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John Grisham: A Critical Companion (Critical Companions to Popular Contemporary Writers)

Mary Beth Pringle

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With his seven legal thrillers, all published since 1989, John Grisham has won a huge following of readers and set a standard few contributors to the genre can match. Because of the success of his novels, the legal thriller is the most popular genre in American fiction today. In this study, Pringle explains how Grisham's legal thriller evolved from the thriller tradition and borrowed from the heroic romance novel, gothic novel, crime novel, and detective fiction. She shows how his novels examine contemporary social and legal problems that do not have simple solutions—ecology, ethnic relations, capital punishment, corporate greed, and health insurance—and how he depicts both the legal system and lawyers in their best and worst lights.

Following a biographical chapter that focuses on Grisham's childhood in Arkansas, education, political career, and development as a writer, Pringle examines the legal thriller, its antecedents, and Grisham's contribution to the genre. An individual chapter is devoted to analysis of each of his novels. Each chapter synopsizes the novel, discusses its reception by critics, and features sections on plot development, character development, social/historical context and issues, and an alternative critical perspective from which to approach the novel, such as psychoanalytic theory or feminist criticism. The work includes a complete bibliography of Grisham's work, critical sources, and list of reviews of all of his novels. Because of Grisham's popularity with adults and young adults and the contemporary issues he raises, this study is valuable to students, book discussion group participants, and other interested readers, and is an essential purchase for school and public libraries.

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