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Middleton’s *The Witch* Costume Design

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Bridgewater State University

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Middleton’s *The Witch*

Costume Design

Brianna Sceviour
For my honors capstone, I completed a costume design for the main characters of Thomas Middleton’s play *The Witch*. Although it was published in 1778, the play is thought to be written between 1606 and 1620. This places its origin in the Jacobean Era, directly after the Elizabethan Era which ended in 1603.

When first discussing this project with my advisor, Miranda Giurleo, there was a clear path on how to go about the process. I knew that I wanted to design something close to the Elizabethan Era, which is where the research began. I read many plays from around the time period including *The Roaring Girl* by Thomas Middleton & William Dekker, *As You Like It* by William Shakespeare, *The Honest Whore* by William Dekker, and more but ultimately decided on *The Witch*. Once this was in place, I reread the chosen play and created a costume plot. Costume plots are easily accessible spreadsheets that document what each character is wearing in each scene. Having this document made it easy to begin play and period specific research. This included finding primary sources of visual and textual information about the clothing worn and the era as a whole. I used these as the bones of the project, going on to find secondary sources of comparable manner. It was not until a month of research and a multiple read through of the play that I felt comfortable creating rough sketches of my costume ideas. After a few drafts I arrived at my final products. Even then, deciding on the direction of the witches took trial and error before bringing them to their final product.

When it came time to costume the Duke, I chose to put him in a starched collar with layered ruff, doublet with round shoulders, cape, breeches, hose, and hat. The ruff, a round frill worn around the neck, is four layers all hemmed with lace. His doublet, a fitted short, padded jacket, has braided trimming and wings. It includes a yellow sash as well as deep cuffs with lace edging on the sleeves. To complete his look, he has a short cape with similar detailing, fully
gathered breeches with lace detailing on his garter, leather shoes with small heels and rosette fasteners as well as a hat. This is a wide brimmed hat with a tall crown. It also includes an ostrich plume, yellow sash to match his doublet and decorated brim.

The Duchess, wife of the duke, wears a wire collar, long sleeve bodice with stomacher, full skirt with petticoat. The collar worn by the Duchess is high wired with lace edging. Her hair is smoothed over a soft pad at the crown of her head, which was quite common for the period. In the drawings she is wearing a pearl necklace as well as a pendant. Her bodice, tightfitting upper part of dress, has a round neckline with lace detailing. Her sleeves lead to wide lace cuffs. Just below her natural waistline is a cartridge pleated peplum overskirt. The main skirt contains box pleats that stop at the ankles. This shows off the Duchess’s rosette detailed leather heels.

The Lord Governor is in a similar color pallet as the duke. His costume consists of a starched collar, doublet, hose, breeches, and a hat. His collar is starched with a two layered lace hemmed ruff. The doublet he wears is decorated with stripes, wings, and large square detailing at the waist as well as tunic sleeves made of strips of fabric. At the ends of his sleeves, he wears cuffs with lace edge detailing. His breeches are created using the same pattern as his doublet with buttons up the sides. He wears leather shoes and a hat with an upturned edge with an ostrich flume.

Sebastian, who was contracted to marry Isabella prior to the play’s start, has a costume consisting of non-starched collar, doublet, breeches, hose, and hat. He wears a collar that is turned down. His striped doublet has small wings and a natural peplum waist position. To conclude his costume, he has gathered breeches with a garter, hose, and leather shoes that tie in a
bow. When needed to disguise throughout the play he wears a wide brimmed hat with a short ostrich plume.

Isabella is the niece of the governor and wife of Antonio. Her costume consists of a wire collar, sleeveless bodice with stomacher, and a full skirt with a petticoat. The wire collar has a lace trim detail. Similar to the duchess she wears her hair smoothed over a pad but with fringed edges. She wears a pearl necklace as well as a flower pendant. The bodice she wears has a round neckline with a lace edge filled with thin gauze. She also wears double lace cuffs on her sleeves. Her full skirt is detailed with a bow at her waist, box pleats and an embroidered petticoat. As for shoes, she wears leather heels with bow detailing.

Antonio, Isabella’s husband, wears a starched collar, doublet, breeches, and hose. His upturned starched collar is trimmed with lace. The doublet he wears has wings and bow detailing at the peplum waist. He also wears cuffs with lace detailing. His breeches gather below his knee with a bow on either side. He also wears knee length soft leather boots that are turned down into cuffs.

Francisca is Antonio’s sister who is pregnant with an illegitimate child. She wears a collar, sleeveless bodice with stomacher, and a full skirt with a petticoat. The collar she wears is unwired with lace details. She keeps her hair pulled out of her face. Her bodice has a square neckline with lace detailing. Throughout the entire dress you can see the embroidered edge detailing. Due to her pregnancy her bodice ties up to the front to give her more space for her growing bump. At the end of each sleeve is a lace edged cuff. Her full-length skirt is complete with a cartridge pleat and visible petticoat. Although unseen, she wears leather heels.
Florida, the courtesan, is seen in a wire collar, bodice with stomacher, full skirt with petticoat. The collar she wears is a short, wired collar. Her long sleeve bodice has a square neckline with paneling in different shades of green. She has a pendant around her neck and keeps her hair pushed over a soft pad. Her skirt is box pleated with the same paneling as her bodice. Under her dress, her detailed leather heels.

The head witch, Hecate is dressed in a long sleeve bodice, without a collar, and a full-length skirt. She keeps her hair down, long, and free. Her square neckline bodice is over a round necked linen undershirt. The bodice laces up the front and has attached distressed oversleeves. Her full-length skirt is hand gathered at the waist with distress at the bottom. She does not wear shoes but does wear an oval pendant.

Firestone is Hecate's son and a clown. He wears a simple linen hat that does not hold shape. His long sleeve linen undershirt with an oversized jacket. He wears breeches that are not loosely fitted around his mid-calf.

Stadlin is a witch. Similarly, to Hecate, she wears her hair down although it is not as long. She wears a long thigh length vest with a long sleeve linen undershirt. The full-length skirt is hand gathered and distressed.

The witch Hoppo is another witch. She wears her hair in a half up style in order to keep it out of her face. Her bodice has a round neckline and laces in the back. She wears a full-length distressed skirt under her beat up apron.
The Witch also has Malkain, who is a cat-like character. He wears an older style shallow ruff that is wired and starched to resemble a modern cat collar. Along with a dual button jacket with long breeches. He also can be seen wearing a plain hip length cape to resemble a tail.

By designing costumes for Thomas Middleton’s, The Witch. I have learned a great deal of information regarding costuming and the time period.
Sebastian

Disguise

[Sketch of a character in green attire with a hat]
Duchess
Staldin