

This is a repository copy of "*She will a handmaid be to his desires*": theatre reviewing in the service of education in Rex Gibson's *Shakespeare and Schools*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/118213/>

---

**Article:**

Olive, Sarah Elizabeth (2012) "*She will a handmaid be to his desires*": theatre reviewing in the service of education in Rex Gibson's *Shakespeare and Schools*. *Cahiers Elisabethains*. pp. 45-52. ISSN: 2054-4715

<https://doi.org/10.7227/CE.Splss12.8>

---

**Reuse**

Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

**Takedown**

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing [eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk) including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

## “SHE WILL A HANDMAID BE TO HIS DESIRES”: THEATRE REVIEWING IN THE SERVICE OF EDUCATION IN REX GIBSON’S *SHAKESPEARE AND SCHOOLS*

### *Re-introducing Rex Gibson*

If we were playing the word association game and I put forward the name Rex Gibson as a starter, you might be expected to reply with one of the following: active methods – a pedagogy for teaching Shakespeare which espouses the active engagement of students’ bodies and minds with his texts, and which is characterised by participative and playful, dramatic and student-centred approaches; the Shakespeare and Schools research project, run during the 1980s and 1990s at the Cambridge Institute of Education and funded by Leverhulme; the Cambridge School Shakespeare editions. You might also invoke the book *Teaching Shakespeare* (1998) or, indeed, the more generic activity of teaching Shakespeare. It is possible that you would mention his other publications on topics ranging from curriculum reform to structuralism; from Shakespeare’s language to the education of feeling. I would, however, be surprised if you said “reviewing Shakespeare”. Yet it is Gibson’s involvement in the latter field of endeavour with which this paper is concerned. I will argue that Gibson’s role as a reviewer of Shakespeare demands attention: not only are his reviews skilful, interesting, and often unique in their perspectives, but they offer further insight both into the nature of (and relationship between) reviewing and the Cambridge Shakespeare and Schools project.

Aside from material gleaned from my exploration of the literature on reviewing in the past decade, the staple source for this paper is five issues (18-23) of *Shakespeare and Schools* (1986-1994). Originally branded a “newsletter” and published triennially to coincide with the three terms in the British school year, this title was dropped after readers petitioned Gibson that the issues were far more weighty than the term denoted.<sup>1</sup> Unlike other teaching journals, then and now, these volumes feature reviews (twenty-six in total) of over a dozen performances of Shakespeare, six Early Modern

dramas, and six contemporary plays/new writing. All but one of these productions were staged by the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), the exception being a *Tempest* by the English Shakespeare Company (ESC). Appearing towards the back of the magazine, five to six concise reviews (between two and three hundred words each) were included in each issue.

The magazines were edited and contributed to by Gibson, with regular input from a research fellow on the project, John Salway. They were produced to disseminate news from the project to school teachers (as a researcher, Gibson seems to have had a concern with the “wider impact” that long preceded the stipulations of quality control and funding exercises such as the Research Excellence Framework); to recruit more participants and establish a sense of an extended teaching and research community (I have argued elsewhere that this network became a model for more recent groups such as the Royal Shakespeare Company’s Learning and Performance Network).<sup>2</sup> The success of this attempt to foster a cooperative spirit is further attested to by the fact that the magazines featured articles on teaching practice from school teachers nationwide, pieces of work by their students, and the writing of then budding Shakespearean academics, including James Stredder and Ros King.

The series is a fascinating resource through which to obtain a snapshot of the key debates around Shakespeare in schools (and beyond) in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with an overview of all the issues offering (the opportunity to discern) narratives about the introduction and assessment of compulsory Shakespeare; the re-building of the Globe theatre and the development of its associated resources; the work of theatre and heritage education departments including the National Theatre and the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust; critical theory at its height (the *Shakespeare and Schools* magazine featured excerpts from left-wing literary criticism by Terry Eagleton, Terry Hawkes, Graham Holderness and Alan Sinfield). Not least,

1. I was belatedly able to access the final issue, 24 (missing from the Shakespeare Institute’s collection), at the Institute of Education library. Although I have been unable to include its contents in this paper, its format overwhelmingly follows that established by the previous five issues.

