The Mask as a Literary Trope between Decadence and Modernism.

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Centre for Comparative Literature
University of Toronto

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2010

Abstract

This dissertation is a study of the mask as literary trope in European literature between 1890 and 1914. Through a comparative analysis of literary and dramatic works, and through a juxtaposition to works of visual art produced in the period, I illustrate how the mask takes numerous shapes and configurations as it is treated as a synecdoche, a metonymy, as a figure of antithesis. I show how, in spite of the mask’s changeability, it continues to echo the same concerns and to function as an image of death and rebirth. Moreover, I argue that the mask can be considered an uncanny phenomenon because of its flexibility as a signifier, as a “symbol that takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes” (Freud 1919, 244) and thus as an image of ambiguity and unintelligibility.

I begin by pointing out the importance of masks in visual arts and in the philosophical and dramatic discourse of the period. I explain how the mask assumes in these years a new significance as a form of portraiture and how it is associated with the idea of fragment; I summarize the notion of masks in Nietzsche and examine how the mask relates to the concept of “uncanny” as formulated by Freud. I then show how several writers use masks to approach the...
matter of a conscious and unconscious self, constructing texts that parallel, and often prefigure the Freudian approach. In addition, I explain how the use of masks merges with sensibilities that are developing at the time, such as the notion of aestheticism, the fear of and fascination with the exotic, the assimilation of Darwinist theories, the notion of degeneration and of a declining phase in Western civilization.

The analyses leads to the conclusions that, in all these texts, the mask becomes a trope for a potentially threatening alterity. The act of recognizing one’s mask coincides with a process of self knowledge, and is linked to the awareness of an uncomfortable resemblance with a dangerous, often “exotic” Other which is reflected in the repressed component of one’s self, but which is also an image of estrangement felt by the individual in a time of rapid change.
Acknowledgments

It is a pleasure to thank all those who made this thesis possible.

I would like to express my gratitude to my primary advisor, Prof. Roland LeHuenen, for his excellent guidance, invaluable assistance and great patience.

Deepest gratitude are also due to the members of the supervisory committee, Prof. Domenico Pietropaolo, Prof. John Zilcosky and Prof. Veronika Ambros, for their precious advice, assistance and understanding.

Special recognition goes to my editors, Prof. Roberto Nickel and Dr. Elizabeth Thomson. I will never forget their generosity and constant encouragement.

I also wish to thank my parents and Rodrigo Hernandez Gomez for the unfailing emotional (and sometime technical) support.

Finally, I wish to thank my colleagues at the Centre for Comparative Literature and all the Faculty and Staff of the centre who, for many years, contributed to making projects such as this possible.
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1) *L’Inconnue de la Seine*. Anonymous. ca.1898-1900, Saint-Denis, atelier de moulages de la Réunion des musées nationaux.
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Introduction

This dissertation examines the role of the mask in European literary and dramatic texts between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, more specifically, from 1892 to 1913, years in which the mask becomes important as a decorative object, as a theatrical prop and as a metaphysical trope. I argue that, in these years, the term “mask” undergoes a radical shift of meaning, coming to address a concrete object as well as a trope standing for both a divided self and the perception of historical change.

The idea for this work took shape as I was working on a comparison between Mann’s Der Tod in Venedig and Hofmannsthal’s Andreas. Analysing these texts, I realised that the mask was linked both to the idea of an unspecified “Orient” and to an irrational component of the self. Later, my attention was repeatedly drawn to examples of sculpted faces, exotic masks and death masks in decadent and modernist fiction of the period. As these phenomena can all be grouped under the term “mask,” I realized that the concept takes myriad shapes in the work of the era: Le Gallienne and Crommelynck address decorative masks; Rilke considers both decorative and metaphysical masks; Lothar and Lucini focus on theatrical masks; Henry James builds The Sacred Fount around a painted mask; Mann's Der Tod in Venedig, Hofmannsthal's Andreas and Bely's Petersburg play with the concept of carnival masks and masquerades, while in Lorrain's work, carnival, exotic and death masks are both objects and metaphors of falsity and deception.

These works suggested to me that, while the mask remains a fluid and flexible notion at the turn of the century, it is also used to express common themes and anxieties, and I began to wonder whether it could rightly be considered a means to express concerns of

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1 I am using the term “dramatic text” to underline that these texts were written for the theatre. However, although I occasionally make reference to the use of masks on the stage, this analysis does not include a study of performance – the latter, in fact, constitutes an independent and complex field of study that has been approached by scholars such as Harris Smith, Sheppard and Wiles.

2 The mask found in the room of the character Sacramozo at the moment of his suicide, in particular, intrigued me. Was it a death mask? Or could it be read as an allegory of rebirth?
the age. More specifically, my impression was that the mask appears across genres as an attempt to understand or overcome the idea of decadence and degeneration, and is closely linked to both death and the expression of a myth of rebirth. In this light, I wondered whether the mask could be considered a key aspect of the transitional phase from Decadence to Modernism.

When I consulted secondary literature on the topic, I discovered that scholars of dramatic literature focused mainly on Modernists and contemporary representations. Harris Smith, in *Masks in Modern Drama*, has thoroughly examined the use of masks on the western stage from 1896 to the 1990s; David Wiles has focused on the use of antique masks in modern theatrical experimentations, Anthony Sheppard has analysed exotic influences and ritualized performances in modernist music theatre; Douglas Clayton has explored the use of the Commedia masks in twentieth century Russian theatre and drama, and Martin Green the impact of the commedia on the modern imagination.

Yet it seemed to me that while the mask continued to be used in Modernist theatre, its implications changed after the First World War, and that transitional texts from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century should be given particular attention and distinguished from later developments. Among the authors who considered the mask in literature, I found important reflections in the work of Jean de Palacio and in the idea that the masks is closely linked to decadence. Palacio's work, however, focused specifically on the French tradition, and I discovered that there was no comparative analysis on the meaning of the mask in literary and dramatic texts which pertained to this specific period. I thus began to think of a work that would take into consideration the international significance of this phenomenon, and the close connection between literary, dramatic works and sculpture and paintings produced in this period. The exhibition organized in 2008 by the Musée d'Orsay, which focused on the use of masks in the visual arts between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, further guided my research.

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In order to understand how in this period the mask acquires an ambiguous connotation, and how it becomes an emblem of decadence and rebirth, it is useful to leave our literary and dramatic texts for a moment, take a step back and consider the mask as an artistic object along with its critical and philosophical background. By juxtaposing two articles written by Vitry and Macke, I will illustrate the artistic debate on the mask; I will then define what we mean by “mask,” consider the cultural context in which this notion develops and explain the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche. I will show how Nietzsche’s ideas are reflected, on the one hand, in the theatrical theories of Edward Gordon Craig, and on the other hand, in Freud’s notion of the Uncanny. Finally, I will explain how Nietzsche’s, Craig’s and Freud’s conceptions of masks relate to the body of work contained in the dissertation and outline the structure of subsequent chapters.

In 1903, Paul Vitry, curator of the Louvre, published an article entitled “Masques,” in which he examines the proliferation of decorative masks by contemporary artists such as Rodin, Bourdelle, Cros, De Chamoy, Carriès, De Rudder and Dalou. Vitry identifies in these masks the influence of ancient Greek, Gothic and Japanese art. He can think of three ways in which the mask, as an object, has been productively used: as an architectural detail (as in the Middle Ages), as a death mask (as in ancient Egypt and Greece) and as a theatrical mask (as in ancient Greek and contemporary Japanese theatre). He states that, while in these cases the mask has an architectonical, practical or ritualistic task, the contemporary decorative mask, although inspired by these sources, has detached itself from any of these functions: “Est-ce que l’amateur de japonaiseries ou le simple curieux qui a accroché, entre ses estampes et ses livres, quelque masque japonais à la grimace énorme, songe souvent que ce masque est un accessoire de théâtre ou de danses sacrées?” he questions. “Non certes, pas plus que le Parisien, en allant à l’opéra, ne songe aux origines religieuses des représentations scéniques” (345).

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4 See appendix.  
5 See appendix.
While he recognizes the artistic value of contemporary decorative masks, especially in the works of Carriès, Rodin and Bourdelle, Vitry complains that they have an unfinished, incomplete appearance. “Tous ces masques au fond ne sont que des mascarons inachevés et inutilisés” (35), he writes, and concludes that these objects are symptomatic of the tendency of modern art to take shape through fragments. These sculpted faces, he continues, could be wonderful if, as in the case of gothic art, they were used to complement a work of architecture; however, exhibited as autonomous pieces, they give the impression of being incomplete and of lacking a fulfilling context. He explains that a perfect correspondence between artistic artefacts and their original function can be found only in primitive eras or epochs of artistic and cultural growth, while such consonance is no longer possible in a contemporary European setting that lacks any sense of harmony and correlation. “L’œuvre moderne est un morceau isolé qui ira rouler n’importe où, s’accrocher sur un mur entre des assiettes où l’on ne mange pas et des sabres ou des armures inutilisables” (353), he writes, reflecting on the feeling of alienation evoked by these artefacts. It follows that contemporary art is, according to Vitry, undergoing a process of degeneration of which the mask becomes the emblem.

The idea that art was in decline is found elsewhere. In 1911, Aubertin published in Munich a volume entitled Die Kunst stirbt (Art is dying), in which he complained that the period lacked an artistic direction and a revolutionary generation. However, this was not a universal sentiment, and such claims were contested by the group Die Blaue Reiter with the publication of an almanac edited by Wassily Kandisky and Franz Marc (1912). Participants were of different nationalities and from different fields of art, and they discussed works ranging from the latest foreign paintings to ancient, primitive, children’s and East Asian art. These artists believed they were at a turning point in history (Marc 38), that art was in a process of renewal that included all fields and the task of

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6 See appendix.
7 With this remark, Vitry echoes the ‘degeneration’ theory that was popular at the time, according to which art was undergoing a process of inverse evolution from realism to decoration. This theory, as Lloyd remarks, was a response to Henry Van de Velde’s 1895 Aperçus vue d’une synthèse d’art. (Lloyd 4).
8 Quoted by Klaus Lankheit in “Die Geschichte des Almanach,” Der Blaue Reiter, 253.
contemporary artists was to create powerful symbols for their own time (Marc 31). Among the participants August Macke, a visual artist with theatrical experience, took up the challenge in an essay entitled “Die Masken.” In this paper, which is a poetic manifesto of the relationship between modernism and primitivism, Macke argues that ancient and oriental traditions constitute sources of worthwhile inspiration which lead to an awakening of modern art. For Macke, drawing on a cultural tradition far away in time or space is as justified as being directly inspired by nature. Whereas Vitry differentiates the contemporary mask from its ancient and exotic models, regarding the first as an empty evocation of the second, Macke considers contemporary and primitive art united by their function as a means of expression (or perhaps as a mask?) for the subjectivity of the artist (56). Like Vitry, Macke mentions Japanese, ancient Greek and Gothic masks, but adds African and Amerindian artefacts to the list. He traces no contradictions or shifts of function, but sees continuity in how the mask is used through time and history: “Für die groteske Zierate der Maske finden wir Analogien in den Baudenkmälern der Gotik, in den fast unbekannten Bauten und Inschriften im Unwalde von Mexico” (58). Unlike Vitry, who sees an emblem of decadence and alienation in contemporary masks, he regards the mask’s rediscovery as a sign of art’s renewal.

As Vitry’s and Macke’s essays make clear, the mask was on its way to being transformed from an image of degeneration to one of rebirth. From an emblem of decadent features

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9 “Ihr Denken hat ein anderes Ziel: Durch ihre Arbeit ihrer Zeit Symbolen zu schaffen, die auf die Altäre der kommenden geistige Religion gehören und hinter denen der technische Erzeuger verschwindet” (Marc 31).


11 As Ettlinger points out, the belief that art should be the expression of the artist’s spirit was common among German expressionists and had already been formulated by Owen Jones in Grammar of Ornament (192).

12 “the grotesque embellishment found in a mask have their analogies in Gothic monuments and in the almost unknown buildings and inscriptions in the primeval forest of Mexico” (89 trans. Henning Falkenstein).

13 Macke’s interest in masks is echoed by Carl Einstein, who in a book in defence of African sculpture (Negerplastik, 1915) included several illustrations of primitive masks and an essay that underlines their artistic values as well as their function as tools of metamorphoses and their religious role.
lingering in contemporary art, the mask becomes in a few years an icon announcing the innovations of Modernism. This transformation is less surprising if we pause to reflect on the notion of “mask” and its metaphorical function. In its most simple and neutral form, a mask is a device that works to efface the expressiveness of the face, replacing mobility with a still, rigid surface. In this fashion, the mask becomes an image of death. “Il y a dans tout masque quelque chose de mortuaire,” writes Nancy: “Le masque représente au sens fort et premier du terme: il n’offre pas une copie ou un simulacre, il nous présente […] une figure non vivante, ce qui veut dire une figure soustraite à la mobilité, au devenir permanent du visage” (14). On the other hand, the donning of a mask creates a mixture of inorganic and organic, strangeness and familiarity, alterity and self, an entity which can no longer be considered “self” or “other” but a hybrid of the two. The act of wearing a mask can thus be seen as effacement, but also as a positive and productive transformation. Seen in this light, the apparent contradiction in Vitry’s and Macke’s articles is explained as a two-step trope in which the mask can stand for decadence and death and also for transformation and rebirth.

Yet what do we mean exactly when we talk about the masks of this period? The masks that Vitry and Macke turn into symbols of contemporary art are at first glance completely different. Vitry refers to two- or three-dimensional ceramic, paste, clay and glass portraits that, even if not created by moulage, are reminiscent of that technique and therefore deliberately play with a sense of ambiguity between casting and sculpting. The art of moulage is, in a sense, the apex of realism; masks created by this technique, as some of these works are or pretend to be, are often questioned as artistic artefacts because of their excessive similarity to their models.14 And yet this utmost realism, in the case of the death mask, paradoxically gives shape to fantasy, to a face that, as its model decays, preserves an exact reproduction of his/her features.

Using a fragmentary, poetic style, Macke argues that the mask embodies the essence of primitive and medieval art; he incorporates several folk paintings from the

14 A letter by the German expressionist Eric Heckel, written as late as 1946, reiterates the ‘illicit’ use of moulding. He writes: “In sculpture, forms should be beaten or cut from the tree trunk or the stone without a clay model or transfer processes” (quoted in Lloyd, 68).
Völkerkundemuseum in Munich, and images from primitive and children’s art. Like Vitry, he seems to aspire to a “contemporary mask” as the fruit of this encounter. He compares Van Gogh’s portrait of Dr. Gachet to a Japanese carving and to a demon-mask from Ceylon (58) and mentions Cézanne, Beardsley and Gauguin. In the rest of his almanac, the works of other modernist artists, including Kirchner, Rousseau and Picasso, are juxtaposed or compared to masks.\textsuperscript{15} As is well known, Expressionists and Cubists looked for an inspiration in primitive art,\textsuperscript{16} and in several of their paintings, faces acquire mask-like features.\textsuperscript{17}

The contemporary masks described by Vitry and Macke can thus be defined as types of portraiture, even though the former mimics a faithful copy and the latter defies the conventions of realism. Yet even here, the boundaries are blurred. The works examined by Vitry include, for example, Carries’s masks, which defy realism by simultaneously mimicking death masks, gothic masks and the grotesque and fanciful demon-masks of

\textsuperscript{15} The almanac is not limited to the works of \textit{Der Blaue Reiter}; it is a statement of the link of art-forms through time and space, as exemplified by Kandisky’s statement:
“Wenn der Leser dieses Bücher imstande ist, sich seiner Wünsche, seiner Gedanken, seiner Gefühle zeitweise zu entledigen und dann das Buch durchblättert, von einem Votivbild zu Delanay übergeht und weiter von einem Cézanne zu einem russischen Volksblatt, von einer Maske zu Picasso, von einem Glasmalerei zu Kubin usw., so wird seine Seele viele Vibrationen erleben und in das Gebiet der Kunst eintreten…(Kandinsky 180) (“if a reader is able to rid himself of his own desires, his own ideas, his own feelings for a while and leafs through this book, going from a votive painting to Delanay, from Cézanne to a wok of Russian folk art, from a mask to Picasso, from a glass painting to Kubin, etc. etc. then his soul will experience many vibrations and he will enter the sphere of art” Kandinsky 147, trans. Henning Falkenstein)

\textsuperscript{16} Ettlinger specifies how the interest in primitivism led to different results in German expressionism and in Cubism. According to him, Picasso “began about 1907 to grasp the intellectual and aesthetic principles of particular types of masks, and to relate Negro sculpture more thoroughly to western art” (191), while for German Expressionists, primitive artefacts remained little more than exotic motifs. His view is challenged by Lloyd, who argues that Expressionism is itself a complex movement with forward and backward tendencies (\textit{passim} vii).

\textsuperscript{17} The most famous example is Pablo Picasso’s “Les Demoiselles d’Avignon” (1907), but we can also mention numerous works by German Expressionists, such as Erich Heckel’s painting “Hude” (1910), Max Pechstein’s sculpture “Head” (1913), Karl Schmidt-Rottluff’s brass relief “Four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John” (1912), Nolde’s Mask of Energy (1896) and, most importantly, Emil Nolde’s “Mask Still Life” series, in which the influence of James Ensor’s paintings merges with that of the artefacts from the Berlin ethnologic collection (Lloyd 171). Lloyd emphasizes the liminality of “Masks Still Life I”:
“Whereas Ensor used masks to reveal the grotesque reality behind the façade of political society, Nolde’s masks were simply hung against the painterly blue background, which isolates them in time and space. In this way he stressed their status as objects, but paradoxically they are objects animated by human emotions-laughing, exclaiming, pensive. Although they refer back to Nolde’s long-standing interest in mask-like faces [ … ], this is the first painting where the masks occupy a peculiar middle ground between the world of objects and subjective emotions. They are like relics of a theatrical event still embued with the stylized emotions of performance …” (Lloyd 175).
After a visit to James Ensor, whose paintings show the influence of *Japonisme*, Nolde, a German Expressionist, painted a series of still lives with masks (1911) in which he merges European masks and the artefacts that he observed at Berlin’s ethnological museum. Between Macke and Vitry’s conception of art stands the European discovery of African art. Even so, this influence can be seen as a step on a path already begun, rather than a radical new beginning, and the two types of masks reveal more common features than we are initially led to believe.

We have seen that the masks examined by Vitry are reminiscent of Greek, Japanese and death masks. In the last years on the nineteenth century, philosophers and anthropologists were discussing the ritualistic origins of theatre and of Greek masks. As for death masks, we know they were initially used for funerary ceremonies (Benkard 20) and that, even when transported and used in a decorative context, they maintain an unsettling, religious connotation. At the turn of the century, when these discussions were going on, masks were still being used as magical objects in Japanese folk dances and treated with reverence in Noh theatre, thus attesting to the ongoing significance of forms of art in which masks had strong religious significance. The masks created by European modernists express the same dynamic. Through their reference to Asian, African and Oceanic folklores, they call attention to traditions in which the mask maintains a strong ritualistic function, either as an apotropaic object able to ward off evil or as a tool that, once worn, becomes the means for the incarnation of a spirit, a liminal object that manifests the encounter of the supernatural with the daily reality. In the
years being examined, does the mask, contrary to Vitry’s argument, once again acquire ritualistic value? If so, how is it related to an understanding of death and/or rebirth? Does it become an alternate form of portraiture and, if so, how does it relate to the representation of subjectivity? Do the references to ancient and “exotic” traditions indicate an encounter between familiarity and strangeness, between Self and Other, and how is the notion of alterity reflected in their use in dramatic texts, in short stories and novels?

This dissertation is an attempt to answer these questions, to examine the growing interest in the mask as an ornament, as a theatrical prop and as a metaphysical trope, and to demonstrate that there are no clear boundaries between these functions. Rather, in these years, decorative masks merge with theatrical and ritualistic masks; masks on stage are attributed a metaphysical role and are often the work of great artists; and masks in literature maintain an aspect of theatricality. The same blurring of boundaries affects what we intend by “mask,” a term that is used during this period to define a two dimensional object and a three dimensional sculpture, that can indicate a mask reduced to a layer of make-up or extended to the creation of a mechanical puppet. Throughout the nineteenth century, the mask is used in visual art mainly as an architectural detail, an intermediary step in shaping statues, but is also a tool for the study of physiognomy. At the turn of the nineteenth century, it gains autonomy and becomes an independent decorative object, a symbol of the renewal of theatre, and a metaphor for the perception of a fragmented self and for the sense of estrangement felt in a time of rapid change.

While the use of masks in theatre and in the visual arts has been widely explored, much remains to be said about the use of masks in literature and about the continuity of the theme across genres. As I was reading Le Gallienne, James, Lorrain, Bely, Hofmannsthal and other authors that pertain to this period, I realised that there is no “literary” mask in a strict sense. In fact, to narrate a mask means to transform into an ekphrasis, into the in comprehensible conception of a deceased person, of an animal, of a plant, of the whole magic of nature, of the rhythmical.” Macke 88, transl. Henning Falkenstein.)

The sacred role of masks is also emphasized in the pages dedicated to masks in Einstein’s “Negerplastik” (XXV-XXVI)
description of a work of art through verbal means. Further, the mask generally has a theatrical connotation: its presence in the texts that I chose to consider is always linked to an imaginary stage, and it frequently transforms the protagonist into a double, a puppet moved by greater, often historical forces. I also realized that the mask appears in these texts both as a concrete object, even if in its most minimalistic form (such as make-up or a veil), and as a rhetorical device. The multiplicity of meaning, the shift of function from ritual to theatrical prop, from theatrical to decorative object, and from decorative to rhetorical device becomes characteristic of a notion that can assume infinite shapes and yet continues to address the same concerns, such as a divided self, the contrast between human interiority and exteriority, between a private and social self and the encounter of self and alterity. These problems have been eternal themes in literature, and in these texts are placed beside the allegorical use of the mask as a trope that signifies man’s alienation in a time of societal change and increasing industrialization.

To understand the origins of the twofold dynamic through which the mask is both an object and a trope reflecting humankind’s interiority and perception of history, we must go back in time and consider the importance attributed to the mask by Friedrich Nietzsche, a philosopher with a major impact on the next generation. As early as The Birth of Tragedy (Die Geburt der Tragödie, 1872), Nietzsche refers to the mask as the first theatrical prop and as a metaphysical trope. His fascination with Greek art and interest in the origin of drama was part of a general trend, since both philosophers and anthropologists were in this period interested in exploring the origin of drama in religious rituals (Innes 111). Nietzsche traces the origin of Greek tragedy to Dionysian rites and explains how the tragic chorus, in which he sees a form of ritual, is transformed into theatre when the god Dionysus is represented by a masked actor (1872, 72). He then goes on to argue that all the heroes of the Greek stage are a “mask” of the god Dionysus, the original tragic hero (1872, 82).

Thus, for Nietzsche, the mask is the object through which Greek tragedy is born. But it is also the emblem of its death, since Euripides, to whom Nietzsche attributes the degeneration of tragedy, is accused of having created characters dominated by single
traits, and the degeneration of Greek theatre is exemplified by the “masks with one expression” (183) typical of the new Attic comedy. Nor is the mask limited to a literal function, since it is the metaphor implied in the dynamic opposition of the Apollinian and the Dionysian, respectively identified as the principles of dreams and individuality, and of intoxication and primordial unity, complementary forces that, once combined, give birth to Greek tragedy. Apollo is introduced as the god of “Schein,” of appearance and illusion, and the Apollinian is defined as the necessary cover, the “veil” that hides the terrible Dionysian truth (37). The Apollinian becomes, then, a means to make bearable a condition that would be too harsh to face unmasked, as Nietzsche explains through a metaphor comparing the Apollinian aspect of the mask to the “curing” dark spots one sees when blinded by the sun: “Wenn wir bei einem kräftigen Versuch, die Sonne ins Auge zu fassen, uns geblendet abwenden, so haben wir dunkle farbige Flecken gleichsam als heilsmittel vor den Augen; umgekehrt sind jene Lichtbilderscheinungen des sophokleischen Helden, kurz das Apollinische der Maske, notwendige Erzeugungen eines Blickes ins Innere und Schreckliche der Natur, gleichsam leuchtende Flecken zur Heilung des von grausiger Nacht versehrten Blickes” (75).

If the mask is associated with the dynamic of the Apollinian and the Dionysian, and, if the complementarity of these principles gives birth to Greek tragedy, the mask has positive significance and is linked to the creative principle of art. This is restated in Beyond Good and Evil (Jenseits von Gut und Böse, 1886), where Nietzsche writes of the “goodness” hidden behind the mask and argues that every profound being has a love and need for it.

It appears contradictory, then, that the mask is also the trope that Nietzsche associates with decadence and degeneration. Euripides, whom he holds responsible for the decay of

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24 “Masken mit einem Ausdruck” (1872, 183).
25 “When after a forceful attempt to gaze on the sun we turn away blinded, we see dark-colored spots before our eyes, as a cure, as it were. Conversely, the bright image projections of the Sophoclean hero- in short, the Apollonian aspect of the mask- are necessary effects of a glance into the insides and terrors of nature; as it were, luminous spots to cure eyes damaged by gruesome night.” (Transl. Walter Kaufmann, 67).
26 “es ist nicht nur Arglist hinter einer Maske, - es gibt so viel Güte in der List (42)
“There is not only deceit behind a mask- there is so much goodness in cunning” (Trans. R. J. Hollingdale, 51)
27 “Jeder Tiefe geist braucht eine Maske: mehr noch: um jeden tiefen Geist wächst fortwährend eine Maske” (Nietzsche 1886, 42)
“Every profound spirit needs a mask: more, around every profound spirit a mask is continually growing” (Trans. R. J. Hollingdale, 51).
tragedy, is considered “only a mask,” more precisely, the mask of Socrates (96), the man in whom Nietzsche identifies the origins of rationalism and the faith in knowledge typical of nineteenth-century, decadent (in Nietzsche’s view) humanity. As Vattimo notes, the mask is moreover used in the second essay of Unfashionable Observations (Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen, 1974), written shortly after The Birth of Tragedy, to represent the lack of harmony between exterior and interior that characterizes the late nineteenth-century German who, overwhelmed by the weight of history and hampered by his faith in science and rationality, has become hesitant and fearful. In this text, the mask becomes an easy way to hide in roles which prevent one from assuming responsibilities and recognizing one’s potential, and which shelter the weak giving them the security of a predetermined path in life: “Keiner wagt mehr seine Person daran, sondern maskiert sich als gebildeter Mann, als gelehrter, als Dichter, als Politiker. Greift man solche Masken an, weil man glaubt, es sei ihnen ernst und nicht bloß um ein Puppenspiel zu tun — da sei allesamt den Ernst affichieren — so hat man plötzlich nur Lumpen und bunte und bunte Flicken in de Händen” (104).

To summarize, the mask appears in Nietzsche as a theatrical prop that becomes the emblem of the birth and death of tragedy, as well as a positive metaphor for the creativity of art and a negative one for the decay of late nineteenth-century humanity. To explain this apparent contradiction, Vattimo, who sees in the mask a leitmotif that runs through Nietzsche’s works, differentiates between a positive “mask” and a negative “disguise.” He identifies in the Dionysian principle a double value standing for a fearful reality from which the individual tries to escape, and for a source of creativity and artistic impulses (22). For Vattimo, the complementarity of the Dionysian and Apollinian is resolved in

29 “no one runs the risk of bearing his own person, but instead disguises himself behind the mask of the cultivated man, the scholar, the poet, the politician. If we take hold of these masks, believing that they are serious and not just part of a farce- since all of them affect such seriousness – then suddenly we find ourselves holding in our hands nothing but rags and colorful tatters.” (Trans. Richard T. Gray, 117)
30 Kaufman explains the dual value of the Dionysian is due to a change in Nietzsche’s conception; he argues that, in his early works, Nietzsche associates the Dionysian with the God’s festivals, while in his later works, he tends to consider it as “the creative employment of the passions and the affirmation of life in spite of suffering — as it were, for the synthesis of the Dionysian, as originally conceives, with the Apollinian” (Kaufman 20).
a reduction of the Apollonian to the Dionysian, and the problem of the Birth of Tragedy becomes the liberation of the latter. In its positive meaning, he sees a free poetic, creative force, evocative of the need continuously to create metaphors, as mentioned by Nietzsche in the essay “On Truth and Lies” (“Über Wahrheit und Lüge,” 1873).^31^ The attention that Vattimo draws to Nietzsche’s 1873 essay is essential for understanding Nietzsche’s influence on literature, because it is in this work that Nietzsche mentions repeatedly the mask as a synonym for dissimulation, play acting and social convention, but also, most importantly, as an alternative to a “twitching and changeable human face” (1873, 27). The mask, as a form of creative dissimulation, is associated with humanity’s need to create tropes both as productive impulse and as practice that becomes dangerous when these tropes stagnate, harden, are taken for granted and interpreted as “truths.” “Was ist also Wahrheit?” writes Nietzsche: “Ein bewegliches Heer von Metaphern, Metonymien, Anthropomorphismen kurz eine Summe von menschlichen Relationen, die, poetisch und rhetorisich gesteigert, übertragen, geschmückt wurden, und die nach langem Gebrauche einem Volke fest, canonisch und verbindlich dünken: die Wahrheiten sind Illusionen, von denen man vergessen hat, dass sie welche sind, Metaphern, die abgenutzt und sinnlich kraftlos geworden sind, Münzen, die ihr Bild verloren haben und nun als Metall, nicht mehr als Münzen in Betracht kommen” (1873, 15-16).^32^ The masks we encounter in the following chapters undergo a similar process; they are continuously transformed into synecdoche, metonyms, personifications and other rhetorical devices in a creative game that can become serious. The mask then freezes and becomes a decadent disguise that, almost echoing its semantic origins in ancient Greek theatre,^33^ merges with

^31^ See Vattimo 30 passim. Other scholars argue that, in the Birth of Tragedy, the Dionysian can only manifest itself through the Apollinian and that, in later works, Nietzsche, attributes to the Dionysian the value that he had previously attributed to the interaction of the Apollinian and the Dionysian (see Sloterdijk 206).

