UNSTITCHING THE 1950s FILM Á COSTUMES: HIDDEN DESIGNERS, HIDDEN MEANINGS

Volume I of II

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Abstract

This thesis showcases the work of four costume designers working within the genre of costume drama during the 1950s in France, namely Georges Annenkov, Rosine Delamare, Marcel Escoffier, and Antoine Mayo. In unstitching the cinematic wardrobes of these four designers, the ideological impact of the costumes that underpin this prolific yet undervalued genre are explored. Each designer’s costume is undressed through the identification of and subsequent methodological focus on their signature garment and/or design trademark. Thus the sartorial and cinematic significance of the corset, the crinoline, and accessories, is explored in order to determine an ideological pattern (based in each costumier’s individual design methodology) from which the fabric of this thesis may then be cut. In so doing, the way in which film costume speaks as an independent producer of cinematic meaning may then be uncovered. By viewing costume design as an autonomous ideological system, rather than a part of mise-en-scène subordinate to narrative, this fabric-centric enquiry consolidates Stella Bruzzi’s insightful exploration of film costume in Undressing Cinema, Clothing and Identity in the Movies (1997). Where this study diverges from previous work, however, is in its focus on specific costume designers to illustrate the way in which the costume of costume drama may operate as a complex component of cinematic signification in terms of gender, authenticity, status and power.
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