

She Can Be Real, She Can Be Fictional”: The Significance of Oriana’s Paradoxical Role in Ariel Dorfman’s *Mascara*

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“After experiencing the first three sections of Ariel Dorfman's *Mascara*, readers can empathize with Maya during her interrogation in the “Sort of Epilogue.” While she offers her testimony, Maya honestly believes that she is telling the “truth” (153) when she says that the dead man's eyes looked as if they were “burned out, the color of ashes” (156), and even though the consequent sarcasm and brusqueness of the two men shake her, she is convinced that Dr. Mavirelli survived his confrontation with the mysterious visitor. Readers cannot be so sure. Maya's statements suggest that Mavirelli bestowed his face upon the faceless narrator, but there is no conclusive evidence in Dorfman's description of the event to substantiate this.¹ In a novel in which truth is constantly constructed and then deconstructed, all that readers are left with is the anxiety of piecing together the disparities into some kind of an interpretation. In “Exiling History,” Robert Newman comments that readers make their own incisions into the face of Dorfman's text and stitch them back together in the image of their own narrative memories (24). Dorfman's application of metaphor complicates this operation, and by interchanging metaphorical meanings, readers discover that their interpretations concerning which character has survived are dependent upon how they define each narrator's concept of identity.

In “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” Fredric Jameson points out that third-world allegories contain the identity of the oppressive dictator, which functions as an archetype of capitalist imperialism, an embodiment of the “failures of contemporary third-world societies,” and a “faceless influence without representable agents” (82). In *Mascara*, this figure is portrayed by a combination of the faceless narrator and Dr. Mavirelli, both of whom repress, manipulate, and dominate the identities of others. Mavirelli epitomizes the capitalist ideal by performing the fifteen-minute operation that transforms any client's face into “loveliness and instant media recognition” (128), and by inserting the “small apparatus” that guards the “new face from the ghost of the old face” (140), he in effect controls the patient's perception of self. Although the faceless narrator has a family, it refuses to acknowledge his existence and effectively exiles him from any sense of ancestral history. Cut off from any collective past, he reinforces his own identity by capturing other people's images in his camera and then using the photographs for extortion. His reluctance to pervert Oriana's image through his camera compares closely to the patience which Mavirelli displays as he covets the faceless narrator's chameleon-like skin. His desire to return her adult face to its four-year-old appearance signifies the Master/Slave motif that reoccurs throughout the novel. The faceless narrator and Mavirelli gain power by possessing identity and then manipulating that image of self to serve their needs.

Jameson asserts in *The Political Unconscious* that the collection of narrative voices in a novel represents various social classes and class factions, and as typifications mirror the cultural fragmentation and the political struggle inherent in modern society (144). In *Mascara*, the mediation of the voices establishes the dialectic between Mavirelli/faceless narrator and Oriana, but it also verifies the second interpretative level in this novel. Both men realize that Oriana is being hunted and conspire to control her, and people such as Patricia attempt to keep Oriana free. However, Oriana herself is dialectical. On the one hand, she is a double amnesiac, barely able to remember her name; on the other, she hosts a voice inside of her capable of giving refuge to thousands of memories and sharing them with the poor about to die. Mavirelli and the faceless narrator contribute the thesis and antithesis of Oriana's condition: the faceless narrator describes her as his innocent slave who remembers too little, while the doctor identifies her as a government fugitive who remembers too much. The narrator of the second section provides the synthesis of this polarity, explaining that Oriana is in fact both of these: a silent participant in the rebellion of the dying, but also a traitor preparing to expel the rebel she aids. “Hands,”

“smiles,” and “face metaphors demarcate the presence of the past in the characters, and as a result Dorfman is able to illustrate figuratively what occurs when people recess so deeply into the past by becoming a depository of voices, maintaining an obsession with nostalgia and history, that their own sense of present is erased. Oriana was so severely traumatized as a child that she has become excessively introverted, assuming the role of amnesic child-adult by retreating from a society she fears and divorcing herself from reality. This precipitates the presence of the voice inside of her that has a Christ-like compassion for dying peasants and mythically furnishes them with both faith and a kingdom. By using Oriana as a host, the voice depends upon the woman to take her to the dying so that she may hear their final testimonies.