2. Sarah Olive, *Shakespeare Valued: policy, pedagogy and practice in English education, 1989-2009* (Diss. University of Birmingham, 2011).

it affords a survey of several consecutive RSC seasons and Gibson's response to the performances they offered, filtered through the educational and political context of the time.<sup>3</sup>

The following pages will reflect on Gibson's contribution to reviewing Shakespeare with reference to six, often overlapping, functions of the genre which I have extrapolated from the existing critical literature on the subject – especially the 2010 volume of *Shakespeare* dedicated to reviewing (6.3), but also work by Alan Armstrong, Cary Mazer and Paul Prescott. These include: disseminating a performance, selling newspapers and/or tickets to a production, interpreting, evaluating, recording and contextualising it. Together, they form a useful taxonomy with which to compare and contrast Gibson's reviews with those in newspapers and academic journals (I omit blogs only because they were not a widely available technology at the time of *Shakespeare and Schools*), and contribute to wider discussions of the purposes of reviewing. The paper will then discuss some key traits of Gibson's reviews in relation to the Shakespeare and Schools project. For instance, the range of productions reviewed, the use of language and intertextual or popular cultural references, as well as the preoccupations of the reviewer, will all be analysed. The conclusion will argue that Gibson's reviews are both formed by and further disseminate the project's ideals.

### *Gibson's writings and the functions of reviewing*

Stanley Wells has suggested that "the art of theatre reviewing knows no rules".<sup>4</sup> It does, however, know some conventions and have some established (if contested) functions – outlined above – although these can be manipulated by writers' own agendas or commissions. Although not an established newspaper reviewer, like Kenneth Tynan, Michael Billington or Lyn Gardner, Rex Gibson demonstrably fulfils all these functions, to varying extents. In terms of disseminating a performance – that is to say, communicating the experience of a theatre event to a readership (for radio and television critics, listeners or viewers), Gibson reaches out to his audience of teachers, academics, theatre and heritage education departments with a succinct review text. These texts, if not able to stand in and substitute for the experience of performance to the extent of their equivalents in academic

journals or longer newspaper pieces,<sup>5</sup> at least seek to convey the essence of Gibson's encounter, to circulate his "knowledge and opinion" of the performance.<sup>6</sup> Dissemination through reviewing also involves, as Paul Edmondson has argued, the sharing of "critical expertise and practical theatre work [with] a broader reading public" in a way that is fitted to its destination and readership as well as the inviting and seeking of consensus.<sup>7</sup> For example, Gibson writes unequivocal statements representing his opinion of a production's value: "there's no denying the ESC's achievement" in staging *The Tempest*.<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere, he describes productions as "a treat",<sup>9</sup> "exemplary",<sup>10</sup> and capable of exciting students' "love" as a response to their experience of a play.<sup>11</sup> All these aspects of dissemination can be seen in Gibson's reviews, even if his audience is relatively limited, in size and interest, compared to those of international academic journals and, certainly, national newspapers.

The function of reviews in selling either the publication for which they are written or the production itself has been identified by Laurie Maguire, Eleanor Collins and Kalina Stefanova.<sup>12</sup> The latter two specifically write of the consumer "recommendations" emanating from reviews. Exploring the promotional role of reviewing is important in highlighting the institutional settings in which it occurs, which can impact on its reception and interpretation – Peter Holland, for instance, has reflected on the potential for the diverse readings of Billington's reviews for *The Guardian* and *Country Life*, even where the content of his column is iden-

3. Olive, "Shakespeare and British Pedagogy", *Cambridge World Shakespeare Encyclopedia*, ed. B. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

4. Stanley Wells, "Foreword", *Shakespeare* 6.3 (2010), 275-76, 275.

5. I paraphrase Paul Prescott, "Inheriting the Globe: The Reception of Shakespearean Space and Audience in Contemporary Reviewing", *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, ed. Barbara Hodgdon and W. B. Worthen (London: Blackwell, 2005), 359-75, 360.

