

# Unveiling the Enchanting World of Scents and Sensibility Perfume in Victorian Literary Culture



Perfumes have always been emblematic of elegance, luxury, and sensuality. In the Victorian era, however, perfumes took on a whole new level of significance.

They became an essential part of the literary culture, adding a layer of depth to the portrayal of characters and settings in esteemed Victorian novels. This enchanting mix of scents and sensibility fascinated both writers and readers alike, leaving an indelible mark on literary history.

## The Intricate Relationship Between Perfume and Victorian Society

The Victorian era was defined by an obsession with manners, etiquette, and societal norms. Perfume played a crucial role in upholding these societal expectations. A well-chosen fragrance could reflect one's personality, status, and taste, making it a significant part of one's overall identity in the rigidly structured Victorian society.



### Scents and Sensibility: Perfume in Victorian

#### Literary Culture by Jean-Paul Dubois(1st Edition, Kindle Edition)

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

Language	: English
File size	: 2280 KB
Text-to-Speech	: Enabled
Enhanced typesetting	: Enabled
Word Wise	: Enabled
Print length	: 379 pages
Lending	: Enabled
Screen Reader	: Supported



Popular perfumes of the time had distinct characteristics, from the floral and delicate notes of rose and lavender, to the heavier scents of musk and ambergris. These fragrances symbolized elegance, virtue, and sophistication, creating an atmosphere of refinement in social gatherings and intimate settings.

## Perfumes as Narrative Devices in Victorian Literature

Victorian authors skillfully incorporated perfumes into their works, utilizing them as powerful tools to enrich their narratives. By infusing scents into their descriptions, writers could evoke various emotions, establish atmospheres, and enhance the characterization of their protagonists.

For instance, in Jane Austen's famous novel "Pride and Prejudice," the character of Elizabeth Bennet is often associated with the scent of wildflowers, reflecting her free-spirited nature and untamed personality. In contrast, her refined and elegant sister, Jane, is frequently described with the fragrance of roses, symbolizing her delicate beauty and graceful demeanor.

Their suitors are not immune to the power of fragrance either, with Mr. Darcy often being described as having an alluring hint of sandalwood, exuding a sense of mystery and masculinity, while Mr. Bingley is associated with the refreshing scent of freshly cut grass, reflecting his lighthearted and jovial character.

## **The Symbolism of Perfumes in Victorian Novels**

Beyond their descriptive function, perfumes in Victorian literature also carried symbolic meanings, often representing the characters' inner desires, motives, or hidden agendas. The careful selection of scents becomes a means for authors to add depth and complexity to their fictional worlds.

In Bram Stoker's "Dracula," for example, the character of Count Dracula is often portrayed with a scent reminiscent of fresh earth, symbolizing his connection to the grave and his role as an immortal being. Dracula's scent becomes a prominent motif throughout the novel, signifying his otherworldly presence and immortal allure.

## **The Influence of Perfumes on Readers**

Victorian readers were captivated by the olfactory details and the role perfumes played in the characters' lives. Fragrances became an integral part of the reading experience, allowing readers to immerse themselves fully in the intricate world of Victorian novels.

Perfumes popularized through literature quickly gained popularity in reality as well, leading to an increased demand for scents associated with favorite characters or authors. The Victorian literary culture had a profound impact on shaping the perfume industry, as readers sought to recreate the enchantment they experienced while reading their beloved novels.

## **Rediscovering the Scents of Victorian Literature**

Today, we can still relive the fragrant world of Victorian literature through the art of perfumery. Fragrance houses have developed unique scents, inspired by the characters, settings, and themes of popular Victorian novels. These perfumes allow us to reconnect with the captivating narratives and imaginatively visualize the scenes brought to life by the carefully crafted words of Victorian authors.

By exploring the scents and sensibility of Victorian literary culture, we uncover the secret language of perfumes that infused the pages of cherished novels.

Perfumes not only added richness to the Victorian era but also continue to enchant and transport us to an era where scent and sensibility intertwined to create an unforgettable reading experience.

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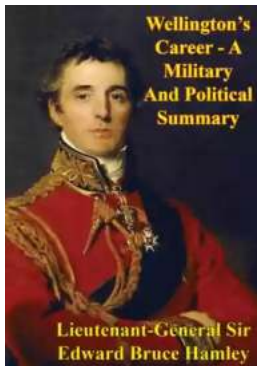
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This lively, accessible book is the first to explore Victorian literature through scent and perfume, presenting an extensive range of well-known and unfamiliar texts in intriguing and imaginative new ways that make us re-think literature's relation with the senses. Concentrating on aesthetic and decadent authors, *Scents and Sensibility* introduces a rich selection of poems, essays, and fiction, exploring these texts with reference to both the little-known cultural history of perfume use and the appreciation of natural fragrance in Victorian Britain. It shows how scent and perfume are used to convey not merely moods and atmospheres but the nuances of the aesthete or decadent's carefully cultivated identity, personality, or sensibility.

A key theme is the emergence of the olfactif, the cultivated individual with a refined sense of smell, influentially represented by the poet and critic Algernon Charles Swinburne, who is emulated by a host of canonical and less well-known aesthetic and decadent successors such as Walter Pater, Edmund Gosse, John Addington Symonds, Lafcadio Hearn, Michael Field, Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symonds, Mark André Raffalovich, Theodore Wratislaw, and A. Mary F. Robinson. This book explores how scent and perfume pervade the work of these authors in many different ways,

signifying such diverse things as style, atmosphere, influence, sexuality, sensibility, spirituality, refinement, individuality, the expression of love and poetic creativity, and the aura of personality, dandyism, modernity, and memory. A coda explores the contrasting twentieth-century responses of Virginia Woolf and Compton Mackenzie to the scent of Victorian literature.



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