Contrary to Dorfman's comment that "the reader will be hard pressed to find human beings who show a hint of loyalty to one another" (1), the narrator of the second section is the preserver of indigenous cultural history and is in conflict with the faceless narrator and the plastic surgeon, whose objectives are to restrict, to redefine, or to destroy innate identity. Unfortunately, the narrator's discussion is only intrinsically articulated; she is a dream voice which is never realized through outside expression. At the beginning of the novel, the faceless narrator's voice is at first only spoken to himself, stating "Yes, Doctor, I'm talking to you, Mavirelli, or whatever your name is. It's true that I'm speaking softly and just as true that you're not even present yet" (3), but the doctor later confirms that he is listening to his client.² The faceless narrator and Mavirelli articulate their voices and they are heard; however, they lack any internal voice, any connection to past or to family. They only live in the present, altering their identities and those of others or manufacturing history because they are incapable of maintaining a spiritual affinity with any ancestral history. Oriana's situation is just the opposite: she houses a voice which is filled with memories, but is unable to articulate it or her own indigenous voice to others in the present.

In an interview with John Incledon, Dorfman admits that he did not consciously construct the conversation between the faceless narrator and Mavirelli. As he states, "It was very strange, how [the faceless narrator] could have so much power in his voice, but not be there. Then [the other voice] came out. I put the plastic surgeon in, answering him. The first voice wasn't really directed toward the plastic surgeon in the beginning. I mean, it was just a man who was there" (103). Dorfman then realized that there "was something missing in the middle" (103) between the two characters, so he inserted the second narrator to bridge their discussion.³ Dorfman also comments that the characters' dialogues allow him to covertly express his political views: "[. . .] a lot of my political obsessions are present in *Mascara*. For instance, alienation, the use of deception in relation to the public and the private world; memory, the need of memory; the erasure of memory as a form of control and the idea of a hidden structure that acts like a vampire in our lives" (103). Furthermore, Dorfman recognizes the various themes that the characters' testimonies suggest:

But there seems to be several levels at which you can read [the novel]. One of them suggests these might be the three parts of a personality of only one human being, mingling together. Or, who knows, you may have Adam and Eve and God. A strange triangle. It can work itself out in many ways. You may have realized that the theme of father and son is something which repeats itself over and over again. (103)

However, interpreting the novel as three parts of a personality does not explain the paradoxical role of Oriana. Granted, the faceless narrator possesses no recognizable identity, the plastic surgeon surreptitiously alters identity, and the voice inside of Oriana is bountiful with identity, but Oriana's decision to banish the voice that has taken over her consciousness undercuts such a reading. Oriana is not schizophrenic; she has forfeited her present to an overreliance upon the past, a surrender to dream rather than to reality, and at the end of the novel she is not only attempting to retain her own identity, but she is reacting against the two men who want to stifle her indigenous voice forever.

In the first section, the faceless narrator reads faces and textualizes their history, which enables him to exploit the past that he uncovers beneath the surface of the skin. This reading of face is similar to Jameson's theory that readers do not confront a text "as a thing-in-itself" but apprehend it through layers of previous interpretations and apply their own master codes, interpretative keys, to the work (*Political Unconscious* 9-10). When the faceless narrator first addresses the doctor, he acknowledges that his narrative is essentially about repression of identity, a story with which Mavirelli can relate: "It makes no difference where one begins to tell a story: we always reach the same conclusion" (4). His textualizing skill is first illustrated when he describes Patricia's visit, how "She pushed her finger into the buzzer [and his] eyes measured the paleness of that pressed finger, the contrast with the calm liquid quiet of the rest of her body, the fury of the trapped bee in that finger" (5). As his anger over not being able to identify the night callers implies, he can only construct his interpretations from sight: "and these hands sweating for minutes on the dead receiver, unable to reconstruct the face of the enemy from muted breath on the other end, the identity of the person--or persons" (6).

This is reiterated when he comments upon hearing a similar voice while standing in line at a bank: "If I had that talent . . . I'd capture his voice, I'd follow it to his hideaway, I'd squeeze his face out, drop by drop . . . But I am utterly unable to discern one tone from another . . . the only music I can distinguish is the kind that flickers in through the eyes" (17). The faceless narrator's obsession with Oriana is primarily based upon his ability to bestow upon her physical identity; he can provide Oriana with names, but he cannot supply her with the ancestral foundation behind them. Ironically, he realizes that Oriana has the potential to restore her own memory, yet he disregards that within her is the exact opposite of himself. He is unable to detect the spirit-like voice which occupies her body.

When Oriana is left with him, the narrator realizes that she is in danger because of something she has previously witnessed, but he believes that she no longer remembers the incident. He tells the doctor, “Those dark glasses of Oriana’s. It wasn’t necessary to read her eyes in order to surmise what the morning, probably the preceding week had been, the slow exhausting of possible sanctuaries” (10).

