




The fit between the anthropological theories and the novels here is so compelling as to emphasize how fully the characters themselves index what their authors understood as stages of cultural evolution. This approach, then, showcases how little novels ultimately push back against anthropology's conflation of women's agency with biology. Without explicitly highlighting this consequence, *Primitive Marriage* problematizes characterological interiority, like recent work by Megan Ward, S. Pearl Brilmyer, and others that takes novels seriously as theories of character and action. Characters come to animate what evolved, over the course of the century, into increasingly deterministic positions on sexual choice as the crux of the modern, a movement with the potential to diminish the existential and psychological texture of narrative—its interest what it feels like to experience the erasure of the choice one thought one had. Even while contending against the teleological impulses of their theories, *Primitive Marriage* shows, Victorian thinkers and writers align against the lived experiences of the troubled women they imagined. If nonconsensual capture was ostensibly a thing of the historical past, representational capture remained all too present.

doi:10.1017/jbr.2024.51

Verity Wilson. *Dressing Up: A History of Fancy Dress in Britain*

London: Reaktion Books, 2022. Pp. 352. \$40.00 (cloth).

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(Received 7 August 2023; accepted 27 February 2024)

During twenty-five years as a curator, Verity Wilson honed her expertise in the object-based, material culture research that is a specific strength of this book. Her previous publications examined the myriad contexts within which “Western” consumers borrowed or appropriated clothing and textiles from the “East” (particularly China) during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and—as importantly—the extent to which, as Adam Geczy and Vicky Karaminas discussed in *Fashion and Orientalism* (2021), the reverse was also the case. In *Dressing Up: A History of Fancy Dress in Britain*, she builds on these earlier investigations to examine ensembles specifically created for costumed balls, tableaux, carnivals, and celebrations (within which imported “exotic garments” (13–15) often played an integral part).

While examples of fancy dress (and related accessories) are—as case studies featured in this book show—relatively well represented in museum collections, such garments have seldom been the central focus of exhibitions, and they have only received sporadic and, often only tangential, study, within academic literature. Well into the 2000s, the leading book remained *Van Dyck in Check Trousers: Fancy Dress in Art and Life, 1700–1900* by Helen Bennett and Sara Stevenson (1978). Articles in journals including *Costume*, *Fashion Theory* and *Textile History* have touched on important case studies and themes specific to fancy dress. So too, have chapters within dress history publications such as Kate Strasdin's *Inside the Royal Wardrobe: A Dress History of Queen Alexandra* (2017) and *The Dress Diary of Mrs Anne Sykes* (2023). The most recent, and most comprehensive, entrant to the field is Benjamin Wild's *Carnival to Catwalk: Global Reflections on Fancy Dress Costume* (2020), which explores a

wider geographical and temporal focus than the in-depth analysis undertaken in this volume, with its tight concentration on a single country.

Wilson's introductory chapter, "Defining Fancy Dress," gestures toward a factor which has contributed to this comparative neglect: Positioned in a liminal space between "fashionable clothing" and "performance costume," the "fantastical" (19) garments on which she centers her study, are directly connected with, but ultimately distinct from, both categories of dress. However, Wilson convincingly demonstrates the need for a greater recognition of the social, cultural, and economic significance of fancy dress, within the field of dress history, and across further academic disciplines and time periods.

The book's eight chapters cover both the key occasions upon which fancy dress was and is worn (balls and parties, carnivals, coronations, and celebrations), and the commercial factors, businesses, and figures that have governed the production of these garments. Wilson's discussion of general and specific trends is supported by a lavish range of images (historic photographs, watercolor designs, sketches, and footage from Pathé newsreels). This visual evidence is supplemented by contextual details from local and national newspapers (accounts of fancy dress, advertisements, and small-ad columns) and further insights gained from close analysis of surviving costumes. Examining these sources in conjunction with specialist manuals, etiquette books, and pattern magazines allows Wilson to expose some of the subtle social nuances and economic considerations that shaped the construction, selection, and reception of fancy dress garments. The depth this range of research brings to Wilson's text is particularly apparent in her analysis of three costumes that retained an enduring position within the "fancy-dress pantheon" of Britain: "Cowboys and Indians," "Pierrot," and "animal disguise" (275). As her examination of the long history of "feathering up" (279) reveals, "Indian" costumes predated the trend for Cowboy and Indian pairing stimulated by tours such as *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* extravaganza (1887). These ensembles both ignored and effectively erased the "many distinctions across divergent First Nation peoples," but were inspired by encounters with "the Indian" through pictures, artifacts, and real Native Americans. Specific decorative features—"beading, fringing and feathers," increasingly combined with grease paint and powder became "key to character recognition" and these tropes continue to influence fancy dress well into the mid-twentieth century, shaping popular ideas and preconceptions about Native Americans throughout this period (277–80).