6. Paul Edmondson, Paul Prescott and Peter J. Smith, "Introduction", *Shakespeare* 6.3 (2010), 277-80, 277.

7. Edmondson *et al.*, "Introduction", 277, 280.

8. Rex Gibson, "Tempest", *Shakespeare and Schools* 20 (1993), 15.

9. Gibson, "Richard III", *Shakespeare and Schools* 19 (1992), 14.

10. Gibson, "Anthony & Cleopatra", *Shakespeare and Schools* 20 (1993), 15.

11. Gibson, "Julius Caesar", *Shakespeare and Schools* 22 (1993), 13.

12. Laurie Maguire, "Afterword", *Shakespeare* 6.3 (2010), 398-402, 399; Eleanor Collins, "Theatre reviewing in post-consensus society: Performance, print and the blogosphere", *Shakespeare* 6.3 (2010), 330-36, 330; and Kalina Stefanova, *Who Keeps the Score on the London Stages?* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000), 95.

tical.<sup>13</sup> In terms of selling a publication, Gibson's reviews appear to have been very much a part of ensuring the continuity of subscription to the *Shakespeare and Schools* magazine (if not an increase in subscriptions) towards the end of the project when constraints on input in terms of funding and human resources may have otherwise jeopardised the amount of available content. Selling tickets to RSC (and ESC) productions is not an explicit function of the review section — although it more often than not contains contact details for group bookings and the RSC education department, information about where productions will go on tour, and a preview of the rest of the season. The reviews also include urgings such as "Do take a school party to this triumphant and inspiring production",<sup>14</sup> "Your students will love being in the thick of great events",<sup>15</sup> "Simon Russell Beale's blazing performance is a gift to every A Level candidate",<sup>16</sup> and "The play's cynicism will provide endless opportunities for discussion of political correctness".<sup>17</sup> Gibson's frequently resounding endorsements of (particularly Shakespearean) productions to teachers and their students, often tied strongly to the demands of the curriculum or assessment, and their pedagogic value, may well have proved economically valuable to these companies: all the more so at a time when funding for school groups to attend, and theatres to stage, plays may well have been threatened by Thatcherite arts policy.

Besides their commercial value, such reviews are also endorsements of Gibson's own project, part of his attempt to sell his ideological and, perhaps more importantly, pedagogical commitment to Shakespeare enacted on the stage. They operate as an additional forum through which to work out, even establish, a position outlined in his journal articles and monographs:

[staging and viewing Shakespeare] signifies a commitment to the play as an allo-graphic work of art demanding completion or rather re-creation, in performance.<sup>18</sup>

Shakespeare was essentially a man of the theatre who intended his words to be spoken and acted

out on stage. It is in that context of dramatic realization that the plays are most appropriately understood and experienced.<sup>19</sup>

The latter, very assured and unequivocal, statement was published in a monograph of 1998. It suggests that Gibson's experiences attending and reviewing plays for *Shakespeare and Schools* may well have contributed to firming up and articulating his long-held belief in the educational value of students experiencing Shakespeare as theatre.

Interpretation — the attempt to understand "what a production was aiming to achieve",<sup>20</sup> the quest to discover the director's and the reviewer's own new insights;<sup>21</sup> to fix a play's meaning through the negotiation of "a whole host of assumptions, preoccupations and expectations"<sup>22</sup> — is a mainstay of reviewing. This interpretative function also has the potential, as Collins has noted, to inform successive directors' construal of a play, as well as scholars' and other readers' interpretations of the meaning and effect of a past performance, through the use of archived reviews.<sup>23</sup> On the whole, Gibson's reviews offer confident recommendations of how to "read" the productions. For instance, he declares David Thacker's 1992 *As You Like It* "a straightforward production concerned to restore Shakespeare's language to the actors".<sup>24</sup> His tone is similar in several other review pieces:

Their easy victory over the callow men *symbolises* the production's presentation of the play as Shakespeare's revenge: against academic pretensions, adolescent ideals, and, most significantly, language itself.<sup>25</sup>

