



In the **1500s**, women
plucked their foreheads

In the **1600s**, they
sipped viper wine

In the **1700s**, they applied
star-shaped beauty patches

In the **1800s**, arsenic and
glycerine were in vogue

In the **1900s**, it was
Retin-A and facelifts

And in

2014?

Hermione Eyre reveals the not-so-pretty future of anti-ageing

et me tell you about the new revolution,' Dr Jean-Louis Sebagh, a champion of non-surgical procedures, says huskily over the phone from his surgery in Wimpole Street. 'It's as big and important as Botox was six or seven years ago. Because what is the one weak point in the non-surgical world? *Sagging.*'

He says it with flair, rather as a preacher might say 'sin'. 'Now I have the tool to address this. It is a product called Silhouette Soft. It's a thread that dissolves completely after 18 months, and it has an immediate lift and a lasting regenerative effect, all along the thread. It's been on the market for 14 months now, and I'm very pleased with the results. It really looks chic. It restores fat to the right place, with the right tension. It provides volume, but not too much. Not like all these weird faces we see puffed up like balloons...'

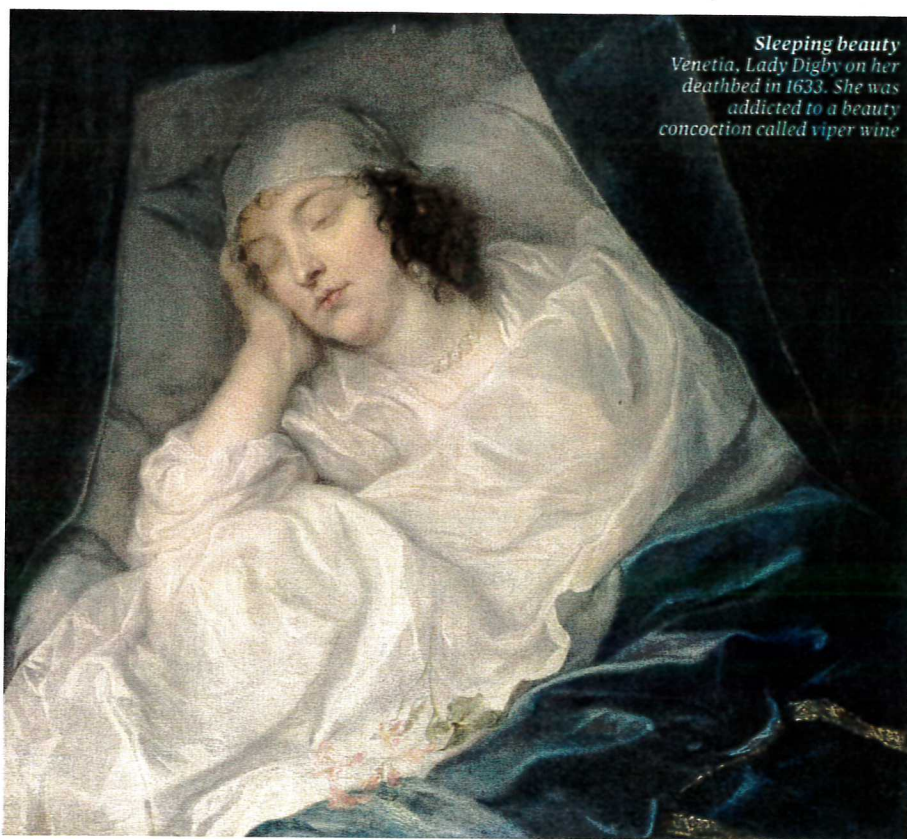
It's worth pausing here to note that we have all come across that person – the one who has gone a little too far with the dermal fillers, or whose face is set in telltale immobility. Non-surgical procedures are becoming so prevalent ('growth in the sector reflects increasing cultural acceptance of cosmetic procedures, particularly among young people,' noted a government report last year) that it's not a question of 'Has she or hasn't she?' these days, rather 'Has it been done well or badly?' In other words, we're living in Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*. Control and delicacy are key in the administration of these powerful new remedies, and Dr Sebagh is known for his artistry.

In his Paris clinic (he divides his time between Paris and London) an embroidered cushion stitched by a grateful customer reads 'Jean-Louis – Docteur, Sculpteur, Magicien, Genie, Merci.' Another demure little sampler says: 'I heart Botox.' He has treated stars including Cindy Crawford, with whom he developed an own-brand range of topical creams; he refused to treat a pregnant Kim Kardashian. He explained to me why he believes dissolvable thread (from £1,200 with Dr Sebagh at The French Cosmetic Medical Company) is the future of anti-ageing.