He adds that “it was as if she were exclusively made up of culminating moments,” and that “No investigation, no file on her past, no photograph, would reveal anything different. Never in my life had I seen a transparent adult, with nothing to hide, without an artificial smile to fashion her . . . Oriana, clear as crystal” (13). He discerns that someone is going “to kill Patricia because of Oriana, due to something that Oriana was hiding, due to . . . something Oriana may perhaps not even have, anymore . . . I thought that Oriana’s past would be there, as always on the surface of her skin—that I could suck it out of her” (22-23). Because of the information that Oriana may or may not possess, the narrator requests the meeting with Mavirelli concerning the erasure of her past: “There is something that will at any moment emerge and will pose itself, just so . . . and if you happen not to be present, if you do not know ahead of time that this supreme moment is on the verge of briefly blossoming, then that truth will submerge itself all over again” (34-35).

The faceless narrator sees the past as only a burden, the shackles of mediocrity. He states, “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 . . . the incessant, invisible remodelers of each baby born” (32-33). And, as exemplified by his parents forgetting that they have a son, his transitory face enables him to erase his presence from others’ memories: “they already begin to wash me from their memory: forgotten before arriving at the scant, sad archangel of a remembrance . . . I have been an erasure. Everybody will go through this process of disappearance, once dead. I am the only one who has had to experience it while still alive” (56). Thus, even though they both are nameless voices, he and the second narrator are essentially antagonists. Whereas memory provides strength, identity, and defense against oppression for the voice inside of Oriana, the faceless narrator considers it as something to be dominated, altered, and ruled. He believes that his lack of identity is an asset and he uses this ability to become the perfect voyeur who records what he witnesses with his camera. Moreover, whereas the second narrator provides a sanctuary for identities, the faceless narrator mechanically imprisons them into photographs. His photography, “the authoritative voice of the adult world” (39), allows him to possess (as opposed to house) the faces of persons whom he may manipulate for political, cultural, or economic power. In his “sweet cavern of that black machine” (40), he can capture what he despises.

The faceless narrator discovers that he does not have to photograph Oriana to possess her, that without an indigenous past she does not threaten him. He comments that she is the “first in which the photo would reveal less than what she already has written all over the fullness of her face” (74), and he believes that they mirror one another: “I with no face and she with no past, the two mirrors reflecting nothing more than each the other and the other again. Because if somebody or something has erased, as if it had never existed, her whole life after she was five, nobody has been able, on the other hand, to banish the experience of those years from her body” (76). This contradicts his behavior with other people. As he states,

I knew that if I had them now [in a photograph], without a tear, without a stain, they would have been the exact and mathematical replica of what I had seen through that magic eye in the howling instant when the button had clicked. More than that, I knew that if I was the owner of a camera, I would be able to reach the most absolute harmony between my brain and the world. (41)

The narrator must commodify the people he sees, turn them into products that he can trade and sell, reify their personalities into photographs, to acquire his personal sense of community. His interaction with Alicia taught him through the photographic image he could “fool and retain the past,” that “Memories . . . are like ham: you can slice them, devour them, digest them, shit them. A photograph: now, you can fuck a photograph forever” (16). Instead of needing to photograph Oriana to unveil her “inner biography” (58) and then “inventing a history” (44) that suits him, the faceless narrator wants to “invade someplace warm and turbulent and digesting and murmuring inside her” (47). As he puts it, “a place which was, which had to be, for me” (47).

From the onset of his narrative, the faceless narrator describes Oriana as a piece of property. This is evident by his comment, “Who knows how many days she had been trying to get the afflicted girl off her back. . . . That’s how I perceived Oriana’s life for months, deposited and transferred from house to house like a package. Until nobody knew who had her or who was responsible for collecting her again” (21). He soon realizes that Oriana will be “so docile, so submissive” (14). She needs his “Permission” (45) to come out of the bathroom, and because of her amnesia, he can impose upon her an identity such as Enriqueta or Alicia, or make her “a saint, a queen, a heretic, a

witch, a whore, [or] a movie star” (79); they can be “each of the past's lovers, each character in each novel . . . it will always be my narrating her” (81). As he asserts, “She can be real, she can be fictional: the only circumstance that never changes is that she always ends up at my mercy, always ends up awaiting my indulgence, my forgiveness” (79). His power over her “permits him the opportunity to dictate the parameters of her identity and thereby substitute his authority for society's” (Newman 22), wielding omnipotent power over her as a god: “For her, every day shall be as a first birth, with all the fresh air that came at the beginning of Creation . . . She is as Eve.

But I shall not be Adam, I shall be God and the Serpent rolled up into one, starting the day as God and ending it as the Serpent, with the chance to begin the next day another story, a new galaxy, another Garden and another Exile, until the end of time” (80). The narrator enjoys his power over Oriana's past so extensively that instead of constantly revising her identity, he asks his nemesis Dr. Mavirelli (someone whom he loathes) to stifle permanently any of the voices that might exist behind the face that he defines and redefines.

