

# Determining How Society's Opinion of Women in England Influenced Their Writing

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## ABSTRACT

This investigation inspects the multiple correlations between social prejudices against women and the literature produced by them. Spanning more than a hundred years, the research covers the late eighteenth century, the Regency Era, the Victorian Era, and the Edwardian Era. Some sources did not provide the relationship between treatment and literature produced but instead set up a historical background for England during the above periods. However, all the sources proved in one way or another that there was mistreatment of women present. With the sources covering the correlation between the treatment of women and the literature they wrote, these found a direct relationship and reflected in novels and poems via way of working women and spinsters.

## Introduction

The period this investigation covers ranges from the late eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century, covering various works; this was a dynamic time for women in England, and some sub-topics concerning where spinsterhood, women in the workforce, differentiating views on women's education, representations in literature, and the suffragette movement. Wollstonecraft, one of the first of her kind in feminism, made significant contributions to the world in the last decade of the 18th century. Her *A Vindication on The Rights of Women* established her clear framework for women's rights and her thoughts and feelings. These had a significant impact on the feminist movement as a whole because it is a basis as a basis for many things. The Regency and Victorian Eras took over an entire century and had more social rules and restrictions for women. They could either be married for money, wait around, and marry for love, or not marry at all - and become the somewhat dreadful figure known in literature from the time as the spinsters. These are often portrayed as being lonely and even ugly- simply because they could not find their way to a husband and the institution of marriage. Women's role in the workforce also developed as the Victorian Era continued. They began to see that they did not necessarily need to marry, and even when women remained single, they could find ways to support themselves by taking on certain professions such as cook, maid, governess, and teacher.

Moreover, even within women's advocacy groups, opinions would be different, such as what could be considered an education or not, what that meant to them, and the right to vote. Patterns in social behavior towards women today have proved that humans are creatures of habit- and studying such permanent records, such as literature by those under social scrutiny in a not-too-distant past, helps us recognize the error of our ways.

## Problem Statement

The problem surrounding this investigation is that many people have demonstrated the tendency to overlook the significance of the relationship between society's treatment of women and the literature they produce. This

problem starts with the limited education of women because of the further issues and societal norms that only saw women as homemakers, wives, and mothers. Women (at one given point in the time that this investigation covers) were often only educated in subjects such as sewing, painting, and languages- effectively not granting them the skills to think critically on a larger scale; these subjects had only meant to make them an attractive prospect to their husbands, and the few women who did get an education in science, math, and beyond, were often pushed to the side.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of writing this research paper is to research how societal opinions of women in England affected their writing. While it is maintained that works written by women are crucial against any historical backdrop, this research paper will examine a limited time frame of historical and societal change. But however, limited this time frame may be, it is still a dynamic and lasting one group of years and should be studied as significantly as any other.

## **Justification**

Literature has a beyond recognizable way of truly shaping what a generation thinks, how they act, and what they believe. To know a generation is to be aware of what media impacted them, so - every impact holds importance. This investigation holds importance because of the way it undoubtedly intertwined with both old and modern social settings. During some of the periods this paper examines, there were few published women authors - at least not under their names. It was unlikely that a woman received even a meager education for a long time. Moreover, even so, they often had to be thankful for the small amounts of education they received. A benefit that can be highlighted by letting the world know about this topic is that being informed serves as a form of enlightenment and seeing that the world has mostly stayed the same from so many things.

## **Research Questions**

1. How did the Regency, Victorian, Edwardian Eras societies' opinion of women influence the literature they wrote?
2. How have women reflected their own circumstances through their literature across history?
3. How has the larger public audience perceived women in literature throughout history?

## **Research Objectives**

1. To analyze and understand the factors that Victorian, Regency and Edwardian societies brought upon women that made them write in a certain style.
2. To evaluate the different ways in which women communicated social circumstances against them.
3. To understand why a larger audience has viewed women in literature in a certain way over the course of time.

## **Theoretical Framework**

When stirring the subject of feminism in English literature, most people would point to Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication on The Rights of Women*. The work reflects popular ideas from the time and contrary arguments.

Wollstonecraft received a meager education and was later criticized for her writing style by the same society, which prevented her from achieving more (Roberts, 1998). However, how women wrote changed since the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the Regency Era. They were clumped into two "generations" given their similar subjects and writing styles (Kellor, 2006). However, from this time also sprung the famous and lasting works of Jane Austen, contrary to assumption, were very much feminist for her time- such as Elizabeth Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice*, who is portrayed as clever, proficient, honest, and witty (Shabir et al., N.D). From Austen's time, literature would grow in the Victorian Era - it would become bolder and cover such subjects as the implication of Lesbian characters and the symbolism of death as freedom. Although Lesbian representation in literature is paramount, it is hard to trace because the identity as we know it today was still in its infancy (Ostvold, 2006). As for the symbolism of death in literature during this time, it was a grave subject and seen as a last resort as it was not completely necessary to the story for women to die- but it was utilized as the ultimate form of freedom (University of Missouri, 2016).