'Surgery is really obsolete now that I can use the thread to give a tailor-made result. I can use it to lift the eyebrows, lift the forehead, correct asymmetry, or fight gravity. I can give you a Nefertiti lift on your neck and jawline, consisting of roughly half an inch on each side to reposition or prevent jowls. I have used Silhouette Soft thread on ten women today, starting in the morning with a queen of one of the Middle Eastern countries...'

The thread, made of polylactic acid (a term that, with his thick French accent, we had some fun deciphering over the phone), is drawn through the skin after injections of local anaesthetic. The procedure takes no more than 30 minutes. 'We are very aware, when we develop our treatments, first that this needs to be delivered by a major professional,' he says, 'and secondly, that it needs to be a lunchtime treatment. You have to be able to walk away quickly, without bruising. Lots of women are hiding this, keeping it secret from their husbands, their neighbours, their friends...'

No matter how much of a breeze this sounds,



Sleeping beauty
Venetia, Lady Digby on her deathbed in 1633. She was addicted to a beauty concoction called viper wine

'I HAVE USED SILHOUETTE SOFT ON TEN WOMEN TODAY, STARTING WITH A MIDDLE EASTERN QUEEN' DR JEAN-LOUIS SEBAGH

Magician
Right: Non-surgical expert Dr Jean-Louis Sebagh
Bride of Dracula
Below: Kim Kardashian posts a selfie during her 'vampire facial' last year



it is a serious undertaking. When I watched a film of it being performed (by another practitioner, completely unrelated to Dr Sebagh) on YouTube, I was nearly sick. It showed a woman, who appeared physically near-perfect, having dots painted on her face, which a spookily smooth-faced male doctor of absolutely indeterminate age joined together, penetrating the skin using a long, jabbing piece of wire. The Silhouette Soft manufacturer's oily tagline is: 'Connect the dots. Reconnect your life.'

'My concern with this treatment becoming widespread,' commented Dr Ayham Al-Ayoubi of the London Medical and Aesthetic Clinic, based at 1 Harley Street, 'is that only experienced facial plastic surgeons must undertake this. It should not ever be presented to the public as non-invasive. People will get into trouble if they do this in the wrong environment. It must be carried out in an operating theatre, in a sterile environment, with equipment to deal with consequences such as bleeding, infection, seroma [build-up of fluid] or allergic reaction. There needs to be a full support team. Technically this is very fiddly and if the wire isn't applied correctly, it can cause significant facial asymmetry, especially over time.'

Dr Al-Ayoubi is a pioneer in laser surgery, both in his private clinic and with the NHS; he has recently lectured on cosmetic procedures at Queen Mary's Hospital. 'My new philosophy,' he told me, 'is that facial plastic surgery is 5D – it has five dimensions. Not only is the face a 3D structure, but it is also mobile. When you introduce thread or gel into a lady's mouth, for example, this is a dynamic structure – this lady will eat, drink, possibly kiss. And the fifth dimension is: how will this change over time? Over three, four years?'

These are clearly issues to consider during

what should be a long consultation process before starting surgery. Sir Bruce Keogh's report for the government last year recommended that practitioners also perform a psychological assessment to pick up underlying conditions such as body dysmorphia, a mental illness that can lead to people believing they need unnecessary surgery. A psychiatric assessment tool for all practitioners is currently being created at the Centre for Appearance Research at the University of West England. According to the report, 'those who undergo cosmetic intervention are statistically more likely to... have been subject to domestic abuse or bullying, or be on medication for sleep disorders and anxiety. Those seeking treatments are also statistically much more likely to have mental health issues.'

Lying to one's friends and spouse about treatments is also endemic. Botox is often the last taboo within a marriage. He declares her perfect; she knows better. He makes an off-hand remark about old women getting Botox; she thinks: if only you knew...

My novel *Viper Wine*, based on a true story and set in the 17th century, reveals a marriage full of love and secrets. Painting with lead foundation damaged women's complexions, and at the grand old age of 32, Venetia Digby, a famous beauty, was in crisis about her looks. Her husband, Sir Kenelm Digby, brought her snails from the Continent known for their complexion-curing properties (the same breed of snail is still found around their former home in Buckinghamshire today), but for reasons of pride and power, Venetia preferred to seek out a personal apothecary whose services she could control – until she became addicted to his potent brew, viper wine, made of baked snakes, progesterone-rich pregnant mares' urine, and opium.

