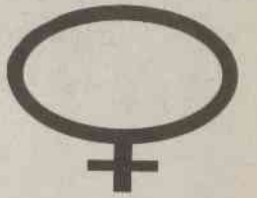


Arts



HE SAID,

She Said



Windy Gordon
Movie Reviewer

Film adaptations of John Grisham's novels, such as *The Client* or *The Pelican Brief*, typically take us racing through layers of legal intrigue with plot twists and turns. There are no such aerobatics with *A Time to Kill*. The journey, dizzying though it may be, is one of descent into darkness. In the first moments we are taken into the dark reality of violence directed against the innocence of youth. Those images have hardly faded when we are swept into the dark rage of lethal revenge. Revenge made all the darker by the realization that we could follow the same path. Finally, the entire story comes to rest in the darkest of images, the reality of racism in a small southern town.

It would have been easy to fill the story with darkness so that we could be lifted up to a bright, promising conclusion. There is no such ascension in this film. In fact, the darkest moment comes in the penultimate moment of every courtroom drama, the closing argument. The defense attorney finds justice not by appealing to the highest principles of humanity but by recognizing the darkest reality of living in a multiracial society. His recognition, and the moment of awareness of everyone on the screen, is a mirror held up to each of us if we dare to look. Grisham did offer a final glimpse of hope but it seems to be a very small candle burning in a deep and abiding darkness.

For all of the harsh reality the film is a "must see." Matthew McConaughey, as defense attorney Jake Berganz, is most impressive. He approaches the trial of a lifetime with the youthful exuberance and naiveté of someone off to a summer league softball game but he quickly ages and matures before our eyes as the events swirling around him take his youth, his innocence, and his ability to deceive himself about where he lives and who he is. Samuel L. Jackson, as Carl Lee Hailey, the defendant and outraged father, is by turns a simple southern man and a brilliant man of the world who sees strategy and opportunity far better than his young attorney. He is captivating in both guises. Sandra Bullock, as Ellen Roark, the liberal northerner inexplicably enrolled at Ole' Miss Law School, was handed a rather confused role. We are asked to accept that a brilliant law student, motivated by the highest of principles, would

appear in a strange southern town dressed as if she were on the beach in southern California. We have to believe that either Roark is brilliant but oblivious or that the director wanted to play off of Bullock's looks for a little market boost. Finally, Kieffer Sutherland appears as yet another demented bad guy with a one dimensional view of the world. The echoes of his dedicated but misguided Marine NCO from *A Few Good Men* almost obscure the pathology of his racist southerner bent on destroying Carl Lee Hailey. He is fun to watch but this boogey man can scare us only so many times.

In the final analysis, it is provocative, engaging and thoroughly entertaining. Joel Schumacher's direction remained true to the novel and the film takes us into Grisham's very first make believe case. It is by far the most emotionally interesting story Grisham has written and the events take us to a place that we don't really want to visit but need to see. That place is not Canton, Mississippi, it is our own view of the people who live around us.

Rating = ****

Michelle Choate
Movie Reviewer

As a parent, if your 10-year-old daughter was raped, subsequently disfigured, and left to die hanging from a tree by two drunk rednecks, what would you do? In "A Time to Kill" based on John Grisham's first novel, Carl Lee Hailey (Samuel L. Jackson) blows the assailants away on the court house stairs, because he's convinced that the crimes will go unpunished. You see, Hailey is a black man living in the rural Mississippi south; the rapist are white locals. Haley hires a young, white, down-on-his luck liberal lawyer, Jake Brigance (Matthew McConaughey), to defend him. Brigance incidentally also has a daughter. What follows is a fairly predictable, but action packed road to the trial and the obligatory courtroom drama. Numerous subplots, several of them left underdeveloped, pepper the plot and quicken the pace.

The Mississippi setting offers an uncomfortable glimpse of a racially charged modern south, where the Klan is alive and well, that has changed little in the last three decades.

If you like John Grisham, then you'll love this movie in one of the few instances where the movie is as good as the book. Relative screen newcomer, Matthew McConaughey gives an outstanding performance as Jake Brigance. No wonder, since Grisham apparently hand-picked the actor. Sandra Bullock is somewhat believable as a law student, with her sites on an ACLU career, who volunteers to clerk for Brigance. She along with the numerous A-list actors in supporting roles, Donald and Kieffer Sutherland, Kevin Spacey, seem to have been chosen more for box office appeal than for suitability for their roles.

**** Good, solid entertainment.
Highly Recommend



Fred Chappell presents his lecture in Dunham Auditorium. He has won several awards for his literary works.

Clarion photo by Brad Kimsey

Fred Chappell lectures at BC

Press Release
BC News Bureau

On Thursday, September 13, Brevard College hosted acclaimed North Carolina poet and author Fred Chappell for the Grace Creech West Lectureship in Southern Literature in Brevard College's Dunham Auditorium. The program featured a reading, discussion, book signing, and reception.

Fred Chappell, a native of Canton, N.C., is the author of a dozen books of verse, two volumes of stories, one volume of criticism, and seven novels. He received his graduate and undergraduate degrees from Duke

University and has taught for many years at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He has been awarded the Sir Walter Raleigh Prize, the North Carolina Medal in Literature, and an award in literature from the National Academy of Arts and Letters. For his poetry he has been awarded the Bollingen Prize and the Aiken Taylor Prize.

The Grace Creech West Lectureship was established to honor a former first lady of Brevard College. The lectureship will bring a distinguished writer to the Brevard College campus each year to present a reading and discussion and to work meaningfully with faculty and students.