

# A Study of the Influence of Female Self-concept on Elizabeth's Garment Behavior in *Pride and Prejudice*

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As one of the visual elements in the film, clothing will undoubtedly contribute to strengthening the visual language. Referred to the fashion design, it is conducive to shaping the character characteristics and setting off the atmosphere. We'll explore the key role of clothing in revealing the story of heroine Elizabeth with multiple perspectives, such as dress design, collocation style and appearance mode in 1995 TV series *Pride and Prejudice*.

**Keywords:** 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* TV Series, Elizabeth, film and television clothing, female images

## Introduction

In 1995, a six-episode British television drama, *Price and Prejudice*, was adapted from Jane Austen's 1813 novel *Pride and Prejudice* by Andrew Davies. By using the clothing role theory successfully, it is in accordance with the original novel. From the calibration of biological sex to the cognition of stereotype impression, then to the construction of social gender roles, clothing plays an important role during the whole period.

Given to the background of Mid-19th Century British Neoclassical period, this thesis will focus on the study in femininity, pastoral style and romance that celebrate in a new take on classicism and ornamentation, mainly stressing on various methods of apparel's expression, such as color, clothing materials, garment piece, clothing and accessories. With the image of the most simple and most appropriate form element, the expression of feelings and values of designer and explanation of the heroine Elizabeth's behavior to evoke emotional sympathy with the audience. Beauty is always all-encompassing. In this way, costumes can be regarded as a passport to behavioral characteristics of Elizabeth as the fundamental basis to explore and analyze characters relationship.

## Analysis of Female Self-Concept on Elizabeth's Garment Behavior

### Brief Introduction on the Role of Clothing in the Film

By using clothing we can change the way to convey information, and it is the most direct way to convey social significance. It is optimized to fully utilize shaping characters by director Simon Langton. As he said, "I want to prepare pale colors or milky white for the girls' clothing to reflect their innocence and enthusiasm. This

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means that we can preserve deeper and richer colors and exotic fabrics for roles such as the Bentley sisters or Lady Catherine de Bourgh.”

Jennifer Ehle, who played 20-year-old Elizabeth, is also worth pursuing its role compatibility. It's true that there is a 6-year age difference, but Jennifer made good use of her lithe and graceful curve, fitting together with princess sleeves, silk dresses and bows to spruce up her personal flavor in lovely Rococo style and charming neoclassical features. Both fashion styles and dressing colors emphasized the femininity, represented Elizabeth's identification of woman and attitude to woman. With the unvarnished design tactics oriented by the designers, it oozes sexuality from every pore on the basis of gently beauty.

### **Various Types of Elizabeth's Dresses and Clothing Accessories**

According to the statistics, long dresses are a staple part of Elizabeth's clothes. In addition to the wedding gown, there are 12 sets of long loose dresses, mainly representing the classicism and pastoral style (Li Zhitian, 2009, pp. 57-58). Most colors are white, flesh and other light colors, while overcoats are made of other deep colors, like blue, dark and tan.

Besides, the patterns include stripes, spots, embroidery, spikes, etc. The most commonly worn jewelry is a black cross necklace with religious significance and the classic clothing accessories are her boundless straw hat, Lace Shawl, brown flat shoes and blue jacket. In the television, the most frequently seen dresses are as followed: black and white spotted long skirts and brown long sleeved skirts with gold line. Having factored Oestrogen, which is responsible for laying down the feminine curves of a woman when she goes through puberty. When the actress are dancing, spinning by herself, her skirt flying out and coiling around her feet, having a supple and graceful bearing, just like drawings.

### **Dynamic Signals of Clothing Display**

#### *Traditional Female Model*

Take the dancing party in the second episode of the TV series at about 26:46 as an example, clothing has a positive impact on Elizabeth's social role. Dressy clothes for Mr. Wickham on social occasion is high on the agenda. When she entered the banquet hall, she took off the silk riding overcoat and wore the beige satin dress at the first sight. The design of square set the mood with her figure, which exaggerated her wasp waist and enlarged her bosom. Achieved through long white gloves, elegance and knowledge were born with her. It amused the audience that the beautiful appearance is a symbol of her gentle inner quality.

