

Sept. 27, 1998

Brian Lamb
c/o C-SPAN
400 North Capitol Street, N.W.
Suite 650
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Mr. Lamb:

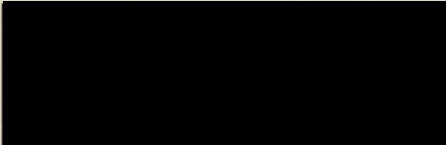
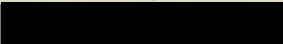
My avocation is teaching Shakespeare to adults. I am not a formal scholar, but an amateur enthusiast.

I have enclosed an essay about how Shakespeare might look at the Bill Clinton/Monica Lewinsky/Ken Starr matter from several perspectives.

My hope is to demonstrate the continuing significance of the playwright's works to a variety of opinion leaders.

All best wishes.

Sincerely,


Columbus, Ohio 43220


8- cu/ctw

What Would Shakespeare Say?



" ... Our country sinks beneath the yoke. It weeps, it bleeds, and each new day a gash is added to her wounds ... " So said Sen. Robert Byrd, (D-Va.), in a speech to his colleagues recently (Sept. 9) about the crisis enveloping the presidency of Bill Clinton.

In that passage from Macbeth, Senator Byrd uttered the words of writer who has been dead for nearly 400 years -- William Shakespeare. As an amateur Shakespeare enthusiast, I have searched his works for statements that might illuminate or explain the events surrounding the investigation.

Some critics of the president disbelieve his avowals of repentance. They might see a similarity between Mr. Clinton and the future Richard III, one of Shakespeare's greatest villains. In Henry VI, Part Three, that character says he can "wet my cheeks with artificial tears, and frame my face to all occasions." They might also cite a line from Macbeth about someone who "lies like truth."

Macbeth provides a great deal of ammunition for the foes of the president and Mrs Clinton. Macbeth refers to his "vaulting ambition" to be king, and Lady Macbeth's iron will gives him emotional strength. Later on, she plays a key role in covering up Macbeth's crime.

Defenders of the president could plead for fairness by quoting Othello, who says, "Speak of me as I am, nothing extenuate, nor set down aught (anything) in malice." And those who feel that the president has honestly confessed his mistakes and that he has been the target of a highly partisan prosecutor could declare that he, like King Lear, is "a man more sinned against than sinning."

The president's backers might agree with this description of Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr and his allies. This curse is from Timon of Athens: "Live loathed and long, most smiling, smooth, detested parasites, courteous destroyers, affable wolves."

On the other hand, the supporters of Mr. Starr could point to the stonewalling by the White House and attacks on him by the president's political aides, and understand the feelings of a character in Twelfth Night who declares: "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you."

And what about the pundits and the "spin doctors" who argue on behalf of Mr. Clinton or those who defend the efforts of Mr. Starr? Says a character in The Merchant of Venice, "In law, what plea so tainted and corrupt, but being seasoned with a gracious voice, obscures the show of evil?"

While no one defends the president's affair with Ms. Lewinsky, and descriptions of it can range from "inappropriate" to "reprehensible," those who adopt a tone of excessive self-righteousness might be going too far. Says a character in Measure for Measure: "How would you be, if He (God), which is the top of judgment (the Supreme Judge) should but judge you as you are? Oh, think on that."

One's legal, moral, and political opinions shape one's viewpoints.

This quick true-false test may prove the point:

1. The prosecutors and press treated Richard Nixon fairly in the Watergate matter. True or False
2. The prosecutors and the press treated Ronald Reagan fairly during the Iran-contra case. True or False
3. The prosecutors and the press have treated Bill Clinton fairly in Monica Lewinsky case. True or False
4. The investigators and the press have treated Al Gore fairly for his role in the Democratic Party's fund-raising efforts in 1996. True or False

My guess is that very few people answer true to all four questions or false to all four questions.

Why?

Let Hamlet have the last word: "There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so."