There's *never a doubt* that these resourceful females will triumph over the callow preening males myopically obsessed with their distorted notions of honour.<sup>26</sup>

This austere and ritualistic production is *dedicated to showing* the working-out of Queen Margaret's curse on the House of York.<sup>27</sup>

19. Rex Gibson, *Teaching Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), xii.

20. Holland, "Critics and their audiences...", 293.

21. Prescott, "Inheriting the Globe...", 369.

22. Collins, "Theatre reviewing...", 330-31.

23. Collins, "Theatre reviewing...", 332.

24. Gibson, "As You Like It", *Shakespeare and Schools* 18 (1992), 14.

25. Gibson, "Love's Labour's Lost", *Shakespeare and Schools* 23 (1994), 15.

26. Gibson, "All's Well That Ends Well", *Shakespeare and Schools* 19 (1992), 14.

27. Gibson, "Richard III".

13. Peter Holland, "Critics and their audiences: The rhetoric of reviewing", *Shakespeare* 6.3 (2010), 292-304. 298.

14. Gibson, "The Merchant of Venice", *Shakespeare and Schools* 21 (1993), 14.

15. Gibson, "Julius Caesar".

16. Gibson, "Richard III".

17. Gibson, "The Country Wife", *Shakespeare and Schools* 22 (1993), 13.

18. Gibson, "'O, What Learning Is! Pedagogy and the afterlife of Romeo and Juliet", *Shakespeare Survey* 49 (1993), 141-52. 145



At the very opening of the play, director John Caird declares his intention. Philo angrily declaims direct to the audience his disgust at Anthony's decline into an Egyptian toyboy.<sup>28</sup>

In the above extracts, I have drawn attention to Gibson's assured interpretative stance by emphasising certain words or phrases. His certainty at having ascertained the directorial vision for the production is certainly not unusual. Newspaper reviewers, writing at the same time, frequently made similar statements: about "the play's long-range strategy";<sup>29</sup> or of a director's "suggestion that Petruchio's treatment of Katherine is a more extreme version of the way that all men treat their women".<sup>30</sup> Others profess to have seen into the rehearsal room – "Mr Alexander has clearly told the cast at some point: Put your head down, play the comedy, and leave the politics out of it".<sup>31</sup> Some identify the way in which a director's attitudes may reveal an unconscious interpretation of a passage. Peter J. Smith, in *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, writes of the aristocrats' horrified encounter with an odiferous, working-class Sly in the induction of the 1992 RSC *Shrew*: "This section revealed more about Alexander's own narrow mindedness than their [the aristocrats'] class background".<sup>32</sup>

Yet there are examples in *Shakespeare and Schools* which can be seen either to express doubt about meaning and therefore highlight the limitations of the lone reviewer or to embrace the uncertainty and potential plurality of the interpretative process. In reviewing Michael Bogdanov's 1992 ESC *Tempest*, Gibson anticipates criticism of the production, and poses a question for both the director and prospective audience: "You may disagree with some bits of stage business, or think that Bogdanov tries too hard (what did the tight-rope walking signify?)".<sup>33</sup> Further questions are asked of a RSC *Murder in the Cathedral*: "Are lines like 'What is woven on the loom of fate' subverted or sustained by pinnies, woolly cardigans and lisle stockings? Why do the tempters quickly reappear as the splenetic knights with barely a change of costume? In the murder scene itself, how well does talk of 'swords' fit with SAS style uniforms

and balaclava hoods?"<sup>34</sup> Rather than expressing the reviewer's weakness, or their condemnation of the artistic direction, weaving such questions into an article is not only a way of ensuring, as Patrick Lonergan has suggested, that reviews should be "the beginning of a debate".<sup>35</sup> Writing for teachers, and indirectly, their students, this reviewing style makes palpable the value of enquiry and debate over evaluative censure – values key to Gibson's student-centred and exploratory pedagogies.<sup>36</sup>

