



Shakespeare Re-Dressed: Cross-Gender Casting in Contemporary Performance

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Since the early '90s, cross-gender casting in performance of Shakespeare's plays has become an increasingly common phenomenon. Such casting has involved not only men playing women's roles but also women playing men's roles, and both playing roles re-gendered for the opposite sex. Yet while scholars have debated endlessly the transgressive potential of boy actors on the Elizabethan stage, few have paid attention to the cultural implications of cross-dressed performances occurring on contemporary stages. The eleven essays in this groundbreaking volume seek to redress this imbalance. Examining recent performances through the lenses of feminism, queer theory, and cultural materialism, they situate cross-dressed Shakespeare in the context of current critical debates over the social construction of gender, the radical contingency of sexual desire, and differences among various forms and functions in transvestism. Essays discuss representative British and North American productions some celebrated (Mabou Mines' *Lear*, the Globe's *Twelfth Night*), others little-known (*Merchant* in a women's prison). The past two decades have seen unprecedented growth in the cross-gender casting of Shakespeare's plays men playing women, women playing men, and both playing roles regendered for the opposite sex. Such casting has been fueled by a revolution in the way spectators view gender in Western societies. Influenced by the same cultural forces that gave rise to feminism and queer theory, contemporary Shakespeare performances have foregrounded the artifice of gender construction and challenged audiences to question conventional beliefs about the nature of sexual desire, sexual orientation, and gendered behavior.

These essays are stunningly comprehensive in their consideration of cross-gender-cast Shakespeare as it evolved over the past century. Theoretically informed yet grounded in the particularity of individual performances, they forge new connections between performance studies and gender theory and broach i

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Editorial Review

Review

James C. Bulman's introduction provides an overview of this excellent collection of essays concerning cross-gender casting: "Does cross-gender casting today," he asks, "signal an archeological interest in historical practices, or does it reflect contemporary debates about gender and sexuality?" (14). Bulman efficiently divides the essays into three categories: "those that introduce theoretical issues which figure in a number of essays, those that focus on North American productions, and those that focus on productions in the United Kingdom, and particularly at the New Globe" (16). Project Muse

About the Author

James C. Bulman is the Henry B. and Patricia Bush Tippie Chair in English at Allegheny College.

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Ida Torres:

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