



# Beauty and Cosmetics 1550-1950 (Shire Library)

*Sarah Jane Downing*

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Exhibiting enormous power or inspiring incredible devotion, throughout history beauty has been women's chief asset. Each age has required its own standard - a gleaming white brow during the Renaissance, the black eyebrows considered charming in the early 18th century, or the thin lips thought desirable to the Victorians. For those naturally blessed, their beauty could ensure a good marriage, offer social mobility, fame or notoriety whereas those without such obvious gifts would resort to any ends to achieve an illusion of beauty.

Ours is not the only age when beauty is celebrated but also judged and quantified. From the color of the ear to the transparency of the teeth the benchmark for every aspect of beauty has been set and women - and some men - have applied themselves wholeheartedly risking their lives using poisonous chemicals, their fortunes at the risk of blackmail, or the wrath of God, to reach the desired targets.

From Queen Elizabeth I who used dangerous quantities of white lead to give her complexion the illusion of a youthful lustre, to Marilyn Monroe who blended 4 shades of lipstick to emphasise her perfect pout this book will examine some of the more unusual cosmetic practices contemplated in beauty's name.

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