While Gibson's reviews seem largely to conform to their newspaper and academic counterparts in their interpretative comments, his evaluation of productions is inflected with a focus on the educational value of seeing the plays performed, to a far greater extent than other critics. On the one hand, his reviewing offers much that commentators on the subject have identified as fulfilling an evaluative function: tendering "clear-cut value judgement[s]";<sup>37</sup> explicating "what a production might have done but did not";<sup>38</sup> and "providing [...] constructive criticism and praise to directors and companies".<sup>39</sup> On the other, it omits some other common evaluative traits. As might be expected, given Gibson's educational ideology, his reviews are free from the "tendency to view performance as subsidiary to text" and attempts to "police what is 'Shakespeare'".<sup>40</sup> In terms of tone, they are overwhelmingly characterised by praise for (at least some aspects) of the directors' and company's work. Reviews for newspapers address various imagined readerships, sometimes narrowing down their recommendations from potential theatregoers generally to certain groups within society – Marlovians<sup>41</sup> and "anybody interested in the Elizabethan era",<sup>42</sup> for example. However, Gibson's awareness of writing for a comparatively small readership of teachers, as well as his stu-

28. Gibson, "Anthony & Cleopatra".

29. Irving Wardle, "The School of Night", *Theatre Record* (26 March–8 April 1993), 379.

30. Jane Edwards, "The Taming of the Shrew", *Theatre Record* (25 March–7 April 1992), 418–19.

31. Dennis Slater, "The Taming of the Shrew", *Theatre Record* (25 March–7 April 1992), 418.

32. Peter J. Smith, "The Taming of the Shrew", *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 42 (1992), 89–91.

33. Gibson, "Tempest".

34. Gibson, "Murder in the Cathedral", *Shakespeare and Schools* 21 (1993), 14.

35. Quoted in Stephen Purcell, "'That's not Shakespeare': Policing the boundaries of 'Shakespeare' in reviews", *Shakespeare* 6.3 (2010), 364–70.

36. For this interpretation, I am indebted to Rob Conkie's thoughtful comments on a version of this paper given at the World Shakespeare Congress in July 2011.

37. Elinor Parsons, "As I Like It: The reviewer's voice", *Shakespeare* 6.3 (2010), 371–75, 371.

38. Jeremy Lopez, "Academic theatre reviewing and the imperfect present", *Shakespeare* 6.3 (2010), 350–56, 350.

39. Collins, "Theatre reviewing", 330.

40. Purcell, "'That's not Shakespeare'", 365–68.

41. Wardle, "The School of Night".

42. Benedict Nightingale, "The School of Night", *Theatre Record* (26 March–8 April 1993), 378.

dent-centred pedagogy, is reflected in the way in which he highlights the value of the productions for students' learning specifically:

If you take your students tell them they'll see two plays for the price of one.<sup>43</sup>

If you want your students to see a female actor whose every expression, gesture and word embodies imaginative and sensual intelligence, take them to the Pit when this powerful production transfers to London.<sup>44</sup>

The result is a demanding, sometimes puzzling evening, raising sharp questions about theatre, religion and language.<sup>45</sup>

Do take a school party to this triumphant and inspiring production. But ensure they argue about what may be its Achilles heel: the cutting of Portia's line about her unsuccessful suitor from Arragon "let all of his complexion choose me so".<sup>46</sup>

The value of these productions for students and teachers is communicated in diverse terms by Gibson here: variously, they relate to value for money; the value of seeing an expert at work, of having a skilful role-model; and the value of Shakespeare in performance as a stimulus to reflection and discussion, both on micro-issues, such as the experience of the play text versus performance, as well as more macro-educational questions about life and society. Through such audience-specific evaluations, Gibson ensures that teachers have access to a resource, not available at the time in other similar publications such as teaching journals, which is approachable and reasonably current (in contrast to academic journals, usually published once a run has ceased – note also his use of the present tense in line with most newspaper reviewing) as well as tailored to their needs and concerns.