^32^ What then is truth? A movable army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, decorated and which, after lengthy use, seem firm, canonical and binding to a people: truths are illusions that are no longer remembered as being illusions, metaphors that have become worn and stripped of their sensuous force, coins that have lost their design and are now considered only as metal and no longer as coins (Trans. Ladislaus Löb, 257).

^33^ As Weihe notes, in ancient Greek the word used for the theatrical mask, prósopon, is the same for the face, indicating that they did not differentiate between a natural and an artificial face (Weihe 21).
the face and, evolving from innocent role-play, is re-interpreted and imposed as reality. Nietzsche’s conception of masks and role-play has a major influence on both the literature and theatre of the following generation. In subsequent chapters, we will see his ideas reflected in transitional works of art of the period and consider how they find their way into Modernism.

We have seen that Vitry was puzzled by the decorative use of masks and considered their use in theatre unjustified and outdated. However, the twentieth century marks a rebirth of the mask on the stage, just as in the visual arts, characterized by an interest in Greek tragedy, renaissance masques, commedia dell’arte, pantomime, Japanese theatre and, in general, exotic and ancient traditions where masks are important. Just as in visual art, so too the use of the mask on stage entails a certain ambiguity, as the device can be used as a symbolic object charged with decadent sensibility or as a means to emphasize physicality and abstraction. The mask is, for example, a central object in D’Annunzio’s La città morta (1898), a decadent play staged for both Eleonora Duse and Sarah Bernard, actresses known for playing detailed psychological roles. But masks are also the key of success for Jarry’s Ubo Roi (1896), where they represent general “types” rather than the personal, a use that echoes back to ancient Greek theatre, albeit differently from d’Annunzio. In both cases, the mask provides an alternative to realistic representation. When covering the face, it draws attention to the body, and is a useful tool to emphasize means of expression other than the word; moreover, by substituting the face of the actor with a stylized, symbolic surface, it responds to the needs of a theatre that no longer aims to be a mirror of reality, but to represent it.

The use of masks in Modern drama is anticipated in the works of Maeterlinck and developed by such dramaturges and directors as Yeats, Evreinov, Meyerhold and Pirandello. These authors’ main experimentations with masks take place after the period considered here, but some of their ideas are already evident in the conceptions of Edward Gordon Craig, a British director, mask collector and mask maker, whose theories must be
mentioned to understand the changes affecting the theatre, and whose view is often implicitly echoed in the texts examined in subsequent chapters.

Craig began to use masks with his staging of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* (1900), employed them in several *Masques* and, most notoriously, in his staging of *Hamlet* for the Moscow Art Theatre (1912). However, his most interesting and controversial ideas are not so much reflected in his works as in his writings about theatre, which make him a real advocate for the rebirth of the mask and for its important and innovative function. It is from the notion of the *Übermensch* that Craig, who was familiar with Nietzsche’s writing, developed the notion of the *Über-marionette*, a special actor whose physicality would not interfere with the work represented and who, through the use of masks, could spark the rebirth of contemporary theatre. Starting in 1905, Craig began to elaborate theories of this mysterious figure, for whom the mask, according to his drawings, seems to be a complement.\(^{34}\) The importance that he attributed to masks is also seen in his theatrical journal, *The Mask*, published in Florence, beginning in 1908, in which, to reflect the title, he wrote most of his articles using a variety of pseudonyms.

Like Nietzsche, Craig spoke of the mask as an object, a theatrical prop and a symbol; moreover, his visions echo Nietzsche’s concerns with degeneration, since he regarded contemporary theatre as a decayed form of art in urgent need of inspiration. Like Nietzsche, Craig insisted on the ritual roots of drama and linked its origin to the use of the mask, a notion that led him to find continuous comparisons and affinities between oriental and ancient Greek theatre. Macke speaks of “masks and puppets among the Greeks, Japanese, Siamese” as “important things that are hard to abandon.”\(^{35}\) Similarly, in “A Note on Masks” (1909), later published in *The Theatre Advancing* (1919), Craig argues that the mask is an object that, just like the puppet, is to be taken seriously; he recalls its religious and ritualistic role in ancient Greece and in Japanese, Indian, African and Amerindian art. Moreover, he claims that drama began degenerating when the mask was neglected, and assures that it will regenerate when the mask is brought back: “The

\(^{34}\) According to Le Beauf, the *Übermarionette* of which Craig was so mysteriously talking was to be staged by an actor enclosed in armour (20).

mask will return to the theatre. Of that I grow ever more and more assured; and there is no great obstacle on the way, although there is some danger attached”(105). In the same article, Craig explains that oriental and ancient masks should function as source of inspiration for contemporary art. However, the new “world mask” should not be a copy or a tired revival, but an original, independent creation, the work of a great artist. “They need no fear that we shall ask them to sport the mask,” he concludes, “but they must just see how it becomes us and what fun and what fancy we can make within its shadow” (109-110).

Innes argues that in these years, Craig began to see in the mask the symbol of the human face and the ritualistic acting that he wanted to bring back to the stage (122); Le Bœuf points out that, for Craig, the mask was mainly a mystical, magic object that functioned as a link between the natural and the supernatural and contributed to restore a sense of the sacral in the theatre (2008, 1330). Certainly, Craig had an influence on others; acting on a suggestion by Craig, for example, Yeats decided to place a mask on the character of the fool in The Hour-Glass and began to reflect on the use of masks (Le Bœuf 2008, 201). Bablet even argues that Craig’s vision forestalled experiments by the Russian avant-garde, as well as the work of the Bauhaus and the German expressionist (111). In the following chapters, we will see how reminiscences of Japanese theatre, ancient Greek theatre and the Commedia dell’arte are strongly felt in early twenty centuries literary and dramatic texts, how the mask, as Craig envisioned, is in these texts often the work of great artists and is used as a liminal object for the natural and the supernatural, and how it not only becomes a symbol for the human face, but merges with it, thus turning the theatrical mask into a metaphysical trope and introducing the notion of relativism.

If Nietzsche’s views are reflected in how the mask is perceived in theatre and exemplified by Craig’s theories, they are also traceable in the work of Sigmund Freud. Similarities between Freud’s and Nietzsche’s ideas have been thoroughly listed by Chapman; for our purpose, it suffices to note that, just as, in Nietzsche, the Apollinian mask functions

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36 Among the concepts common to Nietzsche and Freud, Chapman lists the notion of the unconscious mind, the idea of repression, the conception that repressed emotions are later expressed in disguised ways, the concept of dreaming as cathartic process and the notion of paranoid thinking. (Chapman 251-253 passim).
as a cure from the “blinding” caused by the Dionysian, in Freud the mechanism of repression maintains the balance of the individual by pushing unacceptable feelings into the unconscious. In the literary works of this period, masks and Dionysian symbols are often associated with the return of the repressed, and can be read in connection to the notion of “uncanny” as elaborated by Freud in the well known 1919 essay “Das Unheimliche.”

In this essay, Freud is interested in explaining uncanny feelings and to do so, he examines the different meanings of the German word “unheimlich,” the use of uncanny images by E.T.A. Hofmann and other authors and uncanny experiences in real life, finally returning to the uncanny in literature. In the German meaning of the word “heimlich,” Freud traces an ambiguity similar to the duality attributed by Nietzsche to the mask, since the word has among its positive meanings one that coincides with its very opposite.

He then gives a first definition of the uncanny as “jene Art des schreckhaften, welche auf das Altbekannte, längstvertraute zurückgeht” (1919, 231) and, equating the primitive mind and the mind of the child, reaches the conclusion that uncanny experiences occur in life “wenn verdrängte infantile Komplexe durch einen Eindruck wieder belebt werden, oder wenn überwundene primitive Überzeugungen wieder bestätigt werden” (1919, 263).

He adds that, in the field of literature, the opportunity of creating uncanny phenomena is greater than in real life and specifies that it depends mainly on two factors: the boundaries that the narrator establishes for the imaginary world he creates, in which the uncanny phenomenon will constitute a deviation, and the perspective from which he chooses to present the narrative.

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37 The essay was published in 1919, but Strachey, in the preface to the English translation, notes that Freud had been thinking about the subject at least since 1913.
38 As Freud points out heimlich, in German, means both “familiar, friendly, comfortable” and “secret, concealed” (Freud 225).
39 “that class of frightening which leads us back to what is known of old and long familiar” (1919, 220.

40 “either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed” (1919, 249.

41 The role of literature is particularly important: Freud starts his essay from a literary observation (the “uncanny” of E.T.A. Hofmann), continues to explain Uncanny experiences in real life and returns, in his conclusion, to the literary. Freud’s change of field of inquiry and his distinction between fiction/reality have been challenged by a number of scholars, among whom Derrida and Cixous.
In the following chapters, we will examine how the mask, in the literature of the period, becomes an ambiguous, liminal object that, by blurring the distinction between animate and inanimate, constitutes a deviation from the norm in a world with an apparently realistic setting. The mask, like any uncanny phenomenon, represents in relationship to the self both familiarity and strangeness, and, in this period, it is often associated with the mechanical body and with the puppet. These objects are recalled by Freud when he quotes an analysis of Hofmann’s *Sandman* written by Jentsch, who associated uncanny feelings with the ill-defined line between the animate and inanimate, with wax statues, dolls and automata (237). Freud rejects Jentsch’s explanation, asserting that intellectual uncertainty has nothing uncanny, and introduces his own theory based on the resurfacing of repressed experiences. He continues his analysis by quoting Otto Rank on the subject of the Doppelgänger, in which he identifies a common uncanny phenomenon. According to Rank’s *Der Doppelgänger* (1914), the double functions as a symbol of life and as a messenger of death, and thus, we can add, shares with the mask an oscillation between a positive and a negative value. Freud summarizes how the double is created by the minds of the primitive individual and of the child for the purpose of defying death through the principle of multiplication. He also notes how, when the phase of primary narcissism ends, the double takes on a negative connotation and becomes an image of death (Freud 1919, 247). Rank saw the Doppelgänger embodied in literature through mirrors, shadows and guardian spirits. Carrying Rank’s argument a step further, Freud mentions that doubling has a counterpart in the language of dreams and, most importantly, in the practice of ancient Egyptians to create an image of the dead in a lasting material (Freud 1919, 247). The mask is not explicitly mentioned, but, in the form of death mask, it can easily be related to this practice, as well as to forms of

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42 He later states, however, that uncertainty is a necessary component of an uncanny experience (119), and that an uncanny effect is achieved when the boundaries between imagination and reality are effaced (244). Moreover, as an example, he tells the story of an inanimate object (a furniture that reminds of a crocodile) that comes alive. Freud excludes Jentsch’s point by arguing that children are not in least scared by the prospect of their dolls coming alive, but this example, as well as the ones that he gives later, depends on a question of perspective. If the doll was to be an evil one, for instance, the experience would prove, according to Freud’s same reasoning, just as uncanny as the animation of the crocodile. Similar inconsistencies, including the neglect of the doll Olympia in Freud’s text, have been noticed by Hélène Cixous in her reading of Freud’s essay (1876, 352-48).
representations such as the mirror and the portrait, in which both Freud and Rank see an embodiment of the double.

It is important to mention that, although Freud rejects the connection of uncanny experiences to intellectual uncertainty, he emphasizes their association with the mechanical, disjointed body and especially with bodily fragmentation. He writes that: “Abgetrennte Glieder, ein abgehauener Kopf, eine vom Arm gelöste Hand wie in einem Märchen von Hauff, Füße, die für sich allein tanzen wie in dem erwähnten Buche von A. Schaeffer, haben etwas ungemein Unheimliches an sich, besonders wenn ihnen wie im letzten Beispiel noch eine selbständige Tätigkeit zugestanden wird” (257). He explains this uncanny feeling by relating images of dismemberment to the castration complex, to the fear present in the child’s mind and repressed by consciousness in adulthood.

The association between masks, the notion of dismemberment and, more generally, of fragmentation is a central concern of all the literary texts examined. As indicated, Vitry considered decorative masks alienated fragments deprived of meaningful context; moreover, throughout the nineteenth century, masks were associated with the technique of moulage used to produce death masks and anatomical mannequins employed in medical practises, thus with “real” human fragments (Dottin Orisini 109). For many artists, “mask” became in this period a term used for a more or less realistic portrait, and also for a three dimensional representation of a head cut off at the neck, as exemplified by Max Klinger’s sculpture La nouvelle Salomé (1893), which portrays a woman next to a severed head and a mask that have an uncanny similarity to one another. In the literary texts examined, the mask acquires connotations of violence and is associated with the image of a severed head – an association particularly evident in Lorrain’s Monsieur de Phocas, in which the two merge into one image and become indistinguishable.

43 “Dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist, as in a fairy tale of Hauff’s, feet which dance by themselves, as in the book by Schaeffer which I mentioned above- all these have something peculiarly uncanny about them, especially when, in the last instance, they prove capable of independent activity in addition” (1919, 244. Trans. James Strachey).
44 See Klinger, Max, The New Salome, 1887. (Skulpturensammlung, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden.)
45 For more information about the relationship between masks and cut off heads in sculpture and visual art in the period see Papet, 2008, 18-56 passim, especially 46.
Yet the most important notion that emerges in Freud’s essay, and that connects our use of masks to our rhetorical frame, is his apparently side remark that an uncanny experience occurs “wenn ein Symbol die volle Leistung und Bedeutung des Symbolisierten übernimmt” (258). We have previously compared the shift of meaning that the mask undergoes in this period to a transformation into an accumulation of tropes that run the risk of freezing and becoming literal, and in this rigidity we have identified a negative value. We now wonder whether this process makes the masks considered in the following chapters uncanny, if they can be interpreted as doubles of the self, if this double bears any relationship to Freud’s explanation and, most important, if the mask, through a process of “freezing” and through a pattern of unending repetition, can be seen as a symbol that takes over the full function and meaning of what it symbolizes.

Jacques Derrida has pointed out how Freud, looking for a definition for the “uncanny,” switches from the analysis of literature to reality and vice versa, and how the uncanny remains strictly bound to language and cannot be tracked down to a single definition. Followers of Derrida such as Hélène Cixous and Sarah Kofman carried this argument further and elaborated on the uncanny’s elusive nature. “The uncanny,” writes Royle in

46 “when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes” (1919, 244. Trans. James Strachey.)
47 Derrida writes in a footnote: “nous renverrons à Das Unheimliche (1919) […] Nous y serions sans cesse reconduits par les paradoxes du double et le de répétition, l’effacement de la limite entre l’ “imagination” et la “réalité,” le “symbole” et le “symbolisé,” […] les références à Hofmann et à la littérature fantastique, les considérations sur le double sens du mot …” (245)
48 Freud’s essay has sparked long-lasting debate. For what concerns psychoanalysis, the interest in the “uncanny” was mainly stirred by Jacques Lacan who, in his Séminaire X, used the “uncanny” to illustrate the source of angst and further elaborated on the concept of castration. Yet, as Masschelein points out, the majority of critical reception is located in the field of aesthetic. Jacques Derrida, in La double séance (1972) linked the psychoanalytical concept of castration to that of “dissemination,” of endless repetition based on an original lack. Followers of Derrida, such as Hélène Cixous, Sarah Kofman, Neil Hertz and Samuel Weber, have carried his observations further and subjected both Freud’s essay and E.T.A. Hofmann’s “Sandman” to deconstructive readings which demonstrate the incoherencies and inner contradictions of Freud’s text and which question the possibility of conceptualizing the uncanny a scientific concept.

Hélène Cixous (1876, 352-48) emphasizes the elusiveness of the “uncanny,” and questions Freud’s differentiation between reality and fiction, since reality, too, is subjected to interpretation. She illustrate how, as Freud tries to track down the Uncanny, he is always confronted with its elusiveness, and how every attempt to define the uncanny scientifically is doomed to fail, because it erases the doubt which is an inherent quality of it. Kofman elaborates further on the uncanny’s elusiveness, and argues that Freud’s reductive definition of the uncanny as the return of the repressed is itself a repression of his death drive.
a book dedicated to the concept, “has to do with a strangeness of framing and borders, an experience of liminality. […] Above all, the uncanny is intimately entwined in language, with how we conceive and represent what is happening within ourselves, to ourselves, to the world, when uncanny strangeness is at issue” (2). In this sense, the masks represented in our literary texts behave very much like Freud’s uncanny, and acquire the same elusiveness that Cixous and Kofman attribute to the concept. Our chapters constitute an investigation that leads us to understand the mask as a synecdoche, a metonymy, as a figure of antithesis … an investigation that, as Kofman writes commenting on Freud’s search for the uncanny, “is not, at any moment, complete without being immediately invalidated” (Kofman 13). Any conception of “mask,” like Freud’s definition for the “uncanny,” remains temporary, since the mask, like the “uncanny,” is in essence transient and deceitful and remains bound to a textual and linguistic structure. The rhetorical frame of the dissertation, in which the chapters are arranged according to the main rhetorical use that, along with the literal meaning, is associated with the mask, addresses this issue.

Finally, Royle, in his introduction to the uncanny, underlines that the concept “may […] be considered as a foreign body within oneself, even the experience of oneself as a foreign body;” (2) a definition that also applies to the concept of mask. Through an analysis of the texts considered in the following chapters, I will show how Freud’s notion of “uncanniness” is exemplified and at times anticipated by several of these texts. I will examine how the mask remains a token of alterity and is often related to the glance of Medusa or to the experience of Dionysus; figures associated with humankind’s encounter with cultural otherness, death and repressed, hidden components of the self. 49 Moreover, she analyses the connection between author, protagonist, and the concept of Doppelgänger, and emphasizes how writing itself has an uncanny effect (1991, 119-158). Hertz underlines the lack of evidence for concepts such as compulsive repetition and death drive, and argues that these theoretical assumptions can only be described in figurative language and that they must therefore be conceived as metaphors used to circumscribe certain gaps in Freud’s theories (1985, 97-122). Weber, like Cixous and Kofman, points out Freud’s failure to define the uncanny, and suggests that this tells us something of the uncanny’s nature. He argues that the uncanny is not only an emotional phenomenon but is determined by a series of objective factors which, in turn, relate to the literary discourse. (1973, 1102-1133).

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49 As Frontisi-Ducroux explains, Medusa and Dionysus are commonly associated with masks and are both embodiments of alterity (19). Medusa represents the alterity of death, conveying this in her powerful glance. In Greek myth, although she is beheaded by Perseus, her head continuous to live independently and is turned into a mask that decorates Athena’s shield and retains the power to kill. In the Bacchae, Euripides
I will illustrate how the mask symbolizes alienation from one’s surroundings and points to the necessity for transformation and change.

Each rhetorical device associated with the chapters is linked to specific types of masks, including death masks, exotic masks, masks of the Commedia dell’arte and Venetian masks. The first chapter, “Synecdoche,” looks at decorative masks and considers how, in literary and dramatic texts, they are reduced to fragments that gain autonomy, come to life and are attributed the qualities of a person. To this end, I look at Le Gallienne’s story “The Worshipper of the Image” (1900), Rilke’s novel “Die Auzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge” (1910), and I undertake a juxtaposed reading of Crommelynck’s play “Le sculpteur de masques” (1908) and Okamoto’s “Shuzen-ji Monogatari” (1909), translated into English as “The Mask Maker.” I also consider the use of the mask in the films of the period, with Gance’s Masque d’horreur (1912), and in visual arts, with Rodin’s series of “horror masks” (1907-1912). The analysis illustrates how, in these texts, the mask reflects the encounter of the self with a form of alterity that, on several occasions, takes on oriental, exotic features but that can also show the alienation of the individual from the hectic rhythms of an industrialized society.

The second chapter, “Metonymy and Personification,” looks at the metonymic use of masks as a trope for death and their personified use in the Commedia dell’arte’s twentieth century revival. I analyse Lothar’s König Harlekin (1900), Chiarelli’s La maschera e il volto (1913) and Lucini’s I drami delle maschere (1898) as examples of dramatic and “literary” texts (with dramatic ambitions) which note the mask’s development from an emblem of decadence to one of artistic innovation, a transformation that is finally accomplished in the works of Modernism. I show how Nietzsche’s notion of decadence and his conception of masks are reflected in these texts and how the mask becomes a

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reflects the widespread belief that Dionysus, God of masks and metamorphosis, is a stranger who has come to Greece from far away. As Frontisi-Ducroux notes, the god introduces the dimension of the unpredictable into daily life and establishes a contact between man and the supernatural; the aim of Dionysian festivals is, in fact, to become “other,” to enter in contact with the alterity of the divine (25). Thus these mythological figures, which are often associated with the mask and explicitly or implicitly mentioned in the works considered in this dissertation, stand for the intervention of the supernatural into daily life, and more broadly, for the encounter of humanity with alterity.
trope for a fragmented modern consciousness as well as an allegory of revolution and historical change.

The first part of the third chapter, “Figures of Antithesis,” is entitled “Chiasmus,” and consists of a comparison of Schwob’s short story “Le Roi au masque d’or” (1892) with James’ *The Sacred Fount* (1900). In the second part, entitled “Oxymoron,” I use Huysmans’s short story “L’Émailleuse” (1874) as a background against which to juxtapose Mann’s *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912), Hofmannsthal’s unfinished novel *Andreas* (circa 1911-13) and Bely’s *Petersburg* (1913). Chiasmus and oxymoron, one may argue, are not tropes but figures of composition; yet in this context they gain metaphysical significance and are used to introduce the notions of relativism, the theme of degeneration and the encounter of the self with a form of alterity reflected in the both the outer world and the self. I consider the relationship of the mask to the portrait, its extreme reduction into a mask of make-up and its extension into a puppet. In this chapter, the function of the mask as an emblem of exoticism, explored in Chapter one, and as an allegory of change and revolution, explored in Chapter two, come together as the mask is used both as an image of exoticism and as an expression of an historic transition, exemplified by Bely’s novel *Petersburg*.

The fourth chapter, “Jean Lorrain and the game of rhetoric,” focuses on *Monsieur de Phocas* (1900), a novel that revolves around the fear of masks. This chapter does not concentrate on a particular rhetorical device, but shows how Lorrain plays with the different connotations of the mask in these years, deliberately shifting from one meaning to another and turning the novel into a mystery tale, a search for the ultimate meaning of the mask. At the same time, the chapter reviews previous topics, portraying the mask as an independent decorative object, a magical, exotic item that stands on the threshold of life and death, and a *Doppelgänger* in which the self encounters a form of otherness that can be found both in the outside world and in the depths of the self. Finally, I show how the novel can be read as an exemplary document of decadence and also as an allegory of the attempt to overcome it.
The reader may be surprised by the fact that, in this analysis, works as famous and widely criticized as *Death in Venice* are placed beside little known stories like “The Worshipper of the Image.” While I am aware of the inconcinnity, I maintain that they are brought together by the exacerbated attention to masks, portraits and the human face. My aim is not to explain these works exhaustively or to provide a definite interpretation, but to show how the juxtaposition with other works leads to a reflection on masks and faces that would otherwise pass unnoticed. A few of these stories, if read in isolation, would appear absurd and eccentric; yet placed in a framework and set in their historical and cultural context, they show that the interest in masks at the turn of the century exceeds the borders not only of artistic genre but of language and nationality. In addition, juxtaposing these texts allows me to underline their transitional nature and to suggest that what seems primarily an aesthetic concern can also be read as the embodiment of a sense of incompleteness and alienation from the epoch and its values. When seen in this light, the mask stands for a poetic of decadence and an attempt to overcome it, for humanity’s alienation and for a dream of rebirth on artistic and historical levels.
Chapter 1

Synecdoche

Introduction

This chapter focuses on literary and dramatic texts and on works of art created between 1900 and 1913, in which the use of the mask can be identified with a synecdoche, a trope in which “a part is substituted for the whole [ … ] or vice versa” (Martin 1261). In these works, the mask is used to refer to a person, or vice versa, a person is reduced to a mask. In order to make sense of these images we must understand what these stories have in common and where this sensibility comes from.

As decorative hollow faces, and as death masks that reproduce the features of the deceased, these masks are first of all fragments that emphasize the act of rupture through which they have been produced, the violence through which they have been torn from a body. All the pieces considered focus on masks as tokens of death and destruction; in Richard Le Gallienne’s and in Fernand Crommelynck’s works, the violence operates against a living woman who is gradually reduced to a death mask. In Rainer Maria Rilke’s fictional journal, death masks have replaced the faces of the people caught in the rhythm of the modern metropolis. Lastly Kido Okamoto and Abel Gance tell stories of men for whom human life is less important than the creation of a perfect mask. In all these pieces, we can identify a replacement, an act of reification through which living people are turned into death masks and death masks become magical, animated objects.

These masks are hardly worn but mostly considered as separable, independent icons. The protagonist of Le Gallienne’s story finds his death mask in an antique shop among statues and other ornaments, Crommelynck’s and Okamoto’s plays begin with a view of a boutique in which several masks are hanging from the wall, and, in Rilke’s journal, Malte pauses to admire two decorative death masks in the molder’s shop.
We must remember that, throughout the nineteenth century, masks had been frequently used in Europe as details in the sculpture of fountains, churches and in the frame of monuments, and that a similar use was common in oriental art, especially in Japan, where masks were used as ornaments for public buildings and temples. In addition, Europeans in the nineteenth century had collected death masks and Japanese theatrical masks as items for their curiosity cabinets, ignoring their functions as tool for sculptural details and as theatrical props. The question of decorativism is important because, by being used as an ornament, the mask becomes a sort of static portrait estranged from its original function. In the case of the death mask, the resemblance is even more true to life, since the cast is molded on the features of the deceased and provides thus an exact proof of likeness. “Where the effect of most acts of masquerade is to alter the appearance of the masker,” writes Mack, “the death mask seeks to freeze it. As the body deteriorates, the mask remains as a record of appearance, rather as a photograph survives more or less intact while over time the physical appearance of the subject portrayed alters” (16). Yet the mask differs from the portrait in that its hollow surface has touched the skin and continues to suggest the possibility of being worn and of acquiring life, creating an ambiguity between animate and inanimate. In his explanation on how death masks are made, written for Benkard’s catalogue of death masks, the German artist Georg Kolbe explains that, while making death masks is perfectly acceptable, supplementing them with “hair and other adornments” in the attempt to recreate life too closely creates “monstrosities, a violation and a false counterfeit of life” (45). The danger is that the death mask will turn into a fetish, into an object attributed with magical powers.

The change of function that occurs in both death masks and exotic masks leads us to another feature shared by these stories: in all of them, the mask becomes an image of alterity and, at the same time, an allegory of evil. In Le Gallienne’s story, the mask magically crosses time from ancient Greece to modern England and even acquires oriental features, yet it remains throughout a cause of death and destruction; in Rilke’s fictional journal, the mask is identified with a dreadful double that threatens the existence of the self; in Crommelynck, the masks that portray Louison’s face are disclosed in the
moment of her death and animates by Carnival revelers. In all these texts the mask, starting out merely as an uncanny decorative object, becomes a fearful, evil *Doppelgänger* that comes from elsewhere to replace and destroy the self. Why do masks, which in European folklore have been associated with positive forces symbolizing the renewal of the season, the release from strict social hierarchies and the liberating force of laughter, become in these texts tools to carry out confinement, shame and annihilation?

The essays in this chapter are an attempt to answer to this question. In the celebrations of Carnival, the mask is a folkloric symbol that stands for the defeat of death through the renewal brought about by the new season; it has, therefore, a positive and playful meaning as a symbol or rebirth and regeneration. However, as Poppi points out, “the connection between masking, the celebration of the dead and hazy, complex notion of ‘witches’ and ‘spirits’ […] creeps through the tightest mesh of official cultural politics and keeps coming back, its echoes reaching into contemporary times and attesting the presence of ‘the Other’ within modern European culture” (193). The nineteenth century has besides provided, more than any other period of history, an incredible number of death masks, especially in Italy, France and England, some of which, such as the mask of the so called *Inconnue de la Seine*50 (described both in Rilke’s and in Le Gallienne’s works), have become icons of the decadent sensibility of the age (Benkard 18). The mask, as we will see, can be considered among the manifestations of the double; an image that Rank and Freud see as created in the mind of the child as an assurance of immortality, but that in the mind of the adult becomes a harbinger of death.

