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A Cape as Red as Blood and A Slipper as Pure as Gold: Vision and Visuality in the Costume Design of Into the Woods

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**A Cape as Red as Blood and A Slipper as Pure as Gold: Vision and Visuality in
the Costume Design of *Into The Woods***

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master
of Fine Arts in Costume Design at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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BA in Theatre University of Tennessee '15
MFA in Costume Design
VCU
2018

Major Director: Toni-Leslie James, Associate Professor
Head of Design, VCU Theatre

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
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Acknowledgement

I would like to dedicate this section to a great many individuals. I like to think that at the end of my time at VCU, I have not only become a Master in terms of costume design, but also at the skill of introspection. I know that without the guidance of a great many number of people, I would not be where or who I am today. I am in awe of my life and the blessings that I have because of you all. Individually, I would like to start, however, with thanking my mother, Beverly Frizzell Chalman, and my sister, Kathrine Chalman Huddleston. The former for teaching me how to shop and the latter for teaching me the power of literature. To my fiancé, Cody Swartz, thank you for supporting me during the most hectic, powerful, moving three years of my life and for moving the stars to help me. To Toni-Leslie James, thank you for being everything that I could have desired out of a mentor. I did not know how much I needed you in my life until I was at VCU. I would like to thank Neno Russell for teaching me patience and for giving me the very best model of how to keep a costume shop both joyful and productive. I will not forget the lessons that you have taught me and the ways that you have defended me. To my fellow design graduate students and coven, Katherine Field and Emily Tappan, you have taught me the benefits of supporting fellow artists, friends, and women. I will walk through my life knowing more about what sisterhood means because of my time with you two. There is nothing that can break the power of three. To Bonnie McCoy, Xiaolin Lan, and Devario Simmons, thank you for giving me the best first impressions that Theatre VCU offers. You all guided me during my first year when I felt so lost and removed from my home. To Theatre VCU, thank you for providing me with a new home.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my father, Matt Albert Chalman. You believed in me even when I couldn't believe in myself and I was so blessed to be your daughter. I love you and I miss you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Introduction.....	2-5
Renderings.....	6-29
Fabric Swatches.....	30-37
Photos.....	37-47
References.....	48

Abstract

A CAPE AS RED AS BLOOD AND A SLIPPER AS PURE AS GOLD: VISION AND VISUALITY IN THE COSTUME DESIGN OF *INTO THE WOODS*

By Hannah Elizabeth Chalman, MFA

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Virginia Commonwealth University

2018

Major Director: Toni-Leslie James, Associate Professor
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This thesis explores the costume design for Theatre VCU's 2018 production of *Into the Woods*. It outlines my concept for the design focusing on the origins of these archetypes. This concept is further expanded on by discussing Cinderella and the Witch characters and analyzing the choices within their costumes. This thesis also includes renderings, swatches, and photos.

A CAPE AS RED AS BLOOD AND A SLIPPER AS PURE AS GOLD: VISION AND VISUALITY IN THE COSTUME DESIGN OF *INTO THE WOODS*

Into the Woods is successful because it uses our knowledge of fairytales as the base of its storyline. It takes characters that we are all familiar with, that we love or hate, and creates a new facet for each character. To understand the connection that an audience member has to *Into the Woods* and to understand why it is so popular, you must first discuss the importance of fairytales. Fairytales have endured the test of time because they connect us to magic even as we rapidly progress on a technological front. They have preserved as explanations of elements of our world that we did not understand; framed important or terrifying experiences in a medium that people of the past could accept. Fairytales were also used, and still are, to guide children into understanding acceptable social norms. Through history, certain details of the story may change, but it is through this familiarity that we understand *Into the Woods*.

My concept for Theatre VCU's 2018 production of *Into the Woods* was centered around staying true to the archetypes that this production presents. I wanted to honor the source material and present costumes that were in line with the iconography that an audience would expect. Like *Into the Woods*, however, I wanted to take these archetypes and expose more layers within them. It was important to me that this production and my design felt magical and whimsical. I wanted the actors to be truly transformed from everyday life and thus, transfer the audience from modern day life to our fairytale world. This transformation was also very necessary to the show as most of the characters only have one costume (the exceptions being Cinderella and the Witch).

In order to more thoroughly understand the reasoning behind my choices, I would like to breakdown a few of the characters starting with Cinderella. For me, Cinderella is one of the most important characters in both *Into the Woods* and in the world of fairytales. She is, for young women, the original rag to riches story. She is rescued from a life of neglect and abuse by a prince all because of her kindness. Cinderella, is at her core, the personification of kind and good. *Into the Woods* shows more layers to the traditional story by changing the role of the fairy godmother. Cinderella is instead guided by her dead mother; whose grave is the hazel tree that she has nourished. This allows for her to connect more deeply with the role of the mother, which connects later in the show by her accepting the mother role of the Baker's child.