The narrator believes that “Memory is always a fraud--erased, manipulated, sweetened by somebody, somebody always swearing it was some other way until you are not sure yourself” (36) and calls upon the doctor to impart upon Oriana her final role, a young child. The narrator wants to silence the voice “those men were looking for in Oriana's throat”:

What is deposited in a throat? Melodies? Memories? Stories? Words that others are scared of keeping? Had they been given over to Oriana so she could keep them? And her amnesia, was it precisely a way of trying to avoid those men? So that, if they ever found her, they would not be able to slowly drain from her the memories she had accumulated? If there had been time to explore her before someone downstairs, maybe one of those very men that. . . (48)

And he fears that if Oriana's own voice ever returns to her, she will resemble one of the ordinary people he blackmails with his camera: “Oriana might break away from her own self, awaken from her amnesia, and become again the ordinary everyday person she once was, in other words, precisely one of those beings without a mystery to hide which bore me to death . . .” (75). Furthermore, in one of his “prophetic inclinations” (77), the faceless narrator foreshadows what is possibly happening at the end of the second section: “Her true history is also known by some adult Oriana who is crouched within that child Oriana who stretched out her arms to me so that I could protect her. That older woman is determined to come back to the surface and transform my loved one into a normal, orthodox, uninteresting being . . . Normal: someone with a past, with a mask, with a piece of lipstick” (77).

The narrator wants Oriana as she appears in the photograph that he has received from Jarvik, creating an image that he thinks will finally substantiate and verify his own existence, fabricating his own sense of past and of history.

Whereas the faceless narrator captures identities with his camera, Mavirelli destroys them with his scalpel and his surgical invention, which he describes as a “small apparatus . . . like a metallic clitoris [inserted] into the precise intersecting line of the brain” (140). The device effectively erases memory, and as the doctor comments, “That is why my operations have such an incredible degree of success: because along with the old skin, they eliminate the old habits, the past. My tiny device is merely guarding that new face from the ghost of the old face” (140). Newman points out that the plastic surgeon “reveals himself as a double of the [first] narrator. [. . .] Like the narrator's photography, Mavirelli's surgery functions as a means of erotic possession; penetration constitutes control” (22). When the doctor is first introduced to the faceless narrator, he realizes the “commercial possibilities” (127) of commodifying the chemical in that child's skin: “His skin, particularly the skin on his face, turned out to be special. . . a chameleon, after all, a butterfly altering its colors . . . all are creatures programmed for a limited, cyclical register of environments and habitations. But that a human being would be able to fuse with his ever-changing backgrounds, could mix in to the point of invisibility. . .” (127). As the stereotypical capitalist, Mavirelli considers the “practical purposes” of the narrator's physiological anomaly: “For leisure, for love, for work, for journalism, for military uses” (127). To acquire the “magical” (128) substance, Mavirelli tries to maintain surveillance on the faceless narrator, knowing that he can indeed market the chemical for political, economic, and cultural power.

As an eraser of physical identity, the plastic surgeon can recast any face to meet the cultural or political preference at any given time. When he tells the faceless narrator about the politician, he is preparing him for the transference at the end of the novel. He begins by warning him that his operations are extremely covert: “You are not interested in names or you forget them, so I do not intend to fill your head with insignificant syllables. It is enough to say that the man knew only one thing well in the world; he knew the face he wanted manufactured for himself . . . The only thing he needed in order to be successful, was the exact face that people at a certain moment in history were expecting” (131). Known for his “ads” (131), the doctor was contacted by a political coterie that “wanted a new face” for their candidate, and as Mavirelli points out, “it had become essential to steal the face of the person who was preparing to replace him. . . Transfer it to my client” (132).

He then relates to the faceless narrator, “You will agree with me that to abduct a face is considerably less arduous than people imagine” (132). By telling the narrator this information, Mavirelli is relying upon his counterpart's greed to guarantee him access to the mysterious quality of his skin, bargaining with him that he will change Oriana's face (or steal her present face and replace it with a past image). The doctor states, “So what I am, in fact, suggesting is that we should revert to the first page of this book we are writing, that initial moment in which the nurse brought you to my hospital room like Moses in a basket, and I, instead of taking you in and transforming that baby into a prince, returned you to the turbulent rivers of your life” (135).

Mavirelli understands that “What can be bought . . . is a face” (136), and he hopes that an alliance with the faceless narrator will enable him not only to capitalize upon his physical aberration, but also that their reunion will allow him to revise a past, a narrative history, which will keep his partner subservient to his demands.