## Definition of Terminologies

The word Regency as an adjective is used to describe anything of, relating to, or characteristic of the style of George IV's Regency as Prince of Wales from 1811-1820, and the first documented use of it in this way was in 1811 (Merriam Webster, 2024). As given by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the word Victorian is anything of, relating to, or characteristic of the Reign of Queen Victoria of England or the art, letters, or tastes of her time; the word as it is known in this sense was in 1839, two years after the beginning of her reign (Merriam Webster, 2024). The Merriam-Webster dictionary classifies Spinster (s) as an archaic word. It has two parts to it: an unmarried woman of a gentle family and an unmarried woman, especially one past the typical age for marrying (Merriam-Webster, 2024). It first became widely used in the sense around 1719 (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2024). A suffragette is a woman who advocates suffrage for women, and its first use was in 1906 (Merriam-Webster, 2024). Furthermore, as one of the definitions provided by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, suffrage is the right to vote and exercise such a right (Merriam-Webster, 2024).

## Review of Literature

### Suffragette Militancy in Britain from 1908-1909

Several stereotypes have followed women throughout history; being a violent being is one of these. The suffragette militancy during this period caused the women's rights movement to be seen as violent or even excessive by some for years to follow. By examining different sources, this research clarifies its purpose is to examine the use of militancy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century English women's suffrage movement; this is a component many historians have missed when considering women's suffrage in England.

This site digs into several aspects of women's suffrage in England. It was a movement that began in the nineteenth century but gained pace in the early twentieth. The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) began using militancy to get attention in 1903. They did so by disrupting liberal party meetings, street theatrical performances, and destroying paintings in art galleries. The WSPU would also organize protests, such as one in 1908, where they invited Londoners to interrupt a session in the House of Commons.

In contrast, it also covers groups such as the WFL (Women's Freedom League). The WFL was made up of a group of former members of the WSPU and broke away when they began to disagree with the WSPU leadership, showing that it is impossible to lump all feminists together. Overall, the concept of suffragette militancy is a form of what we would today call "visibility politics." In this regard, the source was able to elaborate:

On 9 October 1908, the WSPU issued a handbill inviting Londoners to join the organization in a deputation to the House of Commons, setting off a chain of events culminating in the arrests and public trial of three Union officials, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst and "General" Flora Drummond. Within 43 days of its release, the handbill's wording— "help the suffragettes to rush the House of Commons" — prompted the Home Office to initiate proceedings against the women on the grounds that they were inciting crowds to violence.

[...]

The WEL's deployment of the language of constitutionalism in the summer of 1909 strove to appropriate the terminology of male radical protest. Repeatedly, the WEL argued in the language of radicalism for women's suffrage, adopting a masculine political identity that served both to legitimate its own protest and to distance itself from the protests of the WSPU.

[...]

From the beginning, WFL commentators implicitly compared the "siege" with earlier WSPU protests. (Mayhall, 2014)

As the other sources in this research imply, the societal treatment of women had many direct consequences. This source aids this by seeking to cover a part of the English feminist/suffragette movement that is rarely ever discussed by historians. In it, the author details what we know about the women's suffrage movement in England and aspects of the movement, such as suffragette militancy. The definition of this is simply the use of violence in the fight for the right to vote. This source holds importance in this investigation because it clearly shows that women who truly wanted the right to vote did not intend to obtain it by going quietly. This information also helps advance the research project because it helps portray another side of the suffragette movement in England in a completely different light. It also serves as a prime example of how fast actions within a movement can spread. For example, militia usage was initially adopted by the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) but later adopted by other women's organizations. Examining all this in a larger picture helps expand the current public understanding of the suffragette movement in England.

## Life and Education of Mary Wollstonecraft

It is not often that the wider population knows so much about the life of one feminist pioneer whose impact is lasting today. This study focuses on the life of feminist pioneer Mary Wollstonecraft (1757-1797), particularly her educational background and an overview of what education entailed for women in 18th-century England. This source also highlights how her schooling impacted her future goals as a pioneer for women's rights in England. Mary resided in Beverly, Yorkshire (roughly 200 miles from London) between the ages of nine and sixteen. There is no formal record of her schooling while living there, although her husband William Godwin mentions that she attended a Beverly day school; there is no formal record of what subjects she studied there. In her later years, she acquired broader knowledge in arithmetic, literature, science, history, and languages, including French. This knowledge across a wide range of subjects aided her in presenting arguments favoring women's education in *A Vindication of The Rights of Woman* (1792). Education in the 18th century for women focused on developing skills such as sewing and watercolor painting rather than any cognitive skills. She strongly argued against this, presenting the argument that women could overcome deficiencies that women presented as a result of receiving a meager education with a system of education for women that strengthened their intellectual faculties, with an emphasis on logical thinking achieved through the study of mathematics, history, science, languages, and literature. Unfortunately for Wollstonecraft's ideas, there were many, many men and even women in eighteenth-century England who thought that a woman's capabilities were less than a man's. "Women receive only a disorderly kind of education, seldom...with the degree of exactness that men, who from their infancy...observe." (Wollstonecraft, 1792) Regarding the specifics of this topic, the source goes into detail by stating:

