

# Shakespeare: was he a media conspiracy?

ONE OF these years, Mark McPherson may win a conviction in his trial of William Shakespeare.

McPherson, 35, by day makes his living on the staff of Wayne County Community College. But at night and in all odd moments, he is a detective, studying and visiting the haunts of Sherlock Holmes, Shakespeare and others whose doings are shrouded in mystery.

I ran across him the first time when I took his Holmes night school course and later hired him to write the definitive review of the 1978 movie "The Seven-Percent Solution."

Now he has invited me to serve as a juror at 7:30 this Saturday evening in the Players Club in Detroit for his second attempt to reduce the Bard of Avon's stature as the greatest playwright of the English language.

EVEN IF I weren't an avid reader of Shakespeare's plays and attendee of the Hilberry Classic



**Tim Richard**

Theater, McPherson's project would intrigue me. I make my living writing fact and (I hope) well-reasoned opinion, and one of the things I worry about late at night is possible built-in bias in my industry.

McPherson is alleging that Shakespeare in his own day was little regarded; that this actor-businessman's name was used to front for a certain "establishment"; that this establishment enlisted dramatists to sell a political point of view to the public through the mass medium of the day — the theater.

There is a clear parallel between McPherson's efforts to expose the politics behind Shakespeare and those of novelist Josephine Tey ("Daughter of Time") to restore the good name of King Richard III, a villain in the Shakespearean play of the same name.

McPherson notes that what we know today as the Bible was once a hodge-podge of writings that someone, centuries after some of the books were written, sorted through and consciously decided, "This one is in, this one is out."

**CONSPIRACY THEORIES** about the media are well known in our nation, and that is why I suspect that one of these years McPherson will win a majority of a jury and audience.

President Harry S. Truman professed to see a "one-party press," though he was talking mainly about pro-Republican editorial writers.

The Nixon-Agnew team also saw a one-party

media, but these were strident Democrats in the network television newrooms and a couple of major daily newspapers.

Ask any Arab, Lebanese or Armenian about bias in the media, and you'll hear chapter and verse about inordinate play given to pro-Jewish stories to the point where young Americans believe six million Jews were the only ones killed in World War II.

One of these days, we will be hearing a high-pitched attack on the lifestyle sections of newspapers for their streams of uncritical, accepting stories about ERA, abortion, divorce, homosexuality and single-parent families.

Conspiracy charges come, and conspiracy charges go. In time, a few are seen to have merit. Saturday night I hope to bring an open — but seasoned — mind to McPherson's trial of Shakespeare.

## Attorneys need a better image in advertisements

THE LEGAL profession ought to hire a public relations firm to enhance its image, which has been taking a beating lately.

At the beginning of the year, we had the Michigan Supreme Court flip-flop on Dorothy Riley. Instead of looking like an august, deliberative body, the court appeared like a collection of back-room politicians — inept ones at that — as they voted one day to let her keep her seat on the court and unseated her a few days later.

The principals in the scandal centering on the federal bankruptcy court haven't contributed to the legal image. Testimony in the trial of a West Bloomfield attorney and his alleged girl-friend, a former court employee, could have been lifted from the script of a soap opera. The pair are charged with rigging the court docket to ensure fat fees for the lawyer. Testimony has indicated serious accusations of a bankruptcy judge and the lawyer being friendly with their girlfriends in the same hotel suite.

Even the popular movie, "The Verdict," has been a bummer for lawyers and judges. The three principal legal roles in the movie are Paul Newman and James Mason, as unscrupulous attorneys, and a judge who browbeats witnesses to influence the outcome of a case.

OR TAKE THE lawyers' television commercials, which seem to be increasing in quantity and decreasing in quality. While flashing the name of a law firm on the screen, an announcer implores those in the TV audience to think about all the possible reasons one might sue someone else.

Do you have a backache? Could it be the result of an accident you had, or the result of something that happened on the job? Lose your job? How about suing your former employer? Call Ketchum and Pleasem. The commercials are only slightly more sophisticated than that, but getting less sophisticated all the time.

In time, the Supreme Court will regain some of its lost image and the bankruptcy court scandal will



**Bob Wisler**

recede from memory. We can easily concede that "The Verdict" is a Hollywood fantasy devised to sell movie tickets and bears little semblance to reality. But what can be done about the TV commercials?