Mavirelli coercively applies a “paternal tone” (137) to his discussion of Oriana to manipulate the faceless narrator, but his rhetoric also serves as the antithesis to the first section. He begins by preaching that “women are monarchs of deceit,” supporting this with what he believes is the truth concerning Oriana's illness:

You said she is an amnesiac. I would like to tell you, however, that they are searching for her because she has an excess, rather than a diminishment, of memory. It seems that she possesses--or used to, once upon a time, if you are correct--possesses, I say, a remarkable mnemonic faculty. . . . she hides what appears to be a kind of tape recorder, which reproduces with minute faithfulness what people say. Not astonishing, is it, that with that exceptional talent so many people want to get their hands on her? (138)

Refuting the commentary expressed in section one, Mavirelli advises the faceless narrator that he is the one held hostage while Oriana remains in his home, and in response he accepts to “suffocate her other faces” and “burn the memory in her” (140):

. . . let us go first to undress Oriana so her memories can never more rebel. If that is your desire, if you are still doubtful, you can by yourself insert into her this apparatus, which will erase her previous faces. . . Are you not the person who knows most about faces in the universe? Is there any other way to insure that I will not invade, with my hands, the intimate world of Oriana. (142)

In the last part of this section, Mavirelli's fatherly statements toward the faceless narrator complicate what happens in the epilogue. Unlike the faceless narrator, Mavirelli has a semblance of history through his physical identity, and he wants to offer that past to his “Son” (143): “you should put on the only face that I did not extract from nothingness, the only face that was given to me already made, that I inherited, and that now, thanks to you, I can bestow as a gift and someday recover for myself? My face” (143). However, the doctor also comments that he will periodically “descend like a miner” (141) to excavate the “treasure” (141) that is buried beneath that visage.

In this instance as in others in the first and third sections, hands intrude the body cavities, distorting the past and manipulating history. The faceless narrator describes them as tools of repression and destruction: Mavirelli's “yellow gloved” (11) appendages are “butcher's hands” (8), “deceiving hands” (3), two of the “unhealing hands of the surges of the world” (32).⁴ More important, he accuses all doctors of washing their hands and then

inserting their instruments into the mouth and beyond the asshole and under the fingernails, into the swamp of a heart we have inherited. Cleavers that open you as if you were a can of food . . . they proclaim that they have discovered what is corrupting us, when they are the ones responsible for having made us sick in the first place. That's their strategy--to make people suffer . . . (35)

Fictionalizing the manipulation of cultural identity that he discussed in his sociological works, Dorfman characterizes the doctor as an antagonist who delves beneath the cultural surface of his patients and who restructures not only the present that his clients think they want (how they believe they should be perceived), but who also infiltrates his own version of their pasts in the historical void left as a result of the intrusion upon their identities. As the faceless narrator remarks to the doctor, “The past is like one of those faces captured by hands such as yours, Doctor--always subject to alterations” (37). These interpretations of hand metaphors clash with their description in the novel's second section, in which the appendages represent identity, history, and community.

The same metaphorical inversion applies to smiles. Oriana's father's smile and those of the bodies mentioned in the epilogue similarly denote resistance against repression and peace in maintaining identity. On the other hand, the first narrator perceives smiles as only political masks: people put on “artificial smiles” (13), are under the “idea of a smile” (19), and experience love from “leftover smiles” (37).

When the faceless narrator deceptively asks Jarvik how to get his girlfriend “to fix her eyes” (96) upon him, the detective tells him “everybody remembers someone who smiles” (97), whether the smile is genuine or not. Referring to the appearances that Mavirelli constructs out of his client's faces, the faceless narrator comments upon the smiles which the surgeon “fabricates” (29). The contradicting metaphoric meanings signify the conflict between persons who possess intrinsic voice and those who do not, but they also point toward the inner conflict within Oriana. The voice inside of her witnesses the stripping of the past from borrowed hands and hears the calls of other voices who are trying to flee from the men who will erase their identity. An amnesic, Oriana has given up her own identity to placate this voice, and her decision at the end of the novel suggests that she is attempting to create a balance between the inarticulated voice(s) within her and her own articulated voice that she is reestablishing.

In the second section, the narrator is seemingly being exiled from Oriana's consciousness, realizing that Oriana herself is assuming the responsibility of housing voices and preserving the past. The narrator witnesses from the inside of her “mama's cavern” (106) the reification and commodification of history by capitalist agencies, the “two men” (105) who collect and process hands. In retaliation, she constructs a “kingdom” through which the population's identities are saved, and the liberated voices are then distributed to reinforce those who are culturally repressed. The narrator first comments that she is “enclosed” in a world that was created as a result of a dream she had in which “two men always in a hurry” (105) want to rent hands to her. These men tell the narrator that they own “all the hands in the universe” and it is only an “illusion” that hands belong to anyone but them (106). Representations of the first and third narrators, these men “with their knives” and “with their photos” (105) intimidate her by showing images of “Beggars's stumps. Fingerless babies. Hemiplegics. Paralyzed limbs” (106), and years later in her dreams about them she could feel their “multiple arms” (106) descending upon her. In one sense, similar to the surgeon and the faceless narrator, the two men represent the erasure of identity by confiscating hands and boiling the identity off of the bones. However, on another level, they also signify the enforcement of identity upon a population: the only identity that is tolerated is the one imposed by whoever is in power.