By the time Mary matured she had acquired a knowledge of arithmetic, literature, science, history and eventually, the rudiments of French and several other languages. In her later working years, however, she was criticized for an awkward writing style and a weakness in grammar and spelling that may have been indicative of her early schooling or the lack of it. Nevertheless, Wollstonecraft's published work, in spite of flaws, contains many keen insights into the inferior social, political, and economic condition of women in eighteenth century England.

[...]

The limited data from Mary's Beverley days suggests her early schooling included lessons with a neighbouring family of professional educators. During these formative years she also learned at home bitter lessons about the unequal role of women in eighteenth century England. These factors, coupled with the stimulus of the Enlightenment and the social upheaval from England's Industrial Revolution, helped shape the adult woman. (Roberts, 1998)

The salient information gathered from this source indicates that Mary Wollstonecraft's life is the ideal starting point when talking about English feminism. This source is of paramount importance regarding the investigation. It brings importance because it performs in-depth research on a topic necessary to the subject of the research. It also is because it centers around education, specifically women's education in the 18th century. It takes these subjects and applies them to Mary Wollstonecraft, a pioneer in England's early women's rights movement. This connection is essential, as one of the earliest and most famous works written and published by a woman regarding women's rights is by her, the contents of which were impacted by the education she received. This information helps advance the investigation in a simple yet effective manner. In writing *A Vindication on The Rights of Women*, Mary Wollstonecraft set a foundation for a world-changing movement. It would only take off in the Victorian Era but maintains a lasting impact today. It is only possible to talk about women's rights in England, or anywhere really, by thinking of Wollstonecraft's work. She made excellent progress in women's education by being a woman ahead of her time.

## The Spinster in Victorian Literature

The Victorian era was very dynamic; even what seemed like the most minor factors had a more significant impact than we are led to think. This research aims to document and trace changes in Victorian-era attitudes about women, particularly spinsters. It also connects spinsters' fresh viewpoint in England to advances in women's popular poetry. When Queen Victoria (1819-1901) ascended to the throne at nineteen in 1837, there was a cultural expectation: women were expected to marry young, bear many children, and care for them. The Queen swiftly followed suit, saying the same thing. There was an obvious contrast, however, between this type of woman and the spinster (an unmarried woman), especially if she was not "protected" by a male relative (such as a brother, brother-in-law, or father). They had greater legal rights than their married counterparts, but job prospects and socialization opportunities were limited. However, the Victorian era saw more women than men, which was merely one of the reasons for the growth of spinsterhood. The era also experienced economic turbulence, and as a result, middle-class men preferred to postpone marriage until they were financially secure enough to marry. Middle-class women began to reject men who could not offer them the same lifestyle their dads had when they were growing up. Women's prospects began to expand in the late century, and they could create their own money rather than constantly needing to receive it from a family member. Society's attitude toward spinster women shifted from ridicule and mockery to mostly pity, and equivalent sentiments were expressed in literature. A spinster could not be the protagonist since a woman in a novel who had rejected marriage on her own accord and was considered an undesirable heroine. In the research at Iowa State University, Kathleen Hickok elaborates:

"I single woman with a narrow income must be a ridiculous old maid, the proper sport of boys and girls; but a single woman of good fortune is always respectable and may be as sensible and pleasant as anybody else." (Austen, 1816)

[...]

At any rate, it is clear that, despite contemporary opinion, spinsterhood offered more compensation than it might at first appear to do, for some of the most respected and influential women of the century were "old maids." That there were not many, many more such women, since spinsters were becoming so numerous, was due to poor education for women, social pressures against female achievement, and, perhaps, lack of encouragement from within the family. Most of the women writers of the century were either spinsters, or middle-aged brides, or in some other way unmarried during their careers: widowed, separated, or divorced.

[...]

