



Sharon Mcardle  
DMAPP

# COSTUME DESIGN

Prison Notebooks

## **Notes on Costume Design**

The Costume should be reflective of the socio political background of the time. It should reflect Macardle's class, stature, background, parentage, belief system and social circle. It may communicate hidden or symbolic messages to the audience. Dorothy's character evolves throughout the play and this should be reflected in the costume, through possible 'layering' or transformative elements within the design.

Dorothy was known to wear trousers which would have been ahead of her time. There had been much dialogue around a possible 'gender neutral' design as opposed to just wearing trousers, which may be seen as an 'overstatement'. Dorothy was arrested at her workplace and it is assumed that she would be wearing her own clothes in prison (having prisoner of war status).

The costume should help establish time and place.

The timeline of the play is from November 1922 to May 1923 and the costume should evolve with the passing of the seasons from winter to spring or from bleak darkness and despair to hope and aspirations.

Colour, texture, shape, style, silhouette and composition will all play a role in generating the overall statement to the audience.

Movement of the costume will also be considered to accommodate the character's action. It should be noted that the actor will be morphing into many characters throughout the play and, therefore will need optimum mobility within the design.

The Costume Designer has read sample scenes and conceptual frameworks and other background information relating to Dorothy. She has been presented with a character profile and a collage of photographs illustrating types of clothing worn by Dorothy and her contemporaries.

### **Initial consideration: Chanel's 'Little Black Dress'**

The Costume (pictured below) was initially consideration. According to the Costume Designer, this Vintage style 'Little Black Dress' became popular fashion in October 1926 when Vogue introduced Chanel's LBD and despite the fact that the play is set some years earlier, she asserted that Coco Chanel designs were for 'a very forward thinking woman' and took a while to find their way into popular culture. The designer complimented the dress's elegance and simplicity. The buttons on the front are purely decorative and lend a revolutionary feel to

the garment. There are side pleats and zip closure at the back. Because it is a freeform dress, it does not cling to the body in any way. The designer remarked on its avant-garde vibe. She recommended that the dress may be an excellent versatile base for adding a shawl and/or a coat, cardigan and possibly a hat for when she gets cold in the prison, as this would certainly break up the blackness of the dress and dismantle its elegance. Additional layers, such as an under skirt in a possible steel grey colour, could be added to give it a raggle taggle appearance, as if Dorothy was resourceful in prison and wearing whatever was at hand in prison to keep warm. She points out that the dress is below the knee, and that hemlines were changing and getting shorter, therefore this dress would be relatively acceptable. She imagines that this could be the dress Dorothy was wearing when out shopping the day of her arrest. The garment itself is not in pristine condition due to its' age and the condition of the dress nicely alludes to the idea that she is in prison and the likely wear and tear her clothes would have received during her time there.



Image: Chanel's 'Little Black Dress'

### Final Selection

A 1920's- 1930's Period dress was selected and hired from the Abbey Costume department. It was a black faded lightweight crepe dress with diagonal pin tuck pleats down the front of

the dress and on the sleeves with pointed collar and five black woven buttons down the middle of the bodice. A blouson effect with skirt.



Image: Left- Original 1920s/30s black crepe dress from Abbey Costume Dept. Right- Replica of costume

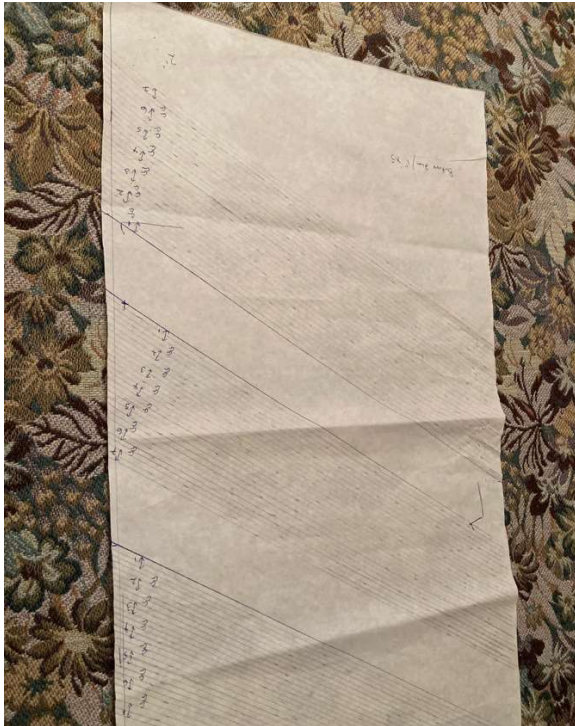
However on closer inspection, the Dress was in disrepair with faded shoulders, tears at the collar where large repair work had been attempted over the years on the dress. It was clear that the dress would not survive the wear and tear of a production run due to the fragile nature of the garment.



Images show original costume in disrepair



It was necessary to create a replica of the dress. I engaged with a vintage costume maker who was able to take a paper pattern from the original dress without having to dismantle the original garment. This process was slow and painstaking due mainly to the amount of micro pleating and pin tucks.



Pin tucks for bodice



Front Bodice and Collar / front facing for buttons



Back Bodice



Sleeve and Cuff

A toile was made from the pattern and alterations were completed over a number of fittings before the final design was transposed onto black crepe fabric.



Image: Toile version of Costume

The blouson effect from the original design did not come through in the paper replica nor in the toile version as the original fabric was warped and stretched to such a degree that the blouson effect had collapsed out of shape. The effect was later constructed by building an inner bodice into the final piece to hold the blouson shape.

The sleeve length and hem length were made longer than the original design as it was more in keeping with the period of the time.