In her dreams, the second narrator anticipates the expurgation of her own hands. The men will cut them off her body, tie them together, and then scrub the knuckles and palms (107). As she describes, “I watched them fracturing the music of that skin. Stuffing my pretty hands into a huge pot of boiling water, extracting them as pale as sheets. Without a wrinkle. Without a line that could remind anyone of what they had once caressed” (107). When they were finished, they would throw them into “a heap with a thousand of other hands” (107-08) and prepare to rent them to other children: “Our hands, white as death, blurred and without history, were now going to start a journey toward the arms of the children who were about to be born. So that no child could know what had come before, what her ancestors had danced. So that we would forget” (108). The men whisper into her ear that she is not to tell anyone what she knows about them: that they will “punish whoever betrays the terms of the contract. It's what will happen to you if you ever tell this secret” (108). However, when Oriana's father dies, the men that existed in the narrator's dreams make their presence into reality, interrogating him for secrets and searching his home for evidence.

The voice rebels against their incursion by listening to the rhythm of her father's hands before his death. As she states, “When those men arrived to get my papa's hands, I had already labored at length to keep the memories clean and intact” (108). Efficiently, the men “withdrew” her father's hands “as if they were a couple of gloves,” but they unexpectedly find that her “papa's face, as begrimed and old and cracked as his hands, opened into a smile” (109). The father “had the last word” (109):

The hands of my papa would not be useful to those men: not to infiltrate the lives of the unborn children, not as the hands of a soldier to hurt rebels, not for anything. Let them take his hands to their washroom and cellar. They would be unable to erase even so much as a scar. Someone had listened to the secret cantata of those hands, giving refuge to each line, rocking each memory in a cradle, singing the couplets that this man's mouth would never more pronounce. (109)

Her father confides in her “an intimate secret” that “when those men came to get [his] hands, they were going to carry away [her] memory” as well, that “memories can rot as quickly as a body” if they are not retrieved and nurtured (110). By listening to her father's memories, the voice defeats the men: “At that very moment those men were testing my papa's hands, and the boiling pot was proving unable to whiten them; at that moment they were asking themselves about that final mysterious smile, and, without another word between them, they were starting out on the way back home” (110).

The men hoped that her father had left something tangible concerning his past. Just as the faceless narrator and Mavirelli must copy or steal an already constructed face, the men are only able to erase or deconstruct other persons' physical pasts: "They were looking for a tape, some notes, papers. Something concrete, something that made a sound, something written. The ephemeral resources with which adults preserve a past that escapes them" (111). In the seminal *Orality and Literacy*, Walter Ong asserts that a primarily oral culture preserves its past through oral epics or through song (146). He explains that the memory of the oral bard is crucial to the preservation of that culture's past and its rituals (60-65). The bard is responsible for remembering all the songs of the past and passing on that oral history to future generations. If the bard fails to remember these songs, the culture's history may be lost forever. The voice inside Oriana becomes her culture's bard, attempting to save the voices of the past from repressors who know that repression will become easier once that cultural identity is eradicated.⁵ When the men ransack her home, tying her mother to a chair and asking where her father's smile came from, the men undress Oriana and "place the angle of a flashlight in the most hidden of that body's seven holes" (111).

This event is the source of Oriana's amnesia, but it also the catalyst that precipitates the construction of the kingdom inside of her. As the narrator tells her audience, ". . . the real house where I had passed the first five years of my existence was in ruins. I watched those men opening the legs of that girl where I had taken up residence since my birth. And I could not do it. I could not return to that body" (112). Instead, she builds "a whole kingdom" full of "imaginary halls and invented towers and endless furnishings," erecting an internal palace for the dying (112). She receives the voices of the poor and oppressed, making Oriana walk into their neighborhoods, noticing when the "hour of their death was written on their hands" (113). Before they die, the narrator collects their lives and reads "what their hands had sung": "I like the dead, the people who are about to die. They ask for nothing more than to be relieved of their voices. They ask for nothing more than to die with a smile . . . The proof was in the smile. Papa had died with the certainty that his hands, at the end, belonged only to him" (112). After gathering the "voice of an old woman peeling potatoes" (114), the narrator describes what she "told" her mother before her death: "When I murmured to those motherly hands in [my and Oriana's] hair that I would harvest them before they were eradicated . . . I told them not to be sad. How was I to allow those men to boil those soft guardians that had washed us, nourished us?" (115). She realizes that one day she must settle her mother's hands "by the side of so many other memories, which filled the infinite coffers" (116) of her kingdom.