There was a complementary tendency among middle-class girls to reject suitors who could not establish for them households comparable to those their fathers had built up over perhaps twenty or thirty years. (Hickok, 1977)

The relevant information within the source informs that social evolution is fascinating, especially regarding how society has viewed the single woman. The information presented in this source further validates the relationship between English society's opinion of women and their writings. This source holds importance within the investigation because it follows an aspect that must be inspected when discussing the correlation between women's social status and literature written by them in England. Spinsterhood has been viewed negatively in the past but more positively with the progression of time, and this source centers around just that. It details how slow yet present societal change in the attitude towards women changed the women's literary world; this includes how often women's books were read, how much more often they were published, and so on. This information helps advance the investigation by putting an unavoidable piece of a larger picture into place. The Victorian Era in England brought about so much change in England, and the information in this source is no exception. The correlation between societal attitudes towards women and the impact on their writing changed so much during this time, and it deserves to be closely inspected in a larger context.

## Working Woman in Victorian Literature

Throughout history, women have been criticized and restricted from doing many things, no matter how harmless they may be. The dynamics of the Victorian era brought about vast social change, and no corner of society was excluded. This study aims to look at the impact of literature on views about women in the workplace during the Victorian era in England. The author explores the rising number of women entering the labor force during the Victorian era. It was not commonly recognized for them to do so at the time. Women were viewed as "the angels of the home" and were not expected to perform much labor. At the very least, there is no job outside of raising children and caring for them and the family. The source also outlines the key sectors where women worked and how they worked. It also emphasizes how these women were treated as a result of this. The source explains this idea further by stating:

The Victorian era is regarded as the most dynamic time. Its dynamism manifests itself not only in social changes, political reforms, and scientific discoveries but also in the ambiguous attitude towards women. The defining features of that period are, on the one hand, the creation of stereotypes concerning women, and on the other hand, the struggle of women against those stereotypes.

[...]

As Priestley (1974) claims, "the chief occupation of growing girls and young women was domestic service. In 1851 there were in Britain over eight million females of ten years of age and upwards - about half a million more than males - and nearly a million of them were domestic servants of one kind and another.

[...]

It is important to note that the Victorian novels do not provide a complete picture of working women in the Victorian era. The authors tend to picture traditional female occupations while setting aside a number of less typical professional spheres such as, for example, medicine or even politics. Thus, the analyzed texts allow us to obtain data concerning the basic Victorian stereotypes of working women and femininity in general. (Shevchenko, 2019)

The present information is paramount for advancing the investigation because it would seem shocking today that a woman's independence was controversial at one point in history. The source's usefulness provides enough detail about a specific sub-section of the broader topic but also recognizes its limitations. At the same time, the author has compiled very detailed research regarding Victorian-era women in the workforce and how they are portrayed in literature. It is essential, however, because it does a fantastic job expanding the realm within women's workplaces during that time, besides working in "Household Service" - such as governesses and teachers. The information in the research also helps advance the investigation significantly because it provides a deeper insight into the working woman's world at the time and specific examples of how this was reflected in popular literature by providing examples from different novels. These include the writings of George Eliot, a woman who famously wrote under a male pen name. It also contributes to investigation by offering different perspectives on working women, depending on where they lived. Women living in the countryside were seen as hardworking and doing what was right. Meanwhile, having a working woman educate herself and have her job in the city was more improper.

## The Case for Victorian Women's Education

Within the world of activism, it may seem more straightforward to put all activists for one specific thing into a single category than to tell them apart. Historically, women- particularly activists - have often been lumped together regarding their ideologies and beliefs. The priority of this investigation is to look into some of the discussions that took place among supporters of women's rights about female education. It also looks at the complex relationship between Victorian feminism and educational reform. This article examines the intricate debates about women's educational rights in nineteenth-century England. However, the movement itself was not so one-sided since there were a variety of feminist interpretations and points of view that broadened the conversation. Among these are religious outlooks and attitudes toward sexual differences. These debates took place in the newly founded Oxbridge women's institutions. As a new presence, women's institutions presented new politics by challenging traditionally feminine ideals. The source elucidates this information by stating:

Yet the relationship between feminism and women's education was by no means straightforward. The foundation of girls' schools and women's colleges also involved men and women who did not necessarily identify with a broader set of feminist politics.

[...]

Even as we recognize the ambiguous relationship that many female educational reformers had with the women's movement, it is worth remembering that all were fighting in the face of entrenched and widespread opposition to educating women outside the home (Howarth & Curthoys, 1987, pp. 214-215). 15). Their schools and colleges were undoubtedly established as part of a more general reform of education, but the very fact of their being for women rather than men radically shifted the grounds upon which they sought legitimacy. Not only did the pioneers of women's education face far greater obstacles than reformers of the boys' public schools

and ancient universities; for women to promote public and professional values within their institutions represented a far greater challenge to dominant ideas of acceptable female conduct (Levine, 1990, p.147). (Schwartz, 2011)

