

[HARDCOVER: US]

What did Shakespeare do for us?

The Bard made modern culture, according to Marjorie Garber, though following her argument requires wading through sometimes-specious points to find the sharply incisive ones

BY JANET MASLIN
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK

If you gave typewriters to an infinite number of monkeys, one of them would eventually quote Shakespeare. That was an oft-repeated theory, but it has now been supplanted by a timelier model. Give search-engine capability to an infinite number of Shakespeare scholars, one of them will eventually discover factoids like the following:

- Macbare, Macbuff and Out Damn Spot are the Macbeth-inspired names of makeup products.

- In popular films that have slight debts to *The Tempest*, Ariel has variously been played by Robby the Robot (*Forbidden Planet*) and Wilson the Volleyball (*Cast Away*).

- It's easier to sing, "just like Romeo and Juliet," as the Detroit doo-wop group the Reflections did in 1964, than "just like Troilus and Cressida."

- Motivational speakers who provide Shakespeare-inspired lessons to captains of industry have described the Welsh forests of *Henry V* as the Silicon Valley of their day. And "while Henry doesn't have the luxury of a policy-planning staff and off-site strategizing meetings," a firm called Movers & Shakespeares instructs, "he proves himself a great leader in identifying and then pursuing a clear vision."

These and many other such nuggets have been strung together by Marjorie Garber, an esteemed and apparently unstoppable scholar, in *Shakespeare and Modern Culture*, the latest of her many Shakespeare-centric academic treatises. She has already written *Shakespeare After All*, not to mention *Profiling Shakespeare, Dream in Shakespeare, Coming of Age in Shakespeare, Shakespeare's Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality* and at least one essay about Shakespeare and dogs that manages to mention two St Bernards featured in *Beethoven's 2nd*, the movie about cute canines.

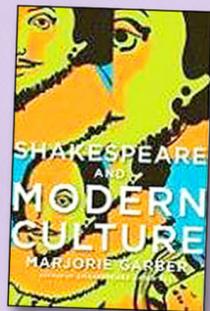
Now Garber singles out a new aspect of Shakespeare's versatility. As her latest title indicates, she is out to assert that "Shakespeare makes modern culture, and modern culture makes Shakespeare." In true academic fashion Garber loves that kind of commutative construction, the chiasmus. Shakespeare loved this too, and Garber has the chiasmus to prove it, straight from the source. ("What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba?" "Fair is foul and foul is fair," etc.) She is happy to compound her book's facile inversions by calling her method, at one point, "as much pedagogical as heuristic (and as much heuristic as pedagogical)."

Why, then, should readers follow Garber's frequently glib trail through Shakespeare's body of work? Because her sometimes-preposterous book mixes specious points with sharply incisive ones, and her good ideas are worth the trouble. If some of her associations are far more tenuous than others, she does bind them together with an overarching idea.

Shakespeare's work, in her opinion, is so constantly mutable that it always exists in the present, whatever that present might be. The ways in which Shakespeare is interpreted in different eras say as much about those time periods as they do about the writing itself.

With modernity as her hook this time, Garber makes *Romeo and Juliet* her most cogent topic point. Her focus here is on youth and romantic love, but Garber traces their evolution insightfully. In past times the world has seen a 44-year-old male Romeo (Charles Kemble in 1819) and a heavy-set, middle-aged 19th-century female Romeo (Charlotte Cushman) who played opposite her own sister. The very impossibility of such casting today makes Garber's point

Publication Notes



SHAKESPEARE AND MODERN CULTURE

BY MARJORIE GARBER

326 PAGES

PANTHEON

about the play's evolution.

Although *Romeo and Juliet* is now treated as teen-centric (this book reprints Roz Chast's hilarious New Yorker cartoon charting Romeo and Juliet's instant messages to one another: "xoxoxo bye see u tmw"), it can confer youth as well as convey it.

Garber describes the way artists like Rudolf Nureyev and Margot Fonteyn were reinvigorated by the ballet version of this story. And she talks about how its depictions of youthful rebelliousness have changed over time. If *West Side Story* was a *Romeo and Juliet* geared to social conflict, it came too early to make drug taking and teenage suicide the central issues they could be now. Along her winding way Garber wonders how the name Romeo got to be shorthand for ladies' man, "with a meaning pretty much opposite to that of Shakespeare's fatally faithful wooer."

Garber merrily illustrates how modern culture can miss Shakespeare's original points. References to *Othello* in general, and to Iago's mocking mention of preserving one's good name in particular, tend to be particularly flat-footed. So do comparisons of any ambitious woman to Lady Macbeth. Still, the layman's temptation to invoke Shakespeare is irresistible: "The commentator sounds profound and witty; the reader, listener or audience feels gratified and flattered to 'get' the reference, and Shakespeare is reconfirmed as the most trenchant and trusted observer of contemporary events since Walter Cronkite."

No one who reads Garber will ever call anything a tragedy of Shakespearean proportions again. "A Shakespearean tragedy played out on a Long Island street where a boozed-up young woman unknowingly dragged her boyfriend under her car for more than a block as he tried to stop her from driving drunk," from the *New York Post*, is the most egregious example to be found here.