“Death masks are akin to their Master, Death himself,” writes Benkard in the text accompanying the first catalogue of death masks, published in Germany in 1927 (15). In its particular form of death mask, and as a symbol of evil spirits and a manifestation of the double, the mask remains strictly bound to the dimension of death. However, the stories considered in these essays also suggest that the appearance of these evil masks can be contextualized and directed to phenomena that constitute a central concern in the

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50 *L’Inconnue de la Seine*. ca.1898-1900. (Saint-Denis, atelier de moulages de la Réunion des musées nationaux) See appendix.
period: the preoccupation with doctrines of aestheticism, the experience of estrangement brought about by an increasingly industrialized society, the fascination and mistrust toward exotic cultures in which the Europeans, at the beginning of the twentieth century, had begun to see uncanny similarities with western civilizations.

Among these phenomena, the question of exoticism deserves further clarification. As we have seen, these masks can be recognized as images of evil and as reminders of mortality. In addition, they reflect a general fear and fascination with alterity. In some of these works (Le Gallienne’s, Crommelynck’s, Rodin’s), this fear takes a specific shape that can be traced back to the encounter between European and Japanese traditions and their reciprocal influences.\textsuperscript{51} Between 1870 and 1900, Japanese masks were avidly collected in Europe and, since their function and origins were mostly unknown, they were often interpreted through European traditions in which masks still played important roles.

Although only few of the works considered explicitly refer to the Japanese tradition (Le Gallienne’s and Rodin’s), many of them show several features that can be read as having been influenced by this encounter. The general concern with alterity, in other words, takes shape through a mask that is suddenly given exotic features. In Le Gallienne’s story, the mask of evil has a foreign name and several references are made to the craftsmanship of Japanese artist. Rodin models his masks of death precisely after the features of a Japanese actress. In Crommelynck’s text, the figure of the mask-maker gains the importance that it has in exotic cultures, while his sculptures are turned into magical objects that remind the reader of the status of the mask in the Japanese ceremonial theatre, which was especially influential on European imagery.\textsuperscript{52} The way in which the

\textsuperscript{51} For a description of the impact that the encounter had on the artists of both cultures see Lambourne 2005: “By the 1880s acute artistic perceptions were becoming swamped by popular mania for paper lanterns, fans and masks. Japanese motifs spread like a rush on everything from cheap trays to biscuit boxes. Fans, kimonos, screens and porcelain enlivened the “artistic” rooms of the day, creating a décor of varying quality.” (109)

\textsuperscript{52} Shimizu explains how the new Japanese government had caused the Noh, which had in the military class its patron, to almost disappear and how many of the traditional masks had been sold. European collectors hurried to buy them but knew very little about their history; few representations of Noh were left, and most of them were not accessible to Europeans. Thus Noh, an ancient aristocratic theatre, was often confused with the popular stage (the kabuki theatre), and its masks were mistaken with the ones used for the temple rituals and street theatre (See Shimizu 2008, 77-81).
masks were used in Noh drams was, at the time, not clear, yet their status as sacred object representing spirits and demons was famous and increased their exotic charm, while their meaning often overlapped with the images of death and skeletons frequent in the Japanese folklore which in turn increased the tendency to interpret the Noh masks as death masks.

The masks analyzed in this chapters illustrate how the traditions of death masks and of exotic masks are often confused and merged in the work of artists who worked in this period, as exemplified in the work of Rodin, and how the mask, deprived of its original task, is accorded a new function as it becomes a fetish, a material object endowed with magical power. The last section in particular will observe how, by carving a face in wood or clay, the mask-maker has the ability to snatch away the soul of the person whom he portrays, to cast a spell on him that slowly leads him/her to die, and to capture his/her essence in an inorganic surface, creating a piece that, just as would a real human fragment, carries a connotation of brutality and violence. Thus the mask becomes a severed head, a double, a fragment that is implicitly treated as a person and that replaces its model, a part that stands for the whole or, simply, a synecdoche.
Richard le Gallienne’s “The Worshipper of the Image”

How the Death Mask became a Fetish

The British poet and essayist Richard Le Gallienne was a member of Oscar Wilde’s circle and, along with Aubrey Beardsley, Max Beerbohm, Ernest Dowson and others, a collaborator of the Yellow Book. His story “The Worshipper of the Image,” published in 1900, set a date for the fascination with the death mask of the so-called l’Inconnue de la Seine, an unknown woman who, according to the legend, was found drowned in the Seine and whose face was thought so beautiful that a plaster cast was made of her features.53 Today, is has been demonstrated that the cast cannot be considered a death mask: the features are too well preserved, the skin too smooth to be that of a victim of drowning.54 At the end of the nineteenth century, however, the morbid charm of the legend was exploited to transform it into a commercial product that sold well to artists and collectors who shared a fin de siècle fascination with the macabre. By making this mask the subject of his short story, Le Gallienne began a trend that made of the Inconnue a popular subject of novels, short stories and plays by authors such as Jules Supervielle (“L’Inconnue de la Seine,” 1929) Herta Pauli (“L’Inconnue de la Seine,” 1931), Louis Aragon (“Aurélien,” 1944), Vladimir Nabokov (“L’Inconnue de la Seine,” 1934), Claire Goll (“Die Unbekannte aus der Seine,” 1936) and later, an important subject for Man Ray, who, exploiting the medium of photography, went so far as “to open” the eyes of the death mask, giving an identity to the unknown woman.55 The story exemplifies the interest for the subject of masks in the period, their relationship to the portrait and the affinities found among late nineteenth century readers between exotic and ancient traditions; we will see how the cast of the Inconnue, through a magical transformation, crosses in Le Gallienne’s text time and space boundaries and is reminiscent of Ancient Greece, of the Middle age and of the Orient. We will also see how the mask is at once a decorative, a theatrical mask and a death mask, and how it eventually becomes a fetish item.

53 See appendix.
54 For a detailed study of life masks and death masks see Papet (2001 passim).
55 For more information about this mask and its treatment in literature and in the arts, see Pinet (passim).
As Erst Benkard points out, no period of history has produced as many death masks as the nineteenth century (19), some of which, like the mask of Beethoven or that of the *Inconnue*, became common decorative objects. Masks were frequently employed in these years both in the study of physiognomy and as means to create sculptures, but they were also considered independently and given an ornamental function; by the turn on the nineteenth century, they had replaced in popularity the bust and the portrait. At the same time, in *fin de siècle* England, authors such as Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde addressed the problem of the text as a form of mask, as a disguise for an attitude. Le Gallienne’s story discusses both issues, as it deals on the one hand with a mask that is ambiguously close to a portrait, and as, on the other hand, it suggests an irony that, whether intended or not, turns the story into a parody of the favorite themes of the period: the ill-defined line that separates the animate object from the inanimate, the obsession with the artificial and the role of the artist as a creator. Moreover, the story skillfully transforms the mask into a synecdoche, into a fragment that is brought to life through the violence that operates against a living woman. Through the point of view of the protagonist, the plaster face is treated and referred to as if it were a whole person; it speaks, eats, drinks wine and moves just as if it were a real woman. Already the first description of the cast refers to it as a “face” and even as a “woman,” creating an ambiguity between the object and a living being:

The face was smiling, a smile of great peace, and also of a strange cunning. One other characteristic it had: the woman looked as though at any moment she would suddenly open her eyes, and if you turned away from her and looked again, she seemed to be smiling to herself because she had opened them that moment behind your back, and just closed them again in time. It was a face that never changed and yet was always changing. (3)

The narrative that Le Gallienne creates for this mask recalls similar tales involving a passion for an inanimate object such ETA Hoffmann’s *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, Edgar Allan’s Poe’s “The Oval portrait” and Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

56 See Papet (10-11).  
57 See Frankel (17-14 passim).  
Antony, a poet who lives in a lonely valley with his wife Beatrice and their little daughter Wonder, finds in a sculptor’s shop, among Greek and Roman sculptures, a death mask of a drowned young woman that reproduces exactly the features of his wife. He brings it home and gradually falls in love with the image, neglecting more and more his wife and spending his days in the company of the mask. One day, he hears the cast speaking. It demands of him a human sacrifice, and he is devastated to see that his daughter, a few days later, falls mysteriously ill and dies. Overcome by grief and unable to destroy the mask as Beatrice had required, he buries it in the wood and becomes once again close to his wife. Yet the temptation is such that, a few months later, he retrieves it and slowly descends into madness, rejecting his wife and becoming obsessed with the mask. Beatrice fulfills the prophesy of the cast by committing suicide by drowning and when Antony, after her funeral, goes back to the mask, he finds its beautiful, peaceful features distorted into an image that reflects his childhood dream of an insect “with the face of death between his wings”(3); a creature that had loved with the “passion of a Japanese artist” (3) but that in the end of the story stands for the metamorphosis that the mask undertakes from an image of “beautiful death” to an allegory of evil.

This brief summary elicits three questions. Why does Le Gallienne deal with a mask, and not, as is usually the case in these tales of mysterious resemblances, with a statue or with a portrait? How does the mask stand in relation to its double Beatrice? Can it be considered a fetish object and, if so, of what kind?

In order to answer the questions above, I will first examine the role of the mask as a familiar but mysterious object that relies on an ambiguity between the animate and the inanimate, since it is made of inorganic material and yet shaped after the feature of what was once a living being. I will then contextualize the episode as a typical Doppelgänger story and move on to an analysis of the death mask as a magical object. Finally, I will look at the story once again as a response to the changes in attitudes to the arts and the social sciences of the turn of the nineteenth century.
Why then does “The Worshippers of Image” deal with a mask? The plot falls into the category of tales of artistic vampirism, in which the image becomes a masterpiece by gradually appropriating the energy of a living being. We are reminded of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Oval Portrait,” in which a beautiful painting is finished only at the expense of the death of its model. Would not a portrait have been enough, and perhaps more appropriate, to illustrate the uncanny resemblance between Beatrice and an image? In Le Gallienne’s story, the mask is only occasionally worn as a disguise, and is mainly hung on the wall like a portrait. Moreover, the stereotypical function associated with the mask, that is the contrast between reality and appearance, is completely absent from the story. In the first chapters, the mask is frequently called “the image” but, as the story progresses, it is more often referred to with the pronoun “she”, as if it were a real woman, or with the name that Antony chooses for it, Silencieux, a name that, as the author points out in the only footnote that he provides for the text, is “masculine” even though the mask has “feminine” features.59

The answer to our question lies in the fact that Silencieux is not only a mask, but a death mask. “By preserving the face”, writes Susan Harris Smith in Masks in Modern Drama, “the death mask denies the finality of death and attests to the power of the personality. However, because the likeness is made after death, the mask also mocks human frailty. This delicate irony of the death mask, captured, for example, in the enigmatic smile of the serene l’Inconnue de la Seine, has attracted many modern playwrights” (139). Among the playwright fascinated by death masks, Smith mentions Kido Okamoto (The Mask-maker 1909), Fernand Crommelynck (Le Sculpteur des Masques 1905) and Herhart Hauptmann (Die Finsternisse 1947).

59 Le Gallienne’s only footnote reads: “Of course, the writer is aware that while “Silencieux” is feminine, her name is masculine. In such fanciful names, however, such license has always been considered allowable.” (5)

Masque, in French, is a masculine noun. However, since the cast represents female features that in the protagonist’s perspective are constantly personified, the choice of a masculine name remains puzzling. Silencieux is an adjective, a grammatical category that can be joined to a masculine or a feminine noun but that has in itself no gender — and that as such indicates the androgynous connotation that the mask acquires in the story.
Silencieux is moreover not just a death mask, but a famous one; by the time Le Gallienne wrote his story, the cast of this supposedly drowned young woman had become a fashionable item with which to adorn one’s walls. Since any contemporary reader would have recognized the reference, we can say that the relationship between the image and its model extends beyond the narrative frame: Le Gallienne borrows the mask from a reality of his time, he imagines a character (Beatrice) with the same features and, in the fictional world, inverts this relationship, giving to the mask the look of the character.

Reflecting on the likeness of Beatrice and Silencieux, the omniscient narrator wonders: “If there is any truth in those who tell us that in the mould and lines of our faces and hands — yes! And in every secret marking of our bodies our fates are written as in a parchment, would it be not reasonable to surmise, perhaps to fear, that the writing should mean the same on the one face as on the other, and that the fates as well prove identical?” (6). Had Silencieux been a portrait, its likeness to Beatrice would not necessarily have proved the existence of her double — it could have been simply the result of the imagination of the artist, and thus the resemblance (and the consequent prophecy) would not have been as fearful. Yet the death mask, which during the 19th century was frequently used for the study of physiognomy, makes this resemblance (and thus the destiny of Beatrice) more of a certainty. Moreover, the death mask, more than the portrait, implies a blurring of the boundaries between the object of representation and the body; a death mask has touched the face and becomes a trace, a witness to its absence. It is an object that can be created only in the moment of death and that thus offers a representation of a body that has already ceased to exist. In Le Galliennne’s story, this relation is reiterated as the death mask gains energy and power by taking the life of a living woman.

Another reason that makes the mask more uncanny than the portrait is its three-dimensionality. As a three-dimensional, hollow object, the mask lends itself well to playful and grotesque games such as being dressed up as if it were a real woman. As soon as Antony brings it home, on a “sudden whim”, he lays it down in a corner of the couch and covers its neck with a black cloak, thus providing it with an imaginary body:
The image nestled into the cushion as though it had veritably been a living woman weary for sleep, and softly smiling that it was near at last. So comfortable she seemed, you could have sworn she breathed. Antony lifted her head once or twice with his fingers, to delight himself with seeing her sink back luxuriously once more. (7)

Beatrice does not find this game entertaining. “She seems so alive, so evil, so cruel,” she cries. “There is something malignant about her, something that threatens our happiness” (8). When the image begins to fall in her direction, she starts screaming in terror: “Please stop. I cannot bear it. She looks so terribly alive” (7). Yet Antony does not take her fear seriously.

In order to fully understand Antony’s and Beatrice’s reactions, we have to pause and reflect on the story’s narrative structure. We have in fact three different perspectives: the voice of the omniscient narrator, who at times stops to comment or to elucidate for the reader, and the radically different and contradictory points of view of Antony and of his wife Beatrice. The juxtaposition and occasional merging of these perspectives creates an ambiguity through which the voice of the narrator can easily be mistaken for the voice of Beatrice or for that of Antony, making it impossible for the reader to understand which one is the “objective voice.” Since the omniscient narrator often coincides with Antony’s perspective in the chapters describing his interaction with Silencieux, the reader is often confused by the mention of actions that could only belong to a living being and that render the scene almost impossible to picture, as for example, in the episode in which Silencieux and Antony begin to dance and sing together:

So they ran in and out among pleasures together, joined strange dances and sang strange songs. They clapped their hands to jugglers and acrobats, and animals tortured into talent. And sometimes, as the gaudy theatre resounded about them, they looked so still at each other that all the rest faded away, and they were left alone with each other's eyes and great thoughts of God. (24, Italics mine)
A paradox arises from the reader’s objection that a death mask cannot open its eyes, nor does it have hands to clap. Through Antony’s perception, the cast has been assigned magical faculties and has begun to speak, yet the narrator often remarks that its eyes are closed and that one is dealing with a clay mask; with a fragment. Moreover, the images related to the circus and to the theatre suggest that Silencieux is not only a decorative, but also a theatrical object and that its world is fictional and self-referential. Antony and Silencieux are dancing on a metaphorical stage, but the margins of this stage are not clearly defined, and often deliberately confused by the game of perspectives.

Antony finds treating the cast as a real woman entertaining, while Beatrice is at first frightened, then worried about games that she identifies as a sign of her husband’s growing madness. Towards the end of the story the reader, after several chapters told entirely through Antony’s point of view, is offered an episode in which his perspective is juxtaposed to Beatrice’s. When she enters the chalet and catches her husband drinking wine with the cast, her conclusion is plain and simple:

“O God, he is going mad,” she cried to herself.
Antony was sitting in a big chair drawn up to the fire. Opposite to him, lying back in her cushions, was the Image draped in a large black velvet cloak. A table stood between them, and on it stood two glasses, and a decanter nearly empty of wine, Silencieux’s glass stood untasted, but Antony had evidently been drinking deeply, for his cheeks were flushed and his eyes wild. (54, Italics mine)

From Beatrice’s perspective, the mask is only an object and any attempt to animate it remains a fantasy. She never sees the mask move, nor does she hear it speak. Beatrice’s aversion for the cast leads us back to the second of our questions, which concerns the relationship between her and Silencieux. As we have pointed out, the mask reproduces exactly her features, and can therefore be considered as Beatrice’s double. In the essay *Das Unheimliche* (1919), Freud argues that the phenomenon of the double in Literature is often manifested through characters who look alike, who share the same thoughts or

60 Italics mine
identify with one another, causing an ambiguity between self and other,\textsuperscript{61} and that these characters often share the repetition of the same features and fate through several consecutive generations (1919, 246).\textsuperscript{62}

We have seen that Beatrice and Silencieux share exactly the same features. Antony is initially attracted to the cast because of its resemblance to his wife, but he very soon considers Beatrice beautiful only insofar as she resembles the image. In Chapter I (4), he almost addresses Beatrice as “Silencieux,” and the same confusion happens in chapter XXI and XXII, in which Antony, in his delirium, mistakes Beatrice for the mask. On the other hand, Beatrice refuses to recognize herself in the cast. We are told that, at the beginning, she “had first taken the delight in her which every created thing takes in a perfect, or even imperfect, reflection of itself” (6). Yet almost immediately, scared that the physiognomic resemblance might also lead to a similar destiny, she asks Antony to take it away. Later in the story, she rejects any association with Silencieux, claiming that Antony is writing poetry for the mask, and not for her, and that it is Silencieux that he is thinking about. Throughout the story, she keeps asserting that she has nothing in common with the mask, yet the voice of narrator brings them gradually closer; already in the second chapter, we are told that Silencieux looks “terribly alive” and that Beatrice is “as white as the image,” and in the same episode, Beatrice is referred to as a “created thing,” a definition that could just as well apply to the death mask. As the story develops, she grows more and more passive, while Silencieux, through Antony’s hallucinations, begins to speak and to act like a woman. Beatrice regains her role as a character only when Silencieux, after the death of the child, is buried in the wood, and falls again into passivity once the mask is retrieved. Finally, the image begins to substitute the model: “Every day new life welled into Silencieux’s face, as every day life ebbed from the face of Beatrice, for the love he gave to Silencieux Antony must take away from Beatrice, from whom as the days went by he grew more and more withdrawn” (12).\textsuperscript{63} Moreover,

\textsuperscript{61} Freud talks about “Ich Verdopplung, Ich Teilung, Ich Vertauschung” (1919 246)- “doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self” (234, translated by James Strachey).

\textsuperscript{62} See Sigmund Freud, The Uncanny (1919 passim).

\textsuperscript{63} The narrator seems here to paraphrase almost literally Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘The Oval Portrait,’ in which an artist decides to paint the features of his beloved wife and life gradually enters the painting as it ebbs from its model. The conclusion of both stories appears strikingly similar: “for one moment, the painter stood
Beatrice herself uses initially the pronoun “she” (7-8) to refer to the mask, thus attributing to it the life that she denies.

The traditional pattern of the *Doppelgänger* story, in which the protagonist must confront a double to obtain a woman’s love, is here reversed. It is not Antony, but Beatrice who experiences the rivalry of a double for her husband’s love; and as in the typical *Doppelgänger* story there is no real “victory” over the rival, because once one of the two is defeated, the other must perish.64 Moreover, the story reflects the traditional notion of *Doppelgänger* in its association with imminent death, which is Beatrice’s faith in the end of the story.

Freud quotes Otto Rank’s analysis of the double in connection with mirrors, shadows and guardian spirits. He does not mention the mask, but it can be considered as one of the forms through which the *Doppelgänger* takes shape. Freud recalls how the double was initially an insurance against the destruction of the ego, a denial of death, and how these ideas have sprung from a phase of primary narcissism, from the “unbounded self-love” of the mind of the child. He adds that, when this stage is over, the notion reverses and that the double, from a positive image, becomes a messenger of death (1919, 247).

The dual value attributed to the double is recognizable in Le Gallienne’s story. On the one hand Beatrice, a mature woman, is immediately frightened by the mask and sees in it a foreboding of her own destiny; on the other hand Antony, who loves his poetry more than anything else, who calls himself “a child” (24) and considers human love a dangerous distraction, can be considered as still experiencing a phase of extreme narcissism and thus sees the mask as amusing and reassuring. “I loved her,” he explains to Beatrice, “because I love you; but I would rather break her in pieces than that she should make you unhappy” (8).

64 We can think of Edgar Allan Poe’s famous story ‘William Wilson’, in which the protagonist confronts a hated double and discovers it to be a projection of himself. (ib.)
Predictably, Antony does not maintain his promise — his love for the artifact supplants his love for Beatrice. He becomes so obsessed with Silencieux that, in Chapter VII, he begs it to open its eyes, an act through which the mask would acquire life and completely replace its model. Silencieux refuses, warning Antony that the glance would kill him. The cast, which was found among “faces of Greece and Rome”(4), acquires now the features of Medusa, the mythological figure who has the power to kill through her glance and is eventually beheaded by Perseus. Like the Gorgon, the woman who has drowned in the Seine is dead, and yet her face continues to live and has acquired a lethal glance. Like the Gorgon, Silencieux is pictured both as beautiful and terrible. Through Silencieux’s conversation with Antony, in which the cast often “echoes” his words (17), we learn that the mask has had many lovers, “far from here” and “long ago”(17), that they were all poets and that they all have died when Silencieux has opened its eyes. We also learn that Silencieux’s first appearance was as a woman in Mytilene, and that her first love was a “very fair” woman “full of fire” who, rejected by somebody that she loved more than Silencieux, threw herself into the sea (18). The latter is a reference to Sappho’s death as told by Ovid in the Heroides, in which Sappho, supposedly writing to Phaon, complains that her love for Phaon had made her forget the beautiful women of Mytilene (Ovid XV, 131-146). We also learn that, in her journey through history and space, Silencieux has had many female and male lovers, including a giant who use to wear her face “like a flower”(19), an image that, by completing the delicate face with a masculine “giant” body, emphasizes the mask’s growing androgynous features. Later in the story, Anthony takes a fancy to the game of masquerade and dresses Silencieux in the “wardrobe of her past” (24):

“To-night, you shall go clothed as when you loved that woman in Mitylene,” Antony would say.
Or: “To-night you shall be a little shepherd-boy, with a leopard-skin across your shoulder and mountain berries in your hair.”
Or again: “To-night you shall be Pierrot — mourning for his Columbine.”
Ah! how divine was Silencieux in all her disguises! — a divine child.(61)

Through this masquerade, Silencieux reinforces its status as a theatrical prop, and its association with maleness. The first costumes Antony chooses, that of a “shepherd boy”
and of a “person” in love with a woman in Mitylene, contribute changing Silencieux, as its name indicates, into an androgynous mask that, through the gender ambiguity, is no longer the exclusive portrait of Beatrice but begins to reflect aspects of Antony’s. The other costumes, which refer to the characters from the Commedia dell’arte, make of Silencieux a mask interpreting a mask, and as the reader familiar with Decadence knows, this game of camouflage represents in this period an occasion for duplicity, for the last mask does not hide a face but only a deadly void, as exemplified by Silencieux’s final appearance in the story. Antony is aware that Silencieux lives through his imagination, and does not find his infatuation remarkable: “There is in all love a component of make-believe. Every woman who is loved is partly the creation of her lover’s fancy” (13).

In this light, Silencieux comes to resemble Antony as much as it resembles Beatrice. It is a mask with a masculine name that shares with Antony a sort of telepathy, that displays through its features Antony’s unconscious desire to see Beatrice dead and that, through its growing androgynous attributes, reduces Beatrice’s feminine features to an image of sameness. Beatrice has in fact become an antagonist; as an imperfect human being, she is not able to maintain her status of muse and becomes a distraction to Antony’s dedication to poetry. “To turn a muse into a wife,” reflects Antony at the beginning of the story, “however long and faithfully loved, is to bid good-bye to the muse” (9). Later we learn that “Beatrice was beginning to bore him, not merely by her sadness, which his absorption prevented his realising except in flashes, but by her very resemblance to the Image — of which, from having been the beloved original, she was, in his eyes, becoming an indifferent materialisation” (13). The conquest of the artificial over the natural, of art over life is yet only temporary, as the author moralizes a little too obviously: “What we call immortality in art is but the shadow of the soul's immortality; but the immortality of love is that of the soul Itself” (47). Art can perhaps strive to be superior to life, seems to be the author’s conclusion, but there is no art without life, nor is there art based uniquely on self love.

See Felicien’s Champsaur Nuit de Fête (1902), a “parable” in which Pierrot tries to undress a woman masker who hides innumerable other costumes. The last costume, once taken off, reveals no body but only an empty space.
The question of narcissism leads us now to the last of our questions. Can Silencieux be considered a fetish object? In its original meaning, the word fetish was used by the Portuguese (*feitico*) as meaning “false” or “of false value” in respect of the objects of idolatry that they found in their colonies. Kaplan, in *Cultures of Fetishism*, explains that, like other words deriving from the Latin *factitius*, fetish or *feitico* suggests “mask, masquerade, disguise, fake” (2). We can adopt Kaplan’s definition of fetishism as “the extravagant, irrational devotion to some material object, idea or practice” (1). This definition is usually further divided into an anthropological and into a sexual notion. From the anthropological point of view, fetishism is defined as the belief that certain natural or artificial objects hold magical or supernatural power, while in its sexual meaning it indicates the displacement of erotic interest on an object or a part of the body. According to Freud, this displacement is nothing but a simulacrum, since the fetish emerges as a structure to prevent the fear of castration from becoming a threat in the child’s mind and since the child has at the same time retained and given up the belief that the woman should have a phallus (1927, 47-157). Therefore, the fetish is at the same time a reassuring image of presence and absence, a definition that applied well to the death mask of Silencieux.

One can certainly speak of the notion of an irrational devotion to a magical object, considering that the title of the work is “The Worshipper of the Image” and that Antony believes the mask can speak and even promises to it a human sacrifice. On the other hand, we also know that Antony becomes totally infatuated with Silencieux, and that this love slowly replaces his affection for Beatrice. As frequently happens with sexual fetishes, his attraction begins with an association with reality, that is with the mask’s likeness to his beloved, but gradually the erotic attraction becomes autonomous, to the point that he forgets any resemblance between the two. Laura Mulvey, in *Fetishism and Curiosity*, reminds us that “Unlike a fully alive human being with dangerous, unpredictable desires who must be wooed and courted, fetish objects are relatively safe, easily available, and undemanding reciprocity” (7).
Silencieux becomes a fetish both in an anthropological and in a sexual sense, as it is both an object of devotion and of erotic yearning. We must remember that, in other contemporary texts, the mask is linked to the severed head and to the myth of Salomé, of the castrating woman. “In its larger, more encompassing meaning,” writes Mulvey, “fetishism is about the deadening and dehumanizing of otherwise alive and therefore threateningly dangerous, unpredictable desires” (7).

Silencieux deadens and dehumanizes Beatrice’s potentially threatening femininity, providing an easy, undemanding object to substitute her too complicated love. Only through her own death mask could Beatrice, as her name suggests, become the muse and the inspiration of Antony’s poetry. Le Gallienne knew and was inspired by the works of the Pre-Raphaelites, who cultivated a deep interest in medieval art and especially in Dante’s *Vita Nova*, an allegorical work that describes the poet’s love for Beatrice, her death and her ascension to Heaven. “The Worshipper of the Image” follows the same pattern, describing first the poet’s love for Beatrice, then her death and her metamorphosis (through her double Silencieux) into an eternal, not earthly figure that can be a pure source of inspiration, or as Antony phrases it, into “some form midway between life and death, inanimate and yet alive, human and yet removed from the accidents of humanity.” (12)

The same renunciation of earthly passions that in the *Vita Nova* leads the poet to a deeper spiritual development and makes his soul immortal has in “The Worshipper of the Image” a much darker connotation. At the end of the story, we learn that “the eyes of Silencieux were wide open, and from her lips hung a dark moth with the face of death between his wings” (57). This image mirrors on the one hand the relationship of the mask to Beatrice, and on the other hand Antony’s childhood dream of the insect that he had loved with “the passion of a Japanese artist” (3). As we have seen, the mask had initially been identified as a portrait of Beatrice, but had later grown autonomous from its model. In the final lines of the story, Silencieux and Beatrice are again reunited into the same

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66 This aspect emerges particularly in French decadent literature. See Jean Lorrain, *Monsieur de Phocas* (1901).
entity; the death mask can be beautiful only as long as she draws life from her double, but once Beatrice perishes, it expresses nothing but the reality of death. On the other hand, the image reflects the relationship of the mask to Antony: just like Dorian Gray’s portrait, it appears as a horrible reflection of the violence that has been perpetrated through Antony’s hand towards his wife and his daughter. As double of both Beatrice and Antony, Silencieux becomes an allegory of death to which no longer follows the illusion of eternity.