The information in this source and its importance within the investigation is that, like many things throughout history, people tend to think all feminists were and still are the same. Besides being paramount to the investigation, the source's information shows variety within the subject matter. This source is essential within the investigation for several reasons. It is about the debates between women's rights advocates and education reformers in 19th-century England and highlights the complexity of Victorian feminism. It also presents a perspective that historians have long thought about - that if the historical campaign for women's schools and colleges can be term 'feminist' - but maintains that there are different feminist theories. This argument, of course, is founded on the basis that there was so much division between the advocates for women's rights - educational reformers were divided by religious beliefs, what type of education they were advocating for, and their thoughts on sexual difference. The information helps advance the investigation considerably. It does so because it helps eliminate the notion that all reformers and advocates thought similarly or similarly. It presents these by citing different works about women who belonged to these movements.

## Lesbians in Victorian Literature

Due to society's prejudices, discrimination has been prevalent against same-sex couples and relationships throughout history. The purpose of this study is to understand better how lesbian identity was represented in British and American literature from the Victorian Era to the early twentieth century. The source uses examples of British and American literature to investigate how women shaped their identities in the Victorian and early twentieth centuries. These are women whom we might call Lesbians now, although doing so can be challenging since, as the author writes, the Lesbian identity was only "in its infancy" at the time. To ascertain what the Lesbian identity was like, the author looks at both literary and nonfictional works. These are the journals of Englishwoman Anne Lister, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, and Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*. All these ladies felt alone in society and sought to express themselves innovatively. While the purpose of this investigation is to shed light on English women, an analysis of American female authors aids in the formation of a time-specific identity. The cited source can outline the following:

The lesbian identity was barely existing in the Victorian time until early twentieth century (Clark 24). One of the reasons was the thought that nineteenth-century women could not conceive of sexual desire for each other, having no words for such feelings (24). During this era, people used the notion "passionate friendships" on relationships between women, where touching one another was widely acceptable. There existed lesbians, but few records of proclaimed women who loved other women. The main evidence researchers and the rest of the world are left with are journals, self-biographies or novels that cover the relationships women had with each other.

[...]

The reason as to why Anne Lister and her diaries are significant to the development of the lesbian identity, is due to fact that the descriptions of herself and her attitude resemble the modern lesbian. Her traits and her personality draw similarities to the social representation of lesbians in the present time, which is why the scholars were taken aback by the content of her diaries. The diaries disclosed the cumbersome and long road through the development her own lesbian identity. Additionally, they show how other lesbian women did not manage to accept themselves and their Sapphic feelings. (Ostvold, 2021)

The application of the focal point of this source concerning this investigation is that it may be impossible to fathom how one person knows as much as possible about one subject without knowing little at the same time. While acknowledging a specific sub-topic of a more prominent theme, the author recognizes the investigation's limitations. The goal of this investigation is to examine how the treatment of women in England from



1790 to 1918 examined the literature written by them. Initially, it might seem like enough to cover the subject briefly and choose some literature written by women to analyze. However, this period was a dynamic and quickly changing time in history and thus is more diverse. This source holds importance within the investigation because it covers the identity of women authors in the Victorian Era and the beginning of the 20th century, who would today identify as Lesbians. The source does this well for something quite challenging to trace, as the author claims that this was a time when Lesbianism and Lesbian identity were very well in their infancy, and the women writing these works could still not put a name to their feelings. Furthermore, this source helps advance the investigation because besides covering English women authors of this specific identity, it also covers American authors. It is not the main focus of this research, but it does well to expand it to confer that these women's experiences were somewhat universal.

## The Feminism of Jane Austen

A problem with modern-day societies is that just because something seems different from how we are used to seeing it, people will quickly label it outdated. This study aims to demonstrate Jane Austen's feminist thought by stressing more than simply women in her work. The investigation thoroughly examines Austen's works and how they accurately reflected the lives of many women of her time. They fought for feminine identity and autonomy in society since, as women, they were considered inferior to men. They could not accomplish as much as a guy because it would appear arrogant. Many people today consider that Regency novels, including those written by women, do not present an accurate portrayal. However, the contrary is true: that notion only persists because it is no longer widely relevant. However, Jane Austen's novels offer a very different picture of the meek women of the time, focusing instead on making her major heroines independent, bright, and powerful, consistent with many early feminist beliefs. In this regard, the following investigation can state the following:

Literature holds a mirror to every society, giving a realistic representation of its culture and people. Jane Austen has highlighted different social issues in her novels with the depiction of women at its core. She has presented a contrasting image of women in her novels: women in contemporary society and Austen's ideal women. In Austen's era, women had no power. The word women stood as a synonym for weakness and dependence. Austen challenged the norms and presented women as self-confident, powerful, and intelligent, aiming to change the prevailing thought. Austen was a modernist, demonstrating her reluctance to follow the rules. She broke the social rules by challenging contemporary thought and views. Austen fought against the prejudices of the upper class and class consciousness. Austen depicts the role of women and their status in society. The novelist is sarcastic in her remarks about women who behaved as puppets in the hands of men. Through her narratives, she wanted to ignite women's minds, making them realize their potential. (Shabir et al., n.)