As Wilson's epilogue acknowledges, while fancy dress "did not slip away from the sartorial stage" after Queen Elizabeth II's 1953 coronation (discussed in chapter 5), the media and businesses influencing and producing costumes has shifted significantly (313). So too have the political and cultural messages fancy dress is employed to promote or challenge. The Notting Hill Carnival (started around 1966) introduced an increasingly diverse and sophisticated range of costumes to British streets. While stylized forms of fancy dress are increasingly being adopted for political demonstrations—a recent example (cited by Wilson) being the Handmaidens—their red cloaks and white bonnets inspired by screen adaptations of Margaret Atwood's novels—that have become a powerful symbol of feminist protest across Britain, Canada, and the United States.

In this evolving cultural and political context it is, as Wilson recognizes, important not only to acknowledge but also to start to address some of the more problematic debates within which fancy dress is enmeshed. However, while she does touch on some of the racial prejudices and misconceptions that have shaped, persisted within, and been perpetuated by fancy dress, this is an element of the text that would benefit from further expansion—particularly given the tension and division exposed by the 2016 Brexit vote, which continues to fuel debates surrounding immigration and British cultural identity. Furthermore, given the complex debates in which (as Wilson has ably demonstrated elsewhere) Orientalism is enmeshed, her use of the term "Oriental" (63) would benefit from a clearer and more precise definition.

Similarly, the significant role fancy dress played in signaling queer identities within historic contexts such as Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball (1928–1938) and the Chelsea Arts Club

Ball (1900–1958), together with the extent to which it continues to provide a vehicle for challenging gender binaries, is touched on only briefly. Further attention could also be paid to the negative backlash, and official sanction, such transgressive dressing frequently excited—and can still provoke.

Nevertheless, this occasional lapse in specificity or depth is amply compensated for by the rich body of research that underpins Wilson's text, along with her ability to convey not simply the practical details of British production and participation in fancy dress, but also the excitement of wearing and examining these extravagant and extraordinary garments. While not pretending to offer a global or contemporary reflection on the evolving significance of fancy dress, Wilson has established a rigorous and fruitful foundation from which future researchers—across disciplines—can start to engage more fully with the cultural and political connotations of fancy dress, both within and beyond Britain.

doi:10.1017/jbr.2024.53

Eve Worth. *The Welfare State Generation: Women, Agency and Class in Britain Since 1945*

New Directions in Social and Cultural History. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023. Pp. 264. \$115.00 (cloth).

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(Received 5 October 2023; accepted 27 February 2024)

Eve Worth conducted interviews with thirty-six women born in the United Kingdom between 1938 and 1952, for the most part, about their “life experiences” and argues that this cohort of women, specifically, should be understood as the “welfare state generation” (1). In *The Welfare State Generation: Women, Agency and Class in Britain Since 1945*, she argues that the United Kingdom's welfare state had such a formative impact on these women's lives that they should be considered a coherent generation, distinct from those that came before and after them. Using her interviews Worth concludes that the welfare state, particularly expansions and changes to secondary and tertiary education between the mid-1940s and the mid-1970s, was a key agent precipitating many of the major changes that this early postwar generation of women were the first to experience: not just working, but pursuing careers, and, relatedly, experiencing what she calls “non-linear” (55) social mobility.

Explicitly drawing from Carolyn Kay Steedman's comment that the welfare state's provision of milk and orange juice made her feel like she “had a right to exist” (1), Worth interrogates her participants' understandings of how different services, like passing or failing the eleven-plus, influenced their lives and made them aware of their place in Britain's class and gender hierarchy. One area where this works well is in her consideration of the women's middle age and later lives in chapters 6 and 7. Worth notes that both sociological and historical studies of, for example, the 1968 generation or second-wave feminists *and* memoirs and autobiographies written by women of the generation she is studying tend to stop around the age of young adulthood, leaving middle and older age unstudied. Worth also encourages us to rethink familiar periodizations when she argues that the 1970s, rather than earlier,