As with the evaluative function, Gibson's reviews are differentiated from the mainstream in terms of their function as a "record". The role of theatre reviewing in offering a record of a performance has been noted by practitioners such as Tynan<sup>47</sup> and Billington<sup>48</sup> as well as academics

(Mazer<sup>49</sup> and more recently Maguire, Wells, and Armstrong).<sup>50</sup> Indeed, Laurie Maguire adds that reviews may also offer a useful documentation of particular social contexts: what it feels "like to be in a specific culture in a specific era".<sup>51</sup> The details captured in a review range from objective facts – such as the date and place of the performance, names of the director and key cast members, the layout of the set – to the more subjective description – the portrayal of characters and performances of the (usually lead) roles in (often) significant scenes.

To take one example of this, Gibson's review of Bill Alexander's 1992 *Taming of the Shrew* at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre lists these facts before it details character – "Lord Simon and his pals are a bunch of Hooray Henries", i.e. loud, wealthy, and foolish young men – and offers a vignette of the final scene: "In an intense and moving silence, Kate and Petruchio, united in their hard-won love, confront their onstage audience".<sup>52</sup> His use of popular culture shorthand ("Hooray Henries") enables his descriptions to be concise (his colleagues in newspaper reviewing were writing between three- to five-hundred words per play at the time). It also enables him to spend proportionally more of his word count than his peers concentrating on the language of the play – an area of particular interest to Gibson, and very much part of the inherent value of Shakespeare in his eyes – than a newspaper critic might: "'What dogs are these?' tongue-lashes Petruchio at the discomfited and embarrassed aristocrats. 'What, no attendance? No regard? No duty?'"<sup>53</sup> Gibson's reviews, then, tend to offer a snapshot of the performance from one or two angles, for example, character and staging or lead actor and directorial concept. They present the essence of the performance, as seen by Gibson, with limited illustrative examples. At most, in terms of being an archive, the reviews may represent an eclectic and highly selective store-house of ideas for performance which teachers could use in the classroom or drama studio. Unlike other forms of reviewing, they are not intended to reconstitute the play for readers in any holistic sense.

---

281-91, 283.

43. Gibson, "The Taming of the Shrew", *Shakespeare and Schools* 18 (1992), 14.

44. Gibson, "The Changeling", *Shakespeare and Schools* 20 (1993), 15.

45. Gibson, "Murder".

46. Gibson, "Merchant".

47. Kenneth Tynan, *Curtains* (New York: Atheneum, 1961), 135.

48. Michael Billington. "The past and present of Shakespearean reviewing", *Shakespeare* 6.3 (2010),

49. Carey Mazer, 'Shakespeare, the Reviewer, and the Theatre Historian', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 53 (1985), 648-61, 649.

50. Maguire, "Afterword", 401; Wells, "Foreword", 276; and Alan Armstrong, "Romeo and Juliet Academic Theatre Review Kit", *Shakespeare Bulletin* 26.1 (2008), 109-24, 118.

51. Maguire, "Afterword", 401.

52. Gibson, "Taming".

53. Gibson, "Taming".

A final way in which Gibson's reviews differ from those in published in other forums is in their lesser concern with the function of reviews in placing a performance within its social and historical context;<sup>54</sup> a "great tradition" of plays, and particular stagings of plays;<sup>55</sup> the work of other companies; and the director's corpus.<sup>56</sup> Gibson does invoke the impact of the Holocaust in his review of *The Merchant of Venice*, previous productions in arguing the uniqueness of a promenade *Julius Caesar* in the Swan, the educational politics surrounding the standard attainment tests implemented for British school students in 1993 and distinguishes between text and production: "Director Michael Attenborough thaws Middleton and Rowley's icy tragedy into a warm and audience-engaging domestic catastrophe of passion".<sup>57</sup> However, reading through newspaper reviews of the same time, one finds that they are weighted much more heavily than Gibson's towards finding some historical resonance between the plays, their historical context, and life in Britain during the mid 1990s. This fact may well relate to the need to appeal to a broad readership, for whom Shakespeare (or, indeed, the theatre) is not compulsory (although they would almost invariably have encountered him at school), but who *are* presumably interested in current affairs. Thus the functions of reviews in presenting the context to performance, as well as in recording and evaluating a performance, offer a useful way to understand Gibson's reviews as differentiated from other such provision. In contrast, the purpose of reviews in disseminating, promoting and interpreting performances varies very little between Gibson and other writers at the time.

