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A Lacanian Perspective on Face and Identity in Ariel Dorfman's Mascara

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Abstract

In this study, the unnamed narrator of Ariel Dorfman's *Mascara*, who has a congenital facial peculiarity, is examined through Jacques Lacan's critical ideas on the formation of the subject. Lacan gives an extensive account of the process of the individual's becoming a subject and the positions this subject takes in relation to the social structures. The subject's tendency to conform to the norms of society is closely intertwined with a continuous "desire" that arises in relation to an existential lack. For someone having an atypical appearance, just like the protagonist in *Mascara*, the burden on this lack is doubled because he lacks both in being and in the face, the most critical body part in an assigning identity to an individual. Due to his featureless face, the unnamed narrator in Dorfman's novel is conferred a devalued status offered by the wider society as the Other. Highly aware of his status as an outsider, the narrator believes that it is possible for him to become visible and ordinary through someone's love. Although his "desire" to be recognized by a woman costs him his life, neither his death nor the absence of a physical face prevents the unnamed narrator in *Mascara* from getting what he demands, which is remembrance. Drawing on the theoretical framework by Lacan, this article offers that the occurrence of facial stigma as a subordinate social category is due to a set of social expectations that are transformed into "ideal" and "standard."

Keywords: Ariel Dorfman, *Mascara*, Jacques Lacan, Facial Anomaly, Other.

Ariel Dorfman'ın *Maskara* Romanında Yüz ve Kimliğe Lacancı Bir Bakış

Öz

Bu çalışmada, Ariel Dorfman'ın *Maskara* isimli romanında doğuştan yüz bozukluğu olan isimsiz anlatıcı, Jacques Lacan'ın özne oluşumuna dair geliştirdiği önemli fikirler aracılığıyla incelenmektedir. Lacan, kişinin özne olma sürecine ve bu öznenin toplumsal yapılar dahilinde aldığı özne konumlarına dair kapsamlı bir içerik sunar. Öznenin toplumsal normlara uyma eğilimi kendi varoluşsal eksikliğine bağlı olarak ortaya çıkan amansız bir "arzu" ile yakından ilişkilidir. *Maskara* romanının başkahramanı gibi alışılmamış

bir yüze sahip birey için bu varoluşsal eksikliğe bağlı yük iki katına çıkar, çünkü özne hem varoluşsal bakımdan hem de kişiye bir kimlik atfetmekte en belirleyici role sahip olan yüz bakımından eksiktir. Olmayan yüz hatlarından dolayı, Dorfman'ın romanındaki isimsiz anlatıcı, Öteki olan geniş toplum tarafından daha değersiz görülen bir statüye uygun görülmüştür. Dışlanmış konumunun oldukça farkında olan anlatıcı, birinin sevgisi yoluyla görünür ve sıradan olabileceğine inanmaktadır. Bir kadın tarafından tanınma "arzusu" hayatına mâl olmasına rağmen ne ölümü ne de olmayan yüzü *Maskara*'daki isimsiz anlatıcıyı talep ettiği şey olan hatırlanmayı elde etmesinden alıkoymaz. Bu makale, Lacancı bir bakış açısı üzerinden, sıradışı yüz hatlarına sahip bireylerin damgalanarak daha değersiz görülen bir sosyal kategoriyle ilişkilendirilmesinin, "ideal" ve "standarta" dönüştürülen bir takım toplumsal beklentilerden kaynaklandığını savunur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ariel Dorfman, *Maskara*, Jacques Lacan, Yüz Anomalisi, Öteki.

INTRODUCTION

Human face is of utmost importance and holds a critical place in informing the social identity of a person and his/her social position in interpersonal relationships. Apart from its social aspect, a proportional face is a significant factor in determining the degree of an individual's psychological well-being. Regarding the value attributed to appearance in present-day society, a potential "anomaly" is perceived as a deviation from the expectations of society, and it negatively affects the whole individual experience in one's social milieu. For instance, when the face is visually impaired or marked by an atypical appearance, its social impact is also damaged. Though sometimes useful, the social face, the appearance or the presented image of the self, causes unfair treatment. In other words, "face-ism," or judging people on the basis of facial features, leads to inequalities just like other forms of discrimination such as sexism, racism, and ageism (Robson, 2015).

There exists a body of literature and their film adaptations that feature facial anomaly as their theme such as *The Elephant Man* (1980), *The Man without a Face* (1993), and *Wonder* (2017). The facially marked characters in these works are grievously excluded, discriminated, and stigmatized by the members of the society who act on the established stereotypes and bias. In this regard, it can be said that face serves as a site which dramatically shapes the quality of one's life and relationships. *Mascara* (1988) by Ariel Dorfman, an Argentine Chilean American Jewish author, playwright, poet, and essayist, is one such other book which tells the story of a man with a featureless face.

Living in the United States as an exile, Dorfman reflects his struggle to find belonging in a particular community through various allegories in his writings. As Sophia A. McClennen argues, *Mascara* focuses on the problem of "belonging" and "identity" (p. 122) while placing a great emphasis on "the element of evil and capacity for cruelty that exists within all human beings" (2010, p. 123). She also explains that Dorfman's vested interest in identity in his works reveals his oscillation "between understanding the self as a subject of free will or as a socially and historically determined entity" (p. 14). Furthermore, Robert Atwan regards the novel as an attempt to dig into the problem of identity, "an excursion into a world where human identity, as in a skillful composite photograph, no longer refers to verifiable identification" ("He with No Face, She with No Past," 1988).