The relevant data within this source outlines that, just like society's beliefs have evolved, so have the ways of portraying them. The information presented in the source further validates that literature written by women at the time was accurate to living people. Jane Austen has highlighted different social issues in her novels with the depiction of women at its core. She has presented a contrasting image of women in her novels: women in contemporary society and Austen's ideal women. In Austen's era, women had no power. The word women stood as a synonym for weakness and dependence. Austen challenged the norms and presented women as self-confident, powerful, and intelligent, aiming to change the prevailing thought. Austen was a modernist, demonstrating her reluctance to follow the rules. She broke the social rules by challenging contemporary thought and views. Austen fought against the prejudices of the upper class and class consciousness. Austen depicts the role of women and their status in society. The novelist is sarcastic in her remarks about women who behaved as puppets in the hands of men. She wanted to ignite women's minds through her narratives, making them realize their potential.

## Death Equals Ultimate Freedom

Several elements throughout history have represented different things in different groups, and Victorian women are no exception. This report examines how nineteenth-century female authors used death to represent liberation. This study from the University of Missouri looks at the topic of death in Victorian literature. While mortality is a common theme in Victorian literature, it takes on a different tone in works written by and about women. Situations like these are due to the disparity in how women were treated at the time, which became a "Society vs. Women" problem. Women in the Victorian era suffered enormous social limitations. Death, being the intriguing and engrossing concept that it is, allowed them to experience freedom that they would not have otherwise. The essay analyzes this by examining several historical literary works, such as Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Felicia Herman's *Records of Woman*. The following excerpt will further discuss this by indicating:

In so examining writers like Charlotte Bronte, Felicia Hemans, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, it is important to note that these women held enormously powerful positions in Victorian societies: the position to express and discern the struggles of British women. And with struggle comes a perhaps freeing death. These women, however, are anomalous in that they rose to a point in which they may inform and inspire the women who had been facing the same obstacles as they-women's education, the 'separate spheres,' views of female artists, and so on. Considering these struggles, a compelling argument for death as freedom is there, and these women hint at it throughout their works. Death can be freeing in 19th century women's literature, particularly in two ways: internally for the woman in a time of romantic, societal, or political strife; and symbolically in the context of 'the Fallen Woman' and purity. (University of Missouri, 2016)

This source is pertinent to this investigation because it can delineate that freedom means many different things to different people. The usefulness of this given source indicates that the way that we see freedom today is not necessarily the same that Victorian women did. This source holds much importance within the investigation. It holds importance because it takes the more general, broad concept of death and explores it in a way specific to Victorian women in the 19th century. Women in Victorian society were harshly restricted in many aspects of life, and many women authors saw death as the ultimate freedom. This source also helps advance the investigation significantly because of the way these women saw death as the ultimate freedom. It further gives an accurate portrayal of Victorian society because it allows us to add a piece to our mental picture of it. A strict, uniform society that was as fascinating as it was harsh and frustrating. Death as the ultimate freedom is a macabre concept - but fully aligned with other notions of the Victorian Age - yet something that no one should have as the means to end. It contributes an essential factor in literature, more importantly, how the treatment of women is reflected in their literature and how we should strive to be a better society and learn from our past mistakes.

## Edwardian Suffragette Literature

Literature can be a personal aspect to people, but it can get somewhere beyond personal when it is based on very real and lived experiences. This source evaluates female authors of the 1910s as neo-Edwardian writers through fictional and autobiographical writings, including suffragette narratives before World War I. It also examines their continued popularity among scholars. This source goes into the identities of suffragettes in England's early twentieth century/Edwardian Era. It seeks to accomplish this by examining both fictional and non-fiction literature. These include works by authors such as Constance Maud, Gertrude Colmore, and Lady Constance Lytton (also known as Jane Warton.) These authors' publications illustrate and evaluate the Edwardian feminist and suffragette movements, shedding light on the movement and revealing suffragettes' persecution. Such revelations further reveal the concept of "Society vs. Woman." The following source showcases the following:

Critics of suffragette fiction, such as Sowon Park and Sos Eltis, note that these works are "grounded in what they presented as an accurate reading of reality", but that they are, nevertheless, complex literary texts that develop new formal and thematic structures "to challenge established social structures and class hierarchies"

[...]

A number of literary critics have enumerated the fresh cast of female characters that populate the Edwardian novel, in light of recent social, educational and employment opportunities for women. Miller has outlined this cast as "the suffragette, the Freewoman, the college girl, the typewriter girl and the spinster".