The comparison with Dante’s *Vita Nova* leads us to consider the story as a modern parody of Dante’s parable in which the ending, from an image of salvation and eternal life, becomes a representation of death and damnation. This view reveals the growing discomfort of the turn of the century with the notion of *l’art pour l’art*, with the idea that art constitutes a world of its own that life must strive to imitate. If the natural world is assumed to be a creation of God, Silencieux, as an object of art, was created by man only, and as Beatrice predicts, will gradually become an object of destruction. We can besides find reflected in the story a common notion in the social sciences of the period, which viewed the artistic genius as a form of illness and degeneration, as well as a growing preoccupation with reification, with the treatment of humans as objects, and conversely, with the attributions of human qualities to objects, a concern that had become more pressing with the growth of industrialization.

Silencieux is the death mask of an anonymous woman, and as such, an image of absence as well as presence, a face that “never changed and yet was always changing”(3), that remains the same and is yet subject to continuous metamorphosis. As a mask that begins its adventures in Ancient Greece, that crosses the Middle Ages and arrives through France to England, where it becomes associated with Japanese art, Silencieux recalls the

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67 The criminologist Cesare Lombroso, a supporter of social Darwinism and of the theory of degeneration, argued that criminality was inherited and could be detected by an examination of physiognomic attributes. In 1889, just a year before Le Gallienne’s story, he published *L’uomo di Genio*, a text in which he argues that the artistic genius is a form of hereditary insanity. A concern with physiognomy and with the nature of the artistic genius is recognizable in Le Gallienne’s story.
exotic masks that, in these years, are rediscovered in theatre and visual art. By arriving from distant place in time and space, and by virtue of its foreign name, Silencieux embodies alterity and seems to suggest that “evil” always comes from elsewhere, and to prefigure the growing confusion between death masks and exotic masks that Europeans interpret as an omen of death.

As an image of a face that is throughout the story treated as if it were a complete woman, Silencieux stands for the importance that the fragment takes in the arts of the period. In our story, the hollow surface of the mask, the totally insubstantial, is made substantial through a synecdoche that, through Antony’s perception, becomes literal as the death mask turns into a living being. At the beginning of this essay we have pointed out that Silencieux is created after the Inconnue de la Seine and we have observed how this mask had in the last years of the nineteenth century become a commercial item. As Papet argues, art critics warned in these years against excessive decorativism and wrote at length about the tendency to use mask as autonomous decorative objects (10). Paul Vitry, curator of the Louvre, published in 1903 an article entitled “Masques,” in which he complained the ambiguity of the genre and defined modern art as “an isolated fragment” (354). Le Gallienne not only anticipates this observation, he also explains (and perhaps mocks) the possible function that the mask might serve as it switches from a theatrical to a decorative, and finally to a fetish object.

Perhaps the value of the Worshipper of the Image consists in the fact that it lends itself well to the unraveling of its symbolism, leading to interpretations that can tell us much about the sensibility of the turn of the century and that help us to have a better understanding of why the mask, in this period, should be given so much attention.

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68 In these years, a close attention is paid to Oriental art and to ancient European theatre. Strong affinities are found between the use of mask in Ancient Greece and the Japanese Noh. See Shimizu (2008, 74-85).
69 See above, introduction.
Death Masks and Flayed Faces. Rilke’s *Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge.*

Ich will nicht diese halbgefüllten Masken, lieber die Puppe. Die ist voll. (Rilke 1993)

Masks and flayed faces are a constant and puzzling presence in the *Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, the prose work that Rilke wrote between 1902-1909 and in which he records impressions of his journey to Paris in 1902-1903. Their recurrence can appear confusing, especially since Rilke often uses the term “mask” as an alternative for face; he writes of faces that look like masks, that can be worn and cast off, consumed and even “given to a dog.” This obscurity can be explained when we understand that, in this fictional notebook, the mask functions as a fragment that stands for the whole. Just as each of the 71 journal's fragment can both be read autonomously and be considered as a part of the narrative, masks too can be considered independently while carrying within themselves the essence of the person. The mask, in other words, becomes the expression of the soul, and does so by acquiring a magical, ritualistic connotation. It is part of the self, often attached to the skin and, if taken off, does not reveal a face but only a flayed, bloody surface.

The journal consists of the thoughts and recollections of 28 year old Malte, a Danish artist who moves to Paris and experiences life in a modern metropolis. In the notebook this hectic, anonymous world is constantly juxtaposed with Malte’s childhood memories in the countryside. While in the countryside every object, every detail in the house was charged with a meaning, the reality of the city appears “factory-like,” a place where people are “merely living,” reduced to half masks, to mannequins and puppets. In this highly regulated world there is no time for reflection and imagination and any act of creativity has become impossible; the molding of one’s soul into a mask is no longer the result of a long craftsmanship but is imposed on the individual from external forces. In

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70 I hate these half filled masks/ I’d rather have a puppet-at least it’s complete. (Rilke 1993. Trans by Leslie Norris and Alan Keele, 21).
the analysis of the journal we look at the way in which, through an alternation of childhood memories with contemporary experiences, Malte uses the mask both as a synecdoche and as an allegory of the invasion of the self by alterity, a process that causes man to feel estranged from himself and from nature and to develop a second, artificial way of living.

In order to understand how the mask can be conceived as a synecdoche we must first consider the use that Rilke makes of the idea of fragment both on the formal and on the content level. As we have seen, this notion is an essential part of the journal’s structure, which lacks a traditional plot development and in which each section can be considered autonomously. On the content level, this fragmentation is reflected in the attention given to objects that are mentioned in a section and then resurface unexpectedly several pages later, a pattern that hints at a reading of these elements as part of a greater unity. Masks can be considered among these objects — both as skin-masks and as death masks. They are fragments that continuously call into question the unity with a body, and, as torn pieces, they are also reminders of man’s mortality and of an unavoidable disintegration.

The notion of the fragment had been widely explored and developed in the German Romanticism. Just as for the Romantics, for Rilke the fragment is a piece that in itself reflects the completeness of a totality. Yet his conception of the fragmentary differs from the Romantics’ in that it implies an act of violence. In fact, the fragment not only leads to the recognition of a unity better than the unity itself, but constantly hints at the rupture by which it has been produced. An important influence for the development of this sensibility must be traced in Rilke's collaboration with the sculptor Auguste Rodin, who used the mask both as a tool in the process of creating a sculpture and as an intermediary form between the portrait and the bust. From the letters written to his wife, we know that Rilke had been immediately stuck by the bodily fragmentation that was going on in the atelier of the sculptor:

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71 On the importance of the Fragment in German Romanticism see Lacoue-Labarthe (62-29 passim).
72 On the importance of the fragment in modernist literature see Braun (132 passim)
73 See further Le Normand–Romain (102, 104).
There it lies, yard upon yard, only fragments, one beside the other. Figures the size of my hand and larger ... but only pieces, hardly one that is whole: often only a piece of arm, a piece of leg, as they happen to go along beside each other, and the piece of body that belongs right near them. Once the torso of a figure with the head of another pressed against it, with the arm of a third . . . as if an unspeakable storm, an unparalleled destruction had passed over this work. And yet, the more closely one looks, the more deeply one feels that all this would be less of a whole if the individual bodies were whole. Each of these bits is of such an eminent, striking unity, so possible by itself, so not at all needing completion, that one forgets they are only parts, and often parts of different bodies that cling to each other so passionately there. One feels suddenly that it is rather the business of the scholar to conceive of the body as a whole and much more that of the artist to create from the parts new relationships, new unities, greater, more logical ... more eternal ... (Rilke 1950, 79. Trans. by Green and Norton.)

In 1902, when Rilke wrote this letter, he also began to work on the Aufzeichungen. Several critics point out that Rodin's influence is fundamental for the journal, and that the observation of the sculptor's work increased Rilke's attention to the visual. For our purpose, this letter is important because it offers a clear illustration of how the fragment gains autonomy and importance, since each of these sculptural fragments is described as

carrying the essence of a whole. Most importantly, Rilke talks of “an unspeakable storm, an unparallel destruction” as the source for the fragmentation, and thus conceives of the pieces of sculpture as the consequence of an act of violence and destruction — a sensibility that shows how, at the turn the 20th century, the fragment not only gains autonomy and stands for the whole but also gains a dark connotation. Rilke’s vision of Rodin’s Atelier does not, however, lack a playful, ludic aspect; the body fragments lie there as if to be combined, rearranged at the fancy of one’s imagination. It is in this act of creation that Rilke identifies the task of the artist. For Rilke, the artist is not only the maker of fragments, but he also the one who is able to see the unity that stands behind it; the one who, in other words, is able to treat the notion of fragment as a synecdoche.

In an earlier part of the letter quoted above, Rilke had mentioned how the unfinished features of Rodin’s sculptures fascinate him because they express an intermediary state between dreaming and being awake: “so wundervoll ist das Nochnichterwachtsein hier gesagt - so plastisch” (Rilke 1950, 34). Although the masks of Rodin are absent from the journal, there are two other masks which reflect the liminal state between consciousness and unconsciousness, life and death and that Rilke had the occasion to observe in 1905. In the fictional journal, Malte finds these masks hanging on the wall of the molder’s shop. One is the face of a young woman, “das Gesicht der jungen Ertränkten, das man in der Morgue abnahm, weil es schön war, weil es lächelte, weil es so täuschen lächelte, als wüßte es” (778);75 the other is the face of an older “wise” man.

Malte mentions without naming explicitly two masks that had become a common decorative item in the beginning of the twentieth century: that of the Inconnue de la Seine, a victim of drowning whose face was considered the expression of a supernatural beauty, and that of Beethoven, who had become a legendary figure at the turn of the century. This text is one of the most dense, abstract and untranslatable in the journal, yet

75 The face of the young drowned woman, a cast of which was taken in the morgue because it was beautiful, because it smiled, smiled so deceivingly, as though it knew (24).

If we read between the lines, we discover a certain playfulness. The two masks appear, at first sight, as the opposite of one another: one is the mask of an unknown woman, the other of one of the most famous men of the age. These two faces, however, share an important ambiguity: the features of the *Inconnue de la Seine*, as contemporary scholars remind us (Héra 36) were far too well preserved to belong to a drowned woman, and the so-called “death mask of Beethoven” that was used as a decoration was not his death mask, but a life mask that was taken when the composer was still young and healthy. Rilke is using these masks to exemplify the myth of a dignified, beautiful death that is so present in the journal. The death masks are the last portrait of features shaped over many years, a last memory of the look of a person's face; at the same time, they are also an image of beauty that stands for the persistence of memory after death, for the survival of the human soul.

Both masks, however, have been identified by experts as the result of a *moulage sur le vif* (Héra 36) and as such contradict the myth that is formulated. As death masks, they defy the reality of death by creating an eternal memory of perishable human features and yet as life masks, they mock the myth of the beautiful death since they prove that the last portrait, in order to be beautiful, must be taken before death. Rilke seems to be implying that man’s power to shape his own features and to determine the way in which he will be remembered after death has become an illusion, that control over one own death is no longer possible. If, throughout the nineteenth century, these masks had stood as an image of the myth of beautiful death, the turn of the century turned them into a mockery of this possibility. One of Malte’s obsessions is in fact the right to an individual death, which he sees denied in contemporary society: “Bei so enormer production ist der einzelne Tod

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76 Rilke does probably not allude to the mask taken by Josef Danhauser after the death of the composer, but to the more famous and reproduced mask by Franz Klein, taken when Beethoven was 36 years old. The death mask of Beethoven was produced two days after his death and shows the features of a man disfigured by illness and by the amputation of the ears. It would thus offer a complementary image to the serenity reflected in the features of the *Inconnue*, while the life mask would reinforce the image of a peaceful, dignified death. (see further Héra 2002, 36).

77 The nostalgia for the past, for a society that ran at a slower pace and that offered the right to an individual life and death is constantly present in the journal. Moreover, the narrative is filled with the myth of the "beautiful death," with reflections on the possibility that death could be not only terrifying or dignified, but also a source of beauty.
The abundant industrial production has made everything replaceable, even people’s faces, and with them the expression of individuality. As people are gradually dehumanized, turned into gears of the industrial mechanism, their faces become skin masks, objects that can be used and thrown away once that they have served their use.  

The skin masks are revealed to Malte through an epiphany that is the result of more subtle perception, of a way of seeing that he has developed by living in the city.

“Ich lerne sehen” writes Malte at the beginning of his journal. “Ich weiß nicht, woran es liegt, es geht alles tiefer in mich ein und bleibt nicht an der Stalle stehen, wo es sonst immer zu ende war” (710). Malte uses the verb sehen (to see), not schauen (to look). His perception is the fruit of a training, and yet it remains passive; he is overwhelmed by visions and suffers them with a mix of horror and wonder:


Andere Leute setzen unheimlich schnell ihre Gesichter auf, eins nach dem andern, und tragen sie ab. Es scheint ihnen zuerst, sie hätten für immer, aber

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78 "When production is so enormous an individual death is not nicely carried out, but does that matter? It is quantity that counts" (17).
79 As Bredekamp has noted, Marx talks in Das Kapital of "Charaktermaske" and "Maskenträger" to point out that individuals, in modern capitalist societies, are only the personification of greater economical forces, and repeatedly uses the metaphor of the world as a theatre (see Bredekamp 51-53).
80 "I am learning to see. I don’t know why it is, but everything penetrates more deeply into me and does not stop at the place where until now it always used to finish. I have an inner self of which I was ignorant” (14).
I am learning to see. To think, for instance, that I have never been aware before how many faces there are. There are quantities of human beings, but there are many more faces, for each person has several. There are people who wear the same face for years; naturally it wears out, it gets dirty, it splits at the folds, it stretches, like gloves one has worn on a journey. There are thrifty, simple people; they do not change their face, they never even have it cleaned. It is good enough, they say, and who can prove to them the contrary? The question of course arises, since they have several faces, what do they do with the others? They store them up. Their children will wear them. But sometimes, too, it happens that their dogs go out with them. And why not? A face is a face.

Other people put their faces on, one after the other, with uncanny rapidity and wear them out. At first it seems to them they are provided for always; but they scarcely reach forty – and they have to come to the last. This naturally has something tragic. They are not accustomed to taking care of faces, their last is worn through a week, has holes, and in many places is thin as paper; and then little by little under layer, the no-face comes through, and they go about with that. (15)

Just as any disposable object, the “face” can be exchanged, worn out, thrown away; it is not eternal and it can easily decay. This notion contradicts the usual perception of the mask as lifeless material placed over living subjects, as a changeable, false surface that covers the “real” face. Like human faces, these skin-masks are made of organic

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81 It is perhaps not a coincidence that we find a similar use of the trope in a contemporary text by Franz Kafka, who just like Rilke was born in Prague and who shared with him the same feeling of discomfort towards an industrialized, mechanized society. In a passage of a short story entitled "Beschreibung eines Kampfes," Kafka comments on how girls wear their skin in the same way they wear a fancy dress: "Doch sehe ich Mädchen, die wohl schön sind und vielfach reizende Muskeln und Knöchelchen und gespannte Haut und Massen dünner Haare zeigen, und doch tagtäglich in diesem einen natürlichen Maskenanzug erscheinen, immer das gleiche Gesicht in die gleichen Handflächen legen und von ihrem Spiegel widerscheinen lassen. Nur manchmal am Abend, wenn sie spät von einem Feste kommen, scheint es ihnen im Spiegel abgenützt, gedunsen, verstaubt, von allen schon gesehen und kaum mehr tragbar." (Kafka 1936, 62).

"And yet I see girls who are beautiful enough, displaying all kinds of attractive muscles and little bones and smooth skin and masses of fine hair, and who appear every day in the same natural fancy dress, always laying the same face in the same palms and letting it be reflected in the mirror. Only sometimes at
material, they can be cast on and off just like a mask, but once they are removed, they point only to a second mask or to what Rilke calls the *Nichtgesicht*, to the reality of death. The categories of the natural and of the artificial, usually represented by the human face and by the mask, lose their distinctive characteristics and take over each other’s functions; the skin becomes a garment, the garment a second skin.

Malte continues the passage describing the encounter with a woman who had collapsed her face into her hands, and recalls how the face remained lying in them: "Ich konnte es darin liegen sehen, seine hohle Form. Es kostete mich unbeschreibliche Anstrengung, bei diesen Händen zu bleiben und nicht zu schauen, was sich aus ihnen abgerissen hatte. Mir graute, ein Gesicht von innen zu sehen, aber ich fürchtete mich doch noch viel mehr vor dem bloßen wunden Kopf ohne Gesicht" (712). The gesture of holding one’s face in one’s hands can be interpreted as an act of effacement, as casting off a mask that we expect to reveal a real face, and can thus be read as a process of metamorphosis and rebirth. Yet in the journal, the mask always reveals another mask and the metamorphosis can only be repeated a limited number of times. When all the stored faces have been exhausted, the identity of the person lies on the hollow surface of the last mask. The skin-mask becomes a synecdoche, a fragment that stands for the whole and that carries with itself the person’s soul, while what remains on the body is the anonymous surface of death. If this skin-mask is itself imposed on man by the estrangement of the industrial society, the real face is lost forever, has become one with the mask. The back of the mask, which Malte is so afraid to see, is perhaps dreadful because it still carries some signs of the melting of the mask and the face, of the fusion of the self with alterity.

The mask and the flayed face are recurrent motives in Malte’s diaries and are also the images around which revolve the episodes of the “little green book” that Malte used to own in his childhood. Malte recalls two stories that he found particularly striking: *The End of Grishka Otrepioff*, a false czar who was eventually discovered and executed, and

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82 I could see it lying in them, its hollow form. It cost me indescribable effort to stay with those hands and not to look at what had torn itself out of them. I shuddered to see a face from the inside, but still I was much more afraid of the naked flayed head without a face. (16)
The Downfall of Charles the Bold, a duke of Burgundy whose body was found maimed and frozen after the Battle of Nancy. Both episodes are historical facts, but Malte is not so much interested in the details as in turning them into stories of the death of a man with a mask and of a man without a face, thus into parables about the meaning of the mask in the moment of death.

The story of Grishka Otrepioff, an impostor who presented himself as the lost heir to the Russian throne and who in 1605 was crowned Czar, had made a strong impression on Malte as a child: “Nach so viel Jahren," writes Malte, "entsinne ich mich der Beschreibung, wie der Leichnam des falschen Zaren unter die Menge geworfen worden war und da lag drei Tage, zerfetzt und zerstochen und eine Maske vor dem Gesicht” (882). Grishka represents the perfect actor, somebody who forged his mask with such care that he became one with it and even dared to summon the real czar’s mother for a recognition. Reworking the story, Malte emphasizes how Grishka, until the moment of death, maintained the will to play out his role, and how the mask remained on his face in death, even as his body was torn and mangled. Grishka becomes a mythical figure, someone who controlled, who forged his own mask and who determined the way in which he would be remembered after death. Instead of having a mask imposed on him by society, he chooses his own mask and becomes one with it.

In the journal, Malte wonders how the story of this master of metamorphosis could stand in the same book next to the episode of Charles the Bold, a man famous for being the same all his life and for the consistency of his cruelty. This coincidence appears less wonderful when one considers that these stories represent two opposite developments of the same theme: the fusion of the face with a mask and the forced removal of a mask that reveals a flayed face. If Grishka has the courage to choose and mold his own mask, Charles represents instead the man who is overpowered by alterity, who does not have any control over the mask and who suffers the act of erosion that it slowly operates on the self. We have seen how, at the beginning of the journal, Malte had been terrified to

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83 "After so many years I recall the description of how the corpse of the false czar had been thrown among the crowd and lay there three days, mangled and stabbed, with a mask before its face" (162).
84 A very similar episode is narrated in König Harlekin, by Rodulf Lothar.
glance at the flayed face of the woman on the street. The story of the mangled body of Charles the Bold embodies this fear, reinforces it visually and is also used to introduce the themes of alterity within one’s body. Skillfully substituting the narrator of the little green book, Malte narrates how this cruel emperor suffered an estrangement towards his own body, how he felt that his was nourishing an independent entity that he was unable to dominate: “Oft ängstigte es ihn, daß es ihn im Schlaf anfallen könne und zerreiß. Er tat, als bändigte 85 ers, aber er stand immer in seiner Furcht” (885).

The second part of the story deals with the disappearance of the Emperor and the search for the body on the frozen battlefield. For Malte, the moment of recognition constitutes the climax of the story, and yet this expectation is soon frustrated by the realization that the body has become unrecognizable. As the servants pull it away from the ice, they are forced to recognize a terrible mutilation: "Das Gesicht war eingefroren, und da man es aus dem Eis herauszerrte, schälte sich die eine Wange dünn und spröde ab, und es zeigte sich, daß die andere von Hunden oder Wölfen herausgerissen war; und das Ganze war von einer großen Wunde gespalten, die am Ohr begann, so daß von einem Gesicht keine Rede sein konnte." (889)

The two stories end with the description of a corpse, but while Grishka’s corpse is a devastated body recognizable only through the integrity of the mask, Charles’ body is a corpse without a face. If, in the first story, the mask becomes the means through which an identity is forged and preserved, in the second the face, which most of all carries the essence of the individual, is torn away through an act of destruction that leaves only a flayed, anonymous surface. Just as in the example of the death masks hanging in the molder’s shop, reality is not what it seems. The man who makes his life an act of forgery succeeds in mastering his mask, while he who strives to maintain his subjectivity is slowly overpowered by alterity.

85 "He was often frightened lest it attacked him as he slept and rend him in pieces. He made as if to master it, but he stood always in fear of it" (165).
86 "The face was frozen into the ice, and as they pulled it out, one of the cheeks peeled off, thin and brittle, and it appeared that the other cheek had been torn out by dogs or wolves; and the whole was cleft by a great wound beginning at the ear, so that one could not speak of a face at all" (168).
Malte shares with the duke the same fear of an entity nourished by his own blood, growing out of his body. In one of the fragments dedicated to his memories, we are told that he has been suffering since childhood from a fear of something that he had named "das Große" (the big thing), a monster growing out of his own self that resembled a tumor, a second head and that is fed by his own blood:


It was there like a huge, dead beast, that had once, when it was still alive, been my hand or my arm. And my blood flew both through me and through it, as if through one and the same body. And my heart had to make a great effort to drive the blood into the Big Thing; there was hardly enough blood. And the blood entered the Big Thing unwillingly and came back sick and tainted. But the Big Thing swelled and grew over my face like a warm bluish boil and grew over my mouth, and already the shadow of its edge lay upon my remaining eye. (59)

This fear of intrusion, of an entity that gradually penetrates the self, turns in this quote into a surface that extends over the face, in other words into a mask, and the mask is seen as the manifestations of a double that stands dangerously close to the self, that threatens to replace it and that thus leads to its destruction.

The theme of the double and its connection to the mask is further developed in another episode of Malte’s childhood, when the child finds the keys to the closets of the family residence and begins to pull out their contents, to wear the costumes and to admire the effect in the fragmented and colorful mirror. In this episode, Malte discovers the pleasure of the game of disguise and encounters for the first time the fear of masks. The
excitement of exercising the imagination to forge a disguise is in fact juxtaposed with the terror inspired by the mask, through which the game is interrupted and turned into a frightful nightmare.

Several critics have pointed out that Malte shuns the masculine costumes and is much more interested in the feminine ones and in the cloak and wraps that allow him to maintain a fluid, rather than strictly regulated identity; others have reflected on the importance of the mirror, in this case a narrow, colored and fragmented surface that can only return a biased, broken vision of reality.⁸⁷ Linden goes as far as interpreting Malte’s adventure as a reverse Lacanian mirror-stage that leads the child to a denial, rather than to the recognition of his mirror image. For our purpose, this passage becomes interesting also because it restates the function of the mask as a synecdoche. Malte uses masks and costumes that can be combined, taken apart, transformed … fragmented items that gain life and autonomy and that, as the child loses his mastery over them, are endowed with magical power. Since the very first moment in which he tries on the different clothes, he is confronted with the resistance of the mirror: "Der Spiegel glaubte es gleichsam nicht und wollte, schläfrig wie er war, nicht gleich nachsprechen, was man ihm vorsagte Aber schließlich mußte er natürlich "(803),⁸⁸ writes Malte, who delights in the game of disavowal and acknowledgment. In the beginning, there is a moment in which he is not able to recognize himself, but once the recognition has taken place and he feels reassured of his identity, he begins to walk and act in different ways in order to intensify the thrilling, but controlled, emotion of seeing himself as an other. The masquerade is pleasant only because it reinforces, rather than calls into question Malte’s identity. It is in fact nothing but a repeated fiction, a more elaborate version of the “fort-da” game described by Freud, in which the infant delights in seeing an object removed only to find it placed again before his eyes. “Diese Verstellungen gingen indessen nicht so weit, dass

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⁸⁸ "The mirror did not, so to speak, believe in it, and did not want, sleepy as it was, to repeat promptly what had been said to it. But naturally it had to in the end" (91).

One of the closets that the child is able to open contains the costumes used for masquerade: Venetians and commedia dell’arte costumes, Turkish trousers and many other “exotic paraphernalia.” Malte finds these costumes silly; being already prepared, they present themselves as obvious artifices and do not lend themselves well to the ambiguity for which he is searching. He finds, instead, a better material in the mantles, shawls, veils, in all the undefined pieces of cloth that he can simply arrange at his pleasure and that he uses to interpret many possible characters, from Jeanne d’Arc to an old Sorcerer. These costumes offer him the opportunity to exercise his imagination, to try out different possibilities, allowing him to play with the notion of gender and with the model that has been imposed on him by society. They have, therefore, a liberating function that is identified as positive game of creation.

This game of disguises, however, suddenly changes from curious entertainment to a real terror when Malte discovers the masks, “große drohende oder erstaunte Gesichten mit echten Bärten und vollen oder hochgezogenen Augenbrauen” (805). 91 Malte is immediately struck by them. “Ich hatte nie Masken gesehen vorher, aber ich sah sofort ein, das es Masken geben müsse“(805), 92 he comments, stating the necessity of mask and implying, similarly to Nietzsche, 93 that the mask is inherent to human nature and that man cannot possibly do away with the device. As opposed to the costumes that he has so far created, the mask that Malte tries on is ready-made, not the result of a creative action, and instead of opening up for the self endless possibilities, it forces the child in one precise direction. It is now the mask, not the child, that begins to dictate the rules of the game, and it is only to complement the mask that he selects the clothes and materials that

89 “These disguises never, indeed, went so far as to make me feel a stranger to myself. On the contrary, the more varied my transformations, the more convinced did I become of myself” (92).
90 The notion of gender is often questioned in the journal, also through Malte's masquerade as "little Sophie," in the episode in which he remembers approaching his mother as a young girl.
91 … large, threatening, astonishing faces with real beards and full of high drawn eyebrows (93).
92 I had never seen masks before but I understood at once that masks ought to be (93).
93 See introduction.
he wraps around himself. Finally, dressed in front of the mirror, Malte is impressed by the image and tries to increase the effect with a great gesture, but the reversed symmetry of the mirror confuses him and he overturns a little table. This small accident turns into a nightmare: the glass objects that stood on the table shatter into fragments, and when the child bends down to repair the damage he discovers that the costumes restricts his movements and the mask his vision. He hurries to the mirror to take off his costume but the mask fits tightly to his skin, and, as he watches his own hands trying to unloosen the costume, he begins to feel a sense of estrangement from his own body and to fear the effects produced by the mirror, that he addresses as if it were a living entity:


For this the mirror had just been watching. Its moment of retaliation had come. While I strove in boundlessly increasing anguish to squeeze somehow out of my disguise, it forced me, by what means I do not know, to lift my eyes and imposed on me an image, no, a reality, a strange, unbelievable and monstrous reality, with which, against my will, I became permeated: for now the mirror was the strongest, and I was the mirror. I stared at this great, terrifying unknown before me, and it seemed to me appalling to be alone with him. But at the very moment I thought this, the worse befell: I lost all sense, I simply ceased to exist. For one second I had an indescribable, painful and futile longing for myself, then there was only he: there was nothing but he. (94)

In an essay on mirrors, Umberto Eco reflects on the ingenuity of the idea that mirrors show a reverse image in which the right side is exchanged for the left and vice versa. Mirrors, Eco points out, reflect the right and the left exactly as they are: “E’
l’osservatore”, he writes, “che per immedesimazione si figura di essere l’uomo dentro lo specchio, e guardandosi si accorge che porta, diciamo, l’orologio al polso destro. Ma il fatto e’ che lo porterebbe se egli, l’osservatore, fosse colui che sta entro lo specchio”\(^94\) (Eco 12). Like Eco’s "naïve" observer, who in front of the mirror identifies with the image, Malte also falls into the trap of believing, by identification, to be the person in the glass, and perceives his real self, standing in front of the mirror and covered by the mask, as an extraneous entity. The mask has not only become alive and autonomous; it has melted to the skin and it has created a *Doppelgänger*, a double that comes from elsewhere but that stands ambiguously close to the self and is interchangeable with it. Malte instinctively runs away, but the difference between the reflection and the self has been effaced and he cannot escape from an entity that has merged with his own self: “Ich rannte davon”, he writes, “aber nun war es er, der rannte. Er stieß überall an, er kannte das Haus nicht” (808). \(^95\)

Rilke seems to suggest that, although as human beings we have the potential to create and shape our masks and to turn them into expressions of the soul, most individuals suffer them as constrictions that are imposed on them and that slowly annihilate their nature, substituting it with a second, artificial way of being that leaves them in doubt as to what their self is. Only the true actor who, like Grishka, \(^96\) is aware of his mask and molds it according to his wishes can control it, while most people are instead ruled and shaped by it, to the extent that their individuality is cancelled. The mask, just as the impulse to act, must thus be seen as part of human nature, as a device that can be positive as well as negative and that is associated with a theatre that stands close to ritual. The last synecdoche used by Malte concerns, in fact, the theatre, which in his imagination turns into an ancient, gigantic mask: “die starke, alles verstellende antikische Maske, hinter der die Welt zum Gesicht zusammenschoß” (922). \(^97\) In this symbol of theater, Malte

\(^94\) “it is the observer [ … ]that, through identification, imagines being the man in the mirror, and looking at himself realizes that he is wearing, let’s say, a watch on his right wrist. But the reality is that he would wear it if he, the observer, was the one inside the mirror” [my translation].

