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Morag Martin, *Selling Beauty: Cosmetics, Commerce, and French Society, 1750-1830*.

Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009. viii + 228pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$55.00 U.S. (hb) ISBN 0-80-189309-7.

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Morag Martin's *Selling Beauty* engages multiple narratives within early modern historiography: the consumer revolution, changing norms of beauty and aesthetics, the growing medical authority over women's bodies, and the history of masculinity. Martin's book fleshes out some of the most important details of these narratives, providing rich descriptions of how the marketing, use, and meaning of cosmetics developed hand-in-hand with modern consumer culture, the authority of science, and a new modern sense of self that was more malleable and less rigidly fixed by class hierarchies than earlier models. From rouge to hair pomades, by the late eighteenth century cosmetics were no longer restricted exclusively to the imperative of aristocratic ostentation and were adopted by a broader group of consumers, who applied tonics and tints for their individual private pleasure. The results of this transformation are well-known to historians. As Martin phrases it, "The stark white skin, brilliant red cheeks, and black silk patches of Versailles were replaced by naturally flushed skin and an open, honest countenance free of artifice" (p. 1).

But, Martin argues, conventional histories of the "downfall of paint" provide a superficial story that requires complicating. Relying on a wide range of print and archival sources, from newspaper advertisements, to beauty manuals and medical treatises, to portraits and poems, Martin analyzes the ways in which producers courted new consumers and compromised with, and softened, the voices denouncing cosmetics. In doing so, they created by the early nineteenth century a modern beauty culture in which cosmetics were promoted as both exotic luxuries and natural health aids. Martin's title, *Selling Beauty*, aptly captures her project, which explores the ways in which cosmetics producers and retailers "sold" French men and women on the utility, necessity, and safety of cosmetics. It is a story that ends when, in Martin's words, "The small rouge pot, labeled as safe and natural, could now give the neighborhood laundress natural color as well as mark her entry into the paired worlds of consumerism and fashion" (p. 133). The modern cosmetics industry, she argues, had roots deep in the eighteenth century.

The first three chapters of the book, "The Practices of Beauty," "A Market for Beauty," and "Advertising Beauty," form a unified whole and provide a finely detailed portrait of the consumption, production, and advertising of cosmetics to the end of the eighteenth century. For historians seeking a thoughtful analysis of the history of cosmetics in eighteenth-century France, Martin provides an excellent overview without being encyclopedic. Martin's concise history of makeup describes the difference between *cosmétiques* (used to cleanse and beautify the skin), *parfumerie* (used to scent skin and clothing), and *fards* (*rouge* and *blanc* used to mask imperfections). Her study also discusses ancillary practices, including care of the teeth and hair. Indeed, Martin observes, "The most popular cosmetics were ultimately not for the face but for the upkeep of prominent wigs" (p. 23). The typical perfumer's client, Martin observes, "bought large amounts of powder and pommades but not much else" (p. 23). One of the most important conclusions of this chapter, as well as the entire book, is that although men stopped using visible

makeup by roughly 1780, they continued to buy other cosmetics, including creams, and hair tonics and oils, in great quantities. As Martin concludes, “The feminization of makeup still left room for men to participate in the practices of the toilette” (p. 24). Martin provides conclusive evidence that historians’ narrative of “the Great Masculine Renunciation” of fashion needs to be significantly revised to acknowledge men’s continued participation in the consumption of cosmetics and products for the hair well into the nineteenth century.[1]

Martin argues that by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries shop girls, neighborhood laundresses, and other non-elite consumers participated in the consumption of cosmetics. Martin makes a good argument for the “populuxe” (in Cissie Fairchild’s apt term) nature of cosmetics, yet her evidence for lower-, working-, or even middle-class, practices of cosmetic use is speculative.[2] Her most significant set of sources for the actual use of cosmetics, over six hundred watercolor profiles by Louis Carrogis Carmontelle, which reveal the kinds of makeup used by a range of elite sitters, provide scant views of lower-class use of cosmetics. Martin’s analysis of transformations in cosmetics production and marketing, the subjects of chapters two and three, however, suggests the eighteenth century witnessed a significant commercialization and broadening of the cosmetics market. Whereas previously men and women had prepared their own concoctions based on recipe books and oral tradition, by the eighteenth century a wide range of commercially-made goods, at a range of prices, were available.

