Study on Film Costumes of James Acheson

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1. Purpose

The film costume is the tool to visually represent the characters and themes in the films. Thus, the costume is another linguistic system in the films and symbolic form. James Acheson is the distinguished film costume designer realizing the definition of film costumes as they are. He won the costume awards three times in the Academy Film Awards with the costumes of the times that he focused on. Along with his celebrity as the designers for the costumes of the times, he is engaging in the production of contemporary costumes. This study examines how much attractive and remarkable his film costumes are in the films.

2. Method

The film costumes created by James Acheson are analyzed in consideration of the following characteristics of film costumes suggested by Louis Giannetti.
① Period: Appropriateness to the Times, Accurate reproduction
② Class: Income level of those who put on the costumes.
③ Gender: Feminity of female costumes and masculinity of male costumes
④ Age: Appropriate relation between costumes and ages of characters
⑤ Textile: Appropriateness of materials
⑥ Accessory: Use of jewelries, hats and sticks
⑦ Color: Symbolic meaning of colors
⑧ Physical Exposure: Degree of exposure suitable for characters.
⑨ Function: Functionality of costumes
⑩ Image: General image created by the costume

3. Research

James Acheson was grown in Essex in the UK and entered into the Art School in Wimbledon before starting the costume design. He became engaged in the film costume designs from the film of a variety of Monty Python such as ⟨Time Bandits⟩(1981), ⟨The Meaning of Life⟩(1983) and ⟨Brazil⟩(1985).
James performed the costume designs in the prominent films of the director (Bernardo

Bertolucci 1940-, Italy) such as 〈Last Emperor〉(1987), 〈Sheltering Sky〉(1990), 〈Little Buddha〉(1994).

For the film 〈Last Emperor〉, James created a number of costumes to represent the lost world due to the China Revolution. Through the costumes in this film, the public could observe the inside of the royal family in China that was not disclosed to the public. For depicting the times from 1903 to 1969 when Pu-Yi, the last emperor of China, lived, about 10,000 pieces of costumes were created. With this film, James received his first costume award in the Academy Film Award. Then, he took charge of costumes in the second film of Bertolucci.

In 1988, James acquired the second costume award in the Academy Film Award by creating the costumes in the 18th century and wigs sprinkled powder on them in the film 〈Dangerous Liaisons〉 that filmed the novel of Stephen Fear in the 18th century. The film that honored his third costume award in the Academy Film Award was the film 〈Restoration〉 that the 17th century was the background. While James used mainly the orange colors in the films of Bertolucci, he adopted the affluent colors such as bright reds in the film 〈Restoration〉. In mid-17th century, people put on the costumes with wide sleeves, shoes with high heels about 4 inches and wigs as big as half of sheep. The characters should act with such costumes and makeup. In particular, James created the costumes as thinking that this film was produced by the interaction between the costumes and the performances of actors and actresses.

Although James made such a great success, he designed the costumes for the film 〈Spider Man〉 of Sam Raimi beyond his stable roles as the period costume designer.

Like many other prominent costume designers, James has the ability to understand any kinds of film contents. His creative works are impetuous and keen, devoted and out of center in some aspects.

4. Conclusion

James Acheson is known as the designer who is faithful to the scripts to the extent that he makes it important to sit comfortably to read the scripts. James reads the scripts three or four times as thinking what costumes will depict the films in the best ways and how to create such costumes, gets ideas and talks with the directors all day long. James considers that the costume design is to help and develop the actors or actresses and the key point of costume is to help the performance. Thus, James emphasizes that the roles of costume designs are to ultimately support the actors or actresses and to create the world where he exists. Accordingly, James have the unique point of view that the actors or actresses have to put on the costumes not vise versa. His costumes contributed on enhancing the values of films as well as complied with the artistic propensity of directors and satisfied the themes of films.

Filmography

Spider-Man 2(2004)/ Daredevil(2003)

"Mist of Acalon,the"(2001)(mini) TVseries/ Little Vampire, The(2002)

Man in the Iron Mask, The(1998)/ Wind in the Willows, The(1996)

Restoration(1995)/ Frakenstein(1994)

Little Buddha(1993)/ Wuthering Heights(1992)

Nozze di Figaro,Le(1991)(TV)/ Sheltering Sky, The(1990)

Dangerous Liaisons(1988)/ Last Emperor, The(1987)

Biggles (1986)/ Highlander (1986)

Water (1985)/ Brazil (1985)

Bullshot (1983)/ Meaning of Life, The (1983)

Time Bandits (1981)/ "Doctor Who" (1963) TV Series