and makes it harder for them to get what they deserve, whether from society or the law *"He tore into the judicial system and its desire to prosecute a good and decent man who had done no wrong; a man who, if white, would not be on the trial; a man who was on trial only because he was black and that was what was so wrong with the prosecution and persecution of Carl Lee Hailey"* (Grisham 231). The quote above clearly demonstrates how the difficult realities of life under segregation and discrimination are highlighted to African-American characters like Carl Lee Hailey and Jake Brigance, who navigate a hostile environment where their rights and dignity are routinely violated. Characters are compelled to and are forced to consider issues of morality, fairness, and accountability as a result of the pursuit of justice, which serves as the moral and philosophical framework of the book. Various forms of literature, including novels, dramas, and poetry, have utilised revenge. This is something that many of these literary devices have dealt with. While many cultures do not advocate using vengeance as a means of emotional release or conflict resolution, it is nonetheless a tool that many people use. Because, according to Freud, vengeance exports revelation or inspiration, and psychoanalysis is a good tool for testing or analysing the motivations that drive characters, particularly protagonists, to exact revenge from their oppressors. By applying psychoanalytic techniques to character analysis, this paper can track not only how well the novel's tasks are accomplished, but also how convincing and satisfying those characters are from a psychological standpoint.

Incorporating Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory and Temporary Insanity in Grisham's A Time to Kill

During the 19th century, this legal defence was developed, and it became particularly associated with the defence of individuals who committed crimes motivated by passion. A member of Congress from New York named Daniel Sickles was the first person to successfully use the defence in 1859 after he had murdered Philip Barton Key II, who was his wife's lover (Kennedy, Robert 2001). According to "The Insanity Defense in Criminal Law Cases" (2023) it is generally required that Individuals who are not guilty because of mental disorder or insanity in the United States undergo psychiatric treatment in a mental institution, except in cases where the insanity is temporary. John W. Hinckley was found not guilty of attempting to assassinate President Ronald Reagan in 1982 due to an insanity defence, prompting several states to revise their insanity laws. Several states have changed the legal responsibility of proving a defendant's insanity from the prosecution to

the defence. This means that defence attorneys must provide clear and convincing evidence or a preponderance of evidence to demonstrate that the defendant was insane (Hermann, 2015). In "A Time to Kill," Attorney Jake Brigance employs the concept of temporary insanity, a concept explored through Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Freud's theory suggests that individuals may be driven by unconscious motivations and defense mechanisms, such as repressed desires and emotions (Daniel 2015). In the case of defendants like Carl Lee Hailey, Freudian theory invites an exploration of unconscious conflicts and traumas that may have contributed to their psychological state at the time of the alleged crime. Hailey's actions could be interpreted as a manifestation of repressed rage and trauma stemming from pervasive racial prejudice and violence.

"Ladies and gentlemen, do any of you believe that the insanity defense should not be used under any circumstance?"

They squirmed a little, but no hands...Insanity! Insanity! Insanity! The seed had been planted." (Grisham 389)

He used the metaphor "*The seed had been planted*" to describe the emergence of Carl Lee Hailey's stress emotion when he committed the crime. "*If we prove Carl Lee Hailey was legally insane when he shot Billy Ray Cobb and Pete Willard, is there a person on this panel who cannot find him not guilty?*" Grisham effectively portrays Carl Lee's intense emotions and suffering, illustrating a man who is driven to the edge by the injustices his family has faced. Freud's theory of defence mechanisms provides a structure for comprehending how individuals manage intense emotions and inner conflicts. Defendants in cases of temporary insanity may use defence mechanisms like repression or dissociation to cope with the severe psychological distress linked to their situation. Defendants may use the defence of temporary insanity to lessen feelings of guilt or responsibility by blaming their actions on a brief loss of control, thus shielding their ego from the harsh truth of their behaviour. Analysing Carl Lee Hailey's decision to kill the rapists who took his daughter through Freud's structural model of the psyche sheds light on the inner struggles and motivations that drove him to take matters into his own hands in "A Time to Kill." Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding human behavior, personality development, and mental processes. The theory consists of three layers: conscious, preconscious, and unconscious. The conscious mind is the level of consciousness where we have direct access to our ideas, emotions, and perceptions. The pre-conscious consists of ideas and memories that are not yet conscious but can be brought to consciousness. The unconscious is the most profound aspect of the mind, encompassing ideas, desires, memories, and impulses beyond conscious consciousness (Octave (2015). Freud's structural model of the psyche consists of the id, ego, and superego. The id is the basic, instinctive aspect of the mind, focusing on the pleasure principle. The ego emerges from the id and functions under the reality principle, balancing innate desires with societal standards and moral norms. The superego represents internalized moral norms and values learned through socialization and parental influence, acting as the conscience.

