Introduction

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Most of us will never meet a cowboy, or an atomic scientist, or a private detective, yet we feel that we know how such persons think and act because we have seen them, or their caricatures, in countless television shows. By the same token, most of us have only limited experience with the legal system, yet we feel we know what lawyers and judges do, and how they do it, because we have “appeared” in court with Perry Mason, “attended” a deposition with Arnie Becker, “investigated” a case with Ben Matlock, and “counseled” a client with Ally McBeal.¹

The relationship between law and popular culture is interesting and complex. On one hand, popular culture may be taken by some as a source of knowledge about the actual workings of the legal system and its main players including lawyers and judges. Yet, an image of law and lawyers which departs too dramatically from that which is already accepted in the popular mind would not be “believable” or “credible” enough to serve the dramatic or comedic purpose of the presenters. Thus, popular culture reflects the already existing perception of law even as it helps to mold and reinforce it.

In recent years, law in popular culture has become a subject of study by lawyers and law professors.² For example, a number of books on the subject


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have recently been published. The web has also addressed the topic. Increasingly we are taking law and popular culture seriously.

A number of interesting questions emerge. What does it mean to speak of "accuracy" in relation to a popular culture presentation of law? What effect, if any, does popular culture have on popular perceptions of law? Is the behavior of real lawyers affected at all by how the subject is presented in popular culture media such as film, television and popular fiction? Can popular culture portrayals of law be used to teach about real law to lawyers, judges, law students and others? What should be the response of the bar and the academy to portrayals of law in popular culture?

This symposium issue reflects another addition to the growing body of work considering law and popular culture issues. It grows out of the 1999 Goodwin Program in which I was privileged to participate.

As the Goodwin Professor for 1999, I was allowed to teach a special seminar on Law and Popular Culture and to invite four very special guests from outside NSU to visit with us at the Shepard Broad Law Center. These very special visitors, Michael Asimow, Richard Dysart, Charles Rosenberg, and Lisa Scottoline brought diverse perspectives to the issue and enriched the seminar experience beyond measure. In addition, the students immersed themselves in the topic with enthusiasm and insight. I am very pleased that three of their seminar papers have been chosen for inclusion in this symposium issue. I hope you find this symposium issue as interesting, informative and thought provoking as I do.


3. For example, two books focusing on law in film have been published recently. PAUL BERGMAN & MICHAEL ASIMOW, REEL JUSTICE: THE COURTROOM GOES TO THE MOVIES (1996); LEGAL REALISM: MOVIES AS LEGAL TEXTS (John Denver ed. 1996). A book focusing on law in television is PRIME TIME LAW: FICTIONAL TELEVISION AS LEGAL NARRATIVE (Robert M. Jarvis & Paul R. Joseph eds. 1998).

4. For example, the web site Picturing Justice, edited by John Denver, Rob Waring and Paul Joseph, publish essays up to 2000 words on all aspects of law and justice in popular culture. The site is hosted on the servers of the University of San Francisco School of Law. <http://www.usfca.edu/pj>.

5. I also want to recognize the outstanding contributions of my colleagues, law professors Joel Mintz and Michael Richmond, and Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies professor Steven Alford, who made special presentations and conducted class sessions during the seminar.
In any teaching career, there are high points which stand out as special and precious moments. The Goodwin Professorship is such a moment for me. The opportunity to focus intensively on this topic, to teach it, to write about it, to share ideas with our visitors and our students has been an experience that I shall always remember with great fondness and pleasure. I want to thank Dean Joseph Harbaugh who took a chance on an unusual topic. My deepest thanks, however, are reserved for the Goodwin Trustees for making this program possible.
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