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The graphic design of *The Journal of Dress History* utilises the font, Baskerville, a serif typeface designed in 1754 by John Baskerville (1706-1775) in Birmingham, England.

Georges Vigarello, *The Silhouette: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present Day*, Bloomsbury Visual Arts, London, 2016, Index, Notes, Bibliography, 120 Colour Illustrations, 164pp., £30.

This hardback book looks at one of the many areas where art and dress history meet, tracing the origins of the word silhouette through to its twenty-first century meaning. It is well structured, fully illustrated and delightfully easy to read.

Chapter one begins with the invention of the word silhouette in eighteenth-century France and the practice it described. Vigarello explores the way in which artists examined and studied physical characteristics, from early shadow portraits to line drawn caricatures. He then goes into further detail on the art of silhouetting, its popularity, and how silhouetting progressed from faces to figures.

Chapter two explores how artists in the second half of the eighteenth century went on to depict a person's rank and status via physical distinctions in a silhouette. Here Vigarello also explores older artworks, including some by Leonardo da Vinci, which could be viewed as precursors to the eighteenth-century silhouette. The chapter moves on to address the silhouette as a precursor to photography and the appeal of the mechanical process involved in making it, plus the emergence of morphological study.

Chapter three covers innovations in graphic art, including the use of simple figures for immediate impact. The mechanisation of press in the nineteenth century meant that widely circulated newspapers and books now combined text and image, using a simple bold illustration style. Gradually, the word silhouette began to refer to metaphorical representation. Human bodies were divided into physical types by artists, objects were anthropomorphised, and diversity was surprisingly popular.

Perhaps the most interesting section for a dress historian will be the short one which describes the 1820s, where 'silhouette' and fashion first meet. Vigarello looks at how tailoring followed the physical form of the male body, whereas women's fashion focused more on exaggeration. What follows is continued discussion of the simplification of line in the art of the silhouette, mainly in satirical drawings from newspapers and posters by graphic artists such as Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec.

Chapter four begins by looking at the silhouette in late nineteenth century photography – particularly those who were using the medium to analyse movement, such as photographer Eadweard Muybridge and scientist Étienne-Jules Marey. The discussion then returns to fashion in the early twentieth century, addressing both the slimmer shape of women's clothing and the S-bend corset, which led to the word silhouette being used to describe the fashionable outline of the body.

With the advent of a new definition of silhouette, Vigarello notes that 'women's entry into the public sphere changed both their physical contours and their mobility.' This physical transformation accompanied a cultural shift in the 1920s with women urged to focus on a lean figure – the silhouette was now personal rather than external. The quest for the ideal figure began, through devices like girdles and also via exercise. This pursuit of slenderness also applied to men around this time and there was a fascination with changes to the body due to ageing, plus a continued classification of body types. From the 1930s, fashion introduced a new silhouette each season and psychological exploration of the perfect physique was popular.

Although, chapter five looks at the contemporary silhouette, it is short and adds little in the way of historical detail compared to the first four chapters of the book. It discusses the silhouette in a more theoretical way, looking at society versus the individual, covering the obsession with low body weight

and its impact on our quest for an ever more polished appearance. Sadly, this chapter never goes into enough detail about what these changes in the ideal fashionable figure can tell us about Western society.

The *Silhouette* is a fascinating and well-illustrated book that helps the reader take a fresh look at an often overused word. Bringing together fashions in both art and clothing, with a look at how Western society perceives the human body, Vigarello has succeeded in creating an engaging and accessible academic book. However, despite what the title might imply, this is not a fashion history book. If your interest is purely in dress history, I'm afraid there may not be enough relevant content to warrant the price.

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