



**NON LEGAL FICTIONS OF JOHN GRISHAM'S  
MICHAEL'S ROOM" AND "FUNNY BOY"- THE VALUE OF  
LIFE AND DEATH DILEMMA**

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"Michael's Room" is the most emotional story of the "Ford Country" story collection by John Grisham. The author paid attention to the psychological point of view of human being.

The plot of the story is following: Stanley Wade is an attorney who is kidnapped at a convenience store by an imposing working-class man and his teenage son and driven into the wilds in the man's old pickup truck. At gunpoint, Wade is forced to walk down a deserted road with the man after the truck drops them off. The road leads to a ramshackle house, and in the back out the house is eleven-year-old Michael Cranwell, who is severely developmentally disabled.

Stanley Wade was the attorney who successfully defended the incompetent, and possibly intoxicated, doctor who caused Michael's extensive birth defects. During the course of the trial Wade insisted that the doctor was a great and caring man, dismissing Michael and mocking the evidence of malpractice.

Wade is forced to listen to pages of the trial transcript read to him by Mr. Cranwell and begins to feel remorse for his actions and those of his guilty clients. Instead of killing him, Cranwell drops Wade back at the convenience store parking lot, allowing him to go home. He claims he will leave Wade alone until Michael dies, filling the attorney with dread.

The story is totally built in contrast, the comparison between rich and common people, the contrast between Stanley Wade and Jim Cranwell, the discrepancy between Mr. Cranwell's wife and Lawyer Wade's wife, the similarity between Mr. Cranwell's manner of speech and the skilled lawyers' report, the differences between common people's friends and the wealth's friends and the pity unlike features between healthy and ill children, professional differences between Dr. Parkin and Dr. Trane. Grisham uses the concept of comparison and contrast to identify the main idea of the story, with the help of this method it is easy to catch the meaning of it. From the beginning till the end of the story the comparison is used via parallel constructions. This Grisham's work fragmented by dualisms such as past and present, lie and truth, health and illness, good and bad, right and duty, reason and emotion, sensation and intellect, crime and punishment and so on.

The comparison between Mrs. Wade and Mrs. Cranwell is demonstrated so simply, any reader can make a conclusion on a woman as a wife and a mother, what is her duty to her children and to her husband.

Some lines on Mrs. Wade: "For Stanley Wade, the encounter was caused in part by his wife's lingering flu and in part by their need for sustenance, along with other reasons. After a long day at the office, he called home to check on her and to inquire about dinner. She rather abruptly informed him that she had no desire to cook and little desire to eat, and that if he was hungry, he'd better stop by the store. When was he not hungry at dinnertime? After a few more sentences they agreed on frozen pizza, about the only dish Stanley could prepare and, oddly, the only thing she might possibly want to nibble on. Preferably sausage and cheese. Please enter through the kitchen and keep the dogs quiet, she instructed. She might be asleep on the sofa."

Another part of the story, which is connected with Mrs. Cranwell: "Her long hair was all gray and pulled into a ponytail. Her eyes were sad and fatigued. She made no effort to hide the dark circles under them. She stood and took a step to a door next to the bed. She opened it and pulled down a small foldaway cot. "This is where in sleep, almost every night. I can't leave him because of the seizures. Sometimes Doyle will sleep here, sometimes Jim, but somebody has to be here during the night. The seizures always come at night. I don't know why." She shoved the cot back and closed the door. "I feed him four times a day, an ounce at a time. He urinates at least five times and has at least two bowel movements. You can't predict when. They happen at different times. Eleven years now, and there's no schedule for them. I bathe him twice a day. And I read to him, tell him stories. I seldom leave this room, Mr. Wade. And when I'm not here, I feel guilty because I should be. The word 'constant' doesn't begin to describe it." She sat back down in her old recliner at the foot of Michael's bed and stared at the floor. "

Having read these facts about two women we can say that the antithesis is used as a tool of comparison. Mrs. Cranwell's name is Becky but for Mrs. Wade the author doesn't give any name. As most of the fictions the names aren't used to the secondary or unnecessary characters, but sometimes it is done deliberately to make degradation. Mrs. Wade doesn't want to open the door to her husband while Mrs. Cranwell is busy with her ill son's seizures. Becky doesn't work anywhere even left her work because of her responsibility as a mother. Before Michael was born, Becky worked as a teacher's assistant at a school in Karraway.