Although the perfumers’ guild was the main contender for the production of cosmetics, mercers, wigmakers, and vinegar makers also flooded the market with their cosmetics. A fierce competition, typical of eighteenth-century turf battles between the guilds, ensued. And, Martin reminds us, “from street corners, doorways and stores, new female entrepreneurs sold goods of their own invention” (p. 37). Martin gracefully compresses the details in her narration of these particular corporate rivalries in order to focus on her main point: “The constant pressure of competition, though divisive for the guild structure, forced cosmetics producers to turn to new forms of legitimacy and marketing, which became the basis for the commercial development of beauty” (p. 39). For example, Antoine-Claude Maille, a member of the vinegar makers’ guild, gained fame for his luxurious vinegar and mustard based cosmetics and became *vinaigrier du roi*. Martin argues that “Maille represented a new type of artisan, one who was both a respected master of a guild dependent on royal privileges and also an independent artist and inventor” (p. 47). Although Martin admits that advertising strategies were not well developed in France until the 1830s, her analysis of over 1,600 advertisements for cosmetics printed in French *affiches* in the second half of the eighteenth century confirms that cosmetics producers and retailers “marshaled complex, aggressive publicity techniques,” invoking their royal patents and stressing innovation rather than tradition in their advertisements (p. 53).

Despite the commercial success of cosmetics manufacturers, the use of cosmetics met with considerable criticism in the late eighteenth century from moralists and medical doctors. Chapter four, “Maligning Beauty,” explores the cultural history of late eighteenth-century criticism that linked make-up, deception, and seduction. Martin argues that attacks on wigs and painted faces, part of a long tradition of attacks on artifice in the West, also took on a new purpose in the late eighteenth century. Drawing on the work of John Shovlin, Martin argues that condemnation of cosmetics was neither an attempt to attack the court nor an effort to keep the lower orders in check.[3] Instead it was part of the attempt to distinguish, “a new group of elite, made up of both commoners and nobility,” who “rallied around the concepts of virtuous luxury and natural beauty” (p. 74). Martin bases her argument in part on her analysis of criticism of the *petit maître*, a social type who, “even more than the coquette, pointed to the perils of artifice for both the women who frequented him and the men who admired his looks” (p. 85). As Martin perceptively observes, “the newly naturalized and feminized body was an amorphous entity whose signs and meanings were much less easily pinned down than the regulated extravagance of court dress” (p. 75). It is precisely the “amorphous” nature of the new aesthetic of beauty, Martin argues, that created such strong debate and enabled merchants creatively to market their vision of a safe, healthy and virtuous use of cosmetics.