\(^95\) "I ran away, but now it was he that ran. He knocked everything. He did not know the house" (94).

\(^96\) In the last pages of the journal, Rilke identifies the "real actor," to whom he seems to attribute a magical, ritualistic power, with the unnamed, but easily recognizable Eleonora Duse (923).

\(^97\) "the strong, all-covering antique mask, behind which the world condensed into a face"(195).
identifies a liminal object able to cross the threshold of the real and the divine, of the natural and the supernatural.

Malte’s continuous references to the theatrical world indicate that, for most people, the tragedy consists in the fact that they are not completely conscious of their acting, and are thus able neither to exploit their masks nor to cast them off. “Wir entdecken wohl,” he writes, “daß wir die Rolle nicht wissen, wir suchen einen Spiegel, wir möchten abschminken und das Falsche abnehmen und wirklich sein. Aber irgendwo haftet uns noch ein Stück Verkleidung an, das wir vergessen. Eine Spur Übertreibung bleibt in unseren Augenbrauen, wir merken nicht, daß unsere Mundwinkel verbogen sind. Und so gehen wir herum, ein Gespött und eine Hälfte: weder Seiende, noch Schauspieler” (920).98

As death masks, skin-masks and carnival outfits, the masks of the Aufzeichunungen share one common feature: they act as constant reminders that the hardest thing to learn is to be oneself, to demand the dignity of an individual life and death. Read allegorically, they carry a connotation of violence and destruction that can be interpreted as the estrangement felt by man from himself and from nature in the age of industrialization and, by extension, as the awareness of an end of a historical era, the world of the Hapsburg Empire that, a few years later, would come to an end with the First World War.

98 We discover, indeed, that we do not know our part, we look for a mirror, we want to rub off the make up and remove the counterfeit and be real. But somewhere a bit of mummery still sticks to us that we forget. A trace of exaggeration remains in our eyebrow, we do not notice that the corners of our lips are twisted. And thus we go around, a laughing stock, a mere “half thing” neither existing, nor actors (194).
Death Mask, Exotic Masks.

Crommelynck, Kido, Gance, Rodin and the Legend of Mask-Making

The art of the mask carver lies in creating an inanimate object which can be imbued with life (Irvine 145)

In 1905 Fernand Crommelynck, a young Belgian author who a few years later would become one of the best known playwrights of the 20s, wrote the first version of *Le Sculpteur Des Masques*. The play was published in 1908 with a flattering preface by Emile Verhaeren: “tragiquement peinte, admirablement sculptée”, writes the poet, “elle est d’une beauté originale et violente; elle donne accès au palais rouge et ténébreux des plus angoissantes passions humaines” (235).99 Without the permission of the author, *Le Sculpteur Des Masques* was soon translated into Russian and performed on the Moscow stage, prefiguring the importance that the playwright would have for Russian constructivism.100 In Paris, the play was performed only in 1911, in an expanded three act version.

This work plays with the notion of the death mask and the carnival mask; introducing the figure of the mask-maker, it implicitly illustrates the extent to which this period was intrigued by otherness and how exotic masks were interpreted and understood in comparison to western masks. Although the text contains no explicit mention of far-off cultures, I will explain how many details can be read as references to exotic traditions. Willinger has once compared the play to “an animation of James Ensor canvass” (136); I will illustrate how Crommelynck, just like Ensor in his paintings, juxtaposes in this play characteristics that belong to carnival masks, death masks and exotic masks. In order to show how the latter were interpreted (and often misunderstood) through the filter of the western tradition, I will first consider the use of masks in Crommelynck’s play as magical objects that are able to cross the threshold between life and death. I will then move to a

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99 'Tragically painted, admirably sculpted, [the play] has an original and violent beauty; it gives access to the red, dark palace of the most anguishing human passions" [My translation].
100 In 1922, Meyerhold staged Crommelynck’s *Le cocu magnifique* in the biomechanical style.
comparative reading of several contemporary works that share similar concerns: a Kabuki play by Okamoto Kido, a screenplay by the French director Abel Gance, and an art project by the sculptor Auguste Rodin. The analysis will show that the mask in these works stands close to a form of portrait that, by capturing the person's soul, becomes a synecdoche, a fragment that stands for the whole. Moreover, I will argue that this fragment continuously recalls the violence through which it was created, and that the perception of exoticism merges in these masks with images of death.

*Le Sculpteur Des Masques* only ran four or five days in Paris, but as Piette and Cardullo explain (13), this brief period was enough to stir a lively debate among critics, the majority of whom reacted against the play. According to Piette and Cardullo, this rejection was mainly caused by Crommelynck’s statement of having created a new theatre that he named *théâtre impressif* (theatre of impressions), in which gestures and silences were to be more important than verbal expression. This style of acting, which was strongly influenced by Maeterlinck and Ibsen, was condemned by contemporary critics as "snobbish and tedious" (Piette 15). Yet the subject matter must have had some interest, since it was reproduced, literally or slightly modified, by several contemporary artists few years later. We can thus either assume that the play had reached a considerable number of readers or that it dealt with a concern that had become a shared obsession at the turn of the century.

The play is set in Belgium, in Flanders during the Carnival celebrations. This setting is important because it accounts for the presence of masks within a local tradition and sets the standards according to which these masks are expected to be read, which is later disrupted by the introduction of otherness under the form of a death mask. As in many of these stories, the plot is necessarily limited: no matter how one interprets it figuratively, the mask is after all an object and there are only a certain number of uses that one can make of it. In the play Pascal, the village’s mask-maker, betrays his wife Louison with her younger sister Magdeleine. After discovering the adultery, Louison falls ill and dies without speaking a word against the two, while the villagers, enraged by the family triangle, isolate the house and turn it into an object of pranks and vandalism. Pascal,
tortured by his sense of guilt, carves a series of wooden masks representing Louison’s
grieved face and, at the time of her death, gives them to the villagers to wear during the
Carnival celebrations. The plot is simple, and yet the juxtaposition of Christian and pagan
elements, of carnival and death masks makes it very powerful: “Tous les masques
sculptés par Pascal acquéraient une signification morale effrayante,” writes Verhaeren in
his preface to the play, “et la mort survenant enfin au milieu des rires du carnaval et des
prières du prêtre arrachait l’émotion du fond du cœur, par tragiques lambeaux” (236).

In order to understand the piece and the role that masks have in it we must first take into
consideration three of its main elements: the characterization of the figure of the mask-
maker, the quality and properties of his masks, the deliberate confusion between the
carnival mask and the death mask. The main character, Pascal, is a mask-maker, a
profession that has no particular significance in the 20th century western culture but is
fundamental in Asian and in African folklore, where the mask-maker has a considerable
status as and where he is often considered a demiurge, the creator of magical objects that
can transcend the world of the mortals to communicate with the gods. Before his first
appearance, Pascal is described by Magdeleine as “skinny and mean;” “on dirait
vraiment,” the girl comments teasingly, “qu’il veut me faire peur en montrant sa
carcasse” (241). The association of Pascal with death, meanness and sorcery
continues throughout the play and is especially emphasized by his relationship to the
characters of the carpenter and of the doctor. “Quel drôle de métier!” comments the
carpenter, who is in charge of making coffins for the villagers, upon seeing Pascal’s
masks; “[l]ui, il fait des masques, et moi je fais des cercueils ... nous sommes
voisins”(249). Realizing that Pascal dislikes him, the carpenter does not hesitate to
restate the association: “Je travaille pour la douleur et vous travaillez pour la joie, oui…”
“Mais nous sommes voisins...” “Oui, et ceux qui viennent chez vous viendront aussi

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101 “All the masks carved by Pascal will gain a dreadful moral meaning, and death arriving suddenly among the carnival laughter and the priest’s prayers will tear up the emotion in tragic shreds from the deepness of the heart” [My translation].
102 “One would think he is trying to scare me by unmasking the bones in his body!” (37)
103 Unless otherwise indicated all references to Le Sculpteur De Masques are from the following edition: Fernand Crommelynck, Le Sculptor De Masques (Gallimard: Paris, 1967) and all translations are from: Alaine Piette, in The theatre of Fernand Crommelynck ( London: Associated Press, 1998).
103 “What a funny trade!...He makes masks, and I make coffins. We’re neighbors” (38).
This comment terrifies Pascal, who sees his trade as a representation of the forces of life and who can bear no sadness around him. He dislikes the village doctor just as much as the carpenter and forbids him from entering the house, jumping up and down as a clown and screaming: “Non non! Ne vous arrêtez pas devant ma maison! Ici, c’est le Carnaval!” (252). When the doctor, after having greeted Louison and Magdeleine, is about to leave them, Pascal follows him shouting words that reveal his sense of omnipotence: “Adieux! Dites à vos malades que je les guérirai! Je leur montrerai des choses qu’ils n’ont jamais vues ... le tambour du garde champêtre et l’escabeau de la servante! ... Adieu! ... Je leur montrerai des choses inventées par des hommes qui étaient des hommes – et la vie leur reviendra! Adieu ...” (253).

Asserting that he has nothing to do with illness and death, Pascal presents his trade as completely extraneous to that of the carpenter and the doctor; yet boasting of his ability to defy death and illness through the use of art and imagination he also confirms his role as their rival. He restates his passion for beauty and life in his first attempt to seduce Magdeleine when, after having been refused, he exclaims: “Tout ce qui est beau et vivant est à moi. J’étouffe d’envie et de colère quand on me refuse ce qui est beau et vivant” (262). Like a fairy tale ogre, Pascal is hungry for beautiful things and he is also willing to make use of violence and appropriation to realize his desires. Later in the play, when the people in the village become aware of the adultery and react by either avoiding the house or by turning it into a target of vandalism, Pascal is repeatedly called a “sorcerer” and compared to Bluebeard, the fairy tale character who kills his wives and hides their bodies in a tower.

The villagers look at Pascal from the beginning with suspicion, because his masks, which are defined in the stage directions as “grotesques, terribles et charmants” (237) are

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104. I work for sorrow, and you work for joy, yes.. but we are neighbors... yes, and those who come to you will also be coming to me” (42).
105. “No! No! Don’t stop in front of my house! There’s a carnival going on here!” (40).
106. “Good-bye! Tell your patients that I shall cure them! I’ll show them things they’ve never seen before! The forester’s drum and the servant’s stool!...Goodbye!...I’ll show them things that men have invented, real men! And life will come back to them! Good bye!” (40).
107. “Everything that is beautiful and alive belongs to me. I choke with rage and envy when I am refused what is beautiful and full of life” (44).
modeled after their own features and reveal their passions and vices. This resemblance is introduced as a joke but soon begins to be felt as uncanny. The initial playfulness is emphasized by the reaction of Cador, the cheerful boy who likes to spend time in the boutique of the mask-maker and who delights in recognizing a portrait of the villagers in the masks:

Pascal’s masks portray precise human features and can thus be defined as mimetic and anthropomorphic. Since they also underline and exaggerate the villagers’ traits, they diminish their humanity and become satirical. Cador laughs at their resemblance to the villagers, yet the fact that Magdeleine hurries to deny it shows that this mimicry entails shameful and unacceptable elements. “The villagers don’t like Pascal because the ugly masks he carves in their image resemble them too closely, and also because the masks make them feel robbed of some essential part of their superficial ugliness,” argue Piette and Cardullo. “Pascal’s fellow citizens deeply resent being violated in this way for all eternity, just as some primitive tribes today resent being photographed for much the same reason: the photograph is simultaneously a likeness and a larceny” (18). Piette and Cardullo argue further that the mask-maker, through his ability to recreate facial traits,

\[\text{Tout à coup Cador s’arrête devant les masques qui ornent les murs. Il rie si fort que Loison et Magdeleine se retournent.}\]
\[\text{CADOR : Oh! Oh! Celui-ci, c’est le potier du quai de la Main Noire!}\]
\[\text{MAGDELEINE : Mais non...}\]
\[\text{CADOR : C’est lui, oui. Celui-là était tellement saoul en suivant la procession qu’il éteignait son cierge avec le vent de son nez!}\]
\[\text{Devant un autre masque}\]
\[\text{Ici c’est la petite Pauline qui pleure quand je l’embrasse et qui dit 'Mon Dieu!...Mon Dieu!..' Et voici Ochs, le vieux Ochs, si avare qu’il a peur de ses deux mains... C’est lui! (247)}\]\[108\]

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108 Suddenly Cador stops in front of the masks, which are hanging on the walls. He laughs so loudly that Loison and Magdeleine turn around.
CADOR: Oh! This one is the potter who lives on the river bank!
MAGDELEINE: No, it’s not…
CADOR: It’s him all right. He was so drunk when he followed the procession that he kept blowing out his candle with his own breath! [In front of another mask]. Here’s little Pauline who cries when I hug her and says: “My Lord! My Lord!...” It’s her all right.. And there’s Ochs, old Ochs, who’s such a miser that he’s afraid of his own hands! …it’s him! (38).
establishes between himself and the villagers a relationship based on power. This relationship is fundamental for our understanding of the play. In revealing the villagers’ souls and making them public, Pascal exposes private traits that should not be shared and turns his masks into offensive, indecent objects. He is carried away by a sense of omnipotence: since he is able to modify and multiply the features of man, he considers himself not only superior to the village’s doctor but goes so far as to assume the role of the Creator. As Harris Smith points out in *Masks in Modern Drama*, the Christian tradition carries the notion that man was shaped after God’s image. Therefore the human face is an emblem of the divine, and the reshaping of the face restages the act of Satan, who tried to usurp the place of God (139). In this text, Pascal symbolizes the temptation of the human being to challenge the authority of God and to rewrite the human destiny. It is then not surprising that, in the course of the play, he should acquire demonic features.

In the first and second acts, the masks are not worn, but hung on the wall just as portraits or ornaments. Through their resemblance to the villagers, they have already been given souls, and Pascal strives now to add the only thing that they lack, a history, a biography. “Les hommes sont malheureux parce qu’ils ne s’étonnent plus,” cries Pascal in a moment of exaltation, “maintenant j’écrirai des légendes derrière mes masques. Je leur raconterai des histoires et comme les enfants, ils demanderont : ‘Et alors?...Et alors?’ ” (250).109 Pascal’s project would turn the masks into autonomous beings with a soul and a history. His fantasy is the equivalent of the mythic sparkle of life and also brings about a parallel with the Japanese Noh theatre, where masks are used to perform certain roles in limited numbers of performances. “I shall hope for a number of typical masks, each capable of use in several plays,” writes Yeats ten years later in the preface to *Four Plays for Dancers*, a work that was strongly influenced by Noh. “The face of the speaker should be as much a work of art as the lines that he speaks or the costume that he wears, that all may be as artificial as possible. Perhaps in the end one would write plays for certain masks” (Yeats V).

109 “Men are unhappy because there are no surprises for them anymore”. Now, I shall write stories, legends behind my masks. I’ll tell them stories, and they’ll ask, the way children do: “And then what happened? And then what happened?” (39).
In Noh theatre, masks are treated with the utmost reverence according to traditional rituals. Irvine, Goda and Martzel note that Noh masks stand close to the ones used in ritual dances and that they maintain something of their original magic: “Ces masques qui ont une vie quasi indépendante de l’acteur,” writes Martzel, “conservent, pensons-nous, quelque chose de l’objet sacré des antiques cérémonies qui permettaient au danseur, en recelant la puissance divine, d’incarner des dieux ou des démons dont la danse, au milieu du village rassemblé, avait un pouvoir magique” (73). In Crommelynck’s play, just like in the Japanese tradition, the mask is handled carefully as an object endowed with magical power. Moreover Pascal’s masks, in reproducing human features, become a means to snatch the human soul, to first double and then substitute the person they are modeled after.

The reduction of the person to a mask begins when Pascal observes the face of his grieving wife and identifies in it the expression of her soul. “J’ai pris son visage entre mes mains,” confesses Pascal, “Et alors-alors – j’ai été épouvanté. Son visage était si douloureux que j’ai cru qu’il allait rester imprimé sur ma chair, comme le visage de Jésus sur le linge de sainte Véronique” (301). Crommelynck refers here to the first death "mask" of the Christian tradition, the image of Christ's face that, according to the legend, remained impressed on the veil of Saint Veronica as she wiped Christ's face from sweat on his way to the Calvary; an image that subsequently acquired the power to perform miracles. The reference underlines Louison's role as a victim, and the fact that the image of her face, carved into a mask, becomes a magical object, endowed with a life of its own that continues to testify her grief. Pascal begins to carve a series of masks of Louison’s

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110 It is, for example, known that the Noh mask is treated with particular reverence and that the actor, before wearing it, must follow a particular ceremony that scholars have identified as a form of ritual: "Il reste d’ailleurs quelque chose d’une cérémonie sacrée dans la prise du masque de l’acteur de nô. Habillé dans les coulisses, il passe en dernier lieu dans une sorte d’antichambre appelée kagami no maa "la chambre du miroir;" un grand miroir y est installé. Le masque est remis à l’acteur une fois la perruque fixée; il saisit l’objet à deux mains et le contemple longuement; quand l’habilleur a noué les cordons sur sa nuque, l’acteur se campe devant le miroir et contemple plus ou moins longtemps son personnage, jusqu’à ce qu’il sente monter en lui la force intérieure qui le poussera à réclamer la levée du rideau et à s’avancer sur la passerelle" (Martzel 1985, 73).


112 "I held her face in my hands, and then…then… I was terrified. There was such agony written on her face. Thought her expression would remain engraved in my flesh, like the face of Jesus on Saint Veronica’s veil" (60).
face that reveal the extent of her suffering and keeps them hidden until he understands that his wife is going to die. Only at this moment, he shows them to Magdeleine:

PASCAL éparpille les masques sur l’établi. Il rit méchamment : C’est elle, il n’y a pas à dire non. C’est elle. Son visage de tristesse, son visage de silence!.. C’est Louison, oui … Son visage de doute, de soupçon; son visage de douleur … C’est bien elle … je ne mens pas … A mesure qu’il parle une saine douleur l’envahit. Il tend un masque vers Magdeleine qui s’affale sur les premières arches de l’escalier, et qui pleure dans ses mains.
Son visage de crainte et de désespoir et d’agonie. C’est Louison, Louison … (307) ¹¹³

In disclosing the masks at the moment of Louison’s death, Pascal associates them with death masks; moreover in showing them to Magdeline purposely to inspire fear, he turns them into tokens of power. At the end of the second act, Pascal confessed to Magdeleine his hate for Louison: “Oh! Parfois, je la hais! J’ai envie de la détruire, d’être sur elle, à guetter sa mort, avec mes deux mains à son cou!” (293). ¹¹⁴ Almost according to his wishes, Louison completely disappears from the stage in the third act, where she is relegated to her room, while the action is centered on the other characters. Her figure is now not only substituted, but multiplied by the series of masks made by her husband. The mask-maker creates a series of doubles that, on the one hand, multiply Louison’s features assuring her survival beyond death and, on the other hand, constitute a series of simulacra that replace her and anticipate her absence.

At the same moment in which Louison’s masks are revealed the house is invaded by the Carnival parade, a screaming inebriated crowd in search of masks. Pascal covers the effigies of his wife with a cloak and, excited by the presence of a public, begins to show them the works that are hanging on the wall. This coincides with the moment in which Soeur Marie Joseph exits from Louison’s room to announce that Louison is dying. Pascal

¹¹³ PASCAL. [Scatters the masks on the workbench. He laughs nastily:] “It’s her, no mistake about it. It’s her. Her face wrapped in sadness, her face wrapped in silence…It’s Louison, all right…Her face full of doubt and suspicion; her face filled with pain.. it’s her, all right, I am not lying …” [as he speaks, he feels pain. He hands a mask to Magdeleine, who collapses on the bottom step of the staircase and hides her face on her hands, sobbing] “Her face filled with fear, despair, and agony. It’s Louison, it’s Louison” (63).
¹¹⁴ “Sometimes I hate her! I feel like destroying her, like keeping my hands around her neck, waiting for her to die!” (57).
rushes to call the priest, followed by most of the crowd, who runs after him, mocking him and making him stumble. As always, Carnival brings about a reversal in established relationships: Pascal has long kept the villagers in his power by stealing their features and capturing them in wood, but it is now the villagers who exercise the upper hand and who persecute him taunting him, screaming and laughing. “Il a le feu au derrière!” the crowd screams, “Oh! Il est tombé! Venez voir! Il est tombé! .. Hou hou! .. Il se relève!” (310).

Magdeleine is left alone in the boutique with some of the revelers. Suddenly one of them lifts Pascal’s coat and uncovers Louison’s effigies:

PREMIER PERSONNAGE, un bourreau rouge: Eh! Là…venez voir! ...
Il accourent.
Regardez. Des masques!
PLUSIEURS VOIX : Quelle horreur!... C’est laid!... Ce sont les femmes de Barbe Bleue.
Rires.
PREMIER PERSONNAGE, mystérieusement : Écoutez [il titube.] C’est la femme du sorcier.
UN AUTRE PERSONNAGE : Quel sorcier?
PREMIER PERSONNAGE : Lui, le sorcier d’ici.
Il se signe.
Miserere
Et conclut :
Vermine!
UN AUTRE PERSONNAGE : C’est sa femme?
PREMIER PERSONNAGE : Oui, c’est sa femme…
Elle est là, dans cette chambre. Elle est là à mourir depuis deux mois (311).116

115 “He’s got ants in his pants! Yoohoo! Yahoo! Oh, he fell down! Come see! He fell! Yoohoo!yohoo! He’s standing up!” (64).
116 FIRST CHARACTER: [A red hangman] Hey! There! Come and see! ... [They rush up]. Look at the masks!
SEVERAL VOICER: How horrible! ... It’s ugly! ... These are Bluebeard’s wives.
[laughter].
FIRST CHARACTER: [Mysteriously]. Listen. [He staggers]. It’s the sorcerer’s wife.
ANOTHER CHARACTER: Which sorcerer?
FIRST CHARACTER: Him, the sorcerer from this place. [He crosses himself]. “Miserere” [and concludes] Vermin!
ANOTHER CHARACTER: Is that his wife?
FIRST CHARACTER: Yes, that’s his wife…She’s there, in that room. She’s been dying for months. (65)
The villagers carry away the effigies along with the other carnival masks, yet in their depiction of Louison’s agony and by being disclosed in the moment of her death, the masks have become death masks. The juxtaposition of Carnival and death masks forms a clear contrast: while the death mask is a reminder of the frailty of human life, the Carnival mask, in its pagan origin, is strongly related to the renewal of the seasons and represents the triumph of life over death. Piette and Cardullo argue that Crommelynck’s Carnival differs from the traditional meaning of the celebration because the vital forces do not triumph at the end. Yet the arrival of spring is celebrated by the villagers and the renewal of life is expressed by the people’s enthusiasm at the end of the play.

Returning from the house of the priest, the mask-maker again meets Cador, the young man who used to visit him in the boutique and who has not been seen after the boycott of the villagers. Cador is wearing a fool’s costume and is obviously impatient to take part to the celebrations. “Comme tu es beau!” (316) 117 cries Pascal overwhelmed by joy at his sight. The young man begins to tell of the dances, of the fireworks on the lake and of the celebrations that he is impatient to join. Full of energy and joy, he laughs at the darkness of the house. He explains that he is looking for a mask, and Pascal immediately puts one on his face. “Veux-tu celui-ci?” 118 he asks, making Cador laugh. “Oui … C’est le tonnellier … oh! oh! — c’est lui” (317). 119

Up to now, the masks have been either hidden in boxes or hung on walls. This action marks a switch from a decorative to a theatrical function, as the mask is for the first time worn and used to impersonate a character. Since the mask has been cast very quickly on Cador’s face, he has not been able to take a look at it and cannot rightly identify it. Although the stage directions do not make the connection explicit, the identity of the mask must be clear when the play is staged, and it is not by chance that Cador’s mistake is omitted in the English translation, where the mask is not identified by Cador as the portrait of the cooper but is immediately recognized as Louison’s effigy.

117 “How handsome you look” (67).
118 “Would you like this one?” (67).
119 “Yes …it is the cooper … oh! oh! It is him!” [My translation. This sentence is omitted in Piette’s translation].
“J’ai peur parce que je lutte. Je ne veux pas être vaincu, comprends-tu?” (300)120 Pascal had said to Magdeleine at the beginning of the third act. At the end of the same act, he confirms that he is not going to give in to death:

MAGDELEINE paraît et disparaît: Pascal! Morte, Pascal! Morte!
PASCAL, très calme: Tu dis ça, toi… mais je sais bien qu’elle est partie danser … [il rit]. Elle est partie avec Cador; je viens de la voir partir… Elle dansera toute la nuit … Je l’ai vue, je te dis, moi … Il ne faut pas rire …121

Giving Louison’s mask to Cador and forcing him to wear it during the Carnival dances, Pascal has symbolically given life to the effigy and has defied the forces of death through the power of creation. Louison’s death becomes of little importance since her soul is now represented by the mask and since the latter has been given a new life. The parallel with Le Gallienne's "The Worshipper of the Image" is striking when one considers the calm reflections of the protagonist over the death of his wife and his consolation in thinking that she lives forever in the features of the mask.

The changing of seasons has in this play a very important role. Although the characters are always inside, they constantly speak of and refer to the weather. From several hints, when Louison praises the beauty of the landscape, we can assume that the first act takes place in a sunny day in late fall. The second act is set in winter, with the family isolated inside the house, while spring is the obvious backdrop to the third act, with the carnival celebrations announcing the new season. Accompanying this circular, eternal cycle of rebirth is the linear chronology of Louison’s sacrifice. While cyclic time is eternal and symbolizes life and renewal, linear time is merely human and marked by the reality of death and suffering. In carving a mask of the dying Louison and giving it to Cador to wear during the Carnival celebration, Pascal, like a magician, takes Louison away from

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120 “I am afraid because I am struggling. I don’t want to be defeated, do you understand?” (59).
121 MAGDELEINE [Appears, then disappears]. Pascal!...Dead…Pascal!..She’s dead!
PASCAL: [Very calm]. You just say that, but I know that she went to the dance … [He laughs]. She went with Cador; I just saw her leaving…She’ll dance all night…I saw her, I tell you, I did… Don’t laugh … (68).
her destiny in linear time and introduces her, through the medium of the mask, into a
mythic time frame. Rather than as a defeat, the conclusive act of the mask-maker can
therefore be interpreted as a victory. As I argued at the outset, Pascal’s ability to recreate
life leads to a complex of omnipotence that makes him believe he is able to defy death.
Although powerless to prevent his wife’s death, he is able to animate a reproduction of
her facial features.

