

Unveiling the Allure of Gothic Fashion – The Croft (500-600 words)

Over time, the concept of “gothic” and what constitutes it has become steadily more saturated. Whilst the gothic image is still thought of as something subversive and mysterious, its influence has gradually bled into the fabric of modern society. When it comes to fashion, this influence is distinctly visible, but in order to understand it we must find its roots.

It is worth acknowledging that gothic fashion as a concept was itself influenced by external sources - the stylistic elements of this subculture have their roots in the macabre romanticism of the Victorian era, as well as the raw, DIY clothes of the punk movement. The first historically noted appearance of the word “goth” was in reference to a Germanic people who frequently invaded the Roman Empire. It wasn't until the Victorian era that the concept of “gothic” as we now understand it came about. It became the custom for widowed women to start dressing entirely in black, after the fashion of Queen Victoria, but many began to add stylish features such as deep v necks, sequins and lacy, ruffled adornments. The gothic novel made its first appearance; gothic architecture started to become trendy; séances and tarot readings became light afternoon entertainment. Far from being deliberately provocative, this morbid aestheticism was a result of a seemingly insatiable curiosity around death and what might lie beyond.

It is this fascination with the macabre that played into the Goth movement of the 1980s. Born of the original punk movement that bloomed just a few years earlier, this traditional goth (aka “trad goth”) image was heavily based on the styling of musician Siouxsie Sioux: experimental makeup that relied on thick liner and heavy black eyeshadow, frizzy backcombed hair and a fashion sense that combined the punk look with items pertaining to the dark and the occult. As the subculture developed, more elements from Victorian and Edwardian fashion began to be integrated, but the goth look still varied wildly depending on the person and the region from which they came. Distinguishing elements of the gothic style could include anything from dark eyeliner, silver jewellery, black leather boots, laddered tights, bulky oversized coats, ruffled shirts, fetish wear - the list goes on.

Although goth still remains its own decidedly secular subculture, the gothic style has since gone on to inspire many other subcultures, usually operating in tandem with punk. Certain stylistic elements are reflected in the clothing of emos, for example, and the subculture has split off into even smaller, more specific divisions such as cybergoth and goth lolita. Cybergoth combines the darkness of goth with classic rave elements such as fluorescent colours, sculptural features and imagery that references the alien or mechanic. Goth Lolita, which originated as a street style in Japan, combines classic goth imagery with cutesy, romantic elements that could be referred to as Throughout them all, there remains a distinct fascination with the dark and twisted. It was this mysticism of the dark and deadly that captured the imagination of haute couture fashion designer Alexander McQueen. He used erotic, macabre imagery, combined with the romantic flair of the Victorian era. His designs included thick black plumage and corsets stitched like the scars of Frankenstein's monster. In his very first collection, titled “Jack the Ripper Stalks his Victims”, he sewed human hair into the lining of a red stained tailcoat. His runway models were often styled to look more like wild beasts or semi-humanoid monsters than people. McQueen was often inspired by fairytales and folklore, and it is easy to see in his designs how the implementation of gothic style can act as a form of escapism.

Nowadays, we can see the influence of gothic fashion in almost everything. The clothes worn by Jenna Ortega in the hit Netflix show “Wednesday” are nothing like the classic style of trad goths, but still they carry an air of dark mysticism and drama. The puffed sleeves and high collared neck of one dress echo Edwardian fashions, for instance, whilst the dress she dances in at prom shares similarities with the aforementioned mourning dresses of Victorian widows. Perhaps this connection

to the supernatural is too obvious when it comes to Wednesday- let us look instead at the immense popularity of corsets in mainstream fashion, originally a garment worn as support underneath the clothing of Victorian women. The introduction of undergarments as outerwear was popularised in large part by the punk and goth movements, as can be seen in the stylings of yet another iconic British designer, Vivienne Westwood.