### *Recognising the unique qualities of Gibson's reviewing*

Before concluding, it is worth briefly considering a few further traits of Gibson's reviews and the way they relate to their newspaper or academic equivalents during the period, as well as to their specific context in a series designed for teachers. These include the choice of plays, the language of the reviews, the intertextual references they deploy and the insight which the reviews give into Gibson's preoccupations. Each of these elements represents material that is ripe for further exploration in future discussions.

54. Wells, "Foreword", 276.

55. Billington, "The past and present", 283.

56. Parsons, "As I Like It", 371.

57. Gibson, "Merchant", "Julius Caesar", "Tempest", and "Changeling".

Gibson's omnivorous consumption of the plays on offer at the RSC is striking. Although he covers the Shakespeare canon and other Early Modern drama which frequently turns up on A-level syllabi (*The Changeling*, for example), he gives similar-length reviews of modern drama (*Murder in the Cathedral* and Ibsen's *Ghosts*), Early Modern drama more rarely seen in the classroom (*The Beggar's Opera*, *The Country Wife*, *The Venetian Twins*, *Tamburlaine the Great* and *A Jovial Crew*), and new writing/adaptations (*The School of Night*, *Elgar's Rondo*, and *The Odyssey*). Whether he offers the whole gamut of the company's season out of an awareness that he may be writing for drama teachers as well as their counterparts in English (in many schools, one and the same), a conviction of the importance of a liberal education, or to fill up space, is difficult to ascertain. Nonetheless, it certainly contributes to the sense of Gibson as a writer concerned with drama in a broad sense and as a critic capable of understanding Shakespeare's plays within their wider literary and dramatic context.

In terms of the language of the reviews, their lack of technical jargon and peppering of clichés or slang resemble far more the style of newspaper reviewing than similar articles in academic journals. Out of twenty-six reviews, I found only four instances of vocabulary from the theatre-world and Shakespearian scholarship: "director's theatre", "concept", "problem play" and "late play" – the first two in a review of *As You Like It*, the second two in one of *All's Well*.<sup>58</sup> In each case, they were placed inside inverted commas within the body of the review, either to indicate their place as jargon, almost as foreign to everyday discourse (with Gibson thereby placing himself, and/or his readers, squarely as non-expert, on the outside of the theatre world, among the teachers), or to indicate a sceptical (again, outsider) attitude towards these terms. In contrast, the reviews are littered with such "vernacular" expressions: terms used in everyday conversation, heard on the television, read in glossy magazines or invented by journalists. They include "softies at heart", "testicular showstopper", "teetering doll-like bimchette", and "dreaming spires".<sup>59</sup>

Jeremy Lopez has pointed to the way in which "review discourse has assimilated popular cultural discourse" in an (approximate, he argues) attempt to capture Shakespeare (and his "ur-otherness") for modern readers<sup>60</sup>. Gibson arguably

58. Gibson, "As You Like It" and "All's Well".

59. Gibson, "Julius Caesar"; "Winter's Tale", *Shakespeare and Schools* 19 (1992), 14; "The Country Wife"; and "Love's Labour's Lost".

60. Lopez, "Academic theatre reviewing", 353.



uses this discourse in an attempt to make the reviews accessible for, and immediate to, teachers of all experience-levels and abilities. Indeed, he goes beyond using terms from popular culture, to deploy snippets of familiar educational theory to put them at ease. He strategically opens one review with the sentence, "A famous test for divergent intelligence is 'how many uses can you think of for a brick?'" to frame his discussion of the director's work.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, among the plentiful references he makes to popular culture in the reviews, some invoke iconic educational figures, for example the fictional headmaster from Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*, describing one character as "Wackford Squeers as demented KS3 SATs setter" and another, Prospero, as "a Crocker-Harris of the bombsite"<sup>62</sup> – an allusion to the protagonist of Rattigan's *The Browning Version*. These references, functioning much like in-jokes, promote a sense of comradeship and collegiality between Gibson (project leader and academic) and the teachers, who are his research participants. The first example also demonstrates the way in which Gibson, to some extent, embraces subjectivity and bias in a way that confronts prevalent notions of academic writing, but can be a hallmark of some critics' reviewing.