The Christian symbolism in this section suggests that the narrator has omnipotent power comparable to a savior and that her kingdom is similar to a heaven. The metaphorical references to the bones could refer to the harvesting of dry bones in the book of Ezekiel, and the narrator's conception suggests a supernatural birth: "And if I had to soil my immaculately washed sheets, if I had once again to clean that blood with the sheets of my recent birth, I would do it all over again" (120). Furthermore, this connection between the voice and Christ is supported by the narrator's references to Oriana as "savior," "saint," and "confessor" (114). But this symbolism is undercut by Oriana's limiting of the narrator's powers (and by the two men having authority over the hands). After the first time Oriana prohibited the voice from returning to her body, the voice began "Thinking, for the first time, of [her] own extinction": "I did not understand, I did not want to understand, the danger. . . . I interpreted the transitory blockade as an accident, a short circuit that would never be repeated. Precisely because Oriana had no life to reassume, because without me she was nobody, . . . it never occurred to me that this might be her first rehearsal for independence" (117). When Oriana does not allow her to listen to their mother's story, "one about the most ancient of our grandparents" (117), the narrator realizes that without Oriana she cannot "give shelter" (119) to the tortured voices of others. She predicts that when the men finally capture the hands that she and Oriana rented, they will also obtain the maps to her kingdom: "One by one, threshold by threshold, without my being able to do anything to protect them, house by house, they would exterminate my memories, until my hands would be ready to be hung from some child about to be born, some remote perishing child who would not know of my existence" (117-18).

In the last part of this section, Oriana allows the narrator to see the two men approaching Mavirelli's office for "someone whom Oriana had comforted" (119). The narrator had believed that Oriana was incapable of banishing her, but realizes that she is indeed fighting for her freedom:

I had always kept a window that looked out upon her existence, a floating fragment of my mind that allowed me to control what that body in which I dwelled was doing. I had interpreted her transitory blockade as an accident, a short circuit that would never be repeated. Precisely because Oriana had no life to reassume, because without me she was nobody, because not a line had been drawn on the palm of her hands, it never occurred to me that this might be her first rehearsal for independence. (116-17)

As a result, she hopes that Oriana will not forget “the refuge of strange voices” (119) that they have saved, because Oriana's consciousness, not the identity comprised of past voices but one specifically concerning the present, wants dominance over her body. Fearing that she and her kingdom will be abandoned, the narrator pleads for help:

I want you to know it, ladies of my dreams. Though you cannot hear me, though you do not dare open your kingdoms to my voice. I want you to know that the one who is dying now is me. I want you to ask yourselves if I do not have the right to a miracle. If I cannot be rescued, just once, just once, just one single time, the way it came to pass in the fairy tales my father told me. . . . While in some corner of this city where I cannot walk, my mother and all the mothers of the universe are dying without anyone to listen to their song. (121)

Oriana has recessed so deeply into herself by becoming a depository of voices that her own memory is erased; she has allowed her body to house so many memories that they have seemingly forced out her present identity. Oriana finally understands that people must not overrely upon the past if they are to have any chance of surviving in the present, and her action to leave Mavirelli's office indicates that she is reconnecting with her own identity. Whether it is the doctor or the first narrator who owns the mysterious, “peaceful,” “serene” smile (157), Maya's description of Oriana helps to unravel the purpose behind the “inherited” face.⁶

Mavirelli's nurse states that Oriana was terrified, telling her that “they're coming” (153). When Maya asked for a message, she received a response suggesting the voice inside Oriana aided whoever died: “He won't be needing me, anymore” (153). The faceless narrator explains in the first section that it is Oriana who needs him, but he also notices the purifying effect she has: “Was I under the innocent influence of Oriana? Was that why I did not even think of an act of vengeance? Was it her sweet infancy that had produced this calm?” (71). Except for possibly a short time in his office, the doctor never meets Oriana, so it is unclear why he would need her other than to influence the faceless narrator. Maya describes the dead man's eyes as ashen (156), a feature associated with the faceless narrator (133). If Oriana aided him, then while she stayed at his home, she was covertly helping him in some way because he needed her. Perhaps, as indicated in the second section, the voice inside Oriana is simply allowed to save another person, regardless who it is, before Oriana exiles the entity from her body.