**APPARENTLY NOTHING.** Michael Alan Schwartz, of the state Judicial Tenure Commission, which handles complaints involving lawyer and judges, says the Tenure Commission can't look into complaints unless the ads involve "false, fraudulent or misleading statements."

He said neither the commission nor anyone else has authority to censure a law firm for commercials designed to stir up litigation even if those commercials are tasteless, vulgar and without redeeming social value.

For many years, the State Bar Association, in its collective wisdom, prohibited lawyers from advertising. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled about six years ago that such a prohibition violates lawyer's First Amendment rights of free speech.

In Michigan, the Supreme Court in 1978 adopted a code that barred "false, fraudulent or misleading" advertising. Other states have adopted the same code. For a long time, advertising was pretty straight-forward, merely listing the qualifications of a firm. But recently the advertising seems more and more intent on enticing people into becoming even more litigious than normal.

Perhaps we can blame it on the proliferation of lawyers, all trying to make a buck. We now have more than 500,000 lawyers in the United States, three times as many lawyers per capita as England and 20 times as many per capita as Japan.

## 'Insulted? Get a lawyer and sue!'



## from our readers

### Fellow workers are maligned

To the editor:

Since your front-page article-editorial "Teachers Reject Student Pleas" on Thursday, April 14, was so full of slander and lack of facts, I am hard pressed now to begin this letter. I shall thus confine myself to one of the many misleading statements.

I cannot stand by and allow you to malign my fellow workers and to spread lies. I feel I need to apologize to them for all of their cooperation that was so easily set aside and that they were made to look like cop-out teachers for giving of themselves. For the past three years I have directed the dramatic productions at FHS. I feel that makes me the expert on cooperation of our staff. In these three years every time I have placed a plea for help in teachers' boxes, I have received more than 20 responses. I am not exaggerating. I mention five or six, I will be leaving out another 15; but here are a few.

Mr. Beardley gave up lunch hours and evenings to sell tickets. Mr. Lefkowitz carted students back and forth in his van to pick up furniture. Mr. Barrett had after-school meetings with printers over the programs. Miss Cramer worked weekends sewing costumes and curtains. Mrs. Gersbach spent hours on advertising after school. (The Observer, by the way, gave us all of four lines in the paper including incorrect starting time for one production.) Mr. Giaccardo worked after school on sets. Mrs. Koller and the Focal Point took pictures (The Focal Point incidentally made every production). I always had far more volunteers

than necessary for chaperones. Indeed, I had to put notes of apology in some teachers' boxes because we couldn't use everyone. These are documented facts, not just editorial opinions disguised as facts on the front page.

Now I come to this year's letter to the teachers. It may be true that not one teacher responded to a student's plea. Did it ever occur to you that it could have been the very tone of the letter that turned teachers away? What self-respecting teacher would sign his name to a letter that states "All you have to do is sit in the back of the auditorium and grade your papers. I'll do the work."

I feel I have to write this letter that will be placed on page seven or eight at the most because neither I nor any teacher was asked to comment on the front-page story. On behalf of the staff I want to thank the Observer for making a very difficult job 100 percent more difficult.

Rita J. Plieron  
Farmington High School

### Consumer warns pet owners

To the editor:

Pet owners, beware, those discount veterinarian ads.

After allowing the kids' kitten to tear up the shears in the front window, claw the fabric from my stereo speakers and disembowel the underside of the living room sofa, I thought it a good idea to have his front claws removed.

I made an appointment with a veter-

inary hospital of longstanding good reputation to have the job done. The kitten was about 6 months old and had no shots. They recommended a rabies and feline distemper shot as well. The distemper shot was to be repeated in three weeks. They told me the cost over the telephone.

On the day I was to take the kitten in, I received one of those discount ads in the mail. I called the number on the ad and found out the price was nearly half for the same (I thought) services. I made an appointment to bring Kitty in right away. I called the other vet and canceled first, of course.