If we take the similarity between Jim's and lawyers' speech during the court, Jim's ready report overweighs theirs. Indicating his fingers while counting the lies which were in Michael's case he acts as if he knows the process and its end beforehand. He can predict what happens then like lawyers who practiced at the court for ages. Jim finds some mistakes of Stanley about Michael's case. Each time he gives statements with justifications, even Stanley realizes his ability. He finds 6 lies:

Lie number one: The expert scoffed at the numbers, said it would take less than ten grand a year to care for Michael. But now most of his food goes through a tube, and it costs \$800 a month.

Lie number two: The same expert testified that a full-time nurse wouldn't be necessary. He disagreed that Michael would require constant care. But as we mentioned before Becky is busy with only Michael from morning till morning not even till evening.

Lie number three: With the help of the expert and the lawyer Wade Dr. Trane's insurance company and the State of the Mississippi didn't pay a dime to Michael's care yet still The Cranwells pay all taxes.

Lie number four: The Cranwell's expert said they could probably hire a part-time nurse for thirty thousand a year and thirty for other expenses, a total of sixty a year, for twenty years one point two million. Nobody else in Ford Country has a million, for this reason they asked nine hundred thousand for trying to profit the little boy. But the lawyer Wade called them opportunistic.

Lie number five: ( in the story it is given as Lie number four) The big verdicts are bad because they drive up the cost of health care and insurance. If juries return small verdicts, or no verdicts, then people are supposed to enjoy low-cost health care and low-cost insurance. Can't let those greedy lawyers and their greedy clients abuse the system and get rich.

Lie number six: Dr. Trane failed to properly diagnose labor pains when Becky first arrived at the hospital, that he shouldn't have sent her home. Yet Lawyer Wade claimed that Dr. Trane adhered to the highest standards of professional conduct.

Cranwell was smarter than most lawyers in the town, and infinitely more prepared. Armed with a handful of lies, Cranwell was ready more. His last question to Lawyer Wade: "Look at this sad little boy, this damaged child whose injuries could've been prevented, and tell us, Lawyer Wade, or is it just another courtroom victory? The two have little in common." ... " Justice, or a courtroom

victory?" Lawyer Wade could say only that it's not justice. Reading such part of the story each reader will ask the same questions and it can't be the same answer.

Michael is the main character of the story, and he is passive physically however this personage makes others' actions and thoughts work actively. Eight years earlier, during the trial, Michael had been displayed for the jury only once. During his lawyer's emotional final summation, the judge allowed Michael to be rolled into the courtroom in his special chair for a quick viewing. He wore pajamas, a large bib, no socks or shoes. His oblong head fell to one side. His mouth was open, his eyes were closed, and his tiny misshapen body wanted to curl into itself. He was severely brain and damaged, blind, with a life expectancy of only a few years. He was pitiful sight then, though the jury eventually showed no mercy. He is eleven years old now, still blind, still brain damaged. Parents don't know how much he hears and understands, but it isn't much. He'll smile once a week he hears his mother's voice, and sometimes he'll smile when his brother Doyle tickles him. The theoretical approach of the content and the form, dualism as past and present are given very skillfully and it is the author's success for making a bridge between he and his readers. The theory of literature always teaches us that the content and the form can coincide or not. One of the astonishing ideas of the story, this sick little boy is a great treasure for his family, though he is just one of the ways of wasting money to the insurance company, to the court and even to the state of Mississippi.