[...]

The active and heroic angel, linked to historical and mythologised figures such as Joan of Arc, and to transformed visual imagery, appears in women's fictions from the 1910s.

The spinster, the suffragette, and the angel merge to significantly affect the characterization and narrative trajectories of the female characters. (Edwards, 2021)

The importance of this source concerning the investigation is that literature is a mirror of the world in which it is written. Like many other sources, the focal point of this investigation proves that women's writings are further affected by their social circumstances. The space occupied by this source in the investigation is crucial. This research examines several writings by English women authors of the early 20th century, covering both fictional and non-fictional works, to establish interconnectedness within the British suffragette movement and their contributions to the construction of the Suffragette identity we know today. It is imperative to analyze both types of works to converge on an understanding, as each provides ways of contributing to the movement that inspired their creation. Non-fiction suffragette literature work immortalizes a woman's lived experiences, while fiction achieves the same through characters and events that reflect reality. This information advances the investigation by offering insights into the diverse literary approaches through which women, striving for change, left their mark. It allows us to look into the past and learn from it to avoid forgetting the events that transpired and prevent similar situations from repeating. Furthermore, it contributes to the advancement of the investigation due to its author's in-depth writing style.

## Two Generations, One "Era"

Some fields besides science separate people into generations; literature will do this just as much as the study of evolution can. This inquiry aims to distinguish between the two "generations" of "Regency" women authors, as popular media tends to lump together the bulk of the literature written by women during this period. "Regency" is in quotation marks because of media attempts to make the regency period look longer than it was in actuality. It lasted roughly a decade in the early nineteenth century, but many believe it began in the late 18th century due to similar attire and writing styles. This source discusses Regency literature and the years it spans in a specific way. It begins by placing the word Regency in quotes as if it were being used sarcastically or casually. The author uses the term Regency to refer to years that are not genuinely part of the Regency period; this is owing to comparable language and fashion/clothing trends, leading many to believe the "Regency" period lasted longer than it did. The author then shows how distinct these "Regency" writers were by categorizing specific female writers into two generations. The "first generation" spans from the late eighteenth century to 1811, while the "second generation" lasted until 1832. To exemplify this further, the following source stated the following:

The first generation of Romantic women writers, responding to the Enright-tenement claim for universal human rights and the Jacobin ideology of the French revolutionary philosophes, initiated what we now recognize to be a feminist movement, a demand for the rights of woman. Mary Wollstonecraft's pleas for the equal education of women, the admission of women into the professions, even the suffrage for women, were-if not endorsed-certainly heard by her contemporary women writers. Several-such as Catharine Macaulay, Mary

Hays, Mary Robinson, and Helen Maria Williams-overtly supported Wollstonecraft's "a REVOLUTION in female manners."

[...]

In 1811, however, the political and cultural climate of Britain had undergone a radical change from the heady days of the early 1790s. The Terror in France, Napoleon's campaigns, and the paranoid British political response, coupled with the illness of the reigning monarch George III, had made it far more difficult to imagine the realization either of Wollstonecraft's utopian program for the liberation of women or the revolutionary democracies celebrated by Blake, Wordsworth, Godwin and their peers. (Mellor, 2006)

The information presented in this source acts as a parting point to distinguish two distinct groups of writers. The significance of this source in the investigation is paramount. It provides specific information for advancing the Regency Era literature segment. Through thoroughly examining both fictional and non-fictional works, the author effectively conveys and illustrates the existence of two distinct "generations" of "Regency" women writers, highlighting their significant differences. This source plays a crucial role in advancing the investigation by dispelling the notion that all women writers during the dynamic Regency Era form a homogeneous group. It emphasizes that there were two distinct groups, preventing the oversimplification of the diverse perspectives within this historical period. It is impossible to consider any group of writers as entirely the same. Each characteristic, no matter how similar they may seem, possesses unique elements, whether in thoughts, experiences, or more.

## Methods

During the investigation, we used a computer with an internet connection and Google Chrome browser. We accessed Google Scholar and EBSCO HOST search engines to gather the necessary sources for our research question. Even though the internet connection was unstable at times, it was enough to complete all the required tasks. The majority of the sources that we used were peer-reviewed, and for the few that were not, we had our investigation mentor review and approve them to ensure their validity. We did not need to conduct any interviews or questionnaires to obtain information. All of these factors worked together seamlessly, creating an optimal environment for the successful completion of the project.