In "A Time to Kill," Carl Lee Hailey's decision to take justice for his daughter, Tonya, can be analyzed through Freud's structural model of the psyche. Carl Lee's id, driven by intense emotions like rage and fear, may have sought immediate gratification without considering the long-term consequences of his actions. The overwhelming trauma and emotional turmoil from Tonya's assault may have overwhelmed Carl Lee's ego, impairing its ability to mediate between his instinctual drives and societal norms. Carl Lee's superego, representing his internalized moral standards, may have been weakened by the extreme circumstances surrounding Tonya's assault, leading to a temporary weakening of its influence. The desire to protect his family and seek justice for his daughter may have overridden his usual moral inhibitions. (Grisham 46) "*It ain't sunk in yet. I mean, twenty-four hours ago everything was fine. Now look at us. My little girl's layin' up in the hospital with tubes all over her body. My wife is crazy and my boys are scared to death, and all I think about is gettin' my hands on those bastards.*" The incorporation of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory into the idea of temporary insanity in the novel brings a deeper comprehension of the psychological complexity that is present in the judicial procedures, as well as the motives of the characters. This study obtains vital insights into the novel's complex representation of momentary insanity and its consequences for justice and human behaviour by analysing the function of the unconscious mind, defence mechanisms, and the structural dynamics of the psyche. This allows to better understand the novel's theme of temporary insanity.

METHODOLOGY

This paper's methodology employs a literary analysis technique centred on John Grisham's book "A Time to Kill." Analysis of key themes, character motives, and narrative events is conducted to comprehend the depiction

of racial discrimination in the court system. Data collection involves collecting textual information from the book to discover trends and insights about bias and legal decision-making. Freud's psychoanalytic theory, namely his structural model of the mind, is used to enhance the comprehension of the characters' psychological motives. This interdisciplinary method integrates literary studies and psychology to examine the intricacies of justice in the face of prejudice and injustice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The author, Laura J. Hatcer in her “Law and Politics Book Review” said- The one reason the girl is raped is because she is African-American. It shows racial tension and sexism come through in nearly the backdrop of history. “The Revenge of Conscience in John Grisham's A Time to Kill” by Mahmood Hasan and Zaghair Al-khazaali (2022) highlighted The law plays a role in the revenge of conscience in John Grisham's 1989 novel A Time to Kill, particularly when lawmakers abuse the law for a variety of reasons, including racism, identity issues, judicial misconduct, and the subjugation of Black Americans. By citing examples like zoning laws that led to racial segregation, loan policies that prevented Black people from buying homes, low-income residents of public housing, and the drug war that disproportionately imprisoned Black people, they help people understand institutional racism. In contemporary discourse, the emphasis has shifted from the individual to the system's structural role in maintaining inequality in the relationship between race and the criminal justice system. Cocolonialism frames several practices, such as drug laws, mass incarceration, bail requirements, all-white juries, racial profiling, and surveillance said in the Book Review: Killing with Prejudice: Institutionalized Racism in American Capital Punishment by Nicholas Petersen, A. Bahraini(2019) In “Race, gender, and Punishment: From Colonialism to the War on Terror” Mary Bosworth and Jeanne Flavin(2007) spoke about discrimination and structural and cultural elements that have created and maintained the current situation. The four primary factors mentioned influencing public opinion and criminal justice policy are immigration, globalization, slavery, and colonialism. By doing this, they highlight how the application of punishments both demands and legitimizes particular racial conceptions. Jason Bainbridge (2003) in “Discovering the Law Again: John Grisham, Ed Stevens, and the postmaterial Lawyer” A lawyer who practices law with a focus on values such as social justice, human rights, environmental sustainability, and cultural expression—values that transcend the satisfaction of basic material needs—is known as a “postmaterial” lawyer. They may be experts in circumstances or matters connected to these broader, irrelevant worries. D. Jones Brown, Michael W. Markowitz (2000) “The System in Black and White: Exploring the Connections between Race, Crime, and Justice” There is discussion regarding the impact of racial demographics on jury verdicts in routine adjudication.

CONCLUSION

This study offers important insight into the psychological aspects of racial bias within the court system, focusing on the interaction of the id, ego, and superego in characters like Attorney Jake Brigance and Carl Lee Hailey. The research highlights the widespread impact of racial prejudice on legal outcomes and the emotional impact on both characters and viewers. Although the study has limitations, it has important implications for social concerns and judicial justice. Identifying the psychological causes of racial prejudice and its effects on judicial procedures emphasizes the need for legal institutions to promote knowledge, empathy, and critical thinking. This research may also help create legal interventions and laws to reduce bias and promote equality and fairness. By including psychological views in the discussion on racial prejudice and justice, this research improves knowledge of the challenges of navigating justice in the face of social prejudices and injustices.

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