We can now consider how the play stands in relationship to the attention that was given
to exotic masks at the time in which Crommelynck wrote the play. There are several
elements that can be read as references to the exotic, and more specifically to the
Japanese tradition: the emphasis on the figure of the mask-maker, which at the time
played no role in western folklore but was extremely important both in African and in
Japanese cultures; the concept of the mask as a sacred object; the attribution of a number
of stories to each mask (as in Noh theatre); and the capacity of the mask to represent a
moment between life and death and therefore function as an omen of destiny. Since none
of these elements constitutes an explicit reference to exotic traditions, one could argue
that they reflect an interest in ancient European traditions in which masks played a
ritualistic role such as, for instance, the use of masks in the ancient Greek theatre. Yet the
interests for far-off and ancient cultures are in this period strongly related, since the
introduction of exotic art, and especially of Japanese masks, which arrive to France in the
1860s and become a common ornament between 1875 and 1900, triggers a new
reflection on ancient European masks and on European folklore. As Blanchetière points
out, in this period secret connections are perceived among the cultures of ancient Greece
and Japan, and Japanese culture comes to be considered as an example of what the
western civilization has lost with the advent of modernity (104).

122 Another parallel with the Japanese tradition can be identified in the fact that, in Noh theatre, the masks
are always worn by the Shite, the main character and his companions, unless they portray living characters.
(Irvine 142). The masked actors symbolize spirits which are no longer part of the linear time but which
have entered a mythical dimension.
124 Still today, some scholars argue that the mask in Greek tragedy functioned in an analogous way as in
Noh theatre: Little is known for certain about the actual staging of Greek tragedy, but we may speculate
that such techniques were used in the Greek theatre as they are employed in Japanese Nō plays, where to
lower the mask (komorasu) is, literally, to ‘cloud’ it; while to look up (terasu) is to ‘brighten’ the mask.
(Jenkins 157).
Another reason not to dismiss these details as coincidental is Crommelynck’s friendship with the Belgian painter James Ensor, who made of masks one of his main subjects and who had a keen interest in Asian artifacts. Ensor often juxtaposes carnival, commedia dell’arte and Asian masks with images of death. We can find these kinds of masks grouped in many of the works of these years, such as *Chinoiserie* (1907), *Skeletons in the studio* (1900), *Le Grand Juge* (1898), paintings that Crommelynck certainly had occasion to see. As Tricot points out in his analysis of Ensor’s painting *Skeleton Looking at Chinoiseries* (1910), many Belgian artists were influenced by the enthusiasm for Japanese prints, carvings and handcraft that is usually referred as Japonisme (1989, 162).

In the first years of the 20th century, most of these items had been massively reproduced and turned into low quality kitsch, yet masks still retained their fascination, perhaps because the performances in which they were used no longer existed and their function remained mysterious. Ensor was able to observe Japanese and Chinese masks in his grandmother’s boutique (Tricot 2008, 161) but Noh masks, along with Japanese prints, were also exhibited in the *Compagnie Japonaise* in the Rue Royale in Brussels.

Crommelynck, who in his plays often reflected on the meaning of the mask, might have taken an interest in these exotic items. A lecture that Ensor gave twenty years later, in 1937, testifies to the suspicion with which they were regarded and emphasizes the constant comparison with the European tradition:

> Que dire des origines troubles, louches, cachées, du masque d’Afrique. Que dire des pêchés capitaux et des crimes couvés et commis sous le masque, couverts par le masque. Aux siècles d’esclavage, masque signifiait lâcheté, dissimulation, criminalité, crapulerie, égoïsme, exploitation, impunité, duperie, fuite, détraquement, cruauté, satanisme, morsures, griffes et féminités. Du masque au fard, il n’y a pas loin. Je condamne sans rémission le masque mal venu des enfers d’Afrique, d’Asie, d’Océanie, de Meurtricie, de Sommeille, de Cracozie. […]

> Voyez, goûtez nos masques ostendais. Oui, ils évoluent aux quatre vents de l’esprit habillés de tendresse, corsés de joliesses, pourprés, azurés, nacrés, coquillés, huîtres, surmoulés, rayés, turbotés, barbus, stockfischés, schollés, gaminés, farcis de fantaisie, ils s’en donnent à cœur joie. Adorable mascarade, couleurs cinglantes, gammes et jardins

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125 See appendix.
Ensor underlines here the playful side of the European mask and its link to the Carnival tradition which, as in Crommelynck’s play, stands for a cycle of life and rebirth. A negative connotation is instead given to the African and to the Asian masks, which are seen as token of criminal and deathly actions. This speech is full of chauvinism and hyperbole, and yet one can detect in it much of the sensibility of the time. If we think of the wooden masks carved by Pascal and compare them with the joyful carnival masks of the villagers, we have an image of evil which contrasts sharply with the colorful, happy masks of the rest of the parade. The mask of death and suffering, introduced into the cheerful Belgian carnival, marks the intrusion of alterity in a known, trusted context.

The convergence of death and alterity in Le Sculpteur Des Masques is made more evident by its similarity with the contemporary play “Shuzen-ji Monogatari,” known in English as “The Mask-maker,” written by Kido Okamoto, a well known writer of Kabuki theatre. The play, which premiered in Tokyo in 1909, was performed in Paris in translation in 1922. As Kincaid points out in the introduction to the English translation in 1928, The Mask-maker reflects the importance of masks in Japanese culture: “Craftsmen who carved masks have always been regarded with reverence in Japan and have handed down their work for a thousand years. Masks are today worn on the Noh stage, and the actor regards his mask-treasures as he would his life. The mask from ancient times has been regarded as divine, something belonging to the gods. Even at the present the No [sic]...”

126 “What can we say of the murky, shady, hidden origins of the African mask. What can we say of the capital sins and of the crimes brooded upon and committed under the mask, covered by the mask. During centuries of slavery, the mask meant cowardice, concealment, criminality, debauchery, egoism, exploitation, impurity, deception, flight, perversion, cruelty, satanism, bites, claws and femininity. It is a short step from the mask to make up. I condemn unequivocally the mask which unfortunately came from the hell of Africa, Asia, Oceania, Murdeland, Dreamland, from Cracozie. [...] Come, enjoy our local masks. Yes, they develop in all directions of the mind, dressed in tenderness, seasoned with beauty, crimson, azure, pearly, shell-like, oystery, over molded, striped, bearded, full of dried cod and turbots, childishly playful, filled with imagination, they enjoy themselves without restraint. Adorable masquerade of bold colors, scales and gardens of love, songs of bumblebee, crystal shocks, covers of the skin. Indeed, our carnival is warm.” [My translation. The text is quoted Tricot (2008, 162)].
actor bows respectfully before his mask when it is taken out of a lacquer box or brocade bag to be worn during a performance.” (Kincaid IV).

Like Crommelynck’s play, Kido’s work is centered on the figure of a mask-maker and his creations. Yashao is a mask-maker who lives in the village of Izu in the early period of the Shogunate. The great Yoriyiye, the Shogun who has been exiled to monastery close to Yashao’s village, gives him the task of carving a mask of himself that is to be handed down to future generations. Yashao agrees, but he is dissatisfied by his work because he sees in it the features of death, rather than of a living person, and is thus late in his delivery. The Shogun, impatient with the delay, comes to Yashao’s house to take the mask and falls in love with his older daughter, who decides to follow him to the monastery. On his way, the Shogun is attacked and assassinated by his enemies, while Yashao’s daughter is wounded and comes home to die. The mask-maker recognizes then that his mask had the power to foretell the Shogun’s destiny, and faithful to his art, he begins to sketch a portrait of his dying daughter: “Thus, according to a modern Asiatic playwright, love for his art transcends the mask-maker’s natural feeling for his dying daughter” (Kincaid V).

Although Crommelynck’s and Kido’s plays are set in different times and places, they share striking similarities. Both open with the description of the mask-maker’s boutique. As in Le Sculpteur Des Masques, we are told that the masks are “arranged on the shelves, and hung on the walls” (1), and the mask-maker’s daughters are working on the masks, just as Magdeleine and Louison do. The first act centers on a fight between the mask-maker’s daughters, Kayede and Katsura, which defines the role of the mask-maker and his ambitions. Kayede is married to Haruhiko, an artisan, and both of them are dedicated to helping Yashao with his masks. On the other hand, the older daughter Katsura is tired of working as a mask-maker, which she deems as a low, tiresome job. Haruhiko is offended by her attitude, and defends the profession of mask-making as honorable:

127 All parenthetical references, unless otherwise stated, refer from now on to the following edition: Okamoto, Kido. The Mask-Maker (Trans. Hanso Tarao. London and New York: Samuel French, 1928).
“Mask-making is an honorable calling,” he reproaches her. “Mask-making is high art, and we should be proud of it!” (3)

Their fight is interrupted by the entrance of the Shogun, who is enraged at Yashao for the delay in delivering the mask he commissioned. Like the masks of Pascal, this sculpture is meant to be a reproduction of the Shogun’s features and is thus strictly related to the portrait. Yashao excuses his delay by arguing that the making of a mask is not like the making of any other object, that it requires a higher ability: “I make masks, giving life to a rough block of wood, giving it the semblance of man, woman, angel, man-eating yasha, infusing into it the spirit of goodness, wickedness, righteousness, or unrighteousness. When the whole energy of mind and body is concentrated in both arms, and the spirit poured like water into the lifeless wood, the mask is shaped. The work is begun, but whether the power persists cannot be told” (7).

Just like the masks of Pascal, Yashao’s masks are portraits carved in wood, but also magical objects endowed with a spirit, with a soul. Yashao is not satisfied by his work and at first refuses to give the mask to the Shogun, but must then let it go, under the threat of death. When the mask is taken out of the box, the Shogun and his helpers are favorably impressed by the resemblance, but Yashao repeats stubbornly that the mask reveals only an image of death:

YORIIYE: You are worthy to be called Yashao of Izu — I am more than satisfied!
YASHAO: Pardon Lord! Look at it closely— it is a mask of death!
GORO: Man, what do you mean?
YASHAO: During many years, I have made masks of the living! But here is the face of one dead!
GORO: I do not understand! I do not agree!
YASHAO: It is not the visage of a living man! The eyes are fixed in hatred, a wraith or ghost, as if cursing (10, 11).

Just like the wooden masks that multiply Louison’s features, this sculpted face is an image of death. When the Shogun walks away with Yashao’s daughter, Yashao is suddenly enraged: “The mask was almost ready!” he screams, while his daughter Kayede
keeps him from destroying all the masks in the atelier. “But it was not finished, and coming into the possession of the Shogun, it will be listed among his treasures as being the work of Yashao, craftsman of the province of Izu. My name will be disgraced, and my poor workmanship will go down to posterity! I cease to be a mask-maker from this day, and will not hold a hammer any more!” (13).

In the second act Katsura, the elder of Yashao's daughters, follows the Shogun to the palace. The third act opens with Kayede, Yashao’s younger daughter, announcing that hundreds of men are attacking the Shogun’s palace. Katsura arrives home in distress, carrying the mask in the one hand and a sword in the other. She is wounded and must be helped by her sister to walk into the house. “My lord was taking his bath, when the forces of Kamakura began the attack unexpectedly,” she reports. “Our side were few in number, but fought desperately. I covered my face with this mask to deceive the enemy, and suffer death in my lord’s stead. In the dim light, I ran to the court, weapon in hand, and cried out, ‘Here is the grand shogun Yoriiye!’ Running out of the palace grounds, all followed me, thinking me to be Yoriiye!” (24).

Just as in Crommelynck’s play, the works of the mask-maker cease to be a static portrait only once, as they are worn and thus gain context of use. By being worn, the mask ceases to be a separable icon and becomes animated, acquiring power and life. As Yashao is examining the blood-stained mask, the Shogun’s priest enters the house and reports that his master has been killed. “Then she impersonated him in vain!” comments Kayede’s husband, and Kayede falls into despair. “Oh father, she is dying!” she cries. Just like the protagonist of “The Worshipper of The Image” after the death of his wife, and just like Pascal at the moment of Louison’s death, Yashao laughs at death and reacts very calmly, satisfied by his achievement:

YASHAO: I thought I was unskilled and clumsy. With death appearing on the mask, every time I carved — I now understand. General Yoriiye, of the Genji, the grand shogun was doomed to end his life in this way. Providence only can foretell one’s destiny, but his fate was revealed through my work. Yashao of Izu, you are first in our craft! (26).
Like the mask of Louison, that of the Shogun is initially intended to portrays the features of a living being, and yet it displays from the beginning the resemblance to death. The mask is thus turned into a death mask, into a prophetic object with the power to forecast the destiny of the person that it impersonates. Like Pascal, Yashao at this point feels himself to be omnipotent: his work has the power to foretell human destiny, to transcend the threshold of life and death, and to be a messenger of the divine. “You must endure a little longer,” he tells to his dying daughter, “I must have the features of a dying woman! Endure a little longer, however it may pain you! Haruhiko, brush and paper, quick!” (26). The play closes with the mask-maker intent on drawing the features of his dying daughter.

As we have seen, there are several similarities between Crommelynck’s and Okamoto's plays: both are centered on the figure of the mask-maker; both present masks as magical, sacred objects and attribute to them the power to cross the frontier of life and death; and, most importantly, in both plays, a loved human being (in both cases a woman) is substituted by an image. It is unlikely that Crommelynck knew Okamoto’s play, since the first performances took place in Japan and since the play was performed in French only in 1928. Okamoto was often in Paris, but it is also improbable that he had the occasion to see Crommelinck’s play, since it remained on stage only for a few days. Instead we can explain the features common to each play by referring to a shared sensibility that was developing in the period, when exotic masks were understood either in assimilation or opposition to western masks and when Japanese artists themselves were beginning to reflect on their tradition. It is well known that, after having been exposed to considerable western influence with the opening of their markets, the Japanese had begun to reflect on how their own art was viewed in the West and to take advantage of this. In a book dedicated to the encounter between Europe and Japan, Lambourne explains how, as early as 1968, “as the enthusiasm for Japanese art spread like a virus across Europe,” Edmond de Goncourt complained against the vulgarization of the trend, protesting that “it was now spreading to everything and everyone, even to idiots and middle-class women”
(131); while Renoir, “most chauvinist of artists,” complained that Japanese artifacts were interesting “as long as they stay in Japan” and that “a people should not appropriate what belongs to another race” (118).

By 1880, the Japanese had begun to produce lower quality artifacts that were destined exclusively for foreign markets, among which figured prints, china and copies of Noh masks. “Les masques de théâtre qui arrivent aujourd’hui du Japon,” wrote the French collector L. Gonse in 1884, “ne sont, pour la plupart, que d’affreuses copies faites pour l’exportation. De bons exemplaires anciens sont venus en assez grand nombre, il y a quelques années à Paris, et ils se sont vendus à vil prix […] Aujourd’hui, ils sont des plus rares; ils deviendront bientôt introuvables” (quoted in Shimizu, 81).

The encounter with Asian art inspired new ways of thinking about the mask both as a western and as an exotic object, and perhaps on the side of both cultures. It is not a coincidence that the central motif of Crommelynck’s and of Kido’s plays – the mask as an object able to reflect the threshold between life and death – should also be treated in a similar manner in two works of very different artists: the film *Masque d’horreur* (1912), by the young director Abel Gance and the series of masks that Rodin makes of Hanako between 1907 and 1912. Just as in Crommelynck’s and in Kido’s play, the theme of the works remains mask-making, with Rodin going so far as to make the references to Japanese culture explicit. A look at these two works attests that Crommelynck’s interest in mask-making is not a Belgian idiosyncrasy or a personal, private obsession, but rather part of a major concern that reflects a tendency to interpret exotic items through references to western culture.

*Masque d’horreur* is the first film directed by Abel Gance, who a few years later would become famous as the first great director of French silent cinema, and who directed classics such as *La Dixième Symphonie* (1918), *J’accuse* (1919), *Napoleon* (1927). In 1912, the year in which he wrote the scenario for *Masque d’horreur*, Gance had just secured funding to form his own production company. All we know about this work

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128 See appendix.
today comes from secondary sources, since the film is irremediably lost. We can, however, still look at the poster, which under the names of Gance as a director and of Edouard De Max as the main actor, consists of a drawing of an artist with a painted face, busy carving a mask in an atelier filled with skulls and clay faces. Thanks to Icart, who has had extensive access to Gance’s personal archives, we know a little more about the plot of this film and of its apparently bizarre subject. The following is his reconstruction of the plot:

Ermont, trente ans, sculpteur, a toute sa vie cherché la réalisation parfaite du Masque d’horreur dans sa plus grande intensité. Cette impuissance à matérialiser les élans de sa volonté le porte à une excitation proche de la folie. Dans un accès de fièvre et de rage, il découvre dans une glace son visage exalté et décide de se prendre pour modèle. Enduisant de son sang le verre de la lampe, il crée une lumière rouge favorable à ses desseins. Mais ce n’est pas assez. Son faciès convulsé ne lui renvoie pas une expression d’horreur assez forte …

“Comment faire? Tout à coup, cette idée géniale (jaillit) dans sa folie. Il va s’empoisonner et, tandis que le poison agira, il travaillera. Il boit ce poison et la glace nous reflète sa figure, à chaque instant plus hagard et crispée; il travaille hagard; exultant… le masque avance, c’est le summum de l’horreur…Le masque devient fantasmatiquement ressemblant sous cette lumière rouge!!! L’œuvre géniale est achevée.”(Extrait du scénario publicitaire). (Icart 49) 129

Fescourt claims that the scenario, although exaggerated and gaudy, made sense in its visual realization, where the immobility of the mask contrasted sharply with the convulsions of the living figure as reflected in the mirror (166). Having already examined Crommelynck’s and Kido’s plays, we know that the subject is not as bizarre as it might

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129 "Ermont, age thirty, sculptor, has spent his life aiming at the perfect creation of a Mask of Horror in its greatest intensity. This impossibility of realizing his ambition leads him to a state of excitement close to madness. In an outburst of fever and rage, he discovers in a mirror his excited features and decides to use himself as a model. Smearing his blood upon the glass of a lamp, he creates a red light favorable to his drawings. But it is not enough. His convulsed features do not convey a sufficiently intense expression of horror…"

“What can he do? Suddenly, an incredible idea (bursts forth) in his madness. He is going to poison himself, and, while the poison will make its effect, he will work. He drinks the poison and the mirror reflects his figure, as it becomes ever more haggard and strained; he works with abandon; exulting…the mask gains shape, it is the apogee of horror...The mask becomes fantastically true to life under the red light!!! The great work is completed." (Extract from the advertising script). [My translation.]
As. Ermont is a mask-maker who, just like Pascal and Yashao, has a passion for creation that transcends the value of human life, a passion that, in this case, leads him to sacrifice not the life of his wife or of his daughter but his very own. Like Yashao and Pascal, he strives to attribute to his mask a spirit and to make it an expression of the threshold between life and death. “I must have the features of a dying woman!” Yashao exclaimed while looking at his dying daughter (Kido 26). We will never be able to see De Max on the screen, but we can imagine that his aims were similar. This subject must have interested Gance deeply since, as Icart points out, a year later he published in the magazine *Le Miroir* a short story on the same theme. Surprisingly, this version is even closer to Okamoto’s *The Mask-maker:* instead of poisoning himself, Ermont models in clay the face of his dying son while he is being suffocated (Icart 49-50).

A few years earlier a “real” mask-maker, the French sculptor Jean Carriès, who had encountered Japanese art at the *Exposition Universale* in 1878, had began a series of “horror masks” which displayed both the influence of Japanese and gothic art, many of which would eventually be reproduced on the *Porte Monumentale* commissioned by Winnaretta Singer in 1889. Carriès, in whose works we frequently encounter dark motifs such as severed heads and death masks, uses Japanese sources to create decorative masks that allude both to Oriental and death imagery. These references are already detectable in the titles given to several of his masks, such as “Masque chinois barbu,” “Masque chinois,” “Masque dir Race jaune,” not to mentions the numerous “Masques d’horreur.”

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132 Simièr notes how the works of Carriès examplify a sensibility for the fragment that pervades Carriès and Rodin’s works: “De fait, le motif de la tête coupée hante l’œuvre de Carriès : masque mortuaire comme la Mère de Carriès, tête voilée d’un linceul (Le Dernier Sommeil), Véritable décollation comme le célèbre Charles 1st du Salon de 1881, masques couvrant les montants de la porte…[…] Il rejoint là un thème illustré de façon spectaculaire par Gustave Moreau, repris sous différant aspects par Odilon Redon et bientôt par leur émules de l’école symboliste, comme Ringel d’Illzach, mais aussi par Rodin” (Simièr 2007, 99).
133 A few of these masks can be found in Vitry’s article, or in the catalogue of the exhibition recently dedicated to the artist, ed. Bellanger. See also appendix.
It is perhaps not a coincidence that a few years later, around the same time as Gance was producing *Masque d'horreur*, a friend of Carriès, the sculptor Auguste Rodin, would work on others “*Masques d’horreur*” modeled on the features of the Japanese actress Hanako. Rodin met Hanako (a stage name for Ota Hisa) for the first time in Marseille in 1906, at the Colonial Exhibition where he had traveled to see King Sisiwath’s Cambodian dancers. Hanako was performing with the Arayama Company under the direction or Rodin’s friend Loïe Fuller. The company’s repertoire consisted of comedies and tragedies inspired by Kabuki and folk Japanese theatre, simplified enough to allow a European audience to follow the play without understanding the dialogue. Fuller made Hanako the company’s main actor, thus casting aside a fundamental convention of Kabuki theatre, in which women are categorically absent from the stage—a detail that, in occasion of the performance of another Japanese actress, Sada Yacco, had infuriated Gordon Craig, who had stated that “The introduction of women upon the stage is held by some to have caused the downfall of the European theatre, and it is to be feared that it is destined to bring the same disaster to Japan” (Craig 1919, 233).

As Savarese notes, Hanako’s acting was not exceptional: as a former Geisha, she had been trained as a dancer but had never taken part in a Kabuki performance and her work was judged very poorly in Japan (63). Yet in the years between 1905 and 1914, Hanako traveled all over Europe and to the United States enjoying considerable success and making a deep impression not only on Rodin, but also on artists and celebrities such as Jakobson, Meyerhold, Duse and Duncan. Hanako’s acting, as Sawada illustrates in a detailed biography of the actress, was considered “primitive and moving” precisely because it enacted all the expectations that Western audience had of primitive and moving art, and also because it was western enough to eliminate all difficulties of comprehension. Loïe Fuller, as the main orchestrator of Hanako’s success, must have been aware of this when she ordered every single play to end with the killing of the main character or her suicide. “Dying is an art and the Japanese female does it exceptionally well” writes Foley, arguing that these performances were appealing because they

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134 See Suketaro (253 *passim*)
provoked a vision of female sexuality that was soon punished through death, as expected in the clichés of European romanticism (81).

Rodin was impressed by Hanako’s acting, and asked her to pose for a portrait: on the paper, next to a drawing of the actress’ face, he sketched a mask-like face, the first of what was to become a long series (Blanchetière 104). When Hanako’s company arrived in Paris a year later, Rodin went to see her and the actress again performed a hara-kiri scene that, according to contemporary reviews, was judged compellingly realistic.

Savarese, in his article “Hanako’s Portrait,” includes an excerpt from the November 1906 edition of L’Illustration that describes both the hara-kiri scene and the audience’s reaction to it:

A sensational drama last Saturday evening at 9:30 p.m. in the presence of Paris’s best audience. Madame Hanako committed suicide by disemboweling herself. But it was suicide. An emulation of Sada Yacco, Hanako is a tiny Japanese gifted with a graceful form, lively eyes, a rebellious nose, feline movements. The comedy in which she displays her varied talents as a saucy flirt, a mime, a dancer, turns into a tragedy when Ossudé (the heroine’s name) the pray of gloomy sorrow, suddenly changes her behavior: she takes hold of a knife and she slowly thrusts it into her flesh, her eyes convulse, her nostrils palpate, her face pales and blood spreads over her white tunic. She then collapses to the floor and dies. It is almost… too realistic. At least for those audience members whose nerves are too weak to tolerate such a performance. (Savarese 68)

As the reviews collected by Savarese and Sawada attest, there was not a unanimous opinion of Hanako’s acting. Some of the public perceived it as extremely realistic, others found in it an inspiration to escape theatrical realism and to give new freshness to symbolism. Common, however, was the enthusiasm with which she was acclaimed all over Europe, from England to Italy, France, Germany, Sweden and Russia.

Rodin shared the public’s interest and repeatedly invited the actress to stay with him and to pose in his atelier. The sculptor, usually interested in observing bodies and movement, aimed in this case to reproduce only the face of the dancer, and in particular her unique

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range of expressions. Sawada reports the struggle that Hanako had to endure to maintain her pose: “For the first thirty minutes it was all right,” complained Hanako, “but after that I found it very difficult to keep the same posture and the same facial expression, particularly the eyes! On the stage I had little difficulty in keeping the same facial expression for three or five minutes. But it was impossible to hold this look for such a long time” (Sawada 43). Rodin was not interested depicting the movements of Hanako's body but exclusively in the glance of suffering that the actress was able to act out in her performance. The sculptor was so obsessed by this look that he created 53 masks in clay, bronze and glass paste representing the actress' agony. The masks made during these settings are often reminiscent of Japanese theatrical masks, which Rodin had learned to appreciate through the collections of his Parisian friends and of which he had himself purchased a few exemplars (Blanchetière 104).

Through Hanako’s witness, we know that Rodin was working mainly on two types of masks, which he named “head of death” and “meditating woman” (Sawada 45). Rodin considered the latter one of his best attempts. He reproduced it several times in glass paste and laid it on a pillow in his atelier in the Palais Biron, besides the mask of his partner and of his former lover. This kind of installation, as Blanchetière observes, is similar to the treatment that was usually reserved for death masks, but the open eyes of Rodin’s vitreous sculpture suggest a portrait of a living being, thus reiterating the same ambiguity between the word of the livings and of the dead that we have seen in the work of Crommelynck, Kido and Gance, and attributing to Hanako the deadly glance of Medusa: “Après le regard pétrifiant de Hanako-Gorgone,” writes Blanchetière, “c’est encore dans les yeux que réside le pouvoir surnaturel du masque en pâte de verre : ce regard vague, que n’appartient ni a une morte ni à une vivante, semble capable de nous

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136 See, among the numerous examples, Auguste Rodin, *Hanako, type B, masque*, 1907-8, terre cuite (Musée Rodin, Paris); *Hanako, type C, masque, plâtre*, 1907-8 (Musée Rodin, Paris); *Hanako, type C, masque grand modèle, 1907-1908, plâtre* (Musée Rodin, Paris).

traîner dans les limbes où il parait devoir flotter à jamais, à la manière de certains esprits livides et muets du folklore japonais.” \(^{138}\)

The encounter of Eastern and Western culture is perfectly illustrated by the meeting of Hanako and Rodin: the one introduces Europeans to Japanese theatre, albeit a theatre organized along the lines of European clichés; the other creates out of these clichés a series of oriental masks and, in giving them the features of death, forces them into the European tradition of the funerary mask. Hanako’s masks can thus be seen both as death masks and as expressions of the exotic. With this ambitious project, Rodin turns the mask into a magical, fetish object able to reflect the threshold of life and death and thus broaches again the subject tackled by Crommelynck, Kido, and Gance. Yet he goes a step further as he underlies explicitly the relationship between otherness seen in the Oriental and the otherness represented by the state of death, as well as the appropriation of Eastern art through a Western model. In doing so, he cast himself in the role of the mask-maker, an oriental legend that, paradoxically, becomes impersonated by one of the most celebrated artist of the western world.

\(^{138}\) “According to the petrifying glance of Hanako-Gorgone, it is again in the eyes that lies the supernatural power of the mask made of glass paste: this vague look, that does not belong to a living nor to a death, seems capable to lead us to a limbo where it seems to be floating indefinitely, in the manner of certain pallid and speechless spirits of Japanese folklore.” [My translation.]
Chapter 2

Metonymy

Introduction

In the first chapter, we have looked at decorative masks that are only occasionally worn and that, when used as theatrical props, acquire a ritualistic connotation. In this chapter, we will instead consider theatrical masks, precisely the masks of the commedia dell'arte as used in dramatic and literary texts in their late nineteenth and early twentieth century revival. While the decorative mask, through its connection to the notion of fragment, can in this period be envisaged as a synecdoche, the theatrical mask, especially the mask of the commedia, can be conceived as a metonymy, “a figure in which one word is substituted for another on the basis of some material, causal, or conceptual relation” (Martin 783). In the case of the commedia dell'arte, the actors/characters of these works are commonly referred to as “maschere,” a designation that implies the substitution of the individual with the tool that characterizes him/her, thus a conceptual relationship between the possessor and his/her associated object. This metonymic relationship is carried further through an association between the mask and the material out of which is constructed. In contrast to the human skin, the mask is made of inert matter, and when used on stage reflects a contrast between animated and lifeless. “À travers le masque,” writes Picon-Vallin, “l’acteur doit se mesurer en scène à la rigidité, au silence, à l’immobilité, en un mot à la mort, pour en tirer une vie artistique” (157).