During the epilogue, Maya states that Oriana shed her bandage (her mask) and escaped. Oriana's destiny is uncertain, as the voice inside her can only hope she remembers “to run” (119) and that she may one day be the normal person that the faceless narrator would despise. After retreating into herself so deeply, Oriana may need time to trust those who lead her from place to place, the faceless narrator, the voice inside her, or simply herself. Readers might later be given an explanation of her actions, as Dorfman concludes the novel with an open ending: “TO BE CONTINUED” (158). However, metaphors complicate any interpretations of this novel, and as the truth is constantly revised by each narrator throughout the text, readers are left to decipher what Jameson terms the “semiautonomous coherence” (*Political Unconscious* 63) that exists in this novel: readers must listen to the narrative discrepancies and ultimately judge which narrator is telling the truth, or better yet, which truth is the most believable and memorable. People should learn how to apply the past, which is always flexible, to the present. Instead of living in the dream of the past, or being manipulated by the dreams of others, people should dream the reality of the present. Perhaps Oriana's paradoxical role in *Mascara* exemplifies what happens when the present is sacrificed, what happens when people listen to so many voices from the past that they forget our own identity in the present, what happens when people fail to maintain the balance between the inarticulated dream and the articulated reality. Although *Mascara* was published in 1988, few scholars—Sophia A. McClennen, in the recently published *Ariel Dorfman: An Aesthetics of Hope*, offers the most thorough study of the author—have addressed Dorfman's treatment of memory, history, and reality in this novel.

Endnotes

¹ In an interview with John Inledon, Dorfman admits that there is not one definitive reading of the epilogue: “[. . .] you have to discover who these two men are. You have an idea who they are. And then you've got to piece together what happened in that studio. That can be done. Except there are two alternatives, and it's not certain which one happened. There are clues. There are hints” (104). He also concludes that the last section “refuses to close the novel” (104).

² The faceless narrator continually undermines the doctor's identity by misspelling his name: “Mirlaveri” (8), “Miralevi” (8), “Mardovelli” (12), “Mavarillo” (16), “Mivalleri” (21), “Mavirelli” (26), “Malaveri” (29), “Mirdovellez” (30), “Moravelli” (34), “Marviralle” (35), “Mentirelli” (37), “Miravello” (51), “Marvirelli” (56), “Mardivelle” (60), “Mirvallori” (63), “Marcarelsohn” (67), “Mirvarelli” (71), “Mierdavelli” (83), “Mavarello” (86),

“Marvorelli” (91), “Miravelli” (94), “Miervadelli” (98), and “Mirevedelski” (101). The first spelling in this section is “Mavirelli”--repeated on pages 51, 69, and 96--and is verified by Maya Lynch as the name of the surgeon. Reiterating that the doctor is not yet present, the narrator also introduces his narrative as “this story that I'll tell to the face of yours that's in my head” (4). The doctor later responds, “I am sure that you will forgive me, my friend, if I answer you with a slight tinge of familiarity in my voice. I do have my reasons: it could almost be stated that we are already partners” (125).

³ Dorfman asserts that writing Oriana's section enabled him to finish his novel: “I know there was something missing in the middle, between the two men talking to each other, but I couldn't figure out what it was. It came out very painfully. Only when that was done, when I had heard the three voices, was I able to realize what the epilogue should be. In fact, there's a second book which will come out of this, which uses two of the characters. It's a detective story set in Chile, a very different book” (103).

⁴ In “Adios, General,” Dorfman writes that his “fractured visions” concerning the Pinochet years are metaphorically of two images: a “voice on the phone” and a “gloved hand” (76)—two traits assigned to the doctor. This refutes Dorfman's comments that his novel is not about Chile and strongly suggests that Mavirelli is modeled after the deposed Chilean dictator.

⁵ This interpretation of the second narrator as the oral bard also supports Jameson's theory that authors are utilizing postmodern variations of the traditional tribal allegory to express the embattled situations of Third-World culture (“Third-World”). Moreover, in this section there is clearly an economic conflict between classes: by renting hands, the two men have access to a product that people such as Oriana's father cannot live without and they exploit their consumers to meet their commodity demands.

⁶ In this rather confusing scene, the doctor receives some sort of salvation. As Newman notes, it appears that Mavirelli gives the first narrator his face (23), and if this is so, the doctor finally acknowledges his past, his sense of identity, and shares this--much like the altruistic voice in the second section--to the faceless narrator. In other words, Mavirelli offers his face to the faceless narrator in the same way that the “old woman who was peeling potatoes” (114) expressed her voice to the second narrator. The dead body's smile indicates that a present identity has been transformed into a cultural past, combined with other voices to become a collective history.

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