

WAISTING AWAY

The Waist and Women in 19th Century Britain

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Introduction

Britain in the 19th century was a time of rapid change, aesthetics not excluded from this. By looking at the women's waist and beliefs surrounding it as shown through fashion and popular thought, can one determine if a woman's class and status are affected by their the shape of their waist?

Methodology

This work is a primarily an analysis of articles on fashion as well as personal letters published in *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*. I related my findings from this primary source to works published by other scholars in the field.

Literature Cited

A Lady of Distinction. *The Mirror of the Graces, or, The English Lady's Costume*. London: B. Crosby, 1811.

William Barry Lord, *The Freaks of Fashion* (London: Ward, Lock, and Tyler, 1870), 173.

Results and Conclusions

How was the waist initially perceived at the beginning of the 19th century?

"From the dinner hour...the arms, to a graceful height above the elbow, may be bare; and the neck and shoulders unveiled as far as delicacy will allow."

What changed in the latter half of 19th century, where the waist was explicitly defined?

"No young lady could now go into good society with a coarse, clumsy waist like a rustic."

The appropriate areas that a woman could reveal yet remain respectable were the arms and some of the upper chest, body parts that were otherwise generally not sexual in nature. With modesty a priority, a small waist was seen as a temptation.

With the rise of the corset, a respectable body was one that had a corseted waist as it was a visual representation of control and discipline a woman had; they were sacrificing their comfort to express respectability and thus their status and rank in society.

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Further Information

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