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Mirror, Mask, and Portrait in Fuentes' *Terra Nostra*

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Abstract:

Portraits constitute one of the three major classes of facial images. They are flanked by mirror images, usually near-perfect re-presentations of living faces, and by masks, typically meant to replace rather than reflect faces. Recent artists, writers, and theorists have frequently turned to mirrors and masks in considering the nature of portraiture. In Carlos Fuentes' *Terra Nostra*, all three classes, along with their combinations, provide Fuentes and his characters with a wide range of approaches along which they can explore the possibilities and meanings of representation itself.

Portraits constitute one of the three major classes of facial images. On one side of these, there are mirror images, which, except in the now rare case of anamorphic mirrors, are normally taken to be near-perfect re-presentations of living faces. They are, in fact, altered by the reversal of sides, the halving of size (Gombrich 6), and any distortion caused by imperfections in or on the glass, but viewers are scarcely ever conscious of any of these differences. On the other side, there are masks, which are normally meant to be substitute faces, replacing rather than reflecting. They may sometimes represent other people, but, most of the time in most of the world, they are not meant to represent a particular face at all, creating a new one instead. A comprehensive understanding of portraiture requires us to see it in the context of these two neighbors, and recent artists and fiction writers, in their quests to comprehend the natures of their genres, have frequently done so.

While we typically take a mirror image to be a fully natural phenomenon, Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, in her history of mirrors, notes that the mirror is "situated at the crossroads of nature and culture" (1). If mirrors were simply exact reflectors, they would not have captivated so many creative imaginations. In fact, the mirror may be, in some circumstances, "a tool of dissimulation" which "creates disguises" (Melchior-Bonnet 153), and it is all the more dangerous for our ingrained assumption of its truthfulness. To take but the simplest kind of example, a mirror angled to any degree may seem to display a different expression or even facial type. (See, for instance, Eugene Robert Richee's remarkable publicity photograph of Carole Lombard in Kobal 43.) Over the centuries we have seen mirrors' eerie possibilities, and impossibilities, exploited by artists such as Holbein (*The Ambassadors*), Parmigianino (*Self Portrait in a Convex Mirror*), Magritte (*The Forbidden Reproduction*), and by writers such as Carroll (*Through the Looking-Glass*), Cocteau (*Orpheus*), and Borges ("The Mirror of Enigmas").

It is worth pausing to consider, as an example, the delightful mirror theory of the philosopher de Selby in Flann O'Brien's novel *The Third Policeman*:

If a man stands before a mirror and sees in it his reflection, what he sees is not a true reproduction of himself but a picture of himself when he was a younger man. De Selby's explanation of this phenomenon is quite simple. Light, as he points out truly enough, has an ascertained and finite rate of travel. Hence before the reflection of any object in a mirror can be said to be accomplished, it is necessary that rays of light should first strike the object and subsequently impinge on the glass, to be thrown back again to the object to the eyes of a man, for instance. There is therefore an appreciable and calculable interval of time between the throwing by a man of a glance at his own face in a mirror and the registration of the reflected image in his eye.

So far, one may say, so good. Whether this idea is right or wrong, the amount of time involved is so negligible that few reasonable people would argue the point. But de Selby ever loath to leave well enough alone, insists on reflecting the first reflection in a further mirror and professing to detect minute changes in this second image. Ultimately he constructed the familiar arrangement of parallel mirrors, each reflecting diminishing images of an interposed object indefinitely. The interposed object in this case was de Selby's own face and this he claims to have studied backwards through an infinity of reflections by means of 'a powerful glass'. What he states to have seen through his glass is astonishing. He claims to have noticed a growing youthfulness in the reflections of his face according

as they receded, the most distant of them--too tiny to be visible to the naked eye--being the face of a beardless boy of twelve, and, to use his own words, 'a countenance of singular beauty and nobility'. He did not succeed in pursuing the matter back to the cradle 'owing to the curvature of the earth and the limitations of the telescope.' (64-65)

Notice the "as he points out truly enough" and "so far, one may say, so good." That much of the theory is, in fact, true. We can accept the veracity of the theory up to a certain point, much as we can accept the veracity of a mirror image up to a certain point. We must exercise caution in determining the point where simple truth gives way, at Melchior-Bonnet's "crossroads of nature and culture."

For many thinkers, such as Jacques Lacan, the mirror has provided an ideal tool for understanding human development and cognition. For many artists and writers, such as Oscar Wilde, it has provided an ideal metaphor for art: "The nineteenth-century dislike of realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass. The nineteenth-century dislike of Romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass." And "it is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors" (5 and 6). These observations fittingly introduce the last great nineteenth-century portrait novel before the twentieth-century modernists largely lost interest in portrait painting. Perhaps of most relevance here is M.H. Abrams's famous use of the mirror to signify mimetic art, as opposed to the Romantic lamp of expressive art. Recent fiction writers reconsidering the place of mimesis in their work would naturally find this metaphor, like that of the portrait, a valuable one.

At the other extreme, contemporary artists and writers have made frequent use of masks. As Joanna Woodall points out, "today, the fixed, immovable features of a portrayed face can seem like a mask, frustrating the desire for union with the imaged self. In looking at a conventional portrait, we no longer have implicit faith in a moment of phantasised unmasking. . ." (Introduction 9). This goes a long way toward accounting for artists' widespread recent interest in the mask.

For our purposes here, the point of all this mirroring and masking lies at the points of intersection among mirror, mask, and portrait. A character in William Gaddis's *The Recognitions* enjoys masquerades, but only "the safe sort where the mask may be dropped at that critical moment it presumes itself as reality" (7). When we leave that "safe sort" behind, we confront "the paradox in the moment when the mask and the face become one, the eternal moment of the Cartesian God, Who can will a circle to be square" (Gaddis 599).

We see this in Roland Barthes's essay "The Face of Garbo," where he helps us to understand both the nature of the mask and its relationship to the face. He observes that, in her film *Queen Christina*, Garbo's "make-up has the snowy thickness of a mask: it is not a painted face, but one set in plaster. . ." (56). We can see this in Clarence Sinclair Bull's publicity shot for this film, and even more in his shot of Garbo for *Mata Hari* (Kobal 75 and 73).

Barthes goes on:

Now the temptation of the absolute mask (the mask of antiquity, for instance) perhaps implies less the theme of the secret (as is the case with Italian half mask) than that of the archetype of the human face. Garbo offered to one's gaze a sort of Platonic Idea of the human creature (56)

He is exactly on target. Is this as true of any other celebrity? Garbo was not necessarily the most beautiful of movie stars. Her features were perhaps too regular for that, since, as the essayist Francis Bacon said, "there is no Excellent *Beauty*, that hath not some Strangeness in the Proportion" (132). She was nevertheless accorded a unique kind of veneration, and this had much to do with this mask-like quality that was emphasized by make-up artists and photographers. Barthes recognizes that "the name given to her, the Divine, probably aimed to convey less a superlative state of beauty than the essence of her corporeal person, descended from a heaven where all things are formed and perfected in the clearest light" (56-57). Her famously reclusive behavior lent further support to this image.

Her air of vulnerability, however, never let us forget that she was a flesh-and-blood woman, and Barthes rightly finds her real interest in the tension between these two images:

And yet, in this deified face, something sharper than a mask is looming: a kind of voluntary and therefore human relation between the curve of the nostrils and the arch of the eyebrows; a rare, individual function relating two regions of the face. A mask is but a sum of lines; a face, on the contrary, is above all their thematic harmony. Garbo's face represents this fragile moment when the cinema is about to draw an existential from an essential beauty, when the archetype leans towards the

fascination of mortal faces, when the clarity of the flesh as essence yields its place to a lyricism of Woman.

Viewed as a transition the face of Garbo reconciles two iconographic ages (57)

It is this, above all, that riveted viewers more than did, say, the human faces of Lana Turner or Ingrid Bergman, whose photographs are portraits (Kobal 92 and 139), or the masks of Theda Bara and Louise Brooks, whose photographs are icons (Golden 38,136, and 194, and Kobal 4).

Jacques Derrida sees all three kinds of images converging in the crucial legend of Perseus. Rather than looking upon the fatal face of Medusa, he sees only her "reflection in the bronze shield polished like a mirror." He then displays her head as a fearsome substitute for his own, so that "each time one wears a mask, each time one shows or draws a mask, one repeats Perseus's heroic deed." The result of this dual action is that "Perseus could become the patron of all portraitists" (73). He embodies the act of representation, portraiture, by observing the reflected face and displaying the substituted one.

This conjunction of the three types of images of the human face is played out at length in Carlos Fuentes' novel *Terra Nostra*. Between the poles of mirror and mask, portraits include elements of both; ostensibly direct recreations of living originals, they inevitably take on some qualities of new creation as they pass through the mind of the artist. These three types of presentation and representation, along with their combinations, provide Fuentes and his characters with a full range of approaches along which they can explore the possibilities and meanings of representation itself.

Fuentes sees mirrors primarily as dangerous revealers of unexpected resemblances -- not a new concept, of course, but freshly handled here, and treated with extraordinary thoroughness. The most elaborately developed instance involves the mirror of the Pilgrim. In traveling from Europe to the New World, he takes only two European artifacts: mirror and scissors, a reflector and a separator. Upon arrival, these become the symbols of his power ("My cross and my orb," 399). In the meantime, his American counterpart has foreseen the coming of the Europeans in a magical mirror in the head of a dead crane (455). The details of the vision, and the descriptions of the New World (including the thirty-three steps and two hundred thousand boats on p. 458) suggest distorted reflections, essential similarities beneath the superficial differences dividing the Old World, epitomized here by the Spain of Felipe II, El Señor, from the New. Thus, appropriately, the Pilgrim's American twin is called Smoking Mirror, the reflection clouded, darkened, distorted, shifting, as if obscured by smoke. Still, the essential resemblance is unmistakable, and horrifies Europeans and Americans alike.

The mirrors also reveal the links among different realms of being. Man becomes animal in the mirror (283-84 and 361). Man and woman exchange their sexual identities (279-84). The living and the dead seem merely reflections of one another (184 and 607). The mirrors even reveal unexpected relationships between man and God, dividing Jesus the man from Christ the God, and identifying the Pilgrim with Quetzalcoatl (194-98 and 456).

Quite unlike a mirror, a mask provides a frankly symbolic substitute for one's original face. Fuentes stresses this by using, as one of the book's central symbols, a mask which is also a map. The mask does not reveal its wearer directly, but provides directions for finding the wearer. When the Lady of the Butterflies gives the map-mask to the Pilgrim, she tells him that it will lead him back to her (462). Throughout the novel, masks, veils, and tattoos alter characters' faces, rejecting the natural faces which the mirrors accept, establishing the alternatives of symbolism, deception and fantasy to the mirrors' apparently direct realism. Still, just as the mirrors often change and distort, so the masks and related devices often serve to identify, rather than disguise, their wearers. The character Celestina turns up in various times and places, and her lip tattoos, while certainly a kind of mask, allow her to be recognized in all of them. The two extremes reach toward their opposites and meet in the portrait.

Art works occupy a middle ground, as becomes clear in the opening pages of the novel. On Bastille Day, in the year 2000, the gargoyles of Notre Dame come to life to jeer at the Parisians: "It was as if the motive for which they were originally sculptured was now revealed in scandalous actuality"(9). Within the Louvre, "the Victory of Samothrace hovered in mid-air without any visible means of support: those wings were finally justifying themselves" (10). The gargoyles and Winged Victory are prominent fanciful mixtures of real and unreal, naturalism and fantasy, representation and independent creation. In this millennial transformation of the world, their seeming absurdities are justified, their essentially dual nature (as art works) is realized. On the same occasion, in the Louvre, "the mask of Pharaoh was superimposed -- in a newly liberated perspective -- upon the features of the Gioconda, and that lady's upon David's Napoleon" (10). The boundaries dividing the traditional types of portraiture -- political and personal, iconic and aesthetic, and so on -- are being broken down.

This includes even the boundary between ostensibly static paintings and the active world outside. In the Louvre, in the opening scene, we witness "the traditional frames dissolved into transparency" (10), and later, as a character looks at a painting, he finds that "the painting is looking at him" (90). Later still, elaborate performances are acted out within the paintings.

Moreover, just as a painting may take on the qualities of life, so life may become a painting:

The painter Julián could tear his own gaze from the vast canvas he had painted to focus upon another, still larger, though less detailed canvas: the court of El Señor, fixed, paralyzed, converted into insensible figures within the space of the royal chapel . . . (344)

The paintings are ambiguous in nature, sometimes seeming to represent living originals, as the mirrors do, and sometimes creating worlds of their own which seem to exist as fully as does El Señor's world.

Because of this ambiguity, pictures can be used to deceive. Brother Julián offers to present an impostor as a true Habsburg by adding the characteristic prognathic jaw to all of the official images of the boy (147). A portrait, he later tells the Queen, "is capable of introducing whatever changes and combinations Your Grace desires" (228). We have all learned that skillfully manipulated statistics may appear to support any number of incompatible positions, yet the statistical evidence still sounds authoritative to us. Similarly, we have a strong tendency to accept a portrait as a representation, and even our intellectual awareness of the artist's active role may not be sufficient to prevent us from being deceived.

Some characters, including the King's mother, see portraits as stable, reliable things -- simple mirrors, in fact. She tells Brother Julián to give his portrait "immutability There is nothing to invent, said the aged Lady, everything is actual" (228-29). She has the naïveté of the person who trusts statistics. Brother Julián, however, is wiser: "Immutability, Most Exalted Lady? The portrait can adopt a thousand different configurations" (228).

Fuentes' sympathies clearly lie with Julián. Portraiture, as they see it, is anything but simple. Although Julián argues forcefully for painting as original, independent creation, he refuses to acknowledge his authorship of his own painting,

fearing that his work's novelty, the audacious rupture from the symmetrical aesthetic demanded by orthodoxy -- so that the works of man might coincide with revealed truth -- would be so obvious that it would be Julián's destiny to join the Chronicler in cleansing himself of the guilt of the worst of all rebellions: not Cain's: fratricide; but Lucifer's: deicide. (334)

The Chronicler here is Miguel de Cervantes, forger (in both senses) of the novel (in both senses) form, the form of *Terra Nostra* itself. Cervantes is presented here as the revolutionary transgressor of the boundary between fact and fiction. Fuentes, who considers *Don Quixote* to be "the greatest novel ever written" (qtd. in Shradly 26), has argued that "all novels are a questioning of the world and a questioning of history" ("Interview" 46). A true heir of Cervantes, he says that his aim in *Terra Nostra* was "the fictionalization of history and a historization of fiction" ("An Interview" 685).

Fuentes wants to test the boundaries of fiction and reality, and Cervantes' medium, the novel, allows him to do so in many ways -- but not in enough ways. *Terra Nostra* is an intensely ambitious work which bursts the confines of its medium. While words can do a great deal, some things can only be done with pictorial images, leading to Fuentes' use of paintings here and in his other works. He doesn't rely heavily on illustrations. Instead, he uses paintings as symbolic plot elements, describing them in great detail and allowing them to play active roles in the novel.

In a 1980 interview, Fuentes suggested one reason for their use:

I am surprised by the way in which a great writer, a great painter, and even a great filmmaker teach us how to see. Velázquez teaches us how to see, and so does Buñuel. And Antonioni and Fellini. This is something which is granted to the man who deals with images. They all have an inherent right to teach you, and you are grateful.

