

# THEATRE AT GRENFELL

## Mary Stuart, Fall 2020

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### Research Approach

For *Mary Stuart*, I divided my research for character design into two sources of inspiration; Inherent themes and introduced themes. Inherent themes include power, religion, and gender. These create points of reference informed by the text for historical fashion, religious influences, and history surrounding England's monarchy. This also extends to symbolism and historical portraits. Introduced themes include the setting and style that has been applied to the script for this particular production. In this case it was Drag Culture, the history of drag, and inspiration from queer culture.

In a unique circumstance and show such as this one, I thought it would be valuable to get insight from the actor's as to how their character would translate to a contemporary Canadian drag club setting. I'm very appreciative that the director and design supervisors supported this and for the cooperation of the cast members. As each actor took on more responsibility than is typical for the development of their character's drag persona, I needed to develop clear underlying concepts and conventions as parameters for this show's costume design.

### Colour Palette and Symbolism

Elizabeth and Mary, as well as their associates, are divided visually between colour palettes. The source of these are their national flowers. For Elizabeth the bright, warm red Tudor Rose, and for Mary the cooler, darker purple Scottish Thistle. In both cases the rich pigmentations would historically suggest wealth. Mary's clothes in mourning reinforce the darker shades while Elizabeth's lighter and brighter pearls help depict the tone of her victory.

I chose to use flowers as a source for design inspiration as there is a tradition of symbolic use of flowers in Queer history and queer art. Violets associated with Sappho's poetry, green carnations worn by Oscar Wilde, and specifically the American "Pansy Craze". Though I was aware the pansy was an older derogatory term for a gay man, it has a fascinating history in creation of underground parties, queer clubs, and drag performers in the early to mid 1900s. As a result I was inspired to incorporate the symbolism of flowers as a nod to that pivotal phase in drag culture history.

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Explicit symbols of the Catholic church can carry a different weight or connotation in reference to the LGBTQIA+ community. However, religion is an integral part of the tension between these queens and their moment in history. Aside from the cross worn by Mary Stuart, all other references to the Catholic faith are subtly included through accessories and colour scheme. As the national flowers influence my colour palette, so do Catholic Vestments. Robes worn by priests are colour coded for specific occasions, reinforce the cooler and darker tones worn by Mary and her known associates. Purple Vestments are worn to represent sacrifices. This applied to Lent but may also apply to the time Mary has spent imprisoned and the sacrifices her loyal followers make to be associated with her. Blue vestments are traditionally for the “Feast of Mary” - in reference of course to the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and not Mary Stuart but the name is a wonderful coincidence for us. In fact, this “Feast of Mary” celebrates her death, subsequent ascension to heaven and is traditionally held during the month of January. In this production the events of the play take place over the span of two weeks as we near Mary’s death. As Mary Stuart was executed February 8th of 1587, the play would overlap with the Catholic Feast of Mary.

#### *Accessories and Hair*

Penicuik jewels are known relics worn by Mary Queen of Scots. An impressive collection of gold and silver lockets, necklace, and pendants, these elaborate jewels influence the accessories worn in Mary’s Drag House.

Pearls are well known as the signature jewel associated with Elizabeth. Symbolically they represent purity and connections to virginal goddesses. In all heavily symbolic Tudor portraits Queen Elizabeth is adorned with expensive pearls in her collars, clothing, jewels, and hair. As a result pearls are an element I have chosen to keep consistent throughout Elizabeth and her drag house’s costume design.

Mary’s multitudes of luxurious gold and silver jewels in contrast to Elizabeth’s simplicity and pearls aims to reflect these historically significant jewels for either monarch. They also symbolize different ideologies towards ceremonial practices in the Catholic and Protestant churches respectively.

Finally, it was important to me that Queen Elizabeth and Mary both have bold red hair. Though one will have warm copper hair and the other has a cooler burgundy, it serves as a reminder of their familial ties as cousins.

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#### Character: Queen Elizabeth

**Inspirations for Design:** In part to legitimize her power and claim to the throne of England, Queen Elizabeth frequently compares herself to her father King Henry VIII. This is demonstrated visually in clothing and portraits, and in action such as religious affiliations and speeches. Our Elizabeth presents as an androgynous drag performer caught between the power they gain from being a man on the throne and femininity used against her each time they want to embrace it. As King Henry VIII in portraits she sports an enhanced cod-piece and fiery red beard...in this show a glitter beard. Bright red, based on the Tudor Red Rose, and signature pearls are employed in a more contemporary headpiece and jewellery.



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#### **Character: Hannah Kennedy**

**Inspirations for Design:** As Mary's devoted nurse, Hannah Kennedy would do anything for Mary. In their drag persona they try to emulate her power and appearance in their own way. She strongly reflects Mary's colour palette and jewellery, right down to the velvet choker. Kennedy is younger and more impulsive than the stoic, polished Mary. From my script analysis and conversations with the actress I have created a hybrid Shawn Hunter and Baby Spice costume design. This has led me to developing a mid to late 1990s style for Hannah Kennedy. One of the prominent elements that was added through the cast's quick drag practices is Kennedy's unibrow. The actress tried it out and I loved it! Kennedy encourages Mary to embrace her natural features and femininity proudly. I think it is perfectly fitting that Kennedy applies that same confidence and body positivity into her own unique drag style.