After receiving the praise for her good looks, Elizabeth was fulfilled with satisfaction. On the contrary, it was a circumstance which must prejudice her against Mr. Darcy because of his ridicule and belittle on her costumes. Weighing the benefits and disadvantages of the issue, I am inclined to agree that different aspects of Elizabeth's attitude has different effects on her behavior.

Firstly, as a molded rich and unique female image, Elizabeth has its own power to move things around with their actions, commands, decisions, ideas and wills. She is lively, cheerful and flexible, humorous in language expression and not willing to dependent on the context of mainstream patriarchal culture carrier, so she sniffed at Darcy's insolent comments. In *Pride and Prejudice* (Simon Langton, 1995), Elizabeth Bennett (Jennifer Ehle) said, “I had not known you a month before. I felt that you were the last man in the world who I could never be prevailed on to marry”.

Secondly, influenced by the traditional female model, Elizabeth would be unconsciously gripped by male ideology, which takes on the definite localization. In a sense, in the way of pursuing happiness, Elizabeth also needed to meet conventional male expectations by perfect features and noble expression in their eyes, even though she is always longing for independence and freedom. Ultimately, she is still a traditional ordinary woman, who needs to be confined in the traditional mode and pursue personal true love in marriage.

#### *A Shock of Class Culture*

Through the comparison of Elizabeth's and Darcy's clothing, especially in the social environment of deep-rooted feudalism and the coexistence of hereditary aristocracy and the middle class, it showed gender inequality in coverage under the conflict of displaying the mental phenomena of the ruling class. Despite that Darcy is rich, noble and dignified, he ended up looking arrogant and even more out of touch. Under the same class, Elizabeth was plainly dressed and valued simplicity of clothing. Next to Darcy, there is no denying that she has no independent economic strength and property inheritance rights.

From our point of view, Elizabeth's normal dress in daily life is considered as a mediocre ugliness, obesity and bloating in the eyes of the upper class. In particular, while getting along with Miss Bingley, Elizabeth would be ridiculed and satirized because of "the clothes of the people at the bottom", but for Elizabeth, she did not feel ashamed and even dared to respond to all "arrogance" in an optimistic and straightforward way, struggling against the arrogance of blue blood.

In a nutshell, it is through Elizabeth's attitude towards clothing and evaluation response of others that television costumes play an indispensable role in being a kind of lubricant for oppress. In other words, clothing is not a protective layer for blaming and censuring herself in the materialistic society, but a weapon against the unfair class culture, so as to adhere to the persist in the value of individuality and be helpful to refine noble aesthetic sentiment. Only in this way, can the female hold the key to cultivate and shape of free and independent consciousness of themselves.

#### *Social Etiquette and Education*

Aside from the style analysis of clothes, Elizabeth's etiquette education can also be considered from the perspective of dressing movements. According to the episode 5, Elizabeth rushed home to solve the problem of her sister Lydia's personal affair, who were desperate to elope with Wickham. Her passion for him made her blind to everything else. That's what Elizabeth worried.

In the film language, to use lens, light, color and space to express the character. As we can see, Elizabeth quickly took off her coat and all accessories. She slipped it off and last with only one white long dress. On these grounds, especially with the help of this dress, it shows audience that Elizabeth has blend into surroundings with her family in a fast speed-home. Most of us seek familiarity and security when under threat, whether a cozy bed or family's comfort, so in an occasion full of trust, Elizabeth's everyday style is pretty laid-back and effortless, and there is no need to care about too many cumbersome etiquette norms and inconvenient customs.

