Queen Victoria’s Influence on Fashion

Happy Canada Day from everyone here at the museum! Canada’s confederation would never have happened without the support and influence from Queen Victoria. The longest reigning British monarch supported the joining of Canada because it would make our country “great and prosperous” as she stated. Her influence brought together our great nation, but it wasn’t her only lasting impact.

Queen Victoria left a large statement on the fashion world. Styles and fabrics may have changed, but surprisingly she’s still relevant today when it comes to a bride’s dress. Before the year 1840 women wore any colour wedding dress they wanted, and there was even a rhyme that went along with the colour you chose. “Married in white, you have chosen right, married in grey, you will go far away, married in black, you will wish yourself back, married in red, you will wish yourself dead, married in green, ashamed to be seen, married in blue, you will always be true, married in pearl, you will live in a whirl, married in yellow, ashamed of your fellow, married in brown, you will live in the town, married in pink, your spirit will sink.” This diversity of colour plummeted drastically after February 10th, 1840 when the 20 year old Victoria said “I do” in a white gown. To this day a majority of women still opt for the traditional colour of the Queen’s choosing.

Another influence the 61st Monarch of England brought into fashion was mourning. When the Queen’s husband Prince Albert died on December 14th, 1861 Victoria became depressed and went into mourning for the rest of her life. She wore a selective wardrobe of all black attire and rarely made public appearances. She remained this way for forty years until her death on January 22nd, 1901. This influence hasn’t been as strongly followed as her previous one and has died out over the years, but was still practiced at the time. During her reign mourning of a close loved one typically lasted 2-3 years, but by the 1950’s mourning periods shortened to one year. As time went on mourning etiquette continued to loosen to the point of black just being typically worn at funerals, and attendance was more important that fashion.

Given these examples it is easy to see why this monarch was so popular throughout time. Whether her influence has lasted 175 years, 148 years, or has faded out of fashion Canadians lives are constantly in contact with Queen Victoria’s lasting effect. So next time you attend a wedding, funeral, or Canada Day celebration don’t forget about her Majesty’s presence.

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