

Collection by Design: A Paperdoll History of Costume, 1750-1900

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Texas Tech University Press (June 1999)

Unknown \$10.95 (36pp)

978-0-89672-421-1

Any owner of this paperdoll book is almost guaranteed to have the most extravagantly dressed dolls in town. The costumes, drawn from the Jerry Silvermann/Shannon Rodgers Collection at the Kent State University Museum, accurately represent the excesses in dress enjoyed by the upper classes during the latter half of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Ruffles, bustles, petticoats, corsets, hoop skirts are included. These gowns could have been worn by Marie Antoinette, the heroines of Jane Austen, Scarlet O'Hara and Anna Karenina.

The dolls and costumes are drawn by Meehan, an experienced fashion illustrator who began creating historical-costume paper dolls in 1991. Druessedow, director of the Kent State University Museum, provides curator descriptions on the back of each doll and costume, as well as a narrative on the history of fashion during the period covered.

The three female dolls come dressed in their underthings, which consist of corsets and chemises for the two ladies and a petticoat for the little girl. The gentleman doll is pre-dressed in breeches and a waistcoat. From there, the owner has a choice of thirty-one costumes, twenty-one of which are for the ladies, and all of which are exquisite.

The book enables readers to appreciate the difficulty in dressing the upper classes of past centuries. Little girls playing with the dolls will learn that wealthy women of the period needed the assistance of maids to dress them in tight corsets and cumbersome petticoats. The heaviness of the fabrics is sensed even in the paper, which the dolls themselves have difficulty wearing as wide skirts and sleeves limit the placements of holding tabs. Consequently, the collection demonstrates how the costumes reflected social restrictions, especially upon women, and thus provides a rich history lesson along with many hours of enjoyable playtime. It is a book for paperdoll collectors young and old and students of fashion history.

SHARON FLESHER (September / October 1999)

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