However, if the scene changes, assuming it ever happened at Darcy's home, the speed and state of Elizabeth's undressing would be entirely different and was the exact opposite of the above dissect. Despite her inner urgency, Elizabeth would still pay attention to her personal image in social occasions, in order to show respect to the host and the culture of the host family and should reflect her status as a classy lady. To

summarize, we can present the appropriateness of clothes and the details of movements to record her thoughts and dig into her internal mind. The rational thinking, exceptional intelligence and keen insight and judgment just followed.

And in the process of self thinking and self-criticism, it is vital to value the reconstruction of female autonomous consciousness. Different collocation styles of clothes should be well utilized, for which can have a constant flow of information to show Elizabeth's critical cognition of herself and the women around her. For instance, although the Bingley sisters are well dressed, she despised their mean human nature; although her sisters loved dressing up, she was disgusted by their clinging to fame and wealth.

On the whole, the education of etiquette makes Elizabeth endow with the quality of establishing a good image in communication. In the long turn, a large gap of dressing style also put Elizabeth under the thirst for tacking great personal pride in her appearance within lucid freedom.

#### *The Change of the Standard Notion of Marriage*

In marriage, women are often regarded as commodities by men and put like merchandise in the male-dominated society. In the sixth episode of the TV series, to made for Darcy a suitable match, in terms of wealth and status over multiple generations, Darcy's aunt Catherine gave priority to strive for family fame and gain rather than Elizabeth's will and thought. It is not uncommon to hear the belief that a couple has to "match" at every level-be it in status, or physical appearance-for a relationship to work out, because they perceived woman's character, knowledge and emotion to be irrelevant. Catherine treated Elizabeth as a hostile spirit and poisonous snake, in her eyes, Elizabeth and her clothing was nevertheless a meaning of poor girl who attached herself to persons in power and wanted to step outside of her family, exploiting Darcy's resources like a vampire. At this moment, clothing plays an auxiliary role in decoration, aiming to process "commodities" and use other means to add value.

In combination with Elizabeth's marriage view, the aesthetic view behind her dressing style can be said to be a part of reductionist explanations of her ideology. She insisted on reminding herself to be flexible, particularly in marriage and family relations, women are dispensable and enjoy equal rights as men. Because in the feudal marriage law relationship, women are always tied, suppressed and harmed, what stroke her most that is not willing to be the object of male desire, not willing to be the foil and vassal of men, but just willing to evince great courage and display her strength on proud self-esteem under plain clothes. So at this very moment, clothing is not a packaging design to realize self-promotion and attract male consumers, nor a magnifying glass to widen the gap with Darcy's identity, but a stage play to show herself.

Faced with Catherine's action in a truculent and arbitrary way, Elizabeth did not chose to be silent. In reserve, she dealt a vigorous counter-blow, in *Pride and Prejudice* (Simon Langton, 1995), Elizabeth Bennett (Jennifer Ehle) said, "Lady Catherine, in marrying your nephew I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He's a gentleman, I'm a gentleman's daughter, so far we are equal. I will make no promise of the kind, and I beg you not to importune me any further on the subject".

In the television, Elizabeth wore the upper black coat. And this kind of talking heads catch audiences' eyes as well as her mood and emotion, showing her anger and rational thinking. Only with this great courage and determination can Elizabeth made clear understanding of being mature and putting the female performance to maximize in marriage relationship on the way of seeking happiness.

## Conclusion

Since in practical terms, from what has been mentioned in the above sections, clothing style, clothing collocation and even dressing action shed light on heroine Elizabeth's behavior habits and personality characteristics.

Firstly and foremost, in response to the audience, it bore resemblance to the iconic image of Elizabeth's beauty, which is a combination of classicism and pastoral style, and a tool to set off women's graceful posture and graceful amorous feelings. Furthermore, as a significant part of interpersonal relationship, the evaluation on clothing connection has an extraordinary significance. On the one side, in Elizabeth's daily social life, the simple and plain label in clothing style made her critical thinking and humorous expression incisively and vividly. Inevitably, the link between costumes and characters' class culture, etiquette education and other aspects is a herald of hook, so as to explore Elizabeth's independent self-confidence, the pursuit of equal marriage and life values.

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