So Garber, with her impeccable credentials as William R. Kenan Jr professor of English and American literature and language at Harvard, where she is also chairwoman of the department of visual and environmental studies, again declares open season on Shakespeare-powered idiocy. She might have delivered more cogent, less free-associative thinking had she not already written so frequently and variedly about her subject. But her book credibly demonstrates that the ever-changing timeliness of Shakespeare's thoughts is what makes them timeless. Refreshingly, when she says that, Garber is not valuing a facile truism over the truth.



From the start I was taught to look at music as a whole, not as a collection of individual parts.

— Steven Isserlis, cellist

Steve Isserlis, the plucky cellist

At 50, Steven Isserlis has learned some things: jet-setting soloists aren't good with orchestras, kids in the audience help him calm down, and he loves terrible puns

BY TOM SERVICE
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

You don't forget a Steven Isserlis performance. On stage, he has a physical, sensual relationship with his cello; so much so that you sometimes feel you're eavesdropping on something too intimate to be displayed in public. If you had to create a stereotype of an overwrought cellist, it would be Isserlis, with his mop of thick, curly hair, otherworldly gaze into the middle distance, and perennial state of rapture. "I never think about what I do on stage, and if I saw it, I'd probably be horrified," he says sheepishly. But that intensity is what makes Isserlis' music-making so special.

When I meet him at his home in northwest London, he seems much younger than his soon-to-be 50 years, a half-century he celebrates with a concert on Tuesday at London's Wigmore Hall. But anyone hoping for a birthday performance from the cellist himself will be disappointed. "John Gilhooly [the Wigmore Hall's Artistic Director] asked if I wanted to mark the occasion at the hall, and I said, 'certainly not by playing.' Why would I ruin my birthday by being nervous and miserable? So I thought if I could persuade Andras Schiff and Radu Lupu to play the Schubert F Minor *Fantasy for Piano* duet — which I also had played at my 40th birthday — that would be fun. So I match-made them, as they've never performed together before, and Radu will also play some Schumann" — Isserlis' favorite composer — "and Andras, some Bach." As well as these two stars of international pianism (Isserlis does a wicked impression of his friend Schiff, perfectly mimicking his soft-focused Hungaro-English), other musical celebrities giving their services in honor of Isserlis are "the singers I've probably worked most with": soprano Felicity Lott and tenor Mark Padmore, and Joshua Bell, the American violinist Isserlis says is "like a younger brother; I've been playing with him for 21 years," as well as pianist Jeremy Denk.

There aren't many musicians who could call on a similar roster of friends to play for them, and, Isserlis admits,

"it's very nice. I do make friends, it seems." There's a musical reason for all this amicability. Whatever he's playing, whether the Schumann concerto in Moscow (he's just flown back from Russia when I meet him), or sonatas with Thomas Ades, Isserlis' approach is the same. "For me, everything is chamber music. I always describe myself as a chamber music player, even when I'm doing orchestral concerts with Mikhail Pletnev — who's also becoming a good friend — or playing pieces for solo cello, which are still musical dialogues." It all goes back to Isserlis' childhood. "My sisters are both musicians [Rachel is a violinist, and Annette, a viola player], my father was a keen amateur, and my mother was a piano teacher. So chamber music, playing together, was part of the family. From the start I was taught to look at music as a whole, not as a collection of individual parts."

Isserlis is scathing about the sort of international soloist who just performs their part in a concerto without responding to what is happening around them. "Cellists tend to be better than violinists in that sense; but when I hear people playing in exactly the same way, whatever orchestra they're appearing with, I just don't understand it. They don't know the whole score. The equivalent is an actor who learns their part without knowing what the other actors are saying: it doesn't make any sense!"

Isserlis doesn't just form close personal bonds with the people he plays with — he feels it with the composers he plays as well. "From the start, my teacher, Jane Cowan, made me feel that the great composers were my friends." And friendliest of all, for Isserlis, is Schumann. "I loved the name even before I knew the music. I never get tired of the music. I love his personality as well, there's not a mean muscle in his body. It's a bit of an obsession. I don't understand it, it's just — there."

I think I can offer a hint: just like Schumann and the twin compositional personas he created, the impetuous Florestan and reflective Eusebius, there's



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TOM MILLER AND KEVIN DAVIS

a deep dichotomy in Isserlis' musical personality. No cellist is able to give themselves to the moment of performance, to attune themselves to the subtle give and take of concerto performance or chamber recital as much as Isserlis. Yet as well as this passionate side, few musicians are as ambitious and self-critical as Isserlis. "I do have a lot of energy," Isserlis says, "and I was discussing where it all comes from with my sister the other day. I decided it's my ego. My ego gives me energy." Isserlis' diary is full for the next few years, and he is away from home for eight months of every year. "I need to be so busy. It's a comfort to me, because I had so little for such a long time. In my 20s, I was nervous if I would make a career at all."