This study, however, explores *Mascara* in terms of the social and psychological impacts of having a physical difference, a featureless face on constructing one's social identity. The novel centers on the human face, or its lack thereof, and the significance of the face in conferring recognition on the individual in social encounters. The unnamed narrator in *Mascara,* a faceless man, tries to figure out his place in his community while struggling with the ignorance of larger society. He has a congenital missing face which turns him to an "unmemorable body" (Dorfman, 1988, p. 24). To put it differently, his congenital facial peculiarity causes him to be regarded as having a lesser social value beside the majority. As a representative of the society, the family of the featureless narrator plays an active role in his social exclusion and exposes him to a relentless disinterest which incites the narrator to organize his life and cope with his devaluation through his own means.

The unnamed narrator's case can be analyzed by using Jacques Lacan's views of identity as a social construct. Through his critical ideas on the formation of the subject, Lacan draws attention to an existential lack and a necessary split in the individual in the process of his/her becoming a social and cultural subject. The subject's tendency to conform to the norms of society is closely intertwined with a continuous "desire" that arises in relation to this existential lack. This lack also leads the subject to be a part of the symbolic "Other" of society, which is presented to the subject much like an ideal with which to identify in order to be a full-fledged human being. For a subject who is having a facial "anomaly," the burden based on this lack is doubled because they lack both in being and in the face, the most critical body part in assigning identity to an individual. On the other hand, the ontological

lack positions the members of society subjected to the Other's appraisal and the power relations it embodies.

In *Mascara*, the lack of a face exposes the unnamed narrator in *Mascara* to unfair treatment that severely impairs the quality of his life, and he is afflicted with grievous suffering and gloom. In Lacanian terms, the narrator is devoid of an ego formation through which he identifies with his "ideal" image. The featurelessness of the narrator causes him to be denied the right to have an image, whereby he could situate himself in the social sphere which is the realm of Symbolic in Lacan's account. In other words, the absence of a face in its physical form deprives him of an opportunity to achieve self-knowledge and subjectivity. He receives representations related to his identity through his ignored status in his immediate familial relations. Likewise, his desire to be the object of the Other's love, related to this double lack intensifies at times as having a missing face. In this vein, a face and the recognition it is going to confer become the phallus symbolizing his effort to gain attention to his existence. This study argues that the narrator's existential lack, coupled with the lack of a proportional material face, deprives him of possessing an ordinary social position and makes him more exposed to the pejorative portrayals related to his stigmatized face. Moreover, the construction of facial stigma as an inferior social category results from the social expectations that are transformed into "ideals" and "standards" related to physical appearance (Goffman, 1963, p. 153).

Society anticipates a status for the unnamed narrator due to his congenital disorder, but the narrator questions and hypothesizes about the legitimization of socially grounded realities about face and appearance. There are at times that the unnamed narrator both consciously and unconsciously submits himself to the devalued social positions. However, his realization of the fact that face is nothing more than a social construct, at one point, brings him to the conclusion that his quest for a permanent face and thereby a coherent identity is meaningless. Social cohesion can be achieved under varying guises in accordance with public expectations. Being highly conscious of the use of multiple faces related to social life, the narrator has the potency to tip the scale in his own favor until his very last breath. In other words, the absence of a physical face does not exempt him from getting what he demands for, which is remembrance.

"A Face without a Skin:" The Unnamed Narrator as a Lacanian Subject

Containing three main chapters and an epilogue, *Mascara* is narrated from the perspective of three characters who cross each other's lives in striking ways. The unnamed, faceless narrator tells the first chapter, which incorporates the major storyline. He is not recognized by others literally and metaphorically but has a superhuman ability to remember the faces he has seen before. Due to his facial anomaly, he has been left in the lurch by his family and his girlfriend Alicia. Alicia, a political militant, undergoes a plastic surgery by Dr. Mavirelli, then she leaves the country and dies after a short while. Despite his deep grudge against the doctor for having destroyed Alicia, the faceless narrator invites the doctor into a partnership when Oriana, an infantile amnesiac woman suddenly enters his life. Her exceptional naiveté and obedience impress the faceless narrator. In order not to lose the only woman he can control, he wants Doctor Mavirelli to make Oriana look like a four-year-old. Mavirelli, who is obsessed with power, is a successful plastic surgeon who remodels people's faces in accordance with the latest beauty trends and the current political climate. As an ambitious and greedy surgeon, Doctor Mavirelli supplies society with the perfect images/faces he constructs. In the third chapter, Dr. Mavirelli addresses the unnamed narrator announcing that he has agreed to operate on Oriana's face in return for the transparent skin of the unnamed narrator. The details about their confrontation is given in the epilogue by one of the assistants of the doctor, Maya Lynch, who reports that after Oriana runs away from the clinic, the doctor and the unnamed narrator engage in a fierce

dispute. At the end of the dispute, the narrator dies of cardiac arrest, and the doctor emerges from the operating room with the skin of the narrator, leaving him with peaceful smile on his face.

