Historical accuracy in costume design: A qualitative analysis of the experiences of Broadway costume designers

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study will be to understand the role of historical accuracy in contemporary American theatrical costume design by exploring the experiences and perceptions of Broadway costume designers. Through interviews, this research will investigate: (a) how Broadway costume designers approach and incorporate history into their costume designs for historically set productions, (b) the characteristics they believe are essential for historical accuracy in costume design, and (c) the significance they place on historical accuracy for the success of the costume design. Based on the analysis of interview responses, an operational definition for historical accuracy will be developed, and it is hoped that a model, framework, or grounded theory of the role of history in contemporary theatrical costume design will emerge as well.

This study will be unique in its systematic examination of the costume design process from the perspectives of contemporary practitioners. A definition of historical accuracy will permit the expansion of the field of study and a model or grounded theory of historical accuracy in contemporary costume design will contribute to scholarly research and provide guidance to practitioners as they embark on the creative design process. This study will also combine the creative practice of costume design with theories of fashion, integrating historical fashion and the communicative qualities of dress. This research will provide a foundation to broaden the reach of costume design, and theatrical design as a whole, as a field of interest for academic study. Generating a model or a grounded theory of historical accuracy in contemporary theatrical costume design will add to the body of knowledge by extending academic research to forms of
clothing not typically considered part of the fashion field, and will therefore be of interest to theorists, designers, and historians.