From a material metonymy, the mask develops then a metaphysical trope, into a means to allude to the human condition and to the roles that we take in our everyday life. In

139 By drawing on a common characteristic between the mask and death, this metonymy stands ambiguously close to a metaphor, a figure to which is strictly linked and not always distinguishable. For the ambiguity between metonymy and metaphor, see Dirven, passim, especially 37. For a fundamental distinction between the two tropes, I refer to the distinction made by Roman Jakobson, according to which metaphor relies on substitution and similarity, and metonymy on context and contiguity (Jakobson 41-48).
Lothar’s and Chiarelli’s texts, the mask can be paralyzing, but also protective, as a screen that allows the actor to change and take up infinite roles while giving the impression of remaining the same, a process in which Taviani identifies the fundamental principle of the Commedia: “Le masque n’est pas un autre visage, mais une face perdue. [...] Comme une croûte, elle indique quelque chose qui a été enlevé. La face perdue est telle parce que toute extérieure: en d’autres termes, elle est la négation du visage comme lieu du corps sur lequel l’intérieur se manifeste de manière électorive et particulièrement visible” (128). As a “lost face,” the mask of the commedia stands close to the veil, to the protective surface which we can define as the “degree zero” of the mask; as an object that reflects a dynamic between interior and exterior, it recalls Nietzsche’s reflections. In the second essay of *Unfashionable Observation*, Nietzsche uses in fact the mask to represent the lack of harmony between exterior and interior that characterizes the late nineteenth-century individual. As we will see, these ideas, as well as the dual value that Nietzsche attributes to the mask, are often traceable in Lothar and Chiarelli’s texts.

The first part of the chapter focuses on a dramatic texts, Lothar’s *König Harlekin*, and illustrates how its theme is further developed in a later play, Chiarelli’s *La maschera e il volto*. The second part considers a literary text with “dramatic ambitions,” Lucini’s *Drami delle Maschere*. Chronologically, Lothar’s and Lucini’s works stand in close proximity, since Lucini’s first section of *Drami* was published in 1898, while Lothar’s play was first staged in 1900. They are both part of a commedia dell’arte revival, and share a number of similarities. Chiarelli’s play was written few years later (1913), but echoes back the same concerns.

Firstly, in all three works, metonymy maintains a central role. In Lothar's play, it relies on the association of an object and its user as well as on a causal relationship. The mask is initially the tool through which the Doppelgänger takes shape, but eventually, it becomes the Doppelgänger itself. Moreover, in both Lothar and Chiarelli, the mask is the direct

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140 See *Nietzsche* 1974, 104 passim.
141 The particular spelling of “Drami” is part of the linguistic idiosyncrasies of the author.
consequence of a crime and, throughout the story, its rigidity begins to stand for death. In Lucini’s *Drami delle Maschere*, the relation is both material and conceptual. The characters are defined through the masks that they wear, they are called “larve” and embody ghosts from another age. Yet the agent is also mentioned for the creation and the creation for its agent, since the masks belong to the people and represent them, and since they are the creation of a puppeteer who speaks and acts through them. In addition, these masks give shape and voice to “moods of history,” to the essence of a period, and can thus be read as personifications. Furthermore, in both Lothar and Chiarelli, the metonymy gradually gains metaphysical significance, and eventually acquires an allegorical meaning as an image of death, but also of revolution and rebirth.

Secondly, in Lothar and Lucini, the voice of the poet is identified with a street comedian; a device that had already been used in French symbolist literature – for example, in the work of Baudelaire and Mallarmé – but that remained a novelty in the rest of Europe. The street actor and the poet have much in common. Both are first of all outsiders; just as the street actor, who must know his public well to amuse it, but who, as a traveler, remains detached from it, so too the artist recognizes the contradictions of society but maintains a distance and is unable to intervene directly. Like the character Harlequin in Lothar’s play, and like many of Lucini’s masks, the poet takes on the role of the provocateur rather than that of the reformer, and addresses the audience revealing their hypocrisy – namely, the masks they wear in their everyday lives. If the audience realizes that the comedy is not confined to the theater, the comedian has succeeded in blurring the boundaries and has thus created the illusion of a *theatrum mundi* through which the world is seen as a stage. This effect is underlined by the use of moments of comic entertainment (*lazzi*) and direct addresses to the public that matter little in the plot but that emphasize the thinness of theatrical boundaries. The actor/artist cannot change reality directly, but can make use of his mask to point out at the dissimulations of society and unmask them; most importantly, he has the power to trigger laughter, which both Lothar and Lucini identify as an important weapon of rebellion.

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142 The artist is compared to a street comedian in Mallarmé’s poem “Le Pitre Châtié” and in Baudelaire’s “Le Vieux Saltimbanque.”
Structurally, lazzi and other forms of metatheatrical movement draw attention to the actor, to his/her movements and gestures, deny the primacy of dialogue and point at a rupture with the conventions of realism. On the level of interpretation, the commedia characters introduce the theme of masks and roles, concepts that in these texts, as in the Latin terminology, stand as synonymous. Lothar, Chiarelli and Lucini, under the influence of Nietzsche, consider life an irrational flux which, to exist, must necessarily be rationised through a form, a “mask” that does not represent reality, but only the way in which we perceive it. These authors thus imply that man cannot exist without the mask or separate himself from it.

Finally, Lothar and Chiarelli attribute to the mask a dual significance, as they see it both as negative constraint and as positive, creative force. On the one hand, the mask is imposed on the individual, it traps him/her by clinging to the skin and limits the infinite possibilities of life, forcing him/her into a single role and thus suffocating the energy of the self and resulting in metaphorical death. On the other hand, these authors also see in the mask an ongoing game of creativity and imagination and reflect that, since human beings must necessarily wear a mask, the best solution is learning how to shape it. In Lucini, the mask follows a similar pattern, as it stands, on the one hand, for creativity, imagination and expression, and on the other, for social convention, with the difference that the masks can no longer be defined as positive and negative, because as we will see, for the author, Decadence itself takes on a positive connotation as a necessary phase in the renewal that leads to historical progress. By considering the dual value of the mask, Lothar, Chiarelli and Lucini offer a positive solution to the crises of subjectivity that began in the nineteenth century. They accept the hopeless fragmentation of the subject and even embrace the game of metamorphoses, but identify a unity in the subject’s creativity and in the faithfulness to an ideal, both of which survive change and discontinuity.

143 In Latin, two concepts are associated with the mask: “larva,” which literally means “ghost, demon” and “Persona,” which refers to a “role” (See Weihes 11).
Lucini’s work was long ignored. Lothar’s play, which enjoyed an enormous contemporaneous popularity, is today often misread or considered condescendingly; Chiarelli has long been overshadowed by Pirandello. Yet modernist theatre was not born in a vacuum, and many of the concerns addressed in these plays play a major role in the works that great directors and playwrights such as Pirandello, Meyerhold and Evreinov produce only a few years later.
“Der Tod geht durch das Schloss, Gisa, und ich fürchte mich” (85), cries a frightened character in Lothar’s *König Harlekin* (1900), throwing a dark shadow on the colorful figures of the Commedia dell’Arte. There is a strong bond between death and masks in Lothar’s play, in which a masker (Harlequin) is forced to wear a second mask as the direct consequence of a murder – a mask that is a direct representation of the features of the deceased. In the story, through displacement, the mask gradually assumes a connotation of death and criminality as the effect comes to stand for its cause, the symbol for the thing it symbolizes; it thus turns into a metonymy, a trope based on conceptual contiguity. Moreover, the metonymy is extended as the mask is initially a tool through which the Doppelgänger takes shape, but eventually becomes the Doppelgänger itself. The play is an expression of the Commedia dell’Arte revival that takes place at the end of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth centuries, and its use of masks relates to the theme of life and forms originally inspired by Nietzsche and destined to become one of Pirandello’s main concerns. Through a comparison with Nietzsche’s ideas, we will examine the dual value that the mask assumes in the play. We will then juxtapose the play to Chiarelli’s *La maschera e il volto*, and observe how the material metonymy develops into a metaphysical trope. Lastly, we will point out how the play’s conclusion suggests an allegorical use of the mask to indicate societal change and revolution.

Rudolph Lothar, born Rudolph Lothar Spitzer, was one of the international intellectuals of the late Hapsburg Empire. Born in Budapest, Lothar studied in Vienna, Jena, Rostock and Heidelberg, traveled to the United States and lived several years in Paris and Berlin. He was active as a journalist, an editor and a writer and was an intimate friend of Arthur

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144 “Death is going though the castle, Gisa, and I am afraid”.


145 For metonymy, we intend “a figure in which one word is substituted for another on the basis of some material, causal, or conceptual relation” (Martin 783).
Schnitzler and the Goncourt Brothers. Today, his work is almost forgotten; yet he enjoyed an enormous contemporaneous popularity and is the author of over 60 plays, operas and textbooks. *König Harlekin — Ein Maskenspiel* — was written in German, staged for the first time in Vienna in 1900 and then translated into a variety of languages and performed on the main European stages.

Clayton, in his book on twentieth-century Commedia dell’Arte revival, considers Lothar’s *König Harlekin* as a product of the last years of a disintegrating monarchy and argues that it is affected by the political climate in which it was written (38-39). Unlike Sprengel, who sees the play as an entertaining satirical comedy with a happy ending (459), he judges it “sadly lacking in humor” and refuses to see in it any trace of modernity and originality. “Its popularity,” Clayton writes, “is symptomatic of a stage in the revival of the tradition when the nature of the commedia was misunderstood as a set of images or theatrical characters, not as structural rupture with the dominant, realistic theatre” (39). The disagreement among scholars is based on a misunderstanding caused by the rarity of the original German edition and the broad availability of the French translation published by Robert de Machiels in 1903, under the title *Arlequin Roi*. In this edition, we find a complete rewriting the fourth act that transforms the most innovative and original features of the play into romantic and sentimental motifs. Clayton is probably referring to this text when he argues that the work lacks any metatheatrical element (39), since the fourth act of the first and second German editions is based on a play-within-the-play that leads to a number of reflections on theatricality.

Mitterbauer notes that the play was influenced by the “Pierrot-trend” of the period, among which we find eminent exponents such as Jules Laforgues and Albert Giraud, respectively with the pantomime *Pierrot fumiste* and the poem cycle *Pierrot lunaire* (77). We can add that pantomine and Commedia dell’arte figures represented in these years an important theme for many Viennese authors: Richard Beer-Hofmann wrote

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146 For Lothar’s biography, see Mitterbauer (72-84).
147 Giraud’s *Pierrot Lunaire* was particularly popular in Vienna, known through the translation by Erich Hartleben and Schönberg’s musical version.
Pierrot Hypnotiseur (1892); Arthur Schnitzler Der Schleier der Pierrette (1892) and Die Verwandlung des Pierrot (1902); Hugo von Hofmannsthal Der Schüler (1901). While these writers use the commedia characters to experiment with pantomime as a possible alternative to the verbal crises that reaches its peak with Hofmannshal’s Lord Chandos Brief (1902), Lothar does not. His characters are too psychologically developed for the types of the Commedia dell’arte, and the importance of pantomime, dance and other non verbal elements is argued by means of dialogue, rather than demonstrated through action. While König Harlekin indicates the way for a break with realistic theatre, it remains partly trapped within traditional structures. Mastery of the spirit of the commedia on the twentieth-century stage is achieved only, a few years later, by Meyerhold and Evreinov. The popularity of Lothar’s play and its early date make it, however, an important precursor in the development of the tradition.

The plot is based on a complicated intrigue that, as Clayton remarks (39), shows several Shakespearean influences: we have a troupe of actors arriving at the palace, a dying king, a prince returning from abroad, a protagonist heavily affected by Hamletic reflectiveness and a play within a play through which a murder is revealed in veiled figurative terms. From the preface to the 1903 French edition, we know that Lothar initially thought of a story set in Scotland with Marlowe as a protagonist, that the play later seemed too serious to him and that he decided to move the action to Italy, to transform it into a tragic comedy and give Harlequin the role of the tragic hero.

The first act begins with the announcement of the death of the King in a realm by the sea, threatened by the Genoese army. The Queen and Tancred, the King’s brother, are waiting for the arrival of Prince Bohemund, who is supposed to be coming home from Venice bringing troops and battle aid. The Queen, who loves her country more than anything else, knows that nothing good is to be expected from her son, just as nothing good has come from her husband, but Tancred is impatient to marry the Prince to his

148 For an analysis of turn of the century pantomime as an alternative to language crisis see Voller, passim.
149 For the identification that occurs in these years between the figures of the Commedia dell’arte and Hamlet see Starobinky (17); Clayton (8); and Storey (73).
150 See Jullien, passim.
daughter Gisa and to rule indirectly through the couple. For her part, the capricious and selfish Gisa is in love with Bohemund’s cousin Ezzo, but wants the advantages of the crown. Except for the queen, who has become blind from all the tears she has shed for her country, none of the characters has any positive qualities: the dying King is a wicked man, Tancred is greedy and ruthless, Gisa vain, presumptuous and cruel, Ezzo childish and helpless and Prince Bohemund, as the queen herself remarks, has learned nothing abroad but debauchery.

When Bohemund finally arrives, he brings no money or aid but only a troupe of actors which follows him in every step: “Meine Leibkömedianten!” he introduces them. “Eine ganz ausgezeichnete Truppe. Wenn ich lachen will, so müssen sie Späße machen. Wenn ich mich langweilige, müssen sie mir die Zeit vertreiben. Wenn ich zornig bin, so prügle ich sie [...] und wenn ich bei guter Laune bin, so dürfen Sie essen, was auf meinen Schüsseln übrig bleibt” (15). Among the actors, Harlequin is particularly dear to him because of a secret that binds them: the comedian looks like him, can perfectly imitate him, and the Prince often uses him as a double in his romantic adventures. Harlequin later confesses: „Ich lernte ihn äffen, o bis zur Meisterschaft lernte ich das. [...] er war mein Vorbild und mein Lehrer... Nie habe ich mich einer Rolle geschämt—dieser Rolle schämte ich mich (58).

Beyond the practical purpose of using Harlequin to conquer his lovers and to escape from unpleasant situations, Bohemund also takes a delight in the mimicry. He addresses the comedian as “my double” (mein Doppelgänger), is astonished by his ability and when he watches his performance, he goes so far as to doubt his identity. He sees in the masked Harlequin a mirror image of his self, and in his own mirror image a reflection of Harlequin. His confusion is detectable in the way he addresses him: “Du machst das sehr geschickt. Du brauchst dazu nicht einmal mehr Schminke als ich selbst brauche, um nicht

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151 “My favorite comedians! A marvelous troupe. When I want to laugh, they have to find out some jokes. When I am bored, they have to entertain me. When I am angry, I beat them [...] and when I am in a good mood, they are allowed to eat the leftover from my dish.”

152 “I learned to mimic him, oh, I mastered the art. [...] He was my model and my teacher… I have never been ashamed of playing a role, but was ashamed of this one.”
allzu hässlich zu sein. Und wenn ich Dich dann neben mir im Spiegel sehe, weiß ich
selbst nicht mehr: wer bist Du und wer bin ich?”(21). Through his gift of mimicry,
Harlequin is introduced as the Prince’s double, while the Prince, whose manners are
highly theatrical and who even wears makeup, is introduced as a masker. The bond
between Harlequin and Bohemund is thus established from the beginning and reinforced
throughout the play — but their relationship is left ambiguous, since Bohemund is a mask
for Harlequin just as much as Harlequin is a mask for Bohemund.

The text is full of (often redundant) questions regarding the nature of acting, which are
part of a broader concern with consciousness and subjectivity. This emerges in the first
conversation between Harlequin and Colombine. The actress initially doubts the sincerity
of Harlequin’s love because she can not trace in him a coherent identity: “Wer bist du?
Alle Rollen spielst Du, Masken trägst Du, als wäre jede Dein eigenes Gesicht. Was ist
Dein wahres Gesicht? In welcher Rolle bist Du Du selbst?” (25). Harlequin is unable
to reassure Colombine with a simple answer and argues for the impossibility of a plain,
transparent identity. For him, the Self in inevitably bound to a form: “Wenn einer dir
sagt, er gebe Dir sich selbst, so lügt er. Sich selbst kann keiner geben, so wenig man dir
Wasser reichen kann ohne Gefäß.“ (26). Furthermore, he argues that each of us plays a
role, taking up a mask that, to avoid unnecessary risk, is usually well established, such as
that of a soldier, king or scholar.

His ideas remind of Nietzsche’s argument in the second essay of Unfashionable
Observations (Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen, 1974). In this text, the mask becomes an
easy way to hide in roles which prevent one from assuming responsibilities and
recognizing one’s potential, and which shelter the weak giving them the security of a
predetermined path in life: “Keiner wagt mehr seine Person daran, sondern maskiert sich
als gebildeter Mann, als gelehrter, als Dichter, als Politiker. Greift man solche Masken

153 “You are very skillful. You don’t need any more make up than I use myself not to appear too ugly. And
when I look at you next to myself in a mirror, I am confused: who are you and who am I?”
154 “Who are you? You play every role, you wear masks, as if each of them was your real face. What is
your real face? In which role are you yourself? Until now, I only saw roles.”
155 “If anybody tells you that he is offering himself to you, he is lying. Nobody can offer himself, just as
water can not be passed around without a case.”
Harlequin thinks of these masks as terrible limitations, as constraints imposed by society that suffocate and deaden the energetic and uncontrollable flux of life. In his conversation with Columbine, he confesses that he abandoned his previous careers as a scholar and as soldier to rely on the possibility of change and metamorphosis offered by the theatrical mask. Life itself is, according to Harlequin, metamorphosis and change, and the theatrical mask is “divine,” the result of creativity and creation. It is the ability to imagine forms anew, to shape them like an artist, to lose oneself in each one and yet avoid being trapped in a single role, in a single form. Since masks are inherent to the human nature, the only alternative to succumbing to them is turning them into a game to exercise creativity and imagination:

Eine Lavaflut ist das [Leben] und ihr Krater ist das Herz. Nicht was wir waren, nicht, was wir sind, ist das Leben, was wir fühlen — das ist es! Für mein Fühlen die Formen suchen, meine Seele in Gefäße Giessen, die ich täglich neu schaffê — das ist meines Lebens Sinn, das ist meine Kunst! Ich schaffê. Ist das nicht göttlich? (26) 

The reader familiar with Nietzsche will recognize in Harlequin’s speech a similarity with the issues of The Birth of Tragedy, a book in which masks are a constant presence both as theatrical props and as metaphysical tropes. Vattimo, in Il Soggetto e la Maschera, Nietzsche e il Problema della Liberazione, argues that Nietzsche proposes a contradictory vision of the mask as both a positive and negative component of human existence. To simplify the explanation of this paradox, Vattimo distinguishes between the terms maschera (mask) and travestimento (disguise), associating the mask with the interaction

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156 “no one runs the risk of bearing his own person, but instead disguises himself behind the mask of the cultivated man, the scholar, the poet, the politician. If we take hold of these masks, believing that they are serious and not just part of a farce - since all of them affect such seriousness - then suddenly we find ourselves holding in our hands nothing but rags and colorful tatters.” (Trans. Richard T. Gray, 117) 
157 Life is a stream of lava and its crater is the heart. Life is not what we were, nor what we are, it is what we feel – that’s it! To look for forms for my feelings, to drop my soul in cases that I create new every day – that’s the meaning of my life, that’s my art! I create. Is it not divine?”
of the Apollinian and the Dionysian that finds expression Greek tragedy, and *travestimento* with the artificial condition of the eighteenth century decadent (in Nietzsche’s view) individual.

According to Nietzsche, decadent man has reached such an awareness of history and of the concomitant impossibility to change its course that he can no longer be imaginative or revolutionary. Out of fear and weakness, he thus adopts the mask (disguise), taking refuge in old and defined roles. Yet as Vattimo points out, in Nietzsche’s thought the mask can not be exclusively associated with decadence because it is also a necessary component of art. In fact, Nietzsche considers the Apollinian, the world of forms and harmony, as a mask used to cover a Dionysian wisdom which is closer to the chaotic flux of life. Since Nietzsche believes that the essence of art lies not only in the Dionysian but also in its interaction with the Apollinian mask, and since he compares the Greek world to modern decadence, Vattimo concludes that the alternative to decadence cannot be found in the suppression of the mask. Through Vattimo’s interpretation, the problem of *Birth of Tragedy* becomes the liberation of the Dionysian as a free creative force that goes beyond fear and insecurity, representing “la forza che produce continuamente la maschera […] superando in sé il dominio dell’individuazione e recuperandolo solo per perderlo di nuovo” (38). The mask is recognized as inherent to human nature, but a distinction is made between the positive Dionysian mask and the negative, decadent disguise. On the one hand, the decadent disguise is the result of a process of “stiffening” of the Dionysian mask – it is always adopted with a precise aim, is permanent and constitutes a cowardly escape. On the other hand, the Dionysian world is the free, liberating creation of masks that cannot be reduced to a scheme of truth and falsehood and in which the subject constantly loses itself.

In Lothar’s play, the masks that are renewed in a continuous metamorphosis represent the creative game in which a consciousness (in Harlequin’s words, “the vase” or “the product

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158 See Nietzsche 1872 (75): “das Apollysche der Maske, notwendige Erzeugung eines Blickes ins Innere und Schreckliche der Natur.”

159 “the force to produce continually the mask […] to overcome in oneself the mastery of individualism and to retrieve it only to lose it again.” (32, my translation)
of the art”) is found only to be immediately lost again in the donning of a new mask. Harlequin, through his acting, is continuously subjected to metamorphosis — he is, as Pirandello would phrase it, “one, nobody and hundred-thousand” at once.\textsuperscript{160} Since he is aware that life cannot take shape without a form, his solution is to change masks continuously, living life as truly and as sincerely as possible.\textsuperscript{161} However, Bohemund’s orders to play his double force him to interrupt this game and to take up a role that is different from the one that he plays daily as a comedian. It is a role of which Harlequin is constantly aware, since he never loses himself in the part. Moreover, it is not chosen deliberately, but imposed on him through a power relation that he can not change at his wish.

When Prince Bohemund tries to seduce Columbine, Harlequin rebels against his master and, in the course of a fight, accidentally kills him. After a moment of panic, he remembers his art of mimicry and has an inspiration which becomes the only possible way out. He throws the prince’s body off the cliff and quickly puts together a mask: “Ins Meer mit dem Toten und dann rasch— seine Maske vor! Die Maske des Toten.” (58).\textsuperscript{162} In the second act, Harlequin takes up Bohemund’s identity. Dressed as Bohemund, he claims to have killed Harlequin in a dispute and sets out to defeat the Genoese’s army. After a successful battle, he becomes the people’s hero and heir to the throne. Although he succeeds in fooling everybody, this mask is different from all the roles he played when he was free to dive into a part and to change it at his pleasure so that none became his stable identity. In Nietzschean terms, it is decadent disguise that gradually becomes one with his skin. It is also a mask that, as Harlequin acknowledges, he cannot play well; the role brings with it too much reflection and a tragic awareness. Harlequin laments the destiny of those who can no longer wear the mask blindly and become aware of the absurdity of their existence: “Weh’ uns, wenn wir uns selbst gegenübertreten, uns Aug’

\textsuperscript{160} I refer to Pirandello’s novel \textit{Uno, nessuno, centomila}, which he began in 1909 but published only in 1926.

\textsuperscript{161} Lothar, as echoing Diderot’s “Paradoxe sur le Comédien,” seems to wonder about what happens to an actor when playing a role. Diderot suggests that the actor remains aware of himself and emotionally detached from the character, while according Harlequin, the actor identifies with each of his roles, becoming one with the character and thus leading the public to believe in his interpretation.

\textsuperscript{162} “The body in the sea and then quick—his mask! The mask of the dead.”

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ins Auge schauen. Ich bin Bohemund und sehe Harlekin! Ich bin Harlekin und sehe Bohemund! (90).\textsuperscript{163} Through time and habits, and through the confirmation of society, the mask slowly takes over his features. The weight is such that Harlequin must share his secret with his friend Pantalone: “Keine Spukgestalt umarmt Dich”\textsuperscript{164} he reassures his friend, who is terrified of having seen a ghost. “Dich küss ein Lebender, kein Toter!”\textsuperscript{(56).\textsuperscript{165}}

The encounter of a character with another who believes him to be dead is one of the devices frequently used in the commedia dell’arte, where its function is to triggers a series of comic misunderstanding. In this scene, however, the device loses its comic potential as it restates, rather than denying, death on a metaphorical level. In spite of Harlequin’s cheerful tone, his confession reveals a deep anxiety; the mask is suffocating the flux of life that he has so far enjoyed in Dionysian excitement and is turning him into a living death, so that he feels the need to restate the fact that he is living as to convince himself of it: “Ich aber lebe! O und wie ich lebe! Hundertfach spüre ich mein Leben”\textsuperscript{(57),\textsuperscript{166}} Harlequin screams. He then reveals how the mask, initially used as a tool to interpret Bohemund’s role, became the Doppelgänger itself, and how it threatens to suffocate him through the stiffness of its features: “Jeden Morgen muss ich mir das Gesicht des Toten vergegenwärtigen, um meine Maske zu machen. Und der Tode lacht mir an, so höhnisch, so grimmig!”\textsuperscript{(60).\textsuperscript{167}}

On the one hand, Harlequin’s adventures follow the romantic motif of the mask that, initially adopted for a precise aim, soon becomes real and merges with the hero’s skin.\textsuperscript{168} “Die Haut Bohemunds klebt mir am Leibe”\textsuperscript{(88),\textsuperscript{169}} explains Harlequin to Pantalone;

\textsuperscript{163} “Woe to us, if we stand in front of ourselves, if we look in our own eyes. I am Bohemund and I see Harlequin. I am Harlequin and I see Bohemund!”
\textsuperscript{164} “It is not a ghost that is kissing you”
\textsuperscript{165} “It is a living person who kisses you, not a dead!”
\textsuperscript{166} “But I am alive, and how! I feel like living a hundred times!
\textsuperscript{167} “Every morning I have to envision the face of the dead, in order to be able to compose my mask. And the dead laughs at me, scornfully and sneering!”
\textsuperscript{168} The text reminds us here of Musset’s Lorenzaccio (1834), a romantic play that also describes a character in search of his soul: “Le vice a été pour moi un vêtement, maintenant il est collé à ma peau” (118) cries the protagonist of this play.
\textsuperscript{169} “The skin of Bohemund is sticking to my body”
“Das Maskenspiel ist ernst geworden” (59). On the other hand, the play introduces an important Nietzschean motif: the distinction between decadent masks, roles that become a prison and suffocate the infinite flux of life, and Dionysian masks, adopted deliberately as an ever-changing form of subjectivity. Through the words of Harlequin, Lothar makes of the actor, who is free to change identity at his wish and who remains aware of the fictional status of each of these roles, a symbol of freedom:

Wir Gaukelspieler, wir Komödianten wissen das am besten. Wir sind die einzig Wahren und Ehrlichen im großen, bunten Maskenspiel des Lebens. Denn wir sagen es allen: wir spielen, wir tragen Masken. Die andern aber sind zu feig, um das einzustehen. Sie spielen, tragen Masken und gestehen es nicht. (61)

Harlequin soon discovers that being a king, just like any other role, requires no authenticity, only the recognition of society. When he meets the Queen in the ceremony in which he is to be crowned King, she recognizes that he is not her son. Nevertheless, knowing Bohemund’s corrupted nature, she decides to crown the stranger for the good of her country. The Queen’s blessing, even though it is based on a lie, gives Harlequin official recognition as King and awards him society’s approval. Yet this blessing, in shaping reality to the lie represented by the mask, makes the mask more powerful, and Harlequin, who is already feeling its weight, begins to grow weary of it. By the third act, he understands that he is not only playing the role of the King, but that this role is itself a mask, and he is thus a masker (he is after all Harlequin) masked in another mask (that of Bohemund) that is being manipulated as a puppet, since he is expected to follow Tancred’s advice in everything he does. “Ich bin ein Schauspieler, der sich selbst sauf der Bühne sieht” (91), Harlequin surmises, a conclusion that restates the motif of the double as well as the blurring of boundaries between the stage and life.

170 “The mask became serious!”
171 “As street comedians, as actors we know this very well. We are the only honest and true people in the great, colorful play of masks that is life. Because we say it all: we play, we wear masks. The others are too coward to confess it. They play, they wear masks and they don’t admit it.”
172 This pattern of recognition can be found, almost identical, in Rilke’s Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge, in the episode in which Malte recounts the adventures of Grishka Otrepiöff (See above, Chapter one).
173 “I am an actor looking at himself on a stage.”
The French translation turns the fourth act into a melodramatic intrigue, while the first and second German editions feature a play-within-the-play. In both the French and the German texts, Harlequin, who knows that his position is now in danger for not wanting to conform to his role as king, must get rid of his mask. In the French version, he unmasksin the room of Columbine, who has invited Bohemund with the intention of revenging Harlequin; in the German version, he suddenly jumps, in his comedian costume, onto the stage where the other comedians are staging a play about Harlequin’s death — a performance that can be seen as representative of the melodramatic mood for which the commedia is also employed in this period; that of the play that “must go on,” no matter the tragedy of the actors. Saddened by the death of their friend, Bohemund’s troupe is nevertheless obliged to put up a play and to make the public laugh. Jumping onto the stage, Harlequin interrupts the melodramatic atmosphere and introduces lively theatricality. He chases Scapino, who has been interpreting his part, out of the scene and argues for the uniqueness of his mask. “Glaubst Du, Betrüger, die Maske macht es aus? Man muss sie auch tragen können! (124), he reproaches him. He then reveals his adventure on stage and tells the story of how he came back from death to become King in the realm of “Lusitanien,” a terrible place full of living death, ghosts and empty masks: “Mir graute vor den Gespenstern” (135), he confesses, “Es ist ein modriges Geschäft. Man geht unter lauter Masken umher. Das ist schrecklich. Lauter große Namen sind der Hofstaat — aber hinter keinem Namen steckt etwas anderes al seine Vergangenheit. Der Hof – das ist wirkliche Maskenspiel” (136).