In the afterword to Dorfman's novel (1988), J. M. Coetzee states that "[h]is [the narrator's] facelessness is not a physical deformity such as we find in medical textbooks. It is rather a nullity, an absence of feature" (pp. 131-2). Nevertheless, the narrator's physical difference, a non-existent face, causes him to feel isolated and left out. From the moment he is born, he receives bizarre treatment as there is "something strange about" in his face (p. 104). In an unintentional manner, the maternity nurse in the hospital "forget[s] the most elementary tasks" with respect to him: "She was not giving him his bottle on time, she wasn't bathing him on schedule, she wasn't taking his temperature" (p. 104). For the rest of his life, as McClennen (2010) suggests, the unnamed narrator is "completely disconnected from society, totally outcast and totally forgotten" (p. 41). He is marked by "a face without a skin" which renders him invisible and impossible to be remembered (Dorfman, 1988, p. 9). Despite his unique look, the narrator suffers from a contradiction: Although his face marks him out as a visibly different person—a situation that might reserve an advantageous position for the person in everyday society—he is destined to be forgotten in the novel. His conflicting situation represents how society prioritizes looks in recognizing people rather than their personalities.

For Heather Laine Talley (2014), facial appearance retains its value, just like currency. An attractive face can be considered as a form of physical capital that can secure privileges and assign social status to its holder (pp. 13-4). As she notes, "appearance functions as a vector of inequality similar to that of race and ethnicity, sex and gender, sexuality, age, disability, and citizenship" (p. 198). The human face is "the prime symbol of self," and, aside from presenting biographical characteristics such as age, gender, race and ethnicity, it is the basis upon which personal identity is constructed (Synnott, 2016, p. 607). Facial anomaly of any sorts, whether it is a disfigurement or a congenital disorder, not only comes to mean a negative label or stigma for the individual, but also confers a lower rank in the social order (Talley, p. 14).

More importantly, concepts related to normality intensify the negative outlook on people with facial differences to such an extent that their lives are not "worth living" (p. 41). As a consequence, facially divergent people become socially dead, or as Talley puts it, they are subjected to "a profoundly dismal and subjugated status that is deeply intertwined with one's status as biologically living" (p. 39). Despite being biologically alive, these individuals' social connectedness is greatly limited.

Throughout the first chapter, which proceeds like an interior monologue that he addresses to Doctor Mavirelli and in a broader sense to the conscience of society, the narrator reveals how he is treated as a "nonentity" since his early childhood (Dorfman, 1988, p. 54). The tone of the narrator's voice turns out to be bitter and cynical. Dorfman states that "the man, arrogant as he was, was somehow incredibly hurt, terribly damaged and twisted" (Dorfman & Incledon, 1991, p. 103). Moreover, the narrator's featurelessness turns out to be unwelcomed by his family who completely ignores the narrator's existence for as long as he remembers. His father, bitterly disappointed that his son is born without a face, neither acknowledges the narrator's presence nor identifies him at a random encounter. His mother, on the other hand, is far from developing an instinctive mother-child attachment and treats him without any motherly affection or care. The narrator states, "she (his mother) would not even deign to pronounce my name" (1998, p. 31). His negligence, of which he becomes fully aware with his sister's birth, is furthered by the school which presages his never expanding social circle. He gently falls into oblivion and spends a certain period of his life being "nothing, no one, less than one" (p. 20):

> I lived as if I were missing. The teachers were surprised when I returned my written tests—as if, for an instant they realized that I did exist... [S]urprised that I was in their class, because they never spoke me or asked me a question, they never expelled me, they never called on my uplifted hand. Anybody sitting next to me at the cafeteria was always talking to the kid on the other side. What I would have given, like a used-up cigarette butt, for someone to have put me to their lips for a last—or in my case, a first—puff. For someone to put their lips to the ashes of my lips (pp. 29-30).

At a family gathering where he is selected to take the family photo instead of taking part in the portrait, he discovers the joy of taking photographs. His family's refusal to buy him a camera led him to take control of his life, and he starts to sell information about people's private lives that he is able collect via his "camouflaged face" (p. 43). After buying his camera, he roams around the city taking sneaky and voyeuristic shots and composes/establishes "an authentic gallery of human privacy" capturing "thousands of faces at their worst, their most intolerable" condition (p. 82). In this regard, photography constructs, as he himself declares, "the most absolute harmony between [his] brain and the world" (p. 32) and provides him "a bulwark against time" (p. 29). With his sharp memory and ability to remember faces, he takes a job as a photograph archivist at the Department of Traffic Accidents and begins to identify those who try to apply for a driving license under fake names. Erasing all records, including the traces of his presence, the unnamed narrator also begins to live a secluded life far from his family and acquaintances, using a name other than his birth name: "I destroyed every last file that contained a reference to my existence. I had been born as if dead. I would live as if dead, without leaving so much as a fingerprint on the world's surface" (p. 50).

Still, having no recognizable feature on his face, the faceless narrator is left alone without care and attention. His stigmatized social identity which constitutes a disadvantage for him induces him to identify with the negative portrayals held by the majority. In Lacan's formulation, the subject acquires his/her first identity through a requisite (mis)recognition of parental support. The infant obtains self-representation during the mirror stage. Becoming a subject of language and a member of society, the human being turns towards a pursuit of recognition, which can only be achieved through recognition by the Other.

The "Other," on the other hand, is a multi-faceted concept which has "many faces or avatars" in Lacan's terminology (Fink, 1995, p. 13). Lacan lists "the little other" and "the big Other" (Evans, 1996, pp. 135-136). While "the little other" is meant to be the ego formed in the imaginary order, "the big other" introduces the "radical alterity" which is beyond "the illusionary otherness of the imaginary" (p. 136). The kind of otherness suggested by the radical alterity cannot be reduced to an identification with the specular image but is established as a site that operates more like an ultimate authority in disguise of family, friends or law, and institutions (p. 136). Likewise, in this article, the notion of the Other refers to an ideal for the subjects to be a part of, or a center that offers representations regarding the social positions of the subject who is in essence a "lack-in-being": "O [in uppercase] represents the social Other of society but as a complete and consistent whole with nothing lacking. This complete Other produces an incomplete or lacking subject ($)[2] that can be completed with identification with the Ideal" (Moncayo, 2012, p. 16). The Other mediates the place of the subject in society, and it is the basis over which the cultural and social practices are transferred to individual through agents such as language, law, and social institutions.

[2] The symbol of barred or divided subject in Lacan's terminology.

To put it another way, in a social group organized around certain rules and standards, the subject comes to assume predetermined positions. These positions are presented as fixed and absolute by the promoted ideology of the group. Being incapable of self-determination, the subject needs the Other to confirm his/her existence and is expected to adopt the perspective of the societal Other. Within this context, the wider society, as the Other, confers a devalued status to physically marked people. The prevalence of norms operates in the unconscious levels of individuals, and they usually tend to conform to the position or lines offered by the majority. The faceless narrator is largely affected by the intense pressure of the norms in the society and accepts a devalued identity.

After discovering that his estrangement emanates from his featureless face, the narrator begins yearning deeply for a tangible face that will enable him to participate in every aspect of life as a full and ordinary member of society. However, the narrator is deprived of an identification with the "Ideal-I" which enables an individual to function as an ordinary human being in his interpersonal relationships. Being bereft of an "imago" does not make the narrator exempt from the necessary identifications the Other provides. The role of his parents in his internalization of the impacts of unusual appearance is immense because "the parents' attention is what has the highest value in the child's universe" (Fink, 1995, p. 101). Therefore, in a slightly different manner from what Lacan predicts in his analysis, the ideal, which is to be offered by the support and guidance of the parents, is given to the narrator over continual abasement and humiliation. In a similar vein, Dorfman places emphasis on the prominence of the family in terms of providing a protective capsule for the child's adaptation to life:

> The first face a little one sees is not something far away, outside, like a mirror in the sky. Not so. The first thing any child sees is the inside of his father's face, he sees the maneuvers that his own features must start rehearsing and that are constantly being sewn onto him like an umbrella of skin against the rain. In order to keep out other, possibly worse, invaders, he adopts his father's shell. Human beings are trapped inside the dead faces of their remote ancestors, repeated from generation to generation. From inside that chain, the grandparents of our grandparents watch us. Adults are their envoys, Doctor, the incessant, invisible remodelers of each baby born. So what every child inspires in the world is not a blessing, but a face lift. Every child, that is, except for me (1998, p. 25).

There seems to exist a dependency between generations which awaits the child before s/he acquires his/her position as a social being. The narrator compares this process which is a kind of rehearsal for life to a surgical operation in which the child is prepared for future action. He, however, is deprived of this privilege. His transition to the social structure adds up to his acquaintance with the stigmatized identity he is assumed to embark on. The narrator experiences "castration" and falls within the axis of the Other. This process is characterized by the permanent search for the Other's love which Lacan terms "desire." Desire, on the other hand, means the opening of a void which is impossible to fill because it is not a desire for a material object, but "a desire for being" (Evans, 1996, p. 41).

It can thus be stated that the unnamed narrator is marked by a double lack; his being "a lack of being" in the Lacanian sense and his lack of a face in the concrete sense. Lacking the necessary salutary image even if it is imaginary, the narrator is enforced to identify with injurious representations of his featureless face and therefore "remains subjected to the Other" (Lacan, 2002, p. 299). He remarks, "It's been so many years since I have had that sort of experience, people denying me what I demand" (Dorfman, 1988, p. 3). It is true that the narrator's physical needs are not satisfied because his family members "used to forget to give that kid his bottle... a piss of milk" (5), but the demand he articulates here is not a physical demand that would be gratified with a feeding bottle.

Rather, it is a demand for "what the Other does not have... [and] what is known as its love" (Lacan, 2002, p. 276):

> Demand in itself bears on something other than the satisfactions it calls for. It is the demand for a presence or absence Demand already constitutes the Other [society] as having the "privilege" of satisfying needs, that is, the power to deprive them [individuals] of what alone can satisfy them. The Other's privilege here thus outlines the radical form of the gift of what the Other does not have—namely, what is known as its love (p. 276).

The narrator's demand for attention, love, and care can be interpreted as his efforts to seek a place and a representation in the Other, or a "desire for recognition" (p. 163). As Lacan notes "[t]he subject has never done anything but demand, he could not have survived otherwise" (p. 243). His missing face prevents him from being recognized, but his desire is to be recognized, which means, the desire to be the desire of the Other. For the narrator, the face has a symbolic function which corresponds to the "phallus" in Lacan's formulation as a never fulfilled "signifier of the Other's desire" and a signifier of lack (p. 279). It is "a token of what the child does not have" yet carries an "overwhelming importance to the child" (Hook, 2007, p. 73). Being aware of his "untouched face," the narrator tries to win his parents' affection in vain (Dorfman, 1988, p. 24). His father who supplies various healthcare products to hospitals could not help him figure out the reason "why nobody paid any attention to [the narrator]" (p. 26).

On the other hand, the narrator wants his ignored existence to find a place in the arms of his mother, the first "Other" for the narrator. His mother, herself a "lack of being," is a makeup artist "too busy with the faces of strangers" (p. 26). In a way, she may be said to offer faces concealed with cosmetics to be identified by the Other. It is his mother's neglect that nourishes his vigilance against the adult world more than anything else:

> [T]he woman who should have succored me did not do so. That she brought me into the world, that lady who cloaked faces, of that there was no doubt. But she had not continued with me for the rest of the voyage. She left me there, featureless, abandoned on the wharf—or on the ship that was departing—and I had to defend myself alone. Because what is superimposed upon the blank blackboard children bring with them is their parent's face. That's why—and not for some stupid biological reason—they look more and more like their fathers and mothers as the years grow by. At birth, parents and relatives and lovers coo, flattering themselves with some conceivable resemblance. Lies. For a real similarity, mere fornication, pressing one seed into service so it becomes an unwilling body, is insufficient. In order to secure that face, the adult must keep on interposing himself between the just-born baby and the world. For the rest of its life, the child will pay for that protection against alien eyes (p. 24-25).

The narrator alludes once more to the role of parental intervention in a child's development for one's place in society which has to be consolidated by the Other by parental stimulation. Yet, he could not inherit the "capacity for camouflage that people learn from their parents" (p. 27) and his need to relate to others manifests itself in his vulnerability to gain attention. He says "what I needed was a loving hand to shed upon me a benediction of colors" (p. 26). It is interesting to note that Lacan confirms the nature of relationship between the mother and the child when he says that it "is constituted... not by the child's biological dependence, but by its dependence on her love, by its desire for her desire" (Lacan, 2002, p. 188). As a facially marked individual, the narrator's desire is to be desired by others; by his family, by his friends, by members of society, even if his stigmatization and the power relations that connect him to this identity prevent him from claiming such a right on the grounds of commonly held social representations of disadvantaged groups.

Ideal images are derived from the prevailing notions of "normality." On the other hand, the absence of a self-image makes him vulnerable to the intricacies of normality which descend like a nightmare on his life and his self-concept. The narrator lacks the "positive social value" (Goffman, 1967, p. 5) he needs in order to assert himself because of "the hollow of [his] face" (Dorfman, 1988, p. 52). Since the unnamed narrator fails to take part in the social structure as a "normal" person, he has to confine himself to the representations offered by the society. His statement on his own condition, in fact, exemplifies the condition of human beings in general:

> I had no better defense against people than to become more submissive, to await someone's remote generosity and to start licking his shoe. It was the lap dog's hope of nuzzling into the nook of somebody's affections. But not even a speck of dust bothering an eyelid, not even a draft that makes you get up to shut the door—I was less than those things to them. I was trapped in the worst of dependencies: at the mercy of someone else's love (p. 29).

When he gives up hope of being loved by his parents, the desperation to be recognized turns into a struggle to communicate with the opposite sex. He tries to be recognized by the women in his life; Enriqueta, Alicia, and Oriana respectively. He supposes that "the permanent look" will mitigate the existentialist alienation coupled with the alienation stigma confers on him (p. 24). At the age of six, he falls in love with Enriqueta, "the most popular of all the girls" (p. 20), who is going to have a birthday party with her schoolmates. Because his father refuses to give him allowance to buy a gift for Enriqueta, he sends her some drawings to catch her attention. Enriqueta's disinterest in him and his discovery that Enriqueta used those drawings as toilet paper for her doll severely damage his psyche and leave an adverse effect on the formation of his identity.

Though repulsive as he also admits, his drawings "to be invited" to Enriqueta's birthday party is "a way for asking attention" and a way of exposing his demand as a human being (p. 22). His desire to be "normal" blends with his dream "of betrothing Enriqueta, of becoming [his] parents' prodigal son, of arriving with fanfare at a party" (p. 32). In this respect, becoming normal would seem to be granted to him only by a face with proportional features. Remarkably, the way the narrator defines his drawings about Enriqueta evokes a similar experience the child has during the mirror stage in which the parental Other convinces the child and him/herself that the idealized image in the mirror is equal to the child's material entity. His infeasible dream of winning Enriqueta's heart manifests itself in his drawing of Enriqueta "as magnificent and benign, generous as a smiling sun" while Enriqueta herself "was frivolous, cruel, merciless" (p. 22). He underlines that "the more illusions you have about someone, the more captive you are" (p. 22).

When Alicia—known by her chosen name—enters his life short-term, his dreams about becoming an ordinary person and leading a normal life seem to come true. However, when Alicia jilts him after a week's stay and has plastic surgery by Doctor Mavirelli, his disappointment and mistrust culminate. She approaches the narrator for her personal interests. Highly aware of his status as an outsider, the narrator believes that it is possible for him to become visible and ordinary through someone's love. In other words, he thinks that gaining attention and recognition will erase his sense of alienation and ease some of his emotional burden. Alicia represents the spark of life that will allow him to make his way through the world and help him gain a "permanent look" (p. 24). However, Alicia's abandonment increases his insecurity and marks him as a pessimist and antisocial person.

Although the narrator defends the nullity of names, everyone in the novel except for the narrator has names. The name of the featureless narrator, however, is never mentioned in the course of the novel. The name(lessness) of the individual actually refers to his/her stigmatized being in the Symbolic order (Fink, 1995, p. 53). To put it differently, Dorfman implies the rare condition of the narrator by not giving him a name. Fink states that:

> [T]he subject's proper name... is often selected long before the child's birth, and it inscribes the child in the symbolic. A priori, this name has absolutely nothing to do with the subject; it is as foreign to him or her as any other signifier[symbol]. But in time this signifier—more, perhaps, than any other— will go to the root of his or her being and become inextricably tied to his or her subjectivity. It will become the signifier of his or her very absence as subject, standing in for him or her (p. 53).

As Fink stresses, one's name does not have a connection to his/her being. Rather, it functions as a symbol that might be used to address the subject in verbal communication. However, "this signifier" locates the subject's existence in social encounters which, in the narrator's case, does not seem probable. His mother's avoidance to utter the narrator's name indicates his appearance that will never grant him an ordinary subject status:

> We require somebody to look at us in order to exist. As nobody can imagine me or even conjecture the possibility that I may be present, as this mistake that I turned into should not be there in front of their eyes, as it is clear to me that my mother should have aborted and maybe did, as my father instead of opening a bottle of champagne at my birth overlooked my existence and went to sleep, because of all this, since then, since before then, I have been an erasure (Dorfman, 1988, p. 45).

The absence of his parents marks a problematic entry into the Symbolic Order that adversely influences his self-perception. In its traditional sense, the Symbolic Order signifies the entry of the child into the pre-established world in which "his place is already inscribed at his birth, if only in the form of his proper name" (Lacan, 2002, p. 140). The child, born into the "world of symbolic exchanges and meaning" comes into contact with language in this Order as an attempt to overcome that sense of lack, entailed by the loss of original unity (Hook, 2007, p. 61). It also signifies the subject's entry into the human culture where s/he meets with "a theme of the discourse of "normal" men" (Lacan, 2002, p. 70). Lacan grants much authority to the Symbolic Order itself for its potency to determine and constitute the subject by way of representations filtered through language because the castrated subject is "limited in his or her abilities, incapable of deciding between different courses of action, subjected to the whims of the Other, at the mercy of his or her friends, lovers, institutional setting, cultural-religious upbringing, and so on" (Fink, 1995, p. 72).

The narrator thus devotes all his efforts to specialize in a profession unusual for someone in his situation and age, that is, photography. His perennial struggle renders him in part a common human being in the Lacanian sense because he supposes that photography, which he defines as his "calling" (Dorfman, 1988, p. 32) will ensure "the most absolute harmony" between his body and his surroundings as well as his rejection, "the solitude to which the rest of [his] being had reigned itself" (p. 30). Without enough money to buy a camera, he starts to blackmail people, which he prefers defining as "war reparations" (p. 44). After buying a camera, the narrator builds an information network and uses it against people: "[o]ne face after the other that I classify inside my own filing system so that they will never have a chance to manipulate me" (p. 61). Coupled with the power photography provides, the narrator's remarkable memory about faces grants him the privilege to protect himself against the profane effects of his invisibility. Interestingly, as a subject who is devoid of the "Ideal-I," he is able to recognize people no matter how many operations s/he has and "identify every person immediately without needing to know what sad, fragile sounds their parents gave to them—like branding cattle" (p. 70). In a way, he exhibits his difference from people who "are trapped by what others start to expect of them; trapped... by the image they themselves have tied to introduce into everybody else's pupils. Do you understand now why I am slave to no one?" (p. 45)

Although he initially tries to dissociate himself from his ego cursed by his face, he manages to turn it into a disadvantage for others. Using the inappropriate photos he takes, the narrator sexually abuses Enriqueta, taking vengeance on her for his traumatized self-esteem in childhood. His defiance of mainstream representations about his stigmatized identity is also appreciated by Doctor Mavirelli who addresses the narrator with a "paternal tone" (p. 113). As Dorfman points out, between the doctor and the narrator, "the theme of father and son ... repeats itself over and over again" (Dorfman & Incledon, 1991, p. 103).

As the representative of the system which ensures the functioning of power, Doctor Mavirelli could be associated with Lacan's concept of "the name-of-the-father" in whom the narrator "recognize[s] the basis of symbolic function, which since the dawn of historical time, has identified his person with the figure of the law" (Lacan, 2002, p. 66). Doctor Mavirelli pioneers "in the promotion of law" to which he contributes by carrying out plastic surgeries and thereby manufacturing ideal images on which people base their being (p. 208). He is very much aware of the innate human passion to seek "the Other's desire" that directs the course of people's lives to a large extent. This awareness has apparently determined his career choice. He states, "I had chosen my specialization precisely because I knew that people kill, lie, betray, accumulate millions, decide who they will marry and who will be their friends, with the sole objective of achieving prominence, of being seen" (Dorfman, 1988, p. 105). Discovering the special skin of the narrator as a newborn baby, the doctor focuses on the "infinite" commercial potential that the narrator's "magical" skin will offer him (p. 105). When the narrator erases all the traces of his existence, the doctor, having lost the track of him, assures himself that he will find the narrator someday. The two meet finally when their cars crash into each other twenty years later.

It is apparent that the doctor appreciates the endurance of the narrator and his efforts for survival for he "feel[s] proud" of the narrator (p. 111). He finds it "admirable" that the narrator contrives a way of securing himself by utilizing his peculiar ability to distinguish faces and turn them into objects through the lens of his camera. In a similar manner, with the name-of-the-father who is "the structural symbolic element" that outlaws a precarious intimacy between the mother and the child, the doctor warns the narrator against his relationships with women and especially with Oriana who, the doctor claims, deceives the narrator with false hope. The women in the narrator's life induce the narrator to lower his guard that he maintains to protect himself from society's reflections of his discredited identity.

The narrator's feelings related to the unconscious call of the subject for at least a dose of care and affection coincides with Lacan's view of the residuary quest for the recognition of one's being when a woman called Patricia brings Oriana to the narrator's house. Disregarding her efforts (or others') to communicate with him, the narrator speaks out the human tendency to be captivated by the allure of someone. In his disadvantaged position, the narrator's experience conjoins with his internalized devalued self-esteem:

> There's something that still melts, still becomes tender all over, Doctor, when a woman speaks to me softly. Even if I know it's hypocrisy, that it was Patricia's press agent spouting the words, that all gentleness was cosmetic and calculated, even so... That someone in this world would treat me with the semblance of affection... It must happen to you all the time: being sucked in by somebody's splendor although you are absolutely aware that, underneath the bronzed skin, one skeleton is just about as unenticing as another (p. 6).

In many aspects, the narrator may be said to resist these representations and what is expected of his stigmatized identity. Though he manages to find alternative solutions to alleviate his suffering, after a while, he realizes that the power photography gives him over others does not fulfill his

ambition to overcome the socially enforced deficiency that inexorably overwhelms him. As an example, the happiness and the notice he hopes to acquire, yet fails to accomplish, when he gets in bed with Enriqueta could be associated with the Lacanian desire which, by definition, does "not seek satisfaction." It is characterized by "its own continuation and furtherance" (Fink, 1995, p. 90). Because of its relation to the experience of lack, there is no way to satisfy this desire for human being. He questions:

> Did I want to live the rest of my life extracting love from other people as if I were milking a cow? What value could her glance at me have if it depended on something as transitory as a photograph, if it was produced by her primitive, inexplicable fear of the photograph that she did not even know existed but that gave me power over her? What value is that, if she forgot me immediately? (Dorfman, 1988, p. 34).

Being bereft of the simplest love and affection a child should naturally be given, he detests make-up which he refers to as "shields" (p. 25). With their "manufacture[d]" (p. 105) faces, the adults claim attentiveness for themselves (p. 105). The artificial covers such as daily make-up or voluntary plastic surgery are to make a feign sympathy and serve to carry out their mutual interests with people whom they regard as "a good investment" (p. 61). To be approved and gain acceptance, people become "too absorbed in that self-love which they disguise as love for someone else" (p. 45). His alienation or estrangement from his family, in this respect, could be regarded as a display of his effort to come to terms with his existence, which has no place in the outside world.

The arrival of Oriana with her simplicity gives the narrator the hope that his demand for love may be satisfied. What he wants to do with Oriana is to return her to her childhood appearance to secure her obedience. The narrator deconstructs the original mirror stage between the child and its reflection on the mirror and equates it in his mind with Oriana. He says, "I with no face and she with no past, the two mirrors reflecting nothing more than each other and the other again" (p. 61). He believes that he can overcome the adverse effects of his facial "anomaly" by achieving the missing unity between his body and reality through Oriana. To the narrator, his missing face and Oriana's missing past complement each other and nourish his sustained demand for visibility: "the girl I loved and protected was gradually turning me into a visible man, I felt, of a sudden, as if a sign or scar had started to grow in the absence I call my face, something that would identify me" (p. 75).

To force the doctor to operate on Oriana, the narrator plans on taking some photos of the doctor in the middle of one of his famous operations, which could bring public backlash, in case the doctor reverses his decision. In the planning stage, when detective Jarvik, one of his business partners, consults the unnamed narrator's memory to find Oriana, the narrator decides to take action because of the anxiety triggered by the possibility of Oriana's entrapment. At that point, their exchange of view with Jarvik on beauty and appearances reveals one of the major themes of *Mascara* and touches on an important matter about a physically stigmatized person's indignation against society, which places utmost value on appearances. Throughout his life, the narrator tries to recover himself from the damage caused by his non-existent face. Warning the narrator against the dangers most innocent faces may seemingly hide and the untold realities behind "people's secret faces," (p. 75) Jarvik provides valuable counsel which the narrator knows innately but is not carried into effect by society: "to be beautiful all you need is the love of one person" (p. 76).

In Lacan's view, as a member of society, the subject is castrated; therefore, the legitimization of those representations derives from the subject's "presenting itself to the other, looking to win attention and recognition from the Other" (Fink, 1995, p. 73). In a way, the subject's taking position in society is a manifestation of his attempt to cover the ontological lack in being. It is this lack and the necessity to

articulate the need that causes the individual to be the object of language as well as the system and determines his lower status. As the narrator states:

> Each human being has around him a hive of almost infinite relationships, people stuck to his life as if it were flypaper, people mixed into his jam, his clothing, his checkbook, his toilet paper. The things people have been told that they need to live, the things somebody else always has to furnish (Dorfman, 1988, p. 51).

In fact, the identity offered by the Other derives from misrecognition and there is no way to reach "the ideal-I" since it does not exist. It appears then that the human being builds his/her being on a dream which is never to be fulfilled. This being the case, the exclusion of the unnamed narrator from life is a fairly unfair act that draws its strength from unreasonable judgments. Lacking the inherited physical traits or genetic makeup, the narrator nevertheless grasps the contradiction in the workings of system which imposes a normative power on the individual. The contradictions and hypocrisy prevalent in society stir up his hatred towards people who, in his own estimation, delude themselves into believing in the legitimacy of their assessments about each other. As J. M. Coetzee explains, in *Mascara*

> the face is no longer part of our natural self but belongs instead to culture. The face is a mask that we inherit, largely from our parents. Our face is part of our self-presentation, like our clothes, but we cannot take it off as we take off our clothes. Yet it is an error to think that beneath the face we wear is our true self, for there is no such thing as not wearing a face. One exception to this rule is a young child whose face has not yet set, particularly a young girl child like Oriana. Another is the faceless man. But neither a young child nor a faceless man can participate in the social order (pp. 134-5).

As Coetzee states, in the novel the face is transformed into a medium that functions as an indicator of social status and/or social class. In a society where appearances and looks are equated with success, the most "valuable asset" of people is their face (108). Accordingly, physical, particularly facial attractiveness, shapes the daily life and behavior of the members of society. The unnamed narrator is stigmatized for his "anomaly" and is subjected to grueling ignorance connected with power and commonly held values, ideas, and beliefs. In other words, his unusual appearance works "as a vector of inequality" that imperils his equal participation and treatment in interpersonal engagements (Talley, 2014, p. 198).

On the other hand, the faceless narrator's deep grudge against the doctor stems from the nature of Mavirelli's job and everything it represents, including the shallowness and superficiality of the society which places so much value on appearance. He accuses the doctor of being a skilled trickster charming and deceiving people. The doctor grants his patients "an additional momentary visibility," and anonymity per se required to "wield more power than they had ever conceived of" (p. 105). Rather than helping those in need of help, his operations serve to the interests of those in authority and eliminate any threat to the stability of institutions. For instance, he remodels the face of a politician with "a curious blend of juvenile features with a serene and mature gaze" in accordance with public demand (p. 108). The faceless narrator considers Mavirelli and others hold power both to play with it and distort people's perceptions of reality.

CONCLUSION

Constituting the center of the Lacanian thought, desire is "continuous force" that arises unconsciously out of the subject's relation to lack (Evans, 1996, p. 37). Lack is first constituted during the mirror stage when the child identifies with a mental picture and disconnects from the illusory

unity with the mother. Motivated by the desire to be "the desire of the Other," the child will relentlessly try to fill this gap throughout his/her life (Lacan, 2002, p. 300). The focal point here, however, is the fact that the subject desires what the other desires "not so much because the other holds the keys to the desired object, as because his first object(ive) is to be recognized by the other" (p. 58). In an attempt to be recognized, (to fill this lack) in pursuit of being the desire of the Other, the individual tends to situate him/herself in the place offered by the society (the Other). To put it another way, the ontological lack—or gap—forces the subject to take his/her position in the web of social relations and power relations with an urge to be a part of the Other.

Within the theoretical framework outlined above, this study claims that the featureless face of the unnamed narrator of Ariel Dorfman's *Mascara* situates him in a relatively vulnerable subject position and thereby in the mercy of the Others in Lacanian sense. Moreover, the absence of self-image causes him to be characterized by a double lack and leads him to be caught in a dream of normality that he deeply wishes for. The narrator longs for basic human needs such as love and a sense of belonging, and tries to overcome the psychological burden of his lack (in both sense) through a couple of failed love affairs. The meaning he attributes to his temporary relationships with Alicia and Oriana and their behavior towards him as an ordinary human being foster an optimism that he could receive the care and respect he has always expected. For the narrator, Oriana is the symbol of the face, life, and of being a regular member of society. However, upon realizing the inconstancy and the baseless demand of the society for normality, the unnamed narrator comes to understand that his pursuit of normalcy is futile. The members of society as castrated subjects of the Symbolic are themselves unavoidably characterized by an experience of lack by becoming social subject. Excluding people with facial "anomalies" in compliance with publicly accepted standards accounts for a piteous attempt of the "normal" to gratify his/her ego in an imaginary state of completeness. No matter how much one strives, there is no chance of being the phallus because the ideal, as the Other, "by definition can never be found in this world" (Davis, 2013, p. 2).

Despite all the dilemmas, the unnamed narrator has the potential to question and unsettle the conventional depictions tied to his stigmatized identity. He gets a job as a photograph archivist in the Department of Traffic Accidents owing to his astonishing memory to remember faces. Moreover, realizing the psychological protection photography offers him, he buys a camera using the privilege his "camouflaged face" grants him, and reorganizes his life in relative isolation from the others. The narrator's stance against the setbacks of his face and devalued social identity prove his capacity to hold the ropes of his life even if he dies in the end. Oriana's escape triggered by the impact of her traumatized history interrupts the narrator's plans and costs his life. Although there is no way to fill the lack, being a Lacanian subject, the smile on his face at the moment of his death in the doctor's clinic reveals that the narrator has fulfilled his desire to be remembered even if it is momentary. In other words, the recognition of the smile on his face by others signifies that his effort to bring attention to his existence is finally realized. He gains the visibility he wishes, even if in his last breath. In this sense, it can be suggested that, the featureless unnamed narrator leaves the Earth leaving his indelible footprint on it just as he has hoped.

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