

## COSMETICS AND POWER

Language helps to maintain the unnatural divide. We have make-up, cosmetics, scents, creams and colorants; 'they' have twigs and swabs, animal fats and dyes. We have plastic surgery; they have mutilation. The anthropologist studying a South American Indian on a ceremonial dancing ground describes the patterns of 'coloured clay' applied with 'pork fat', and the 'ground charcoal' 'daubed' around the eyes. He might think twice about describing his wife's make-up in the same terms; yet she is more likely also wearing a red dye mixed with wax on her lips, blue, green or white pigments mixed with petroleum jelly on her eyelids, and soot and pig's fat on her brows and lashes (Brain 1979:9).

Cosmetics seem to fit largely with the process of ritualization defined as a particular kind of social action in response to a place, event, force, problem or tradition.

Ezekiel 23:40

"Furthermore, they have even sent for men who come from afar, to whom a messenger was sent; and lo, they came—for whom you bathed, painted your eyes and decorated yourselves with ornaments;

Jeremiah 4:30

And you, O desolate one, what will you do?

Although you dress in scarlet, although you decorate yourself with ornaments of gold,

Although you enlarge your eyes with paint,

In vain you make yourself beautiful. Your lovers despise you; They seek your life.

Isaiah 3:16

Moreover, the Lord said, "Because the daughters of Zion are proud and walk with heads held high and seductive eyes, and go along with mincing steps and tinkle the bangles on their feet.