The manipulation of the malleable language of beauty to serve commercial interests is key to Martin's overall thesis and is the topic of pivotal chapters five, "Domesticating Beauty," and six, "Selling Natural Artifice." In these chapters Martin charts the influence of medical doctors on the construction of new ideals of beauty and the legitimating of cosmetics use, noting that between 1750 and 1818 physicians wrote half of all beauty advice manual, and even those manuals not written by doctors cited medical opinion. Doctors offered women a wide range of advice, such as recommending cosmetics made from vegetable matter rather than mineral bases. Martin argues, "Distancing themselves from the severe criticism of *philosophes*, playwrights, and poets, doctors gained a tenable middle position in which they could decry cosmetics for medical reasons while still proposing to make women's lives more pleasant through their application" (p. 108). In chapter six, Martin analyzes how entrepreneurs quieted criticism about cosmetics by invoking the authority of science and medicine. Sellers publicized their patents and adopted a medical language to stress the utility of their cosmetics in treating, for example, the damage previously done by paint. Martin wraps up her main narrative with the ascendancy of a new discourse of cosmetics in which "Women, taught to be good consumers, were to worry about which cosmetics to buy and from whom, rather than about their moral or aesthetic failings. By the end of the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth century the conversation had shifted from the salons to the stores, from private toilettes to public displays of consumption, and from the texts of moralists to those of doctors, perfumers, and fashion magazines" (p. 133). Overall Martin's argument is persuasive, but many historians of gender and fashion would hasten to point out that moral panic about women's fashions and hair would continue throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The final two chapters of the book, chapter seven, "Selling the Orient," and chapter eight, "Selling Masculinity," present interesting and important details, but are not as well integrated as the previous chapters into the main argument of Martin's book. Yet, no book on the marketing of cosmetics in this period could neglect to analyze the use of images of the exotic orient and the harem to sell cosmetics. Chapter eight, "Selling Masculinity," which focuses on the concern over male hair loss, particularly during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods when energetic youthful hair was strongly prized, lends dramatic support to Martin's central argument that men in no way were banished from the world of cosmetics. Martin's focus on youth in this chapter also provides an important reminder that both individuals' use of cosmetics and broader debates over the use of cosmetics were deeply connected to conceptions of what was appropriate behavior for men and women as they aged; in the eighteenth century, as now, the use of cosmetics was inspired by the desire to recapture one's youth.

In her conclusion Martin confesses that many of the most interesting questions about the history of cosmetics are difficult answer: "Did consumers, faced with the prospect of natural fashion, throw away their bottles or did they continue to paint while advocating purity of face?" "How did women feel about their use of paint in this changing world?" "How did men feel about giving up the pleasures of the toilette?" (p. 176) Martin points out that there are few frank and detailed discussions of actual cosmetic use for historians to draw on. But she does provide two rich anecdotes in her conclusion, one based on the memoirs of the celebrated actress at the Comédie-Française, Mlle Clairon, and the other based on the writings and paintings of Anne Louis Girodet as he struggled with his hair loss. Martin's finely wrought reading of Mlle Clairon's and Girodet's attitudes toward beauty, aging and cosmetics leaves the reader wishing that she had incorporated these two examples, and preferably other glimpses of personal experience, into the main body of her narrative.

Selling Beauty is a well-written and impressively researched book that will be useful to historians of consumer culture and early modern gender history who desire an overview of the basic transformation in the production, use, and marketing of cosmetics in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It complements recent works by scholars such as Lynn Festa and Michael Kwass, as well as Catherine Lanoe's recent book, *La poudre et le fard: Une histoire des cosmétiques de la Renaissance aux Lumières*, which Martin cites, but which appeared too recently to be incorporated into her argument.^[4] Readers

interested in the history of gender, commercial culture, and fashion will appreciate Martin's subtle analysis of social and cultural change that enriches and complicates many of our existing narratives of the gendering of consumer culture. Perhaps most important, Martin reminds us that new eighteenth-century ideals of "natural beauty" had to be sold, and that men, as well as women, would continue long after the demise of *mouches* and powdered wigs, to be seduced by the promises of entrepreneurs who were "selling beauty".

NOTES

[1] John Carl Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (London: Hogarth Press, 1966).

[2] Cissie Fairchild, "The Production and Marketing of Populuxe Goods in Eighteenth-Century Paris," in John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[3] John Shovlin, *The Political Economy of Virtue: Luxury, Patriotism and the Origins of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

[4] Lynn Festa, "Cosmetic Differences: The Changing Faces of England and France," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 34 (2005): 23-54; Michael Kwass, "Big Hair: A Wig History of Consumption in Eighteenth-Century France," *American Historical Review* III, no. 3 (June 2006): 631-59; Catherine Lanoë, *La poudre et le fard: Une histoire des cosmétiques de la Renaissance aux Lumières* (Paris: Champ Vallon, 2008).

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