These days, Venetia would have been going for six-monthly 'vampire facials' with Dr Daniel Sister. In 2008, Sister was the first surgeon in this country to offer the £600 PRP (platelet-rich plasma) treatment, also known as 'Dracula therapy' because it involves giving a small vial of blood, which is then put into a machine and separated, using centrifugal force, into two components – red blood cells (which are discarded, or, if you are Kim Kardashian, smeared over the face and shown off in a selfie – see previous page) and plasma, which is full of human growth factors (ie, the platelets) and, if injected back into specific parts of the body, helps them heal. This fact was discovered in the 1950s by two scientists, who won the Nobel prize for their work, and it was applied to sports injuries (Tiger Woods had it in his knee), dental implants and military casualties before being taken up for cosmetic use. 'I inject the plasma on three different levels: deeply around the eyes and in the jawline,' Dr Sister told me, 'then medium-deep on the cheeks, and lightly scattered across the rest of the face. This has the best results.'

Interest in the treatment spiked when Anna Friel, the 37-year-old actress, revealed in 2012: 'I go to Dr Sebagh's and have a thing called a

No pain, no gain

The new non-surgical treatments



VAMPIRE FACIAL

Also known as 'Dracula therapy', this takes platelet-rich plasma from your blood and injects it into specific parts of the face through a thin layer of anaesthetising cream. Anna Friel and Kim Kardashian are fans. From £540

SILHOUETTE SOFT LIFT

In the latest non-surgical procedure, a dissolvable thread made of polylactic acid is drawn through the skin. Popular with Middle Eastern royalty. From £1,200



SHEEP'S PLACENTA FACIAL

The SCBI O-Placenta Facial includes microdermabrasion, chemical peel, extraction and then the application of the hormone-rich sheep's placenta serum, intensified by LED red light. Favoured by Victoria Beckham and Simon Cowell. From £175

FRAXEL LASER

Tiny lasers penetrate the epidermis and stimulate collagen, helping repair pigmentation and scarring. Kim Kardashian swears by it; Jennifer Aniston has had a similar 'laser peel'. It's extremely painful. From £600



FROTOX

Also called Iovera, an intense cold shock puts muscles into 'hibernation' for up to four months, according to practitioners. The needle-like 'smart tip' penetrates the skin and delivers a 30-second burst of highly pressurised liquid nitrous oxide. Unlike Botox, the effects are instant. From £450

CRYOLIPOLYSIS

Also known as Cryo-Lipo or CoolSculpting, this is a non-invasive alternative to liposuction that applies intense cold and heat to targeted problem areas, causing subcutaneous fat cells to die. They are then eliminated by the body over the following weeks. £600-£800

vampire facelift... It's really scientific and natural but it makes a difference.'

How does it feel? 'Uncomfortable,' Kellie Brown, 38, a blogger known as Big Fashionista, told me. 'The needle goes in a lot of different places. You feel like a pincushion!' PRP is delivered over a thick layer of anaesthetising cream, and a constant stream of cool air. 'It's not at all unbearable,' says Dr Sebagh matter-of-factly. He tries all his own treatments. 'For men, it's worse, because of the beard.'

'You're just thinking, I don't think I can take this any more – and then it's over,' said Kellie. 'It was very uncomfortable for the next couple of days. I had lumps and bumps and bruising. But then the results started to show and it was phenomenal. I felt fresh-faced, lots of people told me I looked great, and it gave me a real kick-start into doing the right thing, wearing SPF and giving up smoking. If I could afford to

'WITH THE VAMPIRE FACIAL, YOU FEEL LIKE A PINCUSHION'

have it done again, I would, in a heartbeat.'

The effects of PRP are said to be 'undetected' and they are certainly more subtle than some Botox. 'I have treated 800 people and I have a 70 per cent return rate,' says Dr Sister. PRP is often praised as a natural treatment or even, according to London clinic chain EF Medispa, 'completely organic' – though that really depends on your diet. PRP is also effective, if injected in the scalp, for redressing hair loss, but its impact on stretch marks is, according to Dr Sister, 'disappointing'.

The surgeries I spoke to for this feature were friendly to a fault – at one not named in this piece, an office member welcomed me in to try their wares, even though she knew I was 11 years younger than the youngest age recommended for the procedure. Most admitted they knew addicts.

'I see a lot of that,' said Dr Al-Ayoubi, 'both privately and on the NHS. Professional psychiatric assessment is crucial. But it is a very sensitive issue. If you tell a lady she needs to see a psychiatrist, she will feel insulted. She will go sideways and maybe even overseas. So I like to tell her, specifically, that she needs a second opinion and that she should not underestimate how beautiful she is. I tell her that she looks normal. I also like to say, "We have a few options, and option one is: do nothing."'

Dr Al-Ayoubi goes on to describe how a man in his twenties came to him 'showing me photos of a very young US celeb. I don't know the fellow, but he had a well-defined jaw. I gave this man what he wanted and he was over the moon. Sometimes I can deliver a beautiful nose-job, which everyone loves, but not the patient. That is a failure. If I can deliver what the patient wants, and they are happy, who is to say this is madness?' **ES**
Viper Wine, a novel by Hermione Eyre, is out now (Cape, £14.99)