But when a writer tries to teach you how to read anew, this is terrible. This is not accepted; people become extremely nervous. Of course, writing belongs to the world of language, and language is

supposed to be understood by all. It belongs to all and it is the coin of the realm. Painters, even cinematographers, have this right because they are innovating with what did not exist before. The painting did not exist before, whereas the words which make up the novel do preexist it. It is expected that you give out the wasted, thinned-down coins of common-day speech. When you don't do it, when you say there are other ways of reading, of employing language, in order to say that there are other ways of thinking time, of living time, then people become unhappy. ("Interview" 55-56)

By including descriptions of the paintings in the novel, Fuentes can teach us how to see, as well as how to read, and his ambitions for *Terra Nostra* demand that he do both. These paintings are challenging, unstable, threatening; they demand new ways of seeing, and they force their viewers -- both the characters in the story and the readers of the book -- to look at them with fresh eyes. At the simplest level, El Señor is not used to looking at pictures which change before his eyes, as Julián's does, and we are not used to being forced to construct complex pictorial images out of verbal descriptions. Beyond that, the wonders of such paintings as Julián's train our eyes and minds to comprehend the unexpected. Fuentes says that we are more ready to accept such training from visual works, so he uses the paintings to prepare us for the demands of his novel.

Central among those is the demand that we question our own reading. In a lecture that Fuentes describes as "an offshoot of" *Terra Nostra*, Fuentes demonstrates that *Don Quixote* is essentially "a critique of reading" (*Don Quixote* 23 and 48), and he clearly sees his own novel as part of the same tradition. *Don Quixote* forces us to reexamine our comfortable assumptions about fiction and reality, to see that the boundary between mask and mirror is neither sharp nor stable, and Fuentes wants us to continue and extend this reexamination. As much as he admires the enterprise of Borges' Pierre Menard, he will not be satisfied with writing the *Quixote* itself; he seeks additional techniques, beyond those of Cervantes, to compel us to read actively and critically, and he finds a crucial one in the use of the paintings, the profoundly ambiguous objects which lie between the poles of mask and mirror and miraculously combine seemingly contradictory elements of both. "Art brings truth to the lies of history," he argues in the Cervantes lecture (*Don Quixote* 44). By placing the faces of his characters in Bosch's *Garden of Delights* (*Terra Nostra* 624), by giving Julián the power to bestow identity with his brush (147), and by having Simon of Cyrene assume the face of Jesus and be crucified in his place within the painting (202-03), Fuentes brings his own truth to political history, religious history, and art history.

Even before *Terra Nostra* was published, its translator, Margaret Sayers Peden, voiced a question which this massive novel almost forces us to ask: "How does Fuentes control the enormous complexity of this material?" (4-5) Peden made some useful suggestions, but I would like to call attention to one more. To maintain the integrity of a novel of the extraordinary scope and complexity of *Terra Nostra*, a writer must employ symbols which are closely matched to his themes. In this case, *Terra Nostra's* impressive formal integrity results, in large part, from the manner in which one of its central themes, the interaction of representation and imaginative creation, is complemented and illuminated by this crucial group of symbols. Fuentes uses the portraits as analogies to his own creative activity, and as additional tests of the limits of creation and representation. By also employing both mirrors and masks within the same work, he allows us to put the portraits in their proper conceptual context and thus to follow this theme through the novel's complexities.

In a study of *Terra Nostra*, Raymond Leslie Williams accurately notes both that the mirror is a "central image" which "provides much of the unity to this diffuse novel," and that Brother Julián's painting "functions as a synecdoche of *Terra Nostra*" (107 and 76). He also acknowledges, however, that the novel "abounds in threes" (79). In fact, when we recognize that the paintings in *Terra Nostra* often function as portraits, we can see that the third element in this triad is the mask.

