

The Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon

The 934th meeting of the Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon took place on Tuesday 10 November 2020. The speaker was Dr Patricia Lennox who gave a profusely illustrated talk on Shakespeare and Costume. She was introduced by committee member Helen Hargest. This was a virtual, pre-recorded meeting.

Dr Lennox began by considering the role of clothing, particularly as represented in portraits. Clothes indicate gender, class, economic status, profession and personality. On stage, the actor's costume is the character's clothing, and reflects how the actor sees their character.

To demonstrate how much costume tells us about character she focused on representations of Lady Macbeth. Using examples from as early as 1768 she noted that costume alone shows us different aspects of the character from ferocious, fragile, powerful and highly-sexual. She noted that for many years actors were responsible for providing their own costumes, so these choices belonged to them.

She continued by looking at costume on Shakespeare's stage, known about from a range of sources including illustrations, diaries and inventories listing some of the most luxurious items, as well as designs for masques from 1610. Until the early 1800s theatrical costumes followed contemporary fashion, after which historical authenticity was introduced. It was taken to its extreme at Shakespeare's Globe in the 1990s when "original practices" were adopted, even including authentic undergarments.

From the early twentieth century attitudes towards costume in Shakespeare's plays became more diverse. In 1920 it was seen as revolutionary when Hamlet was performed at Birmingham Repertory Theatre wearing fashionable plus-fours. Her survey concluded by considering the Royal Shakespeare Company's influence on costume design. She noted that Coriolanus, for instance, has shifted from being a heroic Roman warrior to a modern action hero, and that discussions of sexuality have been reflected in the gender-shifting production of *The Taming of the Shrew* in 2019.

Thanks were offered to Dr Lennox for a most interesting and visually rich presentation. After questions contributed in advance, the meeting closed. Over the three days when the meeting remained online, it was viewed over 200 times.