

The Maiden Who Was Born to Be Lolita- The Gothic Lolita Bible and its Significance as an Important Object in Fashion History

Introduction

“... ‘I am a special maiden.’ It’s okay for you to think that you know. Even if there are strangers who look away and snicker at you because your skirt is too poufy, or because the ribbon adorning your hair is too big. You don’t have to let it bother you. Sure, it’s aggravating that there still are some confused people who see Gothic and Lolita as unemotional, cheap cosplay, but you should just remain confident and stand tall....

*Cotton candy envelopes your heart. Scarlet roses bloom in your eyes, and the taste of honey forever spreads upon your tongue. Your hair is soft and your skin is smooth. **You are a maiden who was born to be Lolita.** You exist in a cocoon. The light of the sun and the glistening of the moon fall upon you there. You want to stay in there forever with your eyes closed. While you wish for that, the dreams that fall gently upon you there are woven like a sweet layer of powdered sugar...”* -Excerpts from ‘Oh Maiden: Advance with a Sword and a Rose’ by Arika Takarano of Ali Project, Gothic & Lolita Bible US Winter 2009

The Gothic & Lolita Bible (also referred to as the GLB) was a quarterly Japanese “mook” that was first published in 2001 by Index Communications and was a spinoff of the magazine, Kera. This mook, a combination of magazine and book, focused on both gothic and lolita, but to a greater extent, lolita fashion and lifestyle.

Lolita Fashion and its subculture started in Japan, becoming popular in the streets of a Tokyo shopping district called Harajuku. However, the style of Lolita clothing has its origins in

Victorian fashion and draws further inspiration from Edwardian children's clothing and the Rococo period.

In February 2008, an English language version of the Gothic & Lolita Bible was released in North America by Tokyopop. While the English-language version was discontinued after 5 issues in Spring 2009, the GLB ran until it went on hiatus in May 2017, 16 years after its initial publication. Interest and awareness of lolita fashion began entering countries outside of Japan due to the translation of the Gothic & Lolita Bible into English and its distribution of Japan by Tokyopop. The GLB helped to further spread a subculture and style that subverts contemporary beauty ideals, fashion trends and societal expectations with each candy-colored, imaginative issue.

Historical Context

The styles seen in the Gothic & Lolita Bible evolved from Rococo, Edwardian, and to the greatest extent Victorian fashion. This is seen first in the shape of the silhouette. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the high waisted empire line waist was highly popular. However, as Victoria began to ascend the throne, the waist began to drop, ending (often in a point) below the natural waist. With a cinched waist came fuller, gathered skirts- often produced separately from the bodice- with volume achieved through layers of petticoats. At the same time, necklines were high, shoulders dropped and sleeves became fuller, their volume balancing the top half of the body in relation to the fullness of the skirt.

The silhouette became further exaggerated with the introduction of crinoline, and in the mid-century skirts had reached their fullest dimensions, supported by metal-hooped cage crinolines that replaced multiple petticoats. Pattern and decoration were often used to emphasize the width of the skirt, and multiple flounces, frequently trimmed in lace or ribbon, proved popular (Mitchell 2010).

The most popular garments and accessories of the Victorian era for women include the crinoline, the corset, the petticoat, the parasol, and gloves.

With Queen Victoria's reign came new trends that are still seen worn on special occasions to this day. Queen Victoria wore a white dress for her wedding to Albert, not the established norm at the time as it was more common for them to wear their best dress with no regard for the color. However, the color was incredibly important for mourning. "Elaborate mourning rituals found their expression in black clothing, jewelry, and other accessories. Rules governing proper mourning wear were included in popular home guides, newspapers and magazines; and while strict guidelines were detailed for all manner and degree of relations to the deceased- children, siblings, parents and so on- the widow bore the greatest brunt. For a full year, she was to wear only unadorned, matte black fabrics, and to eschew social visits. After full mourning ended, sartorial restrictions gradually decreased: lace and shiny fabric could be reintroduced, and black gave way to lighter hues of grays and purples. Widowers could meet their mourning obligations by simply donning a black armband" (Figure 1) (Mitchell 2010).

Men's attire remained relatively stable throughout the Victorian era. Menswear was the site of some of the earliest innovations in mechanized sewing and ready-to-wear clothing. In the 1800s, men renounced their right to ornamentation and beauty. This is considered "The Great

Masculine Renunciation”, theorized by J.C. Flügel and published in his book *The Psychology of Clothes*. Men rejected the ornate, foppish suiting of the 18th-century dandy in favor of a more austere wardrobe rendered in tones of black and grey. This reorganization of masculinity shows how “clothes make the man.”