For all its unique characteristics, *Terra Nostra* is, in relation to these themes, a novel representative of its time. The artist-characters in many recent novels, particularly the more innovative ones, have done much with mirrors, especially in relation to portraits. The boy protagonist, for example, in Robertson Davies's novel *What's Bred in the Bone*, takes the pose of the child in Anna Lea Merritt's painting *Love Locked Out*, using two mirrors to enable him to see the resulting tableau (102). Another boy protagonist, in Julián Rios' *Monstruosity*, squeezes a "tube of toothpaste onto the mirror . . . to paint his first self portrait over unattainable features" (189). In both of these cases, powerless, oppressed children seek influence over their fates at the intersection of mirror and art. The artist protagonist in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* loves mirrors in paintings, especially the one in Van Eyck's *Arnolfini Wedding*, a mirror which she says "is like an eye, a single eye that sees more than anyone else looking" (343). The protagonist of David Markson's *Wittgenstein's Mistress* signs a women's-room mirror in the Borghese Gallery with lipstick:

What I was signing was an image of myself, naturally.

Should anyone else have looked, where my signature would have been was under the other person's image, however. (67)

Princess Ateh in Milorad Pavic's *Dictionary of the Khazars* takes a mirror each morning and draws "a new, hitherto unseen image of her own face. According to other stories, Ateh was no beauty at all, but she would train her face in the mirror and compose her features into a lovely expression and a pretty shape" (21). The mirrors provide plenty of opportunity for the characters' exploration of their identities.

Mirrors subtly haunt many of Guy Davenport's stories. One story tells us that "nature is a mirror" in which we see only reflections of ourselves, and that, indeed, all "reality is a mirror" (174 and 210):

A man looking with unobstructed vision in the Einsteinian universe would see his own back. Or time flows on but one surface of space, an August Möbius continuum, and a man looking with unobstructed vision would at the warp see himself looking at himself upside down. The Magus Zoroaster met his own image walking in a garden. Shelley met himself coming downstairs an evening at Pisa, screaming. Socrates, a satyr's mask on a hard old body windy in a weathered wrap, saw his daimon in the lissome bodies of athletes, fair glass enough for innocence to look upon innocence. (248)

In Georges Perec's novel *A Man Asleep*, the Perec-like protagonist goes to the Louvre and stations himself "in front of a single painting": Antonello da Messina's *Portrait of a Man Known as Il Condottiere*. He notes that *Il Condottiere* has "a tiny scar above his upper lip, on the left, that is to say his left, your right" (*Things* 187). Perec's biographer points out that *Il Condottiere*'s scar is "somewhat similar in shape and location to the one Perec acquired in an accident" (Bellos 212). The painting then, with its reversed sides, acts as a mirror for the author/ protagonist, a man self-aware enough to understand that what one sees in a mirror, whether of glass or of paint or of words, is not a perfect reproduction of oneself, but rather an altered recreation. For this reason, presumably, Antonello's painting "became a personal symbol for Perec. It figures in one way or another in nearly every one of his published works" (Bellos 212). It is not quite him, much as the *Man Asleep* is not.

An art historian in Perec's later *A Gallery Portrait* argues that "any work of art is the mirror of another The true signification of many, if not all, paintings lies in their relationship with previous works, which are either simply reproduced within them, partly or entirely, or else, in a much more allusive manner, are encoded" (*Three* 134). Perec was an intellectual Parisian novelist whose fiction was laced with allusions to structuralist monographs, Lacanian theory, and so on (e.g., *A Void* 27 and 18). For such an author, writing in 1979, the analogy with the forms of intertextuality being discussed by Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, and others in the mid to late 1970s was certainly clear. The historian sees this gallery portrait painting, the novel's subject, as "an infinite play of mirrors where, as in *Las Meninas* or in Rigaud's *Self Portrait* in the Perpignan Museum, the act of looking and what is being looked at constantly confront each other and become confused" (136). Again, this is inevitably reminiscent of the complex interplay between mirrored spectators and subjects in Michel Foucault's influential and controversial 1966 analysis of *Las Meninas* in *The Order of Things*. The acts certainly do "become confused," and the playful Perec has several surprises in store as he elaborates this artistic analogy to his own fictional enterprise. It would be inappropriate to reveal them here, since this would give away the book's punch-line, but I will just mention, in this context, one detail: that we are shown a painting which displays "the back, the front and the two sides in profile of one single countenance" through an ingenious use of mirroring surfaces (154 and 163-64).

