



## On Blondes

*By Joanna Pitman*

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Number of natural blondes in America: 1 in 20. Number of American females who dye their hair blonde: 1 in 3.

Blondeness became a prejudice in the Dark Ages, an obsession in the Renaissance, a mystique in Elizabethan England, a mythical fear in the nineteenth century, an ideology in the 1930s, a sexual invitation in the 1950s, and a doctrine of faith by the end of the twentieth century. With its powerful imagery of wealth, light, youth, and vitality, built up over thousands of years, it has woven itself into the most popular materials of the imagination. In art and literature, in history and popular culture, blonde has never been a mere color. For two and a half thousand years, it has been a blazing signal in code, signifying beauty, power, and status.

From Greek prostitutes mimicking the golden haired Aphrodite, to the Californian beach babe; from pigeon dung and saffron dyes to L'Oreal-because you're worth it-Joanna Pitman unveils the lengths to which women will go to become blonde. We watch while the blonde as erotic symbol, saintly virgin, or racial elite waxes and wanes throughout the ages, but never disappears. Why is it that blondes rose to prominence in Hollywood and in Nazi Germany at the same time? Why do young Japanese women today want to be blonde?

By looking at the world through the eyes of famous and infamous blondes and their admirers, we are drawn into an intriguing portrait of society. Weaving a story rich in drama, mystery, triumph, deception, disaster and curiosity, Joanna Pitman effortlessly combines the wealth of her knowledge with a sharp and clear-sighted view of the power of the blonde throughout the ages.

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Pitman, a writer for the London Times, offers a history of the world as seen through abundant locks of magnificent blonde hair, from the ancient sexual power of Aphrodite to the California sun-streaked hair of Farrah Fawcett. In this world history, Eve and Mary Magdalene become the blonde "bad girls" who represent forbidden sexuality, eternal beauty and sin, while Queen Elizabeth and Princess Diana gain attention because they continued to lighten their hair as they aged, attempting to harness the power of bloneness. The examples may sound a bit frivolous, but Pitman takes great care to treat the topic with a serious edge, particularly in the second half of the book. The obsession with blonde hair may have created seemingly innocuous Hollywood icons like Marilyn Monroe and Jean Harlow, but it also was essential to the notion of Aryan supremacy, and the author addresses how Nazi Germany attempted to lighten the hair of its population by ordering soldiers to procreate with blonde female citizens. Later on, Pitman looks at 1970s ad campaigns for hair dye and their internal conflicts about whether a woman ought to dye her hair to appeal to men or to feel good about herself (as L'Oreal so famously puts it, "Because I'm worth it"). In this way, the book tackles issues of race, gender and class, ultimately asking, "[W]hy is America, a culture so publicly concerned with overcoming its problems with race, still so fixated on the blonde?" Pitman admits there are no clear answers, but she offers a bright, energetic and witty exploration of the topic.

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From [Booklist](#)

Did you hear the one about the journalist who wrote a book about blondes? No joke, it's true. Pitman, a distinguished *Times* of London writer, has taken up the subject of why golden hair has so fascinated men and, to a lesser extent, women, for so many centuries. She traces the origin of the fetish to Greek times, when the sex-goddess (literally) Aphrodite was depicted as a golden blonde, thereby encouraging any number of naturally raven-tressed women to bleach themselves to match her image. Through the ages, the association of blonde hair with sexual allure has held, right down to the present, when advertisers double-talk women into seeing bloneness as both empowering ("I'm worth it") and seductive ("I'm worth dating"). With such an engaging subject, it would be hard to go wrong, and Pitman's engaging style only highlights the appeal of this combination of history, folklore, and shrewd cultural commentary. *Patricia Monaghan*

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Review

"An engaging and dishy read, "On Blondes will have power-hungry brunettes reaching for the peroxide." - "Entertainment Weekly

"Blondes aren't stupid. Hillary Clinton runs New York, Madonna heads the music industry and Diane Sawyer is ABC's Everywoman. Is hair color a coincidence? Not likely." - "Playboy

"Ms. Pitman... draws interesting parallels between the Nazis' adulation of the blond, the Soviet Union's promotion of the dynamic blond ideal, and 'the development of a radiantly sunlit blond American ideal, the WASP American dream.'" - "New York Times

"Pitman's engaging style only highlights the appeal of this combination of history, folklore, and shrewd cultural commentary." - "Booklist

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