That nervous energy carries over on to the concert platform. "I get hugely nervous," he says, "especially about memory. I'm very neurotic about memory. But sometimes just seeing a child in the front row, if I'm really nervous in a concert, will make me feel so much better." Surely, after three decades of playing in public, nerves are easier to deal with now? "You don't get over it. The upside of it, and the reason I don't take

any beta-blockers or anything, is that if I still get nervous, it means I still care. I've seen it happen in musicians who have been playing for 20 or 30 years; they're not feeling that much any more, it's become routine. That can't happen to me because of my nerves. In concert, there are two parts of my brain: one part is thinking about the music and enjoying it, the other is saying, you're going to forget, you're going to forget. My sister Annette says she enjoys my concerts most when she knows I'm on edge — even if I don't!"

But Isserlis is addicted to the rush of performance. Just as well: his concerts and recordings, typically using the burnished sound of gut strings rather than modern steel ones ("I'd feel I was betraying Schumann if I played him on steel strings," he says), reveal the cello repertoire in a new light. His disc of Bach's cello suites, released a couple of years ago after his 90-year-old father insisted he record them, is one of the great cello recordings.

Isserlis' main respite from the stress of performing and programming (he has a series of children's concerts in New York, and runs the annual chamber music courses at IMS Prussia Cove in Cornwall) is writing. Two books for children, *Why Beethoven Threw the Stew* and *Why Handel Wagged his Wig*, tell the stories of the lives of the great composers with infectious enthusiasm, and sometimes scatological detail; he's also writing stories that will be set to music by Anne Dudley. After *Goldiepegs and the Three Cellos* comes *Cinderella*. The terrible puns are Isserlis' own.

But his playing will always be the center of his life. That's no surprise when he tells me of the week he's just had. "I got off the plane on Monday to a message from Paul McCartney, who I saw on Thursday. He's a lovely man." McCartney's new album, *Electric Arguments*, is on Isserlis' table, even if he hasn't got past the first track yet — "it's very raucous" — and after playing with Pletnev in Moscow, he's off to Germany to perform Haydn with Ton Koopman. I can see why he's addicted.

[HARDCOVER: US]

Same bat time, different bat channel

Chip Kidd delves into the Caped Crusader's darker recesses in 'Bat-Manga! The Secret History of Batman in Japan'

BY TED ANTHONY
AP, PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

Things always get more interesting when you mix heritages, traditions and sensibilities. Think fusion cuisine or world music — or, for that matter, Barack Obama.

That blending is what infuses such fascination into *Bat-Manga!* — designer Kidd's gorgeous examination of the odd collision between American comic-book superheroes and Japanese manga that took place in Japan in 1966 and 1967, the heyday of the Batman-as-high-camp period in the US. It's as if someone threw a couple of DC Comics issues, a few *Godzilla* sequels and some *Speed Racer* episodes into a blender and pressed frappe.

Kidd, a veteran of graphic

Batman books, offers his usual dead-on collage sensibility. He builds a book that combines actual comics written and drawn by manga artist Jiro Kuwata with images of marketing, licensed character products and ephemera. The book is translated for the first time, and there are illustrations in enough abundance to get a wonderful sense of how the stories unfold. The resulting package conveys not only a feel of how the Japanese *Batman* stories were told but what it was actually like to be a kid in Japan reading them in the 1960s.

Though the drawings are reminiscent of DC's *Batman* of the 1950s and 1960s, and certainly evoke the kitsch of

Publication Notes



BAT-MANGA! THE SECRET HISTORY OF BATMAN IN JAPAN

BY CHIP KIDD

384 PAGES

PANTHEON BOOKS

Adam West's Caped Crusader at times, there is a darkness about them that lurks beneath the stories. As with much postwar Japanese popular art, a nuclear weirdness percolates.

One villain, for example, Crazy Dr Denton, looks like an evil, disfigured Beavis, sans Butt-head, and is far more unsettling than Batman foes such as the Joker and Two-Face as they were rendered in the 1960s. Another, Lord Death Man, in a full-body skeleton costume with decaying skull, evokes an early Ghost Rider but without the redeeming qualities that accompany that later Marvel character's mission of vengeance.

Various phantasmagorical creatures abound, too, in the Japanese monster-movie tradition, and you'll occasionally see lines such as this one from Robin: "Batman! He's a pterodactyl again!"

DC's *Batman* has always been

a darker superhero, born not of unearthly powers but of tragedy — his parents' violent deaths when he was a boy. Seen through the prism of Japanese sensibilities, *Batman* becomes a hero as deeply weird as the enemies he battles, even as he projects the sensibilities of a good guy.

This approach manages to be true to Bob Kane's original *Bat-Man* while taking on a distinctively Japanese flavor recognizable in everything from the old *Ultraman* TV show to today's *Yu-Gi-Oh!* game cards and accompanying stories.

Granted, US\$60 is a high price for a glorified comic book, particularly in the current economy. But as with all of Kidd's work, this is as much a cultural document as a showpiece, and its boundaries reach far beyond the worlds of manga and comic-book fandom. Not that those worlds aren't worthwhile in themselves.