

A Study on the Costumes for the Movie “Dangerous Liaisons”

Kim, Young-Sam
Lecturer, Chung-Ang University

Costume is a form of response to its environment as well as carries its medium of contemporary life in art form. Such expression is frequently used in motion pictures where the director expresses actor's personality through their costume. At the same time, costume is a symbol that reflects the theme of the movie as well as lead viewers to the flow of the storyline as it unfolds. Therefore, the author utilizes visual abstraction by shaping an actor as a visual symbol. Its important with such concept, the author creates various expressions to convert the theme of the movie.

The motion picture offers reflection of social and culture at the same time, it expresses reality by hint of fictional and imaginative way where costume designer has to mix self-imaginative experience (independent idea) and its symbolic image (public belief) to create scenarios visually. Action by association is a powerful tool to utilize in motion picture where its theme can transmit deep interest and emotion to its audiences.

The movie "Dangerous Liaisons" was chosen as having 18th century most enjoyable, most corrupted transformation of noble society as a research subject. The movie is based on the novel "Les Liaisons Dangereuses" by Pierre Ambroise Francois Chodelos de Laclous in 1782. When this novel was released it create huge sensation and some even used as principle of love. There are deep social issues involved in the book that just to call it lovers principle would be somewhat misleading the audience about the value of the book. It sensationally describes the custom of the upper classes admiration and their private lives and having abundance of riches as well as corruption of their moral during the time prior to the French Revolution. The movie "Dangerous Liaisons" is a work of art, which is based on the novel in 18th century that reveals the custom of classical noble society. Also it severely criticizes noble classes, who choose to be full of hypocrisy instead of being honest. The movie is directed by Stephen Frears in 1988, with joint work by both United States and England established by Christopher Hampton and Warner Bros. Inc. The movie also received as the best costume design by James Acheson in 1989 Oscar. James researched Rococo Style in 18th century and successfully revived each and every actors and actresses costume accurately triggered dramatic visual effect and elevated viewers understanding of the plot. This made utmost importance of customs to its motion picture. Many follow up researches of movies Rococo Style's costume and analysis of its personality of each character in that costume were performed to find the importance of costume medium. Also, this research expands the domain by creating fictitious scene for actors and actresses to reveal new costume designs that will create and confirm new analysis by the director and designer's design

explanation.

From costume analysis of the movie "Dangerous Liaisons" features ribbon, lace, flower decoration, and embroidery decorated all over both male and female costumes as it represents 18th century Rococo style. During that time, Merteuile, Tourvel, and Cecil's robe were introduced, and robe à la française displayed for female's costume design and habit à la française displayed for male costume design. Features shown not only with pattern of silhouette, but carefully presents to audiences with other foundations like headdress and accessories. Costumes in the movie were handled in warm pastel colors and materials were picked with the knowledge from careful historical research. For Merteuile who spends most of her time indoor had lack of robe varieties was major drawback. But this movie revived Rococo costume design the best amongst all related movies and calling it masterpiece would be nothing short of understatement.

There are five main characters with costume that speaks by itself. First, Merteuil is described as wicked character that enjoys victory by destroying the lives of the innocents. Her costume is magnificence robe à la française portraying very social person but also cunning as she wants to control the man she is with. Valmont wears habit à la française and redingote decorated by various types of jewelries portraying appropriate elite class. Madame de Tourvel is described as strong, deeply religious, quite and high moral. Her costume is robe à la française, robe à la caraco, and robe à l'anglaise with dimmed pastel color. Cecil is described as innocent and pure. Her costume is robe à la française, robe à la caraco, and robe à l'anglaise with lace are represented with pink, yellow, and white color representing feminine and purity; lastly, Danceny the music teacher is described as timid, narrow-minded but also innocent is wearing frac and redingote appropriate to his social status.

The movie "Dangerous Liaisons" is concrete and clear in their way of describing every characters distinct personalities as background, it presented with completeness of historical research. Performed analysis of original content and converted to motion picture. After gathering and segregating the important storyline into three major scenes as introduction, the story, and the conclusion, fictitious scenes were setup to introduce individual clothing designs. First fictitious scene is setup in salon as social location where Marquise de Merteuil requesting favors to Valmont for revenge to steal Cecile innocence. The second fictitious scene is setup in Cecils room where Cecile plays harp under Dancenys tutor and it become the beginning of loving relationship. The story begins as in third fictitious scene is chosen as aunts house where Valmont is trying to seduce Tourvel by strolling near her house. The fourth fictitious scene is held in the secret room of Marquise de Merteuils house where Danceny's lover, Marquise de Merteuil is enjoying a romantic meeting, which belongs to the second half of the story, and at the same scene there is a hint of a war between Marquise de Merteuil and Valmont.

There are five main characters we need to analyze of their costume design. First, the clothing design for Marquise de Merteuil is made by portraying social queen where she uses her stature to get what she want to reveal her wicked image. Second, clothing design for Valmont is made by

portraying upper class lady's man who is sensual with age in his late 20s. His clothing was bright as his expression. Third, portraying honest and goodness, and innocent as well as representing an outsider make the clothing design for Madame de Tourvel. Her clothing was chosen to be simple design of Marquise de Merteuil. Fourth, portraying her pure image by wearing cute ribbon makes the clothing design for Cecil, and various flower decorated accessories. Lastly, the clothing design for Danceny is made by portraying innocent in the first half when he fell in love with Cecil but also portraying social because of his interest in other woman.

When such processes of research is put into effort, clothes on each characters can effect and speaks to the audience even more in depth than the playwriting can be recognized. My object is to expand the horizon of motion picture industry by costume designing to create power expression by researching for essential theories behind every article of clothing that will be used to portray not only as just article of clothing, but to add personally to them.