Cinderella has two costumes for *Into the Woods*: the poor and the princess. I wanted the silhouettes of these two costumes to be very similar to express the idea that Cinderella has always been deserving of her distinction as a princess because of her innate kindness. This was also meant to highlight the fact that while Cinderella's external circumstances change, she remains the same woman after her change in status. Therefore, both costumes have a gores skirt, a boned bodice, and a puff sleeve featured in different scales; for example, the poor Cinderella skirt has one less panel and is shorter than her princess look.

In direct opposition to Cinderella's kindness is the Witch. The Witch represents power, greed, and agency. This opposition to what we usually expect from a woman is why the Witch as a character has persisted so long in storytelling. Instead of needing to be saved, the Witch is often inflicting punishment on others. This remains true for *Into the Woods* as it is her need for revenge against the Mysterious Man (the Baker's Father) that sets our story into motion. The Witch, like Cinderella, has two costume changes: the old and the young.

Unlike Cinderella, I wanted the Witch's transformation to her younger self completely removed from her previous look. While her original look was meant to evoke the idea of the woods, the young look was meant to be sensual, glamorous, and most of all, deceptive. An important aspect of *Into the Woods* is that the Witch, after her transformation, loses her powers. This revelation, however, is only presented at the time when the Witch needs her powers the most. I wanted, therefore, emphasize the idea of "what you see isn't always what you get" that is a huge part of fairytales. I chose to portray this idea by using a gold metallic spandex for the main part of the dress while using a gold and black sequined stretch for the bodysuit. The silhouette was inspired by the idea of liquid gold. I also knew that a garment that had a lot of draping would allow the male actor to pass for female without a lot of padding. This was important for our show because I didn't want our male actor to look like a drag queen as the Witch. Since

the idea of the Witch hinges on its opposition to woman, I wanted our Witch to appear to be a woman.

Like *Into the Woods*, my costume design was stronger for focusing on the expectations that we have for these fairytale characters and then fleshing out their characters from that point. I believe that this way of exploring these characters, through the lens of their story, allowed me to produce costumes that seemed as if they were taken from pages of a book.

