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Introduction

Charles Fredrick Worth was a master of his craft and created specialized art for the most well-known women of his time. Clothing is one of the most complex art forms because it has to be able to be stretched and washed and worn constantly. It is art that must move with time while telling a story about the wearer and not falling apart. In Worth's era, everything that was worn had to be custom made and tailored as well as having multiple layers of undergarments and overcoats to maintain detail and shaping of the time. This paper will explore Charles Fredrick Worth's 19th century bustle gowns, specifically the ones he created for Princess Eugenie. This topic will be explored through the physical attributes of the dresses, the material culture theories that best go along with Worth and the dresses he created and how they apply to Princess Eugenie, and how these dresses impacted fashion history.

Background to Worth and Physical Attributes of Dresses

Charles Fredrick Worth created ornate and expensive dresses "during the United States Gilded Age (1865 to 1896)" (Holt 11). Worth was a distinguished Englishman that became internationally famous and designed dresses for many distinguished and wealthy women as well as Princess Eugenie, the Spanish wife of Napoleon the Third (Cole 2). This ability to design for the princess thrust Worth into the French court and made him internationally famous (Cole 2). Eugenie was an important fashion icon of her time and encouraged glamour and excess for her court (Cole 2). Worth was said to have started working for the wife of the Austrian Ambassador

to France, Princess Metternich. This allowed Worth into the castle and helped him be in proximity to the princess. Worth targeted Princess Eugenie as his ideal buyer and when he won her affection, also won the affection of the other women in court which propelled him forward. His dresses were made out of luxurious materials and differed in materials depending on season and use (De la Haye 80). Worth designed beautiful dresses “in lavish styles and embellishments” that became some of the most sought-after clothing of his era (Holt 11). Velvet, fur, and mink were used for colder seasons while linen was used in warmer months (De la Haye 80). Silk and lace were used as finishings on dresses for all seasons for aesthetic appeal and beauty (De la Haye 80). In addition to rich fabrics, Worth used bustles that were popular at the time and all the rage for women to enhance their bodies. Bustles were important to women in this timeframe to make their waists look smaller while also making their bottoms look bigger to create a carrier pigeon or wasp type look for the women. These bustles were mostly made from tulle and silk (Berry 87). Bustles were also made from wire frames for a sturdier look that was less likely to fall or become smashed (Everett 1). In addition to bustles being famous artifacts, Charles Fredrick Worth gowns are artifacts because they were made personally by Worth and show a part of history in their style and how they dressed. Because of the nature of these expensive dresses, each one would have been made specifically for the original owner based on her exact proportions. This was done because the waist and length had to fit perfectly. Each dress was made with such ornate fabrics and detail that one woman would have spent a large sum of money on them, wearing them for many events because of their expensive nature. Worth’s inspiration came from many different cultures as well as fine arts and costumers for shows (Berry 85). He used embroidery from Indian shawls and spent many hours portraying stage and painted costumes for his elaborate dresses (Berry 85). Worth made portfolios of dress designs and had

his clients pick out a couple at a time to purchase from him and used their exact measurements to tailor the dress to the individual (Cole 5). Worth simply came to the palace and showed the ambassadors wives, the princess, and her court the dresses and they picked their favorites as he took measurements (Cole 5). The women would often not need to add styling or much jewelry to the Worth gowns because of their decadence and flashy materials as well as the high-necks on many of his designs. The Worth gowns said so much that often no other words or accessories were needed to add to the affect. All of these points on Worth dresses: styling, materials, target audience, and so on, show that Worth gowns were the pinnacle of style and decadence and how revered they were for their design and beauty. Worth's gowns will continue to be seen as an ode to the style of Princess Eugenie and studied in conjunction with the late 1800s as a looking glass into royal decadence and the wasp style of the era.

Theories and Applications

Charles Fredrick Worth is one of the greatest artists of his time, and the two theories that best align with Worth's dresses and their wearers are Marxist Theory and Sociological Theory. Marxist theory, created by Karl Marx, refers to how people buy objects and spend money due to alienation in society. This theory perfectly goes along with Worth's biggest client, Princess Eugenie because she was alienated and set apart from society in her castle and had no real contact with the lower classes or towns other than her servants who simply told her what she wanted to hear. Marxist Theory also says how people buy based on separation or estrangement from nature/culture and how needs are not real but imposed by ads (Berger). This also applied to Princess Eugenie because she did not have much contact with her French culture that she lived in as she was Spanish. She also did not have real needs but needs imposed by the women around

her and having to be better than all others because she was at the top of the food chain and needed to act and dress accordingly. Needs were also imposed on her by the subjects that look at the throne and expect to see wealth and glamour. Marxist theory also puts emphasis on the ruling class and how they are the only ones that benefit from cultural change (Buzney). In Princess Eugenie's instance, she benefits from cultural change because she is able to obtain new clothes and gain new activities for entertainment. Sociological Theory refers to the laws that describe natural social order and the relationships between individuals and society (Berger). It also sheds insight into the role objects play in life and questions how objects function for different people (Berger). In addition, it explores the motivation for the purchase of objects and the demographics displayed by purchase/aspects of object (Berger). This applies to Worth's dresses because of Princess Eugenie's motivation to be the best dressed of the time as well as the demographics of who could purchase these gorgeous but costly dresses. Princess Eugenie's bustle dresses made an impact on history in how they were cemented into fashion history in portraits for the Princess and her friends.

Impact on Fashion History

Worth's impact on fashion history is seen today in how people are still writing about him and his creations as well as his permanent instillation in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. He used luxurious materials and designed for the richest and more beautiful women of his time, and created a cult following that was displayed in paintings as well as photographs to be immortalized and seen for centuries to come. He cemented his name in fashion history when he created the first dress for princess Eugenie and continued to grow in notoriety with each new dress he created on top of the originals. The gowns of the era were dramatically exaggerated and

were simply for looks and how to be desirable at the time (Everett 1). The bustle accentuated the rear but the corsets drastically lessened the movement and comfortableness of women's bodies (Everett 1). Bustles were a great style of the era that created the desired shapes for women's bodies, however, they did not stand the test of time because of their uncomfortableness. Worth's dresses are iconic and a beautiful view into the society and clothing of the time. While they are beautiful and still revered today for their materials and craftsmanship, they could not stand the test of time in terms of their prices and their silhouette. Women today seek comfort and do not dress up as they did back in the day for mundane activities. While these dresses did not stand the test of time in terms of comfort and accessibility, they did make a lasting impact on fashion history and created a beautiful history for people to look back on and see what was put into making clothes back in the late 1800s and how extraordinary they could be at their peak of design. This peak of design shows new generations not only what the silhouette or style of the era was but also teaches how it was done at the highest level for the richest and most powerful women of the time.

Conclusion

Worth used luxurious materials with inspirations from other countries and periods of time in an innovative way that stands the test of time. He targeted upper class, wealthy women and used expensive materials to create a high-class haute couture brand that caught the eye of Princess Eugenie. Thus, propelling him to international stardom in his ability to create dresses upon dresses for royalty that was able to constantly be photographed and in the news because of the princess. Worth's company grew from Marxist and sociological theories in their

estrangement leading to wanting what others have as well as using sociological theory to create a motivation for his dresses and make them solely available to higher-end demographic.

Figures



“White satin and spangled tulle embroidered with sequins and beads in a cloud and shower of rain design, with lace, chiffon, fringes and silk flowers” (Berry).



“Day dress, gold-colored fine wools, and ‘Liberty’ silk and black-and-gold lace with apron back, decorated with soutache swirls” (De la Haye).

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