We see a similar interest in masks in recent novels. In the near future of David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, for example, owners of video-telephones become horrified when they see how they look on the monitors. In a survey,

almost 60% of respondents who received visual access to their own faces during videophonic calls specifically used the terms untrustworthy, unlikable, or hard to like in describing their own visage's appearance, with a phenomenally ominous 71 % of senior citizen respondents specifically comparing their video faces to that of Richard Nixon during the Nixon Kennedy debates (147)

They begin buying masks of their own faces to wear during videophone calls, to ensure stable, acceptable images. Once they have started down this slippery slope, however, they demand more and more flattering masks, until

mask entrepreneurs ready and willing to supply not just verisimilitude but aesthetic enhancement -- stronger chins, smaller eyebags, air-brushed scars and wrinkles -- soon pushed the original mimetic mask entrepreneurs right out of the market. (148)

We move here into the territory of traditional society and state portraiture, in which sitters' money or power enabled them to manipulate the way in which they were presented to the world.

In Richard Flanagan's novel *Gould's Book of Fish*, the convict-narrator incisively notes that the smiling gold mask perpetually hiding the face and identity of the Commandant of a prison colony becomes "the symbol of government property, stencilled on barrels & tools alike, later branded on our forearms, in a spectacular fusion of state & self & concealment. . ." (150). While the Commandant replaces his face to suit his own purposes, the prisoners must bear both face and mask, forced to share a visage, as they must share body and soul, with the system. The narrator, who is both portrait-painter and writer, is well equipped to understand this "spectacular fusion."

The facially disfigured protagonist of Kobo Abe's *The Face of Another*, in considering the complexities of the relationship between face and mask, thinks:

If covering our bodies with clothes represents a cultural step forward, there is no guarantee that in the future masks will not be taken equally for granted. Even now they are often used in important ceremonies and festivals. I do not quite know how to put it, but I wonder if a mask, being universal, enhances our relations with others more than does the naked face. (14)

A face restorer tries to convince him to replace his hopelessly damaged face with a new one:

No, it's common to feel resistance to having one's face manufactured. Perhaps, since modern times Even now, primitive men make false faces as a matter of course I'm unfortunately not enough of a specialist to understand why attitudes have changed. But there's statistical proof. For example, if you consider exterior wounds, facial injuries are about one and a half times as numerous as injuries to the four extremities. And yet the number of people who request treatment for the loss of a limb or even a finger is eighty percent higher. There's clearly some taboo about the face.

Actually, the restorer may be too much of a specialist, rather than too little. To understand such a complex phenomenon, one must view a surprising range of implications: psychological, physiological, sociological, aesthetic, political, and so on. Abe, like Cecile Pineda in her novel *Face*, explores some of these. Abe's protagonist, for instance, recalls that, as a child, he had felt his sister's wig, a kind of partial mask, "to be unspeakably indecent and immoral" and had destroyed it (17), and, after his injury, he tears up a drawing, a portrait, of a masked face (14-15).

The movement from mirror through portrait to mask appears at first to trace two paths with regard to the dual concerns of this study. In terms of mimesis, it goes from presentation through representation to replacement, while in terms of power, it goes from helpless reflection through partial control to complete control. In fact, though, as we have seen, the poles of mirror and mask are much more ambiguous than they appear, so recent writers considering mirroring, masking, and portraiture, in taking on the exceptionally complex task of mediating between unstable, and often paradoxical, phenomena, have been inspired to create some remarkably revealing fictions, among which *Terra Nostra* is particularly notable.

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