INTO THE WOODS

Jack,

1



INTO THE
WOODS
Little Red Ridinghood
2



INTO THE WOODS

Baker

3



INTO THE
WOODS
Baker's Wife
4



INTO THE
WOODS
Witch
5



INTO THE
WOODS

Witch

6



INTO THE WOODS

Cinderella

7



INTO THE
WOODS
Cinderella
8





INTO THE
WOODS
Cinderella's Prince
9



INTO THE
WOODS
Cinderella's Stepmother
10

INTO THE WOODS

Florinda

11



INTO THE WOODS

Lyrcinda

12





INTO THE
WOODS
Jack's Mother
13

INTO THE
WOODS
Cinderella's father
14





INTO THE WOODS

Narrator

15

INTO THE
WOODS
Rapunzel
16



INTO THE
WOODS
Rapunzel's Prince
17



INTO THE
WOODS
Milk & White
18



INTO THE WOODS

Granny

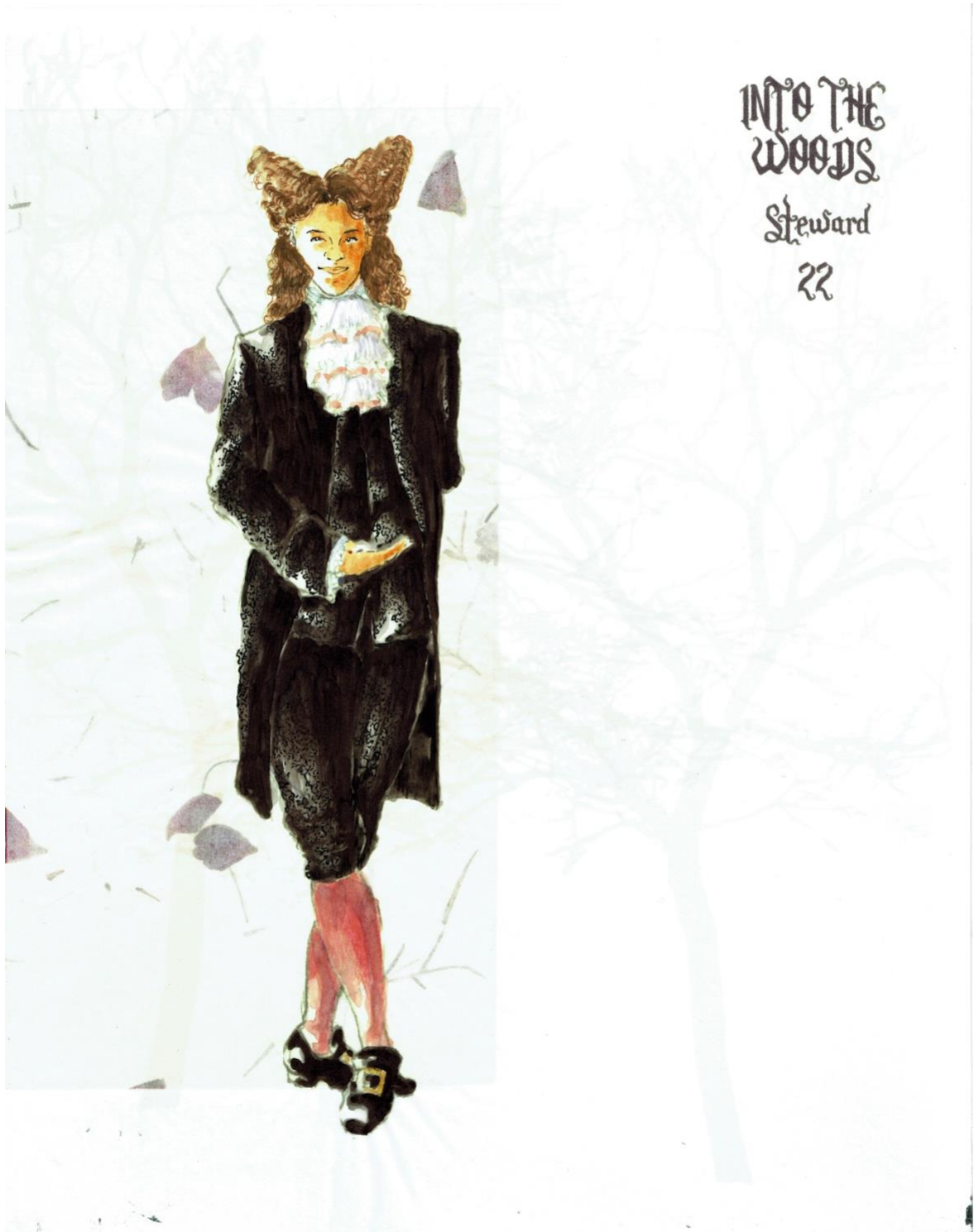
19







INTO THE
WOODS
Mysterious Man.
21



INTO THE WOODS

Steward

22

INTO THE
WOODS
Snow White
23





INTO THE
WOODS
Sleeping Beauty
24

INTO THE WOODS

Character: Jack,

Piece: Parçs	Piece:	Piece:
Vendor: Artée	Vendor:	Vendor:
Price: 7.95/yard	Price:	Price:
		
P	Piece:	Piece:
D	Vendor:	Vendor:
P	Price:	Price:

INTO THE WOODS

Character: Little Red Ridinghood

Piece: Dress	Piece: Pinafore	Piece: Cape
Vendor: Stock	Vendor: Stock	Vendor: NY Elegant
Price: -	Price: -	Price: 14.95/yard
		Piece: Vendor: Price:

INTO THE WOODS

Character: Witch

Piece: Dress	Piece: Bodysuit	Piece:
Vendor: NY Elegant	Vendor: Cut Fabric	Vendor:
Price: 39.95/yrd	Price: 15/ yrd	Price:
		
P		Piece:
D		Vendor:
P		Price:

INTO THE WOODS

Character: Cinderella

Piece: Skirt	Piece: Blouse	Piece:
Vendor: B&J	Vendor: Stock	Vendor:
Price: 15.95/yard	Price: -	Price:
		
		Piece:
		Vendor:
		Price:

INTO THE WOODS

Character: Cinderella

Piece: Dress Base	Piece: Organza	Piece: Dress Overlay
Vendor: Oriole Text.	Vendor: Oriole Text.	Vendor: Day to Day
Price: 4.95/yard	Price: 1.95/yard	Price: 32/yard
Silver Dove - see card	Silver (Sparkle) - see card	
Piece:	Piece:	
Vendor:	Vendor:	
Price:	Price:	


INTO THE WOODS
Character: Cinderella's father

Character: Cinderella's father

Piece: Jacket	Piece: Vest	Piece: Ascot
Vendor: Stock	Vendor: Diana fabric	Vendor: A. fabric
Price: -	Price: 15/ yrd	Price: 25


INTO THE WOODS

Character: Wolf

Piece: Jodhpurs	Piece:	Piece:
Vendor: Mood	Vendor:	Vendor:
Price: 30/yard	Price:	Price:
		
	Piece:	Piece:
	Vendor:	Vendor:
	Price:	Price:

INTO THE WOODS

Character: Mysterious Man

Piece: Vest	Piece:	Piece:
Vendor: Mood	Vendor:	Vendor:
Price: 35/yrd	Price:	Price:
		
		Piece:
		Vendor:
		Price:

ALL PHOTOS CREDITED TO AARON SUTTEN





















References

Lapine, James and Sondheim, Stephen. *Into the Woods*. 1987.

Production photos taken by Aaron Suttan.