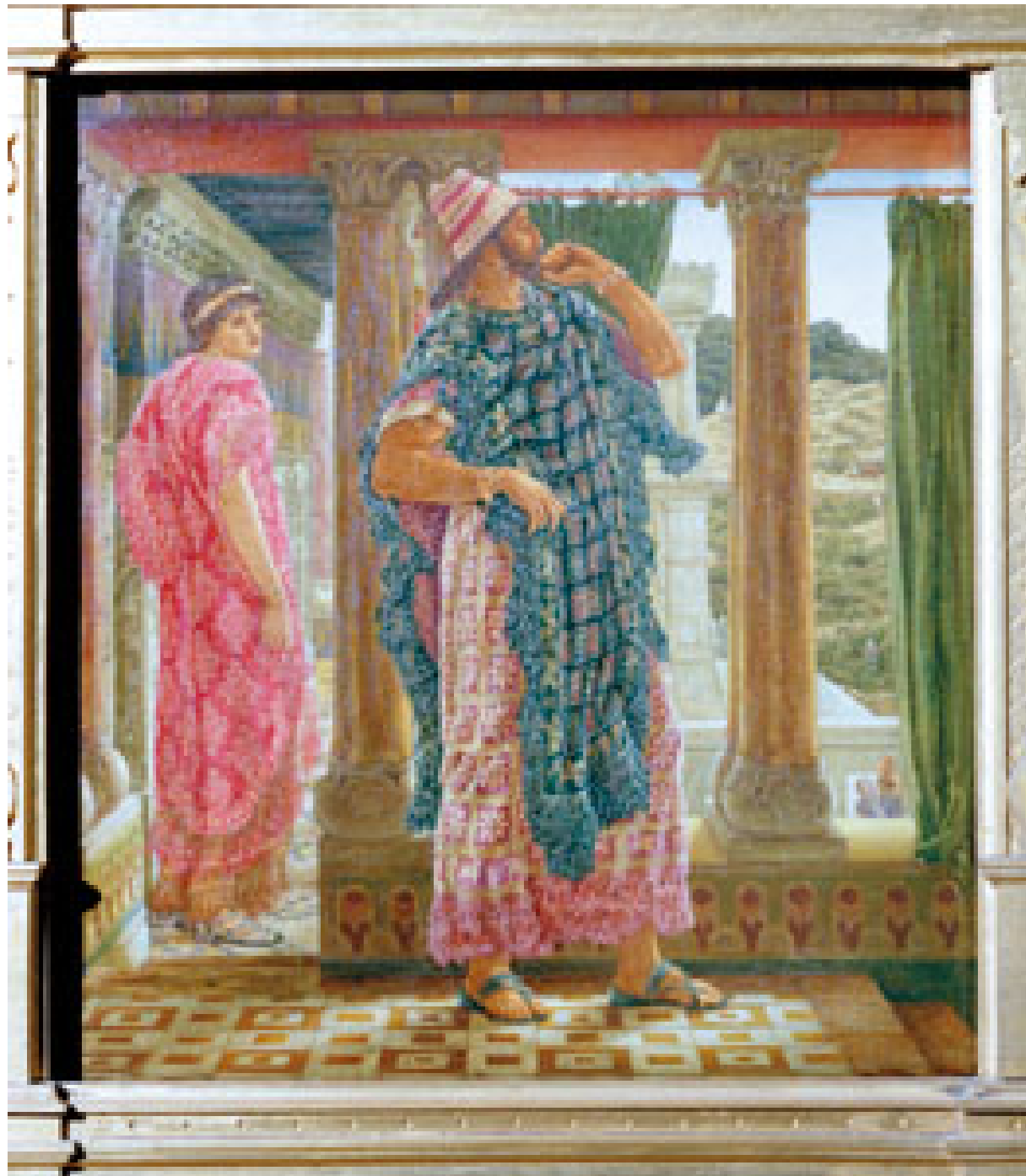
## Jezebel

Jehu went on to Jezreel. When Jezebel heard of it, she painted her eyes with kohl and dressed her hair, and she looked out of the window. As Jehu entered the gate, she called out, "Is all well, Zimri, murderer of your master?" He looked up toward the window and said, "Who is on my side, who?" And two or three eunuchs leaned out toward him. "Throw her down," he said. They threw her down; and her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses, and they trampled her.

Then he went inside and ate and drank. And he said, "Attend to that cursed woman and bury her, for she was a king's daughter." So they went to bury her; but all they found of her were the skull, the feet, and the hands. They came back and reported to him; and he said, "It is just as GOD spoke through Elijah the Tishbite—God's servant: The dogs shall devour the flesh of Jezebel in the field of Jezreel; and the carcass of Jezebel shall be like dung on the ground, in the field of Jezreel, so that none will be able to say: 'This was Jezebel.'"







Seal of Jezebel,  
9th Cent. BC



- ⲗ = lamed = l
- Ⲁ = aleph = ' (vowel)
- Ⲛ = yod = y
- ⲉ = zayin = z
- ⲃ = beth = b
- ⲗ = lamed = l

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Julie Faith Parker also notes distinct overlaps and similarities between Anat and Jezebel. Jezebel, like Anat, is '...a woman who is also a warrior. She wants to be ready for the impending threat and presents her strongest self' (Parker 2015: 183). Neither Anat nor Jezebel's use of cosmetics '...appear to be a gesture of female subservience but an act of warrior readiness'



## Judith

Now after this, she ceased to cry to the God of Israel, and she completed all these words. She rose where she had fallen down and called her maid; and she went down into the house in which she lived on the sabbath days and on her feast days, and she pulled off the sackcloth which she had on, and put off the garments of her widowhood, and washed her body all over with water, and anointed herself with precious ointment, and braided the hair of her head and put a headdress on it, and put on her garments of gladness, which she used to wear during the life of Manasseh her husband. And she put sandals on her feet, and she put on her bracelets and her chains and her rings and her earrings and all her ornaments, and she decked herself out boldly, to allure the eyes of all men who might see her.







## Ruth

Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, "Daughter, I must seek a home for you, where you may be happy. Now there is our kinsman Boaz, whose girls you were close to. He will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor tonight. So bathe, anoint yourself, dress up, and go down to the threshing floor. But do not disclose yourself to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he lies down, and go over and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what you are to do."







Ruth receives no moral censure for her use of oil.

## Esther

When the king's order and edict was proclaimed, and when many maidens were assembled in the fortress Shushan under the supervision of Hegai, Esther too was taken into the king's palace under the supervision of Hegai, guardian of the women. The maiden pleased him and won his favor, and he hastened to furnish her with her cosmetics and her rations, as well as with the seven maids who were her due from the king's palace; and he treated her and her maids with special kindness in the harem.

....

When each maiden's turn came to go to King Ahasuerus at the end of the twelve months' treatment prescribed for women (for that was the period spent on beautifying them: six months with oil of myrrh and six months with perfumes and women's cosmetics, and it was after that that the maiden would go to the king), whatever she asked for would be given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. She would go in the evening and leave in the morning for a second harem in charge of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch, guardian of the concubines. She would not go again to the king unless the king wanted her, whereupon she would be summoned by name.

When the turn came for Esther daughter of Abihail—the uncle of Mordecai, who had adopted her as his own daughter—to go to the king, she did not ask for anything but what Hegai, the king's eunuch, guardian of the women, advised. Yet Esther won the admiration of all who saw her.



...the whole cosmetic extravaganza just constitutes the trimmings of a process that goes much deeper—so much deeper, in fact, that it creates new persons. The girls are participants in a ritual that involves “only” their bodies but ultimately changes their identity’ (Wetter 2012: 326). Esther is able shift her ethnic identity... through the use of cosmetics.



## Vashti

On the seventh day, when the king was merry with wine, he ordered Mehuman, Bizzetha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven eunuchs in attendance on King Ahasuerus,

לְהַבִּיאַ אֶת־וּשְׁתֵי הַמַּלְכָּה לְפָנַי הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּכִתְרֵי מַלְכוּת לְהַרְאוֹת הָעַמִּים וְהַשָּׂרִים אֶת־יְפֹתָהּ כִּי־טוֹבַת מְרָאָה הִיא:  
to bring Queen Vashti before the king wearing a royal diadem, to display her beauty to the peoples and the officials;  
for she was a beautiful woman.