But clothes also made the woman. In 19th century English and American society the roles of men and women differed greatly, and it reflected within their clothing. “Men were serious (they wore dark colors and little ornamentation), women were frivolous (they wore light pastel colors, ribbons, lace, and bows); men were active (their clothes allowed them movement), women inactive (their clothes inhibited movement); men were strong (their clothes emphasized broad chests and shoulders), women delicate (their clothing accentuated tiny waists, sloping shoulders, and a softly rounded silhouette); men were aggressive (their clothing had sharp definite lines and a clear silhouette), women were submissive (their clothing was indefinite, their clothing constricting).” (Roberts 2009)

Victorian girls were educated that their duty was to dress well, and they were encouraged to bestow a great deal of thought and personal care upon the matter. Her preoccupation with her appearance in order to attract a good husband, and when she was finally his wife, she was used to displaying his wealth. “The *Quarterly Review* of 1847 described just such a function: ‘... The responsibilities of a wife in this department are very serious. In point of fact, she dresses for two.... Nature has expressly assigned her as the only safe investment for his vanities; and she who wantonly throws them back from their natural course deserves either to see them break out on his own person, or appear in that of another.’” (Roberts 2009) Dress advertised its wearer’s ability to command wealth and leisure to adorn oneself with garments made from expensive

fabrics, designed with exquisite taste and requiring long hours of another's labor to create. The tightly laced corsets, constricting form of the garments, high heels, elaborate hair dress, fragile fabrics, and delicate colors clearly announced that the wearer couldn't possibly do physical labor and needed servants to dress her and maintain her wardrobe. The upper-class Victorian woman presents an image of being a delicate princess that modern-day lolitas aspire to be like.

The 100th Object- The Gothic and Lolita Bible

Lolita Fashion is a street fashion originating from Japan in the 1970s and typically associated with the Harajuku neighborhood in Tokyo. Although the fashion has changed over time, it continues to be a celebration of femininity, *kawaii* (the Japanese word for cuteness) and beauty that does not fit into mainstream fashion trends. Lolitas dress in clothes that are both elegant and childlike; wearing pinafores and somewhat "formless dresses like those worn by young girls of an earlier era... made up of rather subdued colors or pastels and include delicate attention to detail" (Tidwell 2010). "... (They) portray the image of a Victorian doll, with fair skin and wear ing a dress with ruffles, a bonnet and ribbons, flat shoes, and sometimes a blonde wig, a feminine handbag, and a small umbrella. The keywords for this look are *girlie* and *princesslike*." (Kawamura 2012).

As a style, Lolita is different from other girl-centric street fashions because it draws from Western history, fairy tales, and children's literature, creating a unique sense of cute. In addition, there is a focus on new clothes by Japanese designers as opposed to styling with vintage clothes from abroad.

Lolita Fashion is not related to the 1958 novel by Vladimir Nabokov or the 1962 film of

the same name directed by Stanley Kubrick. “While the name and style’s simultaneous emphasis on childlike innocence and adultlike elegance makes such comparisons tempting and virtually inevitable, Lolitas themselves do not see what they are doing as at all sexual or a reflection of men’s sexual desires.” (Tidwell 2012). Lolita is also not a costume. Because Lolita clothing is very intricate and out-of-the-ordinary compared to mainstream fashion trends, Lolitas are often asked if they are wearing costumes for a play or cosplay. But while cosplayers pretend to be someone else by dressing up as a character in a story created by someone else, Lolita is not a costume. People wear lolita not to be a character or to be someone else but to express a part of self that cannot be achieved through other kinds of clothing

The basic elements of a Lolita outfit include a bell-shaped or a-line skirt supported by a petticoat or pannier that is worn with bloomers. Blouses are worn under jumper-skirt (JSKs) with over-the-knee (OTK) socks or tights with rounded-toe shoes, and a hairbow, beret or headdress. Dresses are expensive. Winter 2019 Release Fairy Snow Decoration Jumperskirt from Japanese Lolita Brand Angelic Pretty costs \$328 (Angelic Pretty). This is because of the high-quality lace and fabric with intricate construction and details. Some will sew their own dresses or accentuate their outfit with handmade accessories, bringing down costs and adding their own touch of DIY to the look.

Common motifs found in Lolita fashion include: “Alice in Wonderland, fairy tales (Cinderella, Snow White, Little Mermaid), cakes, candy, doughnuts, macarons, ice cream, cathedrals, famous paintings, ribbons, roses, violets, daisies, gingham checks, high-quality lace, pintucks, crosses, crowns, tartan, stripes, veleveteen, peter-pan collars, heroines from Ghibli films, straw hats, maximum poofiness, A-line skirts, cherries, strawberries, rabbits, cats, poodles,

angels, coffins, hearts, Mary Janes, Vivienne Westwood rocking horse ballerina shoes, skirts swaying with every step, armor.” (Nyugen and Mai 2017)

Some see Lolita Fashion as a result of cultural anxieties regarding economic insecurities of the 1990s and a related desire to hold on to childhood innocence by dressing like children. Others see Lolita style as a way of connecting with the historical past, specifically an innocent, beautiful version of the past. This nostalgia, whether personal or cultural, seems to be an inescapable element of Lolita fashion. For many, Lolita fashion is empowering. They may dress as children from a nostalgic or nonexistent past, but they experience this fashion subculture as an expression of their true selves.

”Lolita is self-expression and self-satisfaction. Just by looking Lolita, girls may appear as if they are subservient and dressing in a way to get male attention. On the contrary, these girls do it for themselves or for other girls. If they care at all about what people think of them, it is the opinion of other Lolita girls. They compete among themselves and criticize each other.... Adornment and self-display are always social. The girls never simply wear Lolita dress and stay at home. They dress Lolita when they go outside to meet their Lolita friends. For some it is an authentic identity; for others, it is a temporary identity with a mask. One thing that is certain is that dressing Lolita takes them to a different world psychologically and emotionally and that in turn affects and changes their personae for that moment.”

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1. Queen Victoria and her children, in mourning for Prince Albert, ca.1862.Getty Images/The Print
Collector/William Samuel Bambridge. (Mitchell 2010)