As for John Grisham's method of choosing titles for his works, one more time he uses more controversial title to his story. Before touching the work the readers may guess that whether this fiction for children or just for entertainment. The description of Michael's room is purposely given in a simplified way and sounds as following: "The wall next to Michael's bed had no windows, but the two walls along the sides had three narrow windows each. The room was fifteen feet long at most and about twelve feet wide. The floor was covered with cheap yellow linoleum." That's all information about Michael's room on the surface. Here Michael's room is the symbol of justice and injustice, hopefulness and hopelessness, life and death for Lawyer Wade, revenge for Jim Cranwell and his family, patience for Michael's mother Becky and nonsense to Michael, the owner of the room.

It is not good to divide the characters into the positive and the negative ones. Lawyer Wade does his task according to his professional demand. Dr. Trane is also somehow right; it is not the director's task to waste the huge amount of money of his company. We can't blame them, everyone has done his daily job. Because they have to support their family, if they don't do these, who will support him and his family. As usual Americanism, individualism and materialism are the central topics of this story. We think about us, we care for our money, we belief in our career, but what about the society and what about the people around us. Such exclamations come through the text, it is the author's professional and literary talent.

The language of the author is very simple as most of the modern writers. The main goal is "art for everybody", firstly it should be understandable to common people, not as the decadent theory "art for art's sake" at the end of the XIX century. Through the words of the characters, the description of their inner world, their psychology and their status in the society are obviously seen.

In conclusion the author's purpose is to show that any lawyer should think a little about the opposite side. In the court while considering the case winning or overcoming shouldn't be the main goals. They should realize the consequences of this or that case. And again Grisham makes us aware what is our responsibility, our duty and our right. As a humanist writer he has achieved his aim. This story can be a good example on how the contrast and the comparison are used by the author. If literature teachers choose this story while explaining the notions such as: contrast, comparison, dualism, humanist story, contradictory title and unexpected end of fictions, students can easily understand what are the main features of this notions via the story "Michael's room" by John Grisham. In one word the story is a piece of fictional controversy, the author never tells you his conclusion and his reaction to the situation. It is the readers' turn to come to the conclusion at the end this or that. Independent thought is more valuable than other ways of the perception. Maybe for these reasons people read John Grisham, because his characters are close to us and the events are true to real life.

The next story we have analyzed is "**Funny boy**" the last story of the "Ford Country" story collection by John Grisham and it is considered the most colorful and stressful work in this book.

In the mid-1980s, AIDS is virtually unknown in Ford County. The outcast son of a prominent local family is dying from AIDS and is returning home from San Francisco, not wanting his friends in California to have to watch him die. The family does not want the son to be near them and makes a deal with an elderly black spinster living in one of the family's properties in the black side of the town: Take care of the dying son Adrian and the house is yours, free and clear. The young man and the old lady Emporia live together and become close friends even as the entire town comes to resent them both out of fear, ignorance, and bigotry. She reveals to him that she, too, is a homosexual and continues to support him even after her church asks her to take a "leave of absence" until after the young man has died. In the end, he commits suicide to end his suffering, leaving a note declaring his new friend to be the best human being he has ever known.

It is what is written on the surface of the story, but as usual, the deep sense of it is great. Grisham made such a chain among the global health, political and social problems, and there is no way how to determine the line where the author talks on this or that problem. Not only in 1980s, but today also the AIDS is considered as uncured illness, we live in a horrible world and some people cannot escape from this disease. Homosexuality is another terrible problem of new generations; some countries even give permission to homosexual marriage. Now they have an opportunity for bringing up children as a way taking from merry houses. Yet the politicians who made this law have never thought about the family

atmosphere, how can it be? One man is a father and another man is a mother, thus presenting abnormal, miserable situation. In spite of the publication of the story in 2009, the author chose the years of 1980.