Upon bringing Kitty into the vet's office, I was greeted with a hearty handshake from the vet. We put Kitty on the examining table and Doctor looked him over. Then came the sales pitch. "Did I want the claws stitched after the operation?" That costs an extra \$15. "You should have him neutered or he will start to spray." That costs \$19. "Did I want this other shot in addition to the distemper and rabies shots?" I didn't know what it was, but it sounded important, so I agreed. That was another \$7. I didn't want anyone to think I didn't care for Kitty. Then I realized I was up to the price or beyond what the other vet was going to charge.

I was later told that the distemper shot is usually a combination and doesn't cost extra as I was led to believe. I also suspect that stitching-up the claws were included in the other vet's price . . . but I didn't know anything.

Kitty is home now, minus most of his best parts. I won't tell him that I took him to a discount vet. He feels bad enough as it is.

Kenneth A. Kemp  
Farmington Hills

### Coverage is one-sided

To the editor:

I must say I was invigorated by your newspaper's multi-part, one-sided view of Farmington High School's teachers vis-a-vis extracurricular activities (April 14 issue). I've been teaching at FHS for 18 years, and after all that time, I still hadn't realized what a self-serving, lazy lot we all are. It took your incendiary articles, letter to the editor, etc. (and all in one issue, too) that must have taken some planning to make me realize that all we are is overpaid government employees with no real concern for our students once the working day is done.

I guess I had been blinded by Rita Plieron's tireless devotion to years of dramatic productions (in spite of there not even being a drama department), by Tom Krupka's work in order to get computers for our kids when it wasn't fashionable for schools to buy out the cash themselves, and by Sue Klasinger's after-school physical fitness program for the students in her Special Education classes.

That's only four, of course, and I'm not easily blinded, but there were just over so many others working extra hours to help with make-up work, special help, to arrange for field trips and editorials, and contents of all kinds, and to spend a seemingly endless reservoir of energy on the kids to whom we are genuinely devoted. (By the way, have you ever been to an after-hours play, sports event, musical performance, talent show, or infatuation, which wasn't represented by at least one faculty member or administrator? Just that one play rehearsal, humm).

Well, I now see the light. I also wanted to thank you for your stirring article on Pat Tompkins, who has four independent studies students in Greek and who worked with Tim Sipols on revising a 24-page paper on Caesar into the 10-page paper which was chosen by the Michigan Classical Conference to be read in front of the members. It was the first time a high school student had been so honored, and Tompkins will be spending part of her weekend being there to cheer Tim on.

What? Your coverage of this unique accomplishment wasn't a front-page article? It was a one-line mention in the back of the paper?

Linda A. Arndt  
Farmington

### Background is needed

To the editor:

I read Mr. Baer's opinions on the drama situation at Farmington High on Page 1A of the April 14 edition of the Farmington Observer. His only source was Craig Hane, director of this semester's dramatic production of "The Elephant Man." Perhaps Baer should have consulted a few more persons such as faculty members at FHS before publishing his article. Perhaps his material would have been a little more accurate had he learned something about the recent history of dramatic productions at the school. Perhaps he is just playing up any negative aspects he can find.

Where were he and the Observer photographers last spring for the school's absolutely fabulous production of "Oklahoma?" Where were the plaudits for Miss Plieron, Mrs. Koller, and Mrs. Hoemke's efforts then? Where

were the positive headlines on page one?

We have a good student body at Farmington Senior High. We have teachers who spend much time working in many ways with students trying to emphasize the positive aspects of our culture and the responsibilities of being informed citizens. As a Farmington taxpayer and a teacher in the Farmington Public Schools I resent the muck-raking tactics of Baer which present his one-sided interpretation of the high school's dramatic situation as fact.

Perhaps Baer's comments should be placed on the editorial page with Barnaby's article "Wanted: mentors to care enough after the bell rings." Barnaby's slanted remarks at least were on the opinion page. While Baer and Barnaby are opinionating on teachers' failings, perhaps they are forgetting one important fact. Their words are accepted as truth by many of the young who read their words. Perhaps they as journalists should consider that their position is similar to that of us teachers in one important respect. They also serve as role models for our impressionable youth.

Marjorie A. Cramer  
Farmington

### Heroes do exist from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

To the editor:

We were expected to take your editorial in the April 14 issue of the Farmington Observer ("Wanted: mentors to

Please turn to Page 20