History Portrayed through Costume Design.

Description

One of my favorite things about watching a film or television series set in a historical period has to be the costumes. I love seeing the fashion of a particular era represented on screen.

Let’s face it though- some films just do it better than others. I’m sure we all have our favorites, and here are just a few of mine.

I’d love to hear what films you all enjoy watching for the costume designs. Leave me your comments and we can discuss what films really nailed this important aspect of recreating a period.

There are so many film costumes worthy of discussion, but today I will just focus on a couple. I could go on forever, but I’ll save those for another post!

The Tudors

It might go without saying that Showtime series, *The Tudors,* truly captured this style of dress that spanned the reign the of Henry VIII of England. Tudor fashion evolved in England throughout a period of almost 100 years.

Tudor fashion is best personified by Henry VIII (1485-1505) and his many wives, so it is a crucial element of the show to accurately portray this. As you will see, the show took some liberties with the costumes in order to make the time period come alive to modern audiences.

The doublet was a standard feature of men's clothing during this time. Women tended to wear form-fitting gowns that flared out from the hips. These basic styles evolved throughout this period due to changes in fashion tastes and influences from other countries.

The series really captures the free-spending ways of Henry VII through the brighter, gaudier fashions he favored and that were popularized during his reign. The king was no stranger to garments heavily encrusted with jewels!

"In my research, I was always looking for historical scenes which would seem quite contemporary even though people were in costume. We didn't want another Royal Shakespeare company or 'Masterpiece Theatre' kind of thing — all these English actors in period costumes with elaborate and totally contrived mannerisms. We wanted them to be and sound real and think real." -Michael Hirst, Series Creator and Writer

Although men of this era wore longer hair and codpieces, the producers unanimously ruled them out. This decision was reach in order to make the series more relatable to a modern audience.

Joan Bergin, costume designer for The Tudors, has explained how her goal was to reinterpret the costumes of the 16th century for the modern audience.

The thinking behind the costumes was to present a deconstructed Tudor that the clothes wouldn't be purist and odd for a contemporary audience"

She says "I wanted the clothes to say to a modern audience: 'how sexy' or 'how magnificent or whatever – not to be strange. So that meant taking the Tudor garments and adding touches that allow you to relate to them in a modern way'.

A feature that I find fascinating about the show is how the costumes evolve for each character.

Bergin explains this role of costumes in more detail:

"What I've enjoyed most is that the series is very character driven which means I can develop each character through the clothes they wear. So if you're watching it week after week, you should be able to tell how the character has developed from the way they look – have they gone up or down in the social pecking order. Anne Boyeln is the most dramatic example. By the end of the series she's pretty stunning!"

Meek's Cutoff

Meek's Cuttoff is a film by Kelly Reichardt that came out earlier this year about the Oregon Trail. Michelle Williams stars in this film as a woman who travels the Oregon Trail in the group guided by Stephen Meek.

The film explores the harsh reality of the Oregon Trail, following the group as they eventually become lost and are forced to rely on a Native American to lead them to safety.

With the possibility of death looming around every corner and water becoming extremely scarce, trust begins to diminish within the group and tensions rise.

What really stood out to about this film were the beautiful wide shots of the vast plains. The washed out colors accentuate the bright fabrics of the dresses worn by the women in the group.

Although life along the Oregon trail is portrayed as bleak, harsh, and almost hopeless, there is an overall sense of beauty in the way the everything is captured.

Michelle Williams has mentioned in interviews how the best thing about starring in *Meek's Cutoff* was the hand-stitched costumes. She admitted that she loved getting fitted for her costumes because they were made to fit her exactly."

She has praised the film's costumes saying, "The wonderful part was the costumes. All hand-stitched by two women, who did everything including the bonnets. Even doubles of our dresses. They stitched us into them, cut us out, then re-sewed us into them."

Let me know what movies or televisions you admire for the costume design! I'm thinking about revisiting England through a different period in our next discussion. *Pride and Prejudice*, anyone?

CATEGORY

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