Adrian came to the small town of 10,000 people. He has lived in California more than 20 years and decided to die at the same place where he was born. Nevertheless, he and his family don't want to spend the last hours together. The chilly truth of the modern world about relationships between parents and children stays in a problematic state of understanding. Children do not want to obey the rules of the society and parents are never tired of saying that they have been better than their children. Family matters are the main topics of the story and Grisham could manage to describe the awful state of the population through them. At early age each child wants a special attitude to himself/herself, for knowing his/her rank in the family. Parents are too busy; earning money is the main purpose of any day, and career is a strong position that must be achieved. Yet children are waiting their parents at home. The same is with Adrian, they are the richest family in the town in money and the poorest family in kindness. Family supports him every month sending money to California in order to hold a distance from them.

According to our research, "Funny boy" is regarded as the most colorful and literary complete story in the collection. The author used the method of giving intertextuality and allusions very skillfully. As a writer, Grisham's great success lies in his ability to describe the main character's (Adrian) inner world with the help of William Faulkner's works, the reader can easily understand Adrian's thoughts and feelings via the title of Faulkner's novels that Adrian wants to read. Near the death, when Adrian is at Emporia's house, he is eager to read Faulkner's fictions, he chose some of the writer's works, the selection includes "A Fable", "Requiem for a Nun", "The Unvanquished", "The sound and the fury", "The soldier's pay" and "As I lay dying". As we know, Faulkner is a great classic writer, he is known for his experimental style with meticulous attention to [diction](#) and [cadence](#). In contrast to the [minimalist](#) understatement of his contemporary [Ernest Hemingway](#), Faulkner made frequent use of "[stream of consciousness](#)" in his writing, and wrote often highly emotional, subtle, cerebral, complex, and sometimes [Gothic](#) or [grotesque](#) stories of a wide variety of characters including former slaves or descendants of slaves, poor white, agrarian, or working-class Southerners, and Southern aristocrats.

It is very interesting to see that Adrian begins his reading with "Soldier's pay" and finished "As I lay dying". "He had decided to finally confront the fictional world of William Faulkner, an author who'd been forced upon him in high school. Back then, Adrian believed, as did all students in Mississippi, that there was a state law requiring English teachers to include Faulkner. He had struggled through "A Fable", "Requiem for a Nun", "The Unvanquished", and others he had tried to forget, and he finally surrendered in bewildering defeat halfway through "The Sound and The Fury". Now, in his last days after dinner, or "supper", as it was called, he sat on the porch while Emporia washed the dishes

and started at the beginning, with "Soldier's pay", published in 1926, when Faulkner was just twenty nine"

The plot of "Soldiers' Pay" revolves around the return of a wounded aviator home to a small town in Georgia following the conclusion of the [First World War](#). He is escorted home by a veteran of the war, as well as a widow whose husband was killed during the conflict. The aviator himself suffered a horrendous head injury, and was left in a state of almost perpetual silence, as well as blindness. Several conflicts revolving around his return include the state of his engagement to his fiancée, the desire of the widow to break the engagement to marry the dying aviator, and the romantic intrigue surrounding the fiancée who had been less than faithful to the aviator in his absence.

It is easy to catch the intertextual relation between Grisham's story and Faulkner's works, the author chooses such novels by Faulkner for his character's reading, and they are as the mirror of his life, his illness and his coming death. Adrian suicides when he finishes "As I lay dying". "... He was almost finished with "As I lay dying", Faulkner's fifth novel and one Adrian had seriously considered skipping, for obvious reasons. But he found it much more accessible than the others, and unexpectedly humorous. He finished it in an hour, and fell asleep." Faulkner said that he wrote the novel "As I lay dying" from midnight to 4:00 AM over the course of six weeks, and that he did not change a word of it. Faulkner wrote it while working at a power plant, and described it as a "[tour de force](#)." The novel utilizes "[stream of consciousness](#)" writing technique, multiple narrators, and varying chapter. Again John Grisham achieves his success, it is one of his great contributions to compare Adrian's position, even his reading skill with Faulkner's manner of writing. Time can't be the reason to escape the world, time can't control their life somehow and time is a great conquer of their death, within two texts time is in contrast, for the two authors and their characters time is the most expensive and the cheapest thing.