In Harlequin’s description, the mask no longer covers the face, but only the reality of death. Metonimically, the courtiers, whose souls have been destroyed by greed, are turned into a reflection of this devastation. Reflecting the nature of the commedia from

174 In the public, a nobleman complains of the sad tone of the plot, and another nobleman answers by pointing out that, in such plays, the importance lies not in the plot but in all Harlequin’s tricks. This dimension of the Commedia, that becomes so important in the twentieth-century revival, is only hinted at in Lothar’s play.
175 A good example is Leoanncavallo’s opera I pagliacci (1892).
176 “Do you think, impostor, that the mask is enough? One needs to learn how to wear it!.”
177 “I dreaded the ghosts. It is a stinky business. One walks among laud masks. It is terrible. There are lauded great names in royal household—but behind no name is there anything else but their past. The court—that’s a real comedy of masks.”
which the play takes its inspiration, the stage is once more ruled by improvisation and
decomes a place in which the actor, no longer submitted to a script, can allow himself to
talk without fear of being censored. Assuming the role of the provocateur, Harlequin
unmasks the hypocrisy of the court, and lets the audience know that the boundaries
between stage and life are not as sharp as they think:

So viele Flecken auf meinen Rock, so viel Wesen sind in mir. Und nur
eines hält sie zusammen: meine Kunst. Als Künstler bleibe ich immer treu,
als Künstler bin ich ein und eine. [...] Ich mache aus dem Harlekin, was ihr
wollt. Ihr aber macht aus allem, was ihr will, eine Harlekinade. [...] Ich
bleibe trotz aller Masken immer ich, der Künstler, Ihr bleibt trotz aller
Künste immer nur Masken (129). 178

Harlequin’s speech has three important features. The first is identifiable in the way he
addresses the audience directly, encouraging the spectators to think of the actor’s role in
the theatre and, by extension, to compare it to the roles they act in their own lives. The
second is the dual value attributed to the mask, which can be read in connection to
Nietzsche’s reflections in the essay “On Truth and Lies” (“Über Wahrheit und Lüge,”
1873). In the essay, Nietzsche points out that the mask, as a form of creative
dissimulation, is associated with humanity’s need to create tropes both as productive
impulse that is associated with art and as practice that becomes dangerous when these
tropes stagnate, harden, are taken for granted (15-16). 179 Lothar seems to address this
issue. While the mask of Bohemund is the result of a process of “freezing” that forces the
chaotic flux of life into a rigid form and leads to metaphorical death, the mask of the
actor becomes a symbol of freedom, of creativity and imagination. The third important
feature is the representation of the artist as the fool, a frequent image in the literature and

178 “As many Specks as there are in my dress, as many beings are there in me. And only one thing holds
them together: my art. As an artist I am always faithful, I am the one and only. What is my art? The
creation! [...] I create men! I make out of Harlequin what you wish. You instead, you make out of anything
that you wish a comedy! [...] I remain, no matter how many masks, always myself, the artist; you remain,
no matter how much art, always only masks.”
179 What then is truth? A movable army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of
human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, decorated and which,
after lengthy use, seem firm, canonical and binding to a people: truths are illusions that are no longer
remembered as being illusions, metaphors that have become worn and stripped of their sensuous force,
coins that have lost their design and are now considered only as metal and no longer as coins (Trans.
Ladislaus Löb, 257).
visual art of the period. Harlequin’s failure as a king shows that the artist is unable to intervene directly in society, but his brilliant performance on stage reveals him as a sharp and destructive critic who can make use of his detached position to raise awareness.

The play closes with the idiotic Ezzo being proclaimed King and with Harlequin and Columbine running away to freedom. The misery of the people in the kingdom has not changed, a factor which leads Clayton to identify in Harlequin’s speech a nihilist philosophy (40). “Was wollen die Leute, die nach Freiheit schreien?” Harlequin asks Pantalone in the third act. “Sie wollen nicht sehen,” answers Pantalone. “Sie wollen den Kopf in den heißen Sand stecken, wie der Vogel Strauss in der Wüste” (90). According to Pantalone, freedom consists in ignorance, in being unaware of injustice. When Harlequin suggests that freedom can be exercised within the position that one is given, if one exploits all its possibilities and makes the best out of it, he also seems to confirm the notion of a rigid order and a resignation to current power hierarchies. In his speech on stage, however, he identifies an alternative to slavery in the freedom given by laughter:


In the strength of laughter, Harlequin sees a revolutionary tool through which the rigid “death masks” that he had identified in the court can be eliminated through the radical gesture of decapitation. His flight from the country and the crowning of Ezzo illustrate

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180 “What do the people want, when they scream for freedom?”
181 “They want to be blind. They want to hide their head in the warm sand, like an ostrich in the desert.”
182 “I teach the laughter that kills, that overthrows thrones, that frees the people and that beheads the tyrants. My laughter is as sharp as a razor blade! Slash—there goes the head! The magnificence crumbles in the air! Laughter unites and creates bonds, turns the masses into the tool of the man that teaches them to laugh! But laughter also breaks all the chains. Laughter is devil’s art, but also a grace of heaven. Have the courage to laugh and you will be free!”
183 In the following chapters, we will see how the association between masks and severed heads is a common one in this period.
that, as an artist, he is unable to intervene directly in the socio-political changes of society. His ability to trigger laughter, however, remains a powerful tool in his hands, and can lead the people to become aware of their situation and to look for true change.

As a product of its time, the play displays mistrust in the official roles of those in power. In Vienna and in Turin, it was banned and charged with disseminating antimonarchical ideas. It is true that the play offers no positive alternative to a corrupted power. However, Harlequin and Columbine, who are introduced almost as slaves, succeed in reversing their roles, killing a prince and cheating a kingdom. They use laughter to upset hierarchies, and the mask that they choose to shape carries a connotation of freedom, anarchy and revolution. Moreover, the play offers a solution to the modern fragmented consciousness: the hero identifies an element that remains constant through the self’s numerous metamorphoses in the art of shaping one’s mask and in the ability to love, as it is shown in the ending in which he and Columbine are happily reunited.

The question of life and forms, which is so important in Lothar, constitutes a central concern also of many of Luigi Pirandello’s works. Not by chance, Pirandello entitles his collection of plays *Maschere nude*, a title that addresses both the artificiality of masks and the possibility of life beyond them. In the novel *Il Fu Mattia Pascal* (1904) the protagonist decides to abandon the role in which he has been trapped and to create a new identity; in the short story “La patente” (written in 1911, and turned into a play in 1917) a skinny and grim-looking man makes a successful business of the disguise society has imposed on him (that of a jinx); in “La Trappola,” a man raves against the form in which life has trapped him; in *La signora Frola e il signor Ponza* (1915), Pirandello uses the veil to introduce the theme of relativism. In all these stories, death is the powerful shadow behind the mask: Mattia Pascal creates a new identity after everybody believes

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184 It is perhaps not coincidental that Tairow decides to stage Lothar’s play in Russia in 1917. In times of historical change and revolution, the theme of mask gains a great importance. In the same year, Meyerhold stages Lermontov’s Maskarad, which is performed exactly in the evening in which begins the October revolution.

185 The theme of indecidability and relativism is applicable to our analysis: Dionysian masks, as we learn through Vattimo’s reading of Nietzsche, cannot be reduced to a scheme whereby they are simply categorized as truth or false, just as Harlequin’s identity can not clearly be distinguished by the mask of Bohemund.
him to be dead, Rosario Chiarchiaro is a supposed jinx dressed as an undertaker, the veiled lady who impersonates the protagonist of *Cosi è (se vi pare)* is, according to her husband, playing the role of his deceased first wife. The mask loses its literal presence as it becomes a trope for a role, for an inner disguise, but it remains the consequence of (real or imaginary) death. “Ogni forma e’ morte,” declares the protagonist of “La Trappola” (652).

Lothar and Pirandello share an open, fluid conception of the Self, and through their characters, they argue that there is no alternative to the mask, since the chaotic flux of life necessitates a form through which it can be rationalized. They both conceive the mask as a materialization of the influence of others on the individual, as the consequence of a society that requires conformity to pre-established roles: “Le masque est une sorte de pétrification molle et souple de notre conscience par les autres,” writes Krysinski, commenting on the role of masks on Pirandello, and adds that “La pétrification du masque commence en nous-mêmes, par notre propre vanité de paraître” (166). In both Lothar and Pirandello, the mask provides the Self with the coherency necessary to interact in society, and is often adopted spontaneously by the self, as a guarantee of societal success. Lastly, for both authors the mask maintains a negative connotation, often transforms the individual into a puppet and its rigidity is equated with death.

Yet between the conception of these two authors lies a fundamental difference. In fact, Lothar attributes to the mask a dual value, considering a positive, ever-changing Dionysian mask and well as its negative petrification. For him an alternative to the decadent disguise can be found in the inebriating changeability of the theatrical mask. On the contrary, Pirandello sees no alternative to the prison of fixed roles. In his most optimistic works, the masks is recognized through bitter and ironic awareness; in others, the glimpse beyond the mask can even lead to madness. “Chez Pirandello,” emphasizes Krysinski, le masque n’est pas un jeu de différence et de substitution” (171). Role-play and theatrical masks, that in Lothar are considered the key to freedom, lead in Pirandello only to frustration and to the bitter acknowledgement of death, as exemplified by the

186 Every form is death.
attempt of the angry protagonist of the short story “La Trappola”: “Truccarmi, come un attore di teatro? Ne ho avuto qualche volta la tentazione. Ma poi ho pensato che, sotto la maschera, il mio corpo rimaneva sempre quello…e invecchiava!” (651) 187

More optimistic, and closer to the spirit of König Harlekin is the play La maschera e il volto (The Mask and the Face), written by Chiarelli in 1913 and staged by “Compagnia drammatica di Roma” in 1916. In this play, we find the same contiguous relationship between masks and death, in which one appears as the effect of the other, and in which the effect soon starts to stand for its cause, and vice versa. Just as in König Harlekin, the use of the mask leads to the creation of a metaphysical trope and to a reflection on life and form. Moreover, as Lothar’s play, the mask is attributed a negative, as well as a positive, protective value.

With La maschera e il volto, Chiarelli introduces grotesque theatre in Italy, a genre that enjoyed great success in the years before and directly after the First World War. Among the authors usually associated with this genre are Rosso di San Secondo, Luigi Antonelli, Enrico Cavacchioli and sometimes Pirandello. Vena defines grotesque theatre as “a genre of theatre wherein the passions and tragedies of life are mechanically simplified and shockingly distorted. The grotesque theatre incorporates positivistic disenchantment, social criticism, and an unusual concept of ethics which denies traditional values and leans toward a relativistic philosophy” (18). In a chapter dedicated to Chiarelli, Vena notes how the author felt his own theatre to be close to the Renaissance tradition, exemplified by Shakespeare and the Commedia dell’arte. Although no Harlequin makes his appearance in “La maschera e il volto,” it is not difficult to discern in the play a Commedia pattern: the main theme is the usual triangle of wife, husband and lover and the comic incidents are traditional commedia devices. Unlike Lothar, who introduces “humanized” masks, Chiarelli makes the human figures speak and behave like commedia characters. In her introduction to the play, Zaccaro mentions Rudolph Lothar and König Harlekin among the works that influenced Italian grotesque theater (9). Moreover, as we

187 Using make up, like an actor? I considered it, but then I thought that, under the mask, my body remained the same…and aged! (my translation).
have mentioned, the two plays, although written 13 years apart and in completely different settings, share the importance given to the mask. If in König Harlekin, the cause for taking the mask (the murder) slowly comes stand for its consequence (the mask) as the mask gradually turns into an image of death, in *La maschera e il volto* the metonymy is both a cause standing for an effect and an effect standing for a cause: the mask (or, better, the disguise) is the direct consequence of a fake murder that paradoxically turns into a real one.

*La maschera e il volto* is as simple in its structure as *König Harlekin* is complicated. It has three acts and no change of scenery; all the action is set in Paolo and Savina’s house on lake Como, while what happens elsewhere is simply summarized by a character. The play begins with Paolo’s and Savina’s reception, to which they have invited several friends: the old philosopher Cirillo, married to the young and unfaithful Elisa, the betrothed couples Wanda and Piero, Marta and Luciano, the sculptor Giorgio, who is having a relationship with Elisa and the magistrate Marco. The group is observing the young American couple who lives in the villa next door, and who settled in Italy to escape the lady’s terrible husband. Soon they begin a discussion on the theme of infidelity. Paolo claims that a husband who in a case of betrayal did not avenge his honor by killing his adulterous wife would simply be ridiculous and that for such a husband, the only possible solution is suicide. His friend Cirillo, who has become accustomed to the infidelity of his own wife, warns him not to take the matter too seriously. The same evening, Paolo discovers in front of his friends that his wife is betraying him with another man. Both Savina and her lover escape before Paolo is able to force the bedroom door, but Savina comes back to the house later that night with the intention of talking to her husband: “Togliti codesta maschera di delitto,” she implores Paolo as he puts his hands around her throat, “sii sincero con te stesso, leggiti nel cuore, e non essere schiavo delle tue parole e dei tuoi atteggiamenti convenzionali!” (78).

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188 “Remove this criminal mask, be sincere with yourself, read in your heart, don’t be a slave of your words and of your conventional poses!”

Unless otherwise indicated, all numbers in brackets refer to the following edition: Chiarelli, Luigi. *La Maschera e il Volto* (Milano: Mondadori, 1926). All the translations are my own.
The mask, which in *König Harlekin* was a concrete prop modeled after the features of the murdered, is in this play a “criminal mask,” a “tragic mask,” a disguise that, like Harlequin, Paolo decides to wear out of fear. He realizes that he still loves his wife and that he cannot kill her, but terrified to appear ridiculous in front of his friends, he decides to stage a murder and forces his wife to escape abroad with a false identity. “Tu sei morta per me!” 189 he declares to Savina, “… facendosi una maschera tragica” (86). 190 He then hurries to meet his friend Luciano, to whom he confesses that he has strangled his wife and thrown her body in the lake. Luciano, who is a lawyer (and also, without Paolo’s knowledge, the illicit lover of his wife), agrees to defend his case in court. When Paolo returns home after a few months in prison, he is confronted with a surprise: his house is filled with flowers and letters from secret admirers who have heard and approved of his romantic gesture, and there is even a festival planned in his honor. Irritated by the absurdity of these celebrations, Paolo begins to think of the people who surround him as fools. “Credono che io sia diventato il loro buffone?” (122) 191 he wonders. When he meets his friends, he finds out that the couples have mixed and changed: Luciano, who seemed reluctant to marry Marta, has finally decided to do so, and Marco has married Wanda, who was previously engaged to Pietro. As both Marta and Elisa openly flirt with him, he realizes that the people before whom he feared becoming ridiculous are themselves derisible. Just as Harlequin discovers that the royal court is nothing but a group of masks, Paolo begins to see through the masks worn by his friends. “In questo lungo periodo di solitudine ho molto meditato,” he confesses to Wanda, “ed ho compreso, mia giovane amica, che la vita non è fatta di formule!” (113). 192

Paolo finds compassion only in Cirillo, whom he first considered a cynic: “Tu cominci a vedere tutto l’assurdo che e’ nelle nostre convenzioni!” Cirillo remarks, “ma e’ da oggi che comincerai ad uccidere veramente tua moglie. Ucciderla in te stesso... giorno per giorno, ora per ora, sentimento per sentimento!.. Quello che hai già fatto non è nulla!.. il

189 “You are death for me!”
190 “… turning into a tragic mask”.
191 “Do they think that I became their fool?”
192 “During this long time spent in solitude I have reflected a lot, and I came to the conclusion, my young friend, that life is not made of formulas!”
delitto e' solo un punto di partenza!” (132). Just like Harlequin, Paolo begins to wear the mask of crime out of fear; he has become, as Marta ironically calls him, “un attore tragico” (113), and the mask soon begins to feel tight on his skin and to become real. This metamorphosis has several concrete consequences: Paolo is treated by all his friends as a real murderer; he is filled by remorse as if he has really killed his wife and soon he recognizes a body that is found in the lake as Savina. As in Lothar’s play, reality begins to adapt to the fiction of the mask, a process confirmed by the moment of recognition. “E’ necessario che tu la riconosca!” cries Marco, urging Paolo to identify the body as the corpse of his wife. Paolo’s statement is obviously false, since the corpse is that of the young American woman, but it is also a powerful lie that establishes the truth in front of others and brings the story back to a coherent pattern. Paolo, like everybody else, feels pressured to recognize the body. “E’ l’ingranaggio!” he cries “Dove si andra’ a finire poi, Dio solo lo sa!” (156).

Immediately afterward, a woman wearing a thick veil appears, “tutta chiusa entro un ampio e leggero mantello d’un colore grigio tenuissimo” (157). Savina’s veil and mantle are the most neutral possible form of masks, its “grade zero”; they protect her without forcing on her an identity and thus enable her to walk unobserved through the preparations for her own funeral. Unlike her husband’s tragic disguise, her mask is positive and creates freedom, not restraint. “Disgraziata! Non sapete che di là’ c’è’ il vostro cadavere?” cries Paolo when Savina lifts her veil, (150) exploiting, as in Lothar’s play, the ambiguity created by the story of a murder. “Dunque...sono proprio morta?” wonders Savina; “Morta!...Anche per te?...Mi hai riconosciuta!” (161).

When the other characters accidentally meet Savina unveiled, they are initially unable to accept reality and continue to perceive her as dead; Luciano thinks that he is seeing a

193 “You are beginning to see through the absurdity of our conventions! But today you begin to truly kill your wife. To kill her in yourself... day by day, hour by hour, feeling by feeling!.. What you have already done is nothing! ... The crime is only the beginning! “
194 “a tragic actor”
195 “It is necessary that you recognize her!”
196 “It is the trap! Only God knows where we will end up.”
197 “all closed in a wide and light cloak of a very light gray.”
198 “Wretched one! Don’t you know that in the other room lies you corpse?”
199 “So...Am I really dead?”
200 “Dead! Also for you, you recognized me!”
ghost, while Piero touches Savina as to assure himself that she is alive. As in König Harlekin, the ambiguity lingers even when the mask is removed.

Paolo has finally understood that he loves his wife and that he does not wish her to leave, but his friend Marco, who as a magistrate is a representative of the legal order (and thus of social and ethical norms) is not of the same opinion and, outraged to have been fooled into believing in the murder, threatens to charge Paolo with the crime of false witness. Like Tancred in Lothar’s play, Marco wishes a coherent reality and defends the world of decadent masks, of stiff roles of which his job is an example. While Cirillo congratulates him on the resuscitation of his wife, Paolo is still worried about his reputation: “Immagina come si riderá!” 201 he complains to Cirillo; “Anche nei momenti piu’ tragici siamo perseguitati dal ridicolo!” (219). 202 As in König Harlekin, laughter is an essential component of the conclusion; the same laughter which threatened Bohemund’s court now threatens Paolo, but unlike the people in the court, who must learn how to laugh, Paolo must learn not to fear laughter, to go beyond it and thus to prove that he no longer wears a decadent mask. “Veramente si,” wisely comments Cirillo, “nella vita vicino ai grotteschi più buffi avvampano i drammi più spaventosi; nel ghigno delle maschere più oscene urlano talora le passioni più dolorose!” (219). 203

Just like Harlequin and Columbine, Savina and Paolo must escape to avoid arrest and prosecution, and as in Lothar’s play, the ending is not a completely happy one: they leave behind a world of decadent masks and conventions and they are condemned to the life of fugitives. Yet, like Harlequin and Columbine, they have gained freedom. More importantly, they have defeated social convention, learned to rid themselves of their stiff social masks and to live their lives as sincerely as possible. As Lothar, Chiarelli considers the mask inherent to human nature; like Harlequin, Paolo must learn to create a new mask for himself, that allows freedom and has the impetus of social and ethical revolution.

201 “Imagine how they will laugh!”
202 “Even in the most terrible times we are afraid to be ridiculous!”
203 “Actually yes, in life close to the funniest grotesque events flare up the most fearful dramas; in the grin of the most obscene masks cry sometimes the most painful passions…”
As in *König Harlekin*, the play juxtaposes a negative, stiff mask (the mask of the tragic actor taken by Paolo) and a positive mask that becomes one’s own creation. Both plays begin by associating the mask with death, but gradually turn this association into an image of creativity and freedom. More optimistic than Pirandello, Lothar and Chiarelli seem to suggest that the fragmentation of consciousness must not necessarily be seen as a catastrophe and that in the constant creation of masks and the disorderly flow of life, love and creativity give human beings a unique and precious identity.
Lucini’s Drami delle Maschere

In their brief dramatic and literary twentieth-century revival, the commedia dell’arte characters were extremely popular in Vienna, Paris and St. Petersburg, but made only rare appearances on the Italian literary scene and stage. One does not have to look far to find the reason: as part of a local, historical tradition, their masks were for the Italians not exotic enough to be used as a tool of theatrical estrangement, let alone represent the still partly unknown poetics of symbolism. The risk was interpreting them too literally, turning them into a rococo cliché or an empty, fatuous image. Not surprisingly, some of this sensibility remains in Italian criticism. Arbasino, for instance, condemns the motif of masks as altogether unbearable and has very sharp words for Lucini’s *Drami delle maschere,* the Italian work that, on the turn of the century, has commedia characters as protagonists. Arbasino is not alone in taking this stance, but Lucini also has admirers. Among them is Edoardo Sanguineti, who in his volume on twentieth-century Italian poetry dedicates more space to Lucini than to Pascoli and D’Annunzio, and who identifies him as the first important innovator of modern Italian poetry.

As a socialist and a pacifist with anarchic sympathies, Gianpietro Lucini was a bad fit in the political climate of the period, which was dominated by the patriotism of D’Annunzio and the military enthusiasm of the futurists. Moreover, his works offer a difficult and at times irritating reading: the syntax is twisted, there is an incredible number of references and the images are often redundant. As a result, during his lifetime, several of Lucini’s works remained unpublished. *I Drami delle maschere* was one; upon its completion in 1898, Lucini was able to publish only four episodes, *Il monologo di Rosaura, Il monologo di Florindo, Il monologo di Pierrot* and *Intermezzo dell’Arlecchinita.*

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204 An exception is Mascagni’s opera “Le maschere” (1901).
205 The particular spelling of “Drami” is a linguistic idiosyncrasy of the author.
206 According to Arbasino the masks, already irritating in the works Verlaine and Barrault and in the painting of Rouault and Malipiero, are simply “to be strangled” when they “enact the overly sentimental drama of the desperate clown forced to act happily in the excitement of carnival.” Arbasino defines Lucini’s *I Drami delle Maschere* as a “nauseating torment” (223).
207 Giovannetti, who in 2000 published a monograph of Lucini, judges Lucini’s *Drami* altogether “illegible” (43).
whole collection was published by Viazzi only in 1973. While the value of Lucini’s texts remains a subject of debate, I wish to concentrate on his poetics of masks and on the multiple meanings that the mask takes as a trope standing between metonymy and personification, symbol and allegory. By pointing out the similarities between Lucini’s work and that of other writers interested in the revival of the commedia dell’arte, especially Rudolph Lothar, I will place Lucini’s work in an international context. Through an analysis of excerpts from his Drami, I will then demonstrate how the mask is used both as a trope for change revolution and as a means to break with the conventions of realistic theatre.

The book begins with an initial parade of masks that functions as an introduction and is built on a collage of quotations in symbolist style; a parade that, as Valli’s argues, aims to represent “the great stage of life” and to give a portrait of “society in all its manifestations” (125). Participants include not only the masks of the Commedia but also a number of dramatic figures who, according to Lucini, became archetypes, such as the characters created by Shakespeare, Sardou, Dumas, Maeterlinck and Ibsen. The rest of Drami consists of operettas and monologues by commedia figures, masks of the pantomime theatre and, in a few cases, characters such as Don Juan and Lancelot. These masks stand on the one hand for creativity, imagination and expression and on the other hand as a disguise of social conventions. We are reminded of the duality that Lothar attributes to the mask, both as guarantee of constant metamorphoses and as a symptom of death and creative constriction. Yet in Lucini, masks can no longer be defined as “positive” or “negative” because, as we will see, decadence itself is given a different meaning and seen as a process that leads to rebirth.

The main concern of Drami, as in Lothar’s work, is the distinction between life as an indeterminate flux and its fixation into a form, but Lucini also brings in some innovative ideas on both a formal and a content level. He is one of the first Italian authors to write in free verse, which he uses for the first time consistently in Drami delle maschere;208 he is

208 The novelty of having used free verse for the first time in Italian poetry is usually attributed to Lucini, although Giovannetti contests the claim in his monograph (42).
also one of the first turn-of-the-century Italian poets to look at foreign literature as an inspiration; he proposes an Italian version of politically engaged symbolism, and he introduces – albeit unwillingly, since he mainly uses the word symbol – the mask as an allegory for historical change. As it has been indicated, the masks of the *Drami* have more than one meaning. The rhetorical use Lucini makes of them oscillates between metonymy and personification, between symbol and allegory. We can talk of metonymy when two terms stand in a relationship of contiguity — for example, when the agent is mentioned for the creation, the cause for its effect or the effect for the cause (Martin 783). The masks of the pantomime tradition and of the commedia dell’arte are known to be folk masks; metonymically, in *Drami*, masks often stand for the “people,” and the “people” are often mentioned in reference to the masks (Lucini uses the Italian word *popolo*). Already in the initial parade, the mask of Stockman calls for the people and receives the enthusiastic cheering of the masks in response:

   Popolo io ti do un’arme
   Che non si spunta già mai: la rassegnazione! Popolo
   Una corrazza ti cingo sopra al petto: la Critica sovrana.
   Apriam l’occhi alla luce del sole. Quante livide face
   A torno a noi, quante mani tremanti: Popolo
   Maschere disprezze, maschere di lenoni maschere
   meritrici, maschere sciagurate! Una lezione
   mandano le illustrate compagne vostre. Ed han
   paura: Popolo, maschere sante della ribellione! (81)\textsuperscript{209}

The link between the masks and the people is confirmed by the intertextual reference to Lucini’s *La prima ora della academia* (published in 1902, but probably written in the same years), a representation of the eighteenth century in which the same pantomime and commedia characters, once unmasked, are revealed as French revolutionaries.

\textsuperscript{209} People I give you a weapon/ That never breaks: resignation! People/ I dress your chest with an armor: supreme criticism./ Let us open the eyes in the sunlight. How many livid faces/ among us, how many trembling hands: people,/ despised masks, masks of procurers masks/ of prostitutes, wretched masks! What a lesson/ send your companions… and they/ are afraid: people, blessed masks of rebellion!

All the parenthetical references, unless otherwise indicated, refer to the following edition: I Drami delle Maschere (ed. G Viazzi Parma, Guanda, 1973). All translations are my own.
At the same time, the masks of *Drami*, as Lucini explains in the introduction, are puppets born in the “palace of the mind” of the narrator/puppeteer, and therefore nothing but *dramatis personae*, forms through which the “I” is embodied and allowed to speak. The narrator/puppeteer, reinforcing the metonymical link between agent and creation, speaks both for and through the masks. Addressing his masks, he declares in the introduction:

> Il Padrone è con voi, nella coscienza<br>vostra, nell’instabile vostro carattere; cuprei fili che v’accendete<br>e vi scuotete d’elettricità come il vello del gatto. Ed io<br>muovo la mente, io v’allogo le teste al pensiero. (83) 210

Since Lucini’s works are built on a system of hints and correspondences, it is important to bear in mind that a few years earlier he placed the same puppeteer, named Menicozzo, in the novel *Gian Pietro Da Core* (1895), and that the character used the same puppets/masks to represent the struggle of the working class in a puppet show and thus to build an awareness of their condition.211

Yet Lucini’s masks are not limited to one meaning, and the metonymical use through which they become a representation of the people and, at the same time, of the artist is only one of their possibilities. As Lucini writes in “Viatico,” the essay with which he concludes and partly explains the mysteries of the *Drami*, the masks are also “funzioni etiche e sociali,” “tipi che rimangono in noi costantemente e fuori di noi nell’ambiente, come aspetto delle nