

BOOK REVIEW

Patricia Lennox and Bella Mirabella, eds. *Shakespeare and Costume*. Bloomsbury, 2015, pp.294.

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Costume is significant in Shakespearean performance. Costume, to a greater and changing degree, was influenced by its times, choice of players, thoughtfulness of production and genre of the play. It aids the actor to move beyond the transitional space between life and impersonation reconfiguring the personal makeup of an actor. Shakespearean costume moves beyond the exterior make up of an actor but entails the interpretive and aesthetic element. The “Introduction” maps the important spots in the history of costumes in Shakespeare productions. The book is divided into three Parts: Part I “Dressing Shakespeare in His Own Time—Theatre, Fashion and Social Practice” historically locates the material culture and English theatre during Shakespeare’s time. What the actors wore during Shakespearean era to enact Shakespearean plays is little known. However history, socio-economics, age, status, gender and geography influenced costumes worn on Shakespeare’s stage. Maria Hayward’s article deals with royal clothing at court and plays of Shakespeare. Costumes used by Elizabeth I and James I constituted their royal selves on a political stage. It influenced how Shakespeare employed language to recreate the image of royalty in association to Elizabeth’s and James’ kingly wardrobes. However, the author claims that all exhibition of royal power, at court or in the theatre, were counterfeit. Erika Lin traces familiarity of the festive livery practices within aristocratic homes to Shakespearean audience. Liver, for Lin, is a sign of identity, affiliation and a mode of payment. Catherine Richardson argues that clothing of the gentry exemplifies status, shame, honest and dishonest conduct configuring gender and ascertaining morality depending on head coverings and linens. Natasha Korda’s essay brings to light the importance of shoes as not mere historical and material object of attire but also an object of performance. Bella Mirabella speculates how Othello might have been costumed for a performance based on contradictory concepts of masculinity. Part II, “Designing Shakespeare: Theatrical Practice and Costume,” deals with performance history. Russell Jackson highlights the challenges faced by male and female actors from the manner of productions that affect costuming the role. Patricia Lennox discusses how five productions of *Romeo and Juliet* between 1922 and 1936 influenced the designers to

formulate the iconic image of the Nurse costumed in a medieval wimple and starched headdress. Part III, “Interviews with Contemporary Designers,” presents the discussion of costume designers Jane Greenwood and Robert Morgan about their involvement with Shakespeare productions and how costumes have been fashioned through historical and ahistorical epochs, how budgets have influenced costume making, how director’s interpretation and contemporary theatrical fashions persuade to modify the choice and construction of the costumes.

The book, though divided into distinct parts, is meant to be a whole bringing out voices about Shakespearean theatre and performance. The essays bring out the nuances and interconnections that lay around 400 years of theatrical production reminding Shakespearean audience the importance of costume in theatre performances. The variety of costumes staged today can be traced back to the beginnings of Shakespearean performance. Moreover the book opens way for immense research possibilities that remain veiled on Shakespearean plays and performances. This book can be considered as a milestone in Shakespearean performance studies, theatre history, research in material culture and dress history.

