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**THEATRE COSTUME AS A FACTOR  
OF ARCHITECTONICS OF THEATRE SPACE  
(COSTUME DESIGN FOR *THE PENELOPIAD*)**

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**Abstract.** The costume design by Andrew Nasturzio and Alessia Urbani for *The Penelopiad* at the Ryerson Theatre brought an innovative, creative and a unique design approach by embracing the challenges of the production.

**Key words:** costume design, designer, quick change, theatre.

### **Problem statement**

The IV Transatlantic Seminar on Theatre Arts was hosted by the Prague Quadrennial of Theatre Design and Space-19, the World's leading theatre exhibition, in Prague, Czech Republic, 6–16 Jun 2019. The seminar was a joint event of the Department of Design of Architectural Environment, Institute of Architecture on Lviv Polytechnic University, Ukraine, and the School of Performance, Ryerson University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. During the seminar, 10 papers were delivered; the presentations centred on theatre architecture, scenography, and space for performance in historical buildings as well as outdoor venues in Ukraine, Canada and Georgia. Andrew Nasturzio and Alessia Urbani presented on the process of creation of their costume co-design for *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood inspired by the classical poem, *The Odyssey*, produced by Ryerson University's School of Performance in October 2018 (directed by Dragana Varajic. Set Design by Pavlo Bosyy, Costume Design by Andrew Nasturzio and Alessia Urbani, Lighting Design by Amelia McCarthy Blaine, Projection Design by Anson Wong.

### **Objective of the article**

The paper's objective is to present the role of theatre costumes for *The Penelopiad* as a factor of the creation of the theatre space.

### **Results and discussions**

*The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood is a retelling of the classic tale of *The Odyssey* told through the eyes and events of Penelope and her twelve maids who all reside in Hades after the events of Odysseus' return. *The Penelopiad* directed by Dragana Varagic had its Ryerson Theatre debut in October 2018 (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** A scene from *The Penelopiad*, Ryerson Theatre (Photo by Pavlo Bosyy)

*The Penelopiad* featured an ensemble of women who played multiple characters who never exited the playing space. A major motivating theme for the design was ambiguity. This production was set in a

time that was here, and there and nowhere all at once. The space of the show was intended to appear timeless and endless. (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2.** Scenes from *The Penelopiad*, Ryerson Theatre (Photos by Pavlo Bosyy)

As well as then and now and never. The veil of time and space merged into an ambiguous place where we took inspiration and nods from Ancient Civilizations and avant-garde fashion to create a costume design that was symbolic, transformative and fashionable. The design for this ensemble of women was to treat them as individuals who look unified with one another. This was done by ensuring that a consistent colour palette was used for the ensemble and having unifying elements for each actress. The ensemble had a neutral colour palette that reflected various skin tones, representing the flesh of these women that were unjustly punished and murdered. All the maids had leather cuffs to show that they were shackled and slaved as maids. Additionally, this also lent itself to the idea that the women were unified in strength. The maids in our production of *The*

*Penelopiad* were strong, fierce women and their costumes need to show that, which motivated the choice of their footwear – ankle boots. We wanted a strong shoe that carried power and that was the boot. The ensemble of the maids was juxtaposed by Penelope who was costumed in a white and black gown. The white and black represented how Penelope was the executioner and the victim and the veil of the living and the dead was merging into a place of ambiguity. Penelope’s costume was as simple, bold, and ambiguous as the stage; the latter did not feature any forestage, upstage, and side spaces, the orchestra pit was covered by the specially created steeply raked small seating area for less than 100 audience members – that way the 1200-seat auditorium was transformed into a small and incredibly intimate space. This gown was used to show the double imagery which was crucial to our production (Fig. 3).



**Fig. 3.** Costume sketches for *The Penelopiad*

The double imagery was a motivating theme throughout the design as each actress had two or more characters they needed to become throughout the story. Their costumes had to be transformable in a quick second on stage so that they could become a completely new character without affecting the flow of the production. In other words, the performers should not disappear from the stage at any moment of the show for the costume change or whatsoever. This posed an interesting challenge, having to create costumes that could perform quick changes between two characters that were simple enough for the actresses to perform and effective enough that the audience would understand the change in character. The solution was magnets. By using magnets, the costumes were rigged in a certain way that could allow pieces of fabric to fall and reveal other garments. For example, skirts were pinned back to reveal pants and toga-like tops were unhooked to become a skirt that revealed a bandeau that was underneath. The challenge of the onstage quick changes fueled an original design where creativity was the focus which resulted in an exciting and unique costume design for this production of *The Penelopiad*. Along with the other minimalistic space-scenographic solutions.

## **Conclusion**

The original costume design by Andrew Nasturzio and Alessia Urbani was instrumental for keeping the dynamics of the uninterrupted flow of production as well as helped to integrate the scenic action and space harmoniously.

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**ТЕАТРАЛЬНИЙ КОСТЮМ ЯК ФАКТОР АРХІТЕКТОНІКИ СЦЕНІЧНОГО ПРОСТОРУ.  
(НА ПРИКЛАДІ ДИЗАЙНУ КОСТЮМІВ ДО ВИСТАВИ “ПЕНЕЛОПІАДА”)**

***Анотація.** Дизайн костюмів Ендрю Настурціо та Алессі Урбані в театрі університету Райєрсона вніс інноваційний, креативний та унікальний підхід в побудову дії вистави та архітектури сценічного простору, де саме театральні костюми у виставі “Пенелопіада” стали фактором їх творення.*

*Вистава випускного класу Школи виконавських мистецтв Університету ім. Е. Райєрсона “Пенелопіада” відомої сучасної канадської авторки Маргарет Етвуд поставлено на великій сцені школи (її зала налічувала 1200 місць) у 2018 році. Для вистави цей простір був змінений на камерний, де сто глядачів розміщувалося над оркестровою ямою, на спеціально збудованих трибунах, практично в самому просторі дії. Сам простір сценічної дії за задумом не мав мати ні початку, ні кінця як в просторі, так і в часі. Актори не мали зникати під час вистави для перевдягання у просторі сцени за лаштунками, завісами, палетами. При мінімумі інших сценографічно-світлових, просторових, декораційних рішень саме костюмам, рішення яких полягало у використанні магнітів, що утримували, а за потребою, могли падати на планшет і розкривати інший сценічний одяг, вдалося підтримувати постійну динаміку театральної дії без перерв і змін. Сприяти гармонійному синтезу середовища дії і простору сцени.*

***Ключові слова:** дизайнер, дизайн костюму, швидка зміна, театр, сценічний простір.*