The title "Funny boy" is ironical and controversial. If we look the word "funny" through the dictionary, it has several meanings: amusing, strange, dishonest, ill and crazy. At the beginning of the story it seemed as an amusing story character, but after a few explanations the author made readers aware that Adrian is not an amusing boy, he is too close to the death, he has serious illness AIDS and for more than 20 years he has been a gay, which was very unusual at that time ( 1980s). It is obviously seen he is a strange and a sick man who needs others' help, yet his family members keep their distance. They don't want to live with ill man and the danger of the infection breaks the inborn relationships. Grisham ,as his all works, shows the unpleasant truth on Americanism, individualism and materialism. The family can't appreciate the value of relationship and real responsibility of a true man. They make a sphere around them, they think: "It is my life and I don't need other's problems, and it is my world and I don't want others interrupt."

The theme of the story is humanism. As a person, what is my duty and responsibility. The whole story sounds as "should we care for our dears." The



subthemes of the story are family matters, isolation and the danger of the AIDS. The author exactly makes a line that the end of the illness is death and nothing can help. People hate and cannot stay in touch, of course, for everybody his /her life and his business are more important than others'.

One of the striking parts of the story is the repetition of the word expression "That's what they say".

"He's comin' home to die?"

"That's what they say."

"You're not talkin' about AIDS, are you?"

"That's what they say"

"The boy's got AIDS and he's coming to Clanton."

"That's what they say."

"He's living with the coloreds?"

"That's what they say"

This word expression shows the uncertainty of the characters. What is more interesting here the speakers are spreading others' information, they are not witnesses of anything or they don't want to be executed as witnesses. They defend themselves as modern persons from telling lie. Grisham can consume this word expression as one of the key words of the story. It means probability, uncertainty and the speakers' vindication. "That's what they say" strengthens the significance of the dialogues in this work.

The culmination comes close to the end. "By ten the next morning, Emporia realized she had not heard a sound from him. She pecked on the door to his bedroom, and when she stepped in, there was Adrian, neatly dressed, still smiling, eternally at rest." The readers are aware the disease which Adrian has, at the beginning it's also mentioned by the author the end of this illness is exact death. But in any case, besides comprehending these oppositions, any reader's wish is the continuation of Adrian's life. We feel excuse for him.

The letter which is written to Emporia by Adrian demonstrates how clever a man he is, how he can value other's feelings such as kindness and friendship. At the same time it works as a monologue. In the Literary theory it is proofed that a monologue opens inner world of a character more than a dialogue, he/she says more the truth about his/her perception of things or humans. His letter is somehow a direction to Emporia after his death. Adrian can find a good attitude from a colored old lady, yet he needs this relationship from his white blue-blood mother. Adrian ends his letter: "Thank you so much for your kindness. You have made my last days bearable, even enjoyable at times. You're a wonderful human being, and you deserve to be what you are." Without doubt the author wants to say all people are the same, there is no any reason to separate them into black and white or rich and poor. It is not time to think about discrimination. Once more Grisham's writing style is closely connected with humanism.

The language of the author in this story is very simple; he uses some elements of the southern pronunciation. But it's done deliberately and it improves the surface level of the book. The first and the main important feature of any work



in the literature is that it should be understandable to everybody, it should work for the aesthetic taste and it should be a bridge between an author and a reader. Our judgment is John Grisham could manage all.

The story shows what a horrible disease is AIDS. Reading it can be a good lesson in life, as an alarm to young generation and a note to parents. As we mentioned before Grisham could raise the global problem through the social problem and achieved his goal. Taking everything into consideration "Funny boy" is a poignant story and the two concepts "healthy generations" and "close-knit families" are given in parallel and their task is to complete each other.

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