Other references appeal to teachers' (assumed) cultural capital and their love of literature, with references to *Les Misérables*, *Brideshead Revisited* and drama (*Peer Gynt*, the Grand Guignol and *commedia dell'arte*). Yet Gibson also invokes a host of references to popular cultural forms such as television, film and the media: from Sarah Ferguson's infamous "toe-job" (in 1992 British tabloid papers printed pictures of an American financier allegedly sucking the Duchess of York's toes, while on holiday in the South of France, after her separation from Prince Andrew), to *Rambo*, the *Alien* series, *The Wizard of Oz* and Barry Humphries' alter-ego, Sir Les Patterson. He demonstrably attempts to combat possible preconceptions from teachers about the elitism of the theatre world and, in doing so, embraces the way in which Shakespeare's plays might be like a good television drama or salacious tabloid story.

Finally, Gibson's reviews also enable him to convey the preoccupations of his project, just as many other reviewers have been able to use their pieces to vocalise their pet peeves: Billington, for example, on open-air theatre-going,<sup>63</sup> Robert Hewison on the Americanisation of pure British vowels<sup>64</sup>

and Charles Spencer on feminist interpretations of pre-feminist drama.<sup>65</sup> Gibson's emphasis on the importance of liberal humanism and a moral (or more recently, "personal growth") model of education is apparent in his praise for productions which deal with notions of evil, justice, humanity and human decency, which show "the civilizing capacity of theatre; the power of drama to change both attitudes and behaviour".<sup>66</sup> His passion for dramatic approaches to play texts is evidenced in the praise he heaps on productions "vivifying the possibilities of Shakespeare's language", making "Shakespeare truly live", and displaying "spectacular theatricality".<sup>67</sup> In this way, Gibson communicates to teachers the core values of his project, of active methods, and even his ideals for school education more generally, in a way that extends the more explicit rationales given elsewhere for his research (see *Teaching Shakespeare*).

In conclusion, the *Shakespeare and Schools* magazines are similar to other established forums for reviewing in terms of their functions of dissemination, advertisement, and interpretation of productions. They are, however, distinct in terms of evaluating, recording, and contextualising them. On the surface, they resemble their counterparts in the newspapers of the time (to a greater extent than those in academic journals). However, read through the context of Gibson's research, it becomes apparent that the usual features of reviews are frequently slanted towards a specific readership of educators. Moreover, they have a unique function in reflecting and supporting the key tenets and concerns of Gibson's *Shakespeare in Schools* project. They provide the context for, and corroborate the value of, his research. They also offer a sense of a community of people teaching Shakespeare, grounded in similar beliefs, values and interests: a fellowship which is also interested in breaking down barriers between teachers and theatre practitioners, teachers and academics (at a time when these professions needed to gain strength from uniting against the commonly felt assault on their fields from the Thatcher, and to some extent Major, governments). Gibson's magazines are distinctive in terms of their target audience, their ideological and pedagogical mission which render reviewing a handmaid to his larger ambitions of educational reform.

Sarah OLIVE

61. Gibson, "Winter's Tale".

62. Gibson, "The Changeling" and "Tempest".

63. Prescott, "Inheriting the Globe", 362.

64. Robert Hewison, "The Beggar's Opera", *Theatre Record* (25 March–7 April 1992), 422.

65. Charles Spencer, "The Taming of the Shrew", *Theatre Record* (25 March–7 April 1992), 419.

66. Gibson, "Taming".

67. Gibson, "Anthony", "Julius Caesar", and "Tamburlaine", *Shakespeare and Schools* 19 (1992), 14.