

Abstract

"I liked this lippy so much I wore it up a Munroe" (Poucher, cited in Street-Porter, 2000, date unknown)

Industrial chemist William Poucher's 1923 book 'Perfumes and Cosmetics: With Especial Reference to Synthetics' became the standard point of reference for the twentieth century beauty industry. The complete works were diverse in content and included a dictionary of raw materials and aromatics in addition to instructions on synthesising the natural essences of perfumes.

Poucher's dictionary of raw materials included "useful reference information" (Jouhar 1991, vi) as well as a history of the compounds. Since the 19th century achievements of chemical synthesis had made great advances and Poucher's explanations of the principles of production processes, chemical compounds, and formulae contributed to the "Olfaction Revolution" (Tillotson 1991, 21). The dictionary provided data about raw materials in a formalised structure whilst inadvertently revealing the connections between raw materials and colonial networks which helped to advance Poucher's career and the flourishing industry.

Poucher is popularly known for his hillwalking guidebooks, landscape photography and unconventional commitment to his work. Rumored to have tested his products durability by wearing make-up and perfume while walking in the mountains, he presented a contradictory 'centred' (traditional) and 'de-centred' (radical) cultural identity, influencing beauty standards.

The intention of this paper is to describe the ways in which Poucher's dictionary of raw materials and chemical synthetics reduced the cultural identification of the materials and their geographical sources coding them with a them and "us" hierarchy. W.A. Poucher's work as a perfumer-cosmetician reveals the power dynamics within the twentieth century cosmetic industry and its far-reaching implications as to how we still determine material and immaterial cultural codes in beauty and fashion.

References:

Jouhar, A. J, ed. 1991. *Poucher's Perfumes, Cosmetics and Soaps - Volume 1. The Raw Materials of Perfumery*. 9th edition. London: Chapman & Hall.

Street-Porter, J. 2000. The unsung hero of the Yardley soap opera. *The Independent* 30 April 2000: 24.

Tillotson, J. 1991. PhD thesis, *Interactive olfactory surfaces: The Wellness Collection: a science fashion story*. London: Royal College of Art.