This investigation was completed utilizing a qualitative historical documentary analysis design, given the nature of the information gathered to answer the research question. Furthermore, the methodology involved in conducting this research was a descriptive analysis methodology. To populate this research, it was necessary to specify the purpose of each of the ten sources used. Furthermore, it was significant to recognize the source's design and approach, indicate the target audience, highlight their limitations, and finally, determine the recommendations and findings contained in each. An analytical component outlining the significance of the data presented in the inquiry was generated, so a descriptive content analysis methodology had to be utilized for this investigation.

## Results

These results will be organized by publication date (oldest to most recent); however, the number assigned to each will depend on the order in which they are placed in the Literature Review (i.e., first source, second source, third source). The utilized search engines EBSCO HOST and Google Scholar proved to be most beneficial for the selected sources of this investigation. The first and tenth sources were not recent, as they were published in 2006. The first source dealt with information regarding the concept of suffragette militia in Great Britain in 1908 and 1909. The tenth source elucidated and described misconceptions surrounding the duration of the Regency era and separated the women who wrote during this time into two distinct groups. The second, third, and

fifth sources were also not recent. The second source, published in 1998, details the education that feminist pioneer Mary Wollstonecraft received during her life. The third source, published in 1977, highlighted the spinster woman stereotype in English literature by women.

The fifth source, published in 2011, delved into Victorian Feminist thoughts on education in England. The fourth source was recent (2019). It detailed the working woman as represented in the Victorian Novel. The sixth and ninth sources were very recent since they were published in 2021. The sixth source dealt with the Lesbian Identity as represented in Victorian Literature, and the ninth with Suffragette Narratives in literature as written by Suffragettes. Both the seventh and eighth sources have unknown publishing dates. The seventh source held information regarding the feminist thoughts of Jane Austen as reflected by the female characters in her novels. The eighth source showed how Victorian women authors saw death as a form of freedom for the female characters they wrote.

At the early stages of the investigation, our main question was:

1. How did the Regency, Victorian, Edwardian Eras societies' opinion of women influence the literature they wrote?
  - a. The sections titled "Two generations, one 'era', "The Spinster in Victorian Literature" and "Edwardian Suffragette Literature" all provide the answer to the separate eras that this question answers. Not one single source could converge on the answer to this question because all of these eras are distinct and dynamic within themselves, and each have their own characteristics.

As more evidence was gathered, one more question was generated to define further the variables of this investigation (feminism, literature by women, Victorian era, social circumstances):

2. How have women reflected their own circumstances through their literature across history?
  - a. The section titled "Death equals ultimate freedom" directly provides the information needed to answer this question. The source delineates how many women authors during the Victorian Era saw the concept of death as the only way to achieve complete freedom from their circumstances. Death is perhaps a very over-used concept in Victorian culture, but it stands different for women.

Such a situation led to the final question:

3. How has the larger public audience perceived women in literature throughout history?
  - a. The section titled "The Feminism of Jane Austen" provides a simple answer to this question. In many instances in today's world, people have taken to criticizing Jane Austen's work for being an inaccurate representation of women. At the same time raising questions such as "Did her writings actually help women?" These criticisms of Austen's work are in some part correct, but only because her novels are not an accurate representation of women today. They are and always will be an accurate representation of the world in which Jane Austen lived and observed the treatment of women.

## Discussion & Conclusion

To encapsulate, there were ten sources in total used for the purpose of this investigation, with each of their different topics related to social prejudices against women and the production literature written by them. Among the sources presented, several topics spoke about feminism as a general topic. However, many had further sub-tones of feminism in literature, as well as representations of women in literary media over a period of more than a hundred years. And some sources used did not speak of literature or literary representation but sought to provide an adequate historical background for women in tandem with the time period that the investigation covers. As these sources converged to answer the research questions, it was found that English society's treatment of women during the given time period had a very profound impact on them as people and as authors. The

poetry and the novels produced by women in the given time period reflected harsh attitudes towards unmarried women, women who worked, those who classified as spinsters, and women who would maybe today identify with labels such as Lesbian.

Furthermore, the presented sources were able to present a more than adequate amount of material to help further the investigation. However, the sources from the sections titled Lesbians in Victorian Literature, Death equals ultimate freedom, The Spinster in Victorian Literature, and Working Women in Victorian Literature were the most helpful. Generally, it would have been beneficial if the sources could outline more information on the specifics about what women felt about the education they were being given. For upcoming continuing research and data analysis, recommendations include securing more years of data and requesting more study resources.

Finally, based on the research conducted, a historical documentary analysis design would be the most useful to continue investigating this topic.

## Limitations

To successfully conduct the investigation, we needed to broaden the scope of our research question to gather more information. This allowed us to create optimal conditions to answer the research question. However, there were external threats to our investigation such as the institution's slow Wi-Fi connection, limited database, and occasional issues with slow computers. If we had not changed the original research question, it would have been difficult to complete the essay.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my advisor for the valuable insight provided to me on this topic.

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