

Coyle: Royal wedding lacks 'relevance' to Canadians

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Jim Coyle

“The monarchy’s mystery is its life. We must not let in daylight upon magic.”

— Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution*, 1867.

If there’s one reason, above all, why the forthcoming nuptials of Wills and Kate have not captivated the public imagination — and imagination is the key word — it’s surely found in Mr. Bagehot’s warning the year this country was born.

Way too much daylight; far too little magic.

You needn’t be an unreconstructed Fenian or cranky anglophobe to wonder what universe the news outlets hyperventilating about Royal fever, and the April 29 marriage of Prince William and Kate Middleton, actually inhabit.

“They really need to spend more time at Canadian Tire,” observes Suanne Kelman, chair of journalism at Ryerson University.

Her students, Kelman says, are largely unexcited about this royal wedding — a view echoed in most polls taken in Canada or the U.K. The feeling seems to be, “They’re very pleasant. We wish them well. But we don’t care that much.”

Time, technology, circumstance and personality have all played a role in blowing the fairy dust from Royal-Wedding-of-the-Century Redux.

Amanda Phillips, 33, of Toronto is the daughter of a Liverpool man. She’s walked streets The Beatles did when they were just four lads. She’s attended football matches at the hallowed grounds of Anfield.

She’s also a habitual online follower of the English papers and has noticed, in their photos, the thinner crowds turning out to meet William and Kate.

“Two of my aunts are a bit excited about the wedding, but I haven’t had a discussion about it other than people saying, ‘I don’t care’ and ‘I’m fed up with hearing about it’.”

To Phillips, much is explained by the imperatives of the information age — its insatiable demand and overwhelming supply.

“All the extra television channels and gossip websites have given people greater choice in which reality stars (and the Windsors were probably the first) they choose to follow.

“Thirty years ago, there were basically two print sources for celebrity news — *People* magazine and the *National Enquirer*,” she says.

“Now, they can digest Charlie Sheen’s twitter musings, or read about the travails of the woman who lived with Hugh Hefner when she appears on *Dancing with the Stars*.”

Who has the time, really, for such a bland young couple as Will and Kate?

In 1981, Prince Charles and Diana were joined — in what turned out to be wretched matrimony — before the Internet, the rise of celebrity culture and secular royals like the Beckhams, the piling up of decades’ worth of annuus horribilus in the House of Windsor — even the patriation to Canada of the Constitution.

And as much as those times had greater mystery, royal authority and public deference, they also had Diana’s “star power,” Kelman says.

Women loved her. Men “had strong feelings for her — and not just straight men. She had a very wide appeal.



Prince William and Kate Middleton.

Richard Pohle/THE TIMES

“Diana projected from the beginning the same quality as Judy Garland,” says Kelman. “‘Please, please, love me! I’m just barely holding myself together!’”

That vulnerability and neediness “gave her staying power as a celebrity,” Kelman says. “She was able to sustain the story by moving from disaster to disaster.”

Partly because of those disasters, daylight has washed over Buckingham Palace and its occupants over the last 30 years like waves upon the sand.

Ever less about the monarchy is left to the imagination. Ever more, through royal melodrama and tell-all books and movies like *The Queen* and *The King’s Speech*, is known.

Most of it has been found to be profoundly ordinary family dysfunction. Too often, the only majesty on display was the depths of their vulgarity and height of their folly — the toe-sucking, the tantrums, the trysts, the Prince-Who-Would-Be-a-Tampon.

Old Bagehot himself couldn’t have imagined such hideously revealing daylight were he lying on a beach at some all-inclusive in the Dominican.

Kelman says it’s fairly obvious why “people aren’t interested this time around.

“Kate Middleton seems like a pleasant, well-adjusted young lady who knows exactly what she’s getting into.”

In fact, Kate’s been dating her prince so long — 10 years — she was known as “Waity” Katie to the British tabs and must seem like part of the palace furniture.

She’s far nearer the sort of woman, as she prepares to take her vows, that feminism was supposed to produce — self-assured, professional, independent — than was the abashed, certifiably virginal Diana.

As a couple, William and Kate run like a well-oiled machine, Kelman says, which removes any feeling of sympathy, spontaneity or surprise.

They seem emotionally sturdier, better grounded, more kindred than the bride and groom in the last such extravaganza. They’re handsome, stylish, well-scrubbed, have lovely teeth.

Exactly like the sort of privileged and pedigreed pairs announcing their betrothals in the Style section of the Sunday *New York Times*.

And that’s the problem. Rich and famous, surely. But too little mystery or magic.

Maybe the lack of public interest is teaching, Kelman says, “that people are smarter than we think.

“They recognize that the publicity is way over the top and it’s not all that interesting a story.”

Tom Freda, of Citizens for a Canadian Republic, says celebrity status is all the monarchy has left. “The lustre is gone.

“We hope William has a long life and a happy marriage, but we’d like to free him of his constitutional obligation to Canada.”

Like many Canadians, celebrated actor Sean McCann has no desire to “rain on their little parade.” He even remembers his own brush with royalty.

He was working on the production staff at Covent Garden Opera House 50 years ago during a Command Performance — Verdi’s *Macbeth*, he seems to recall — for the royals. Even got a wave, he says, from Lord Mountbatten.

But in contemporary England, people are preoccupied with a devastated economy, he says. “Working-class families and ordinary people in life are trying to scramble their way back.”

Once upon a time, the bread and circuses of a royal wedding would have distracted “the masses from their difficulties, their miseries.” But no longer.

And in Canada, well, it “really doesn’t have any relevance to the average Canadian.

“There doesn’t seem to be any interest. There are more important things going on. The Stanley Cup playoffs. The Canadian election.”

As it happens, McCann was living in London the day of Princess Margaret’s wedding in 1960. He went to the cinema to see a Peter Sellers

movie.

Come April 29, though, he wishes the young couple well, he plans to be watching the Blue Jays, or the NHL playoffs, or reading up on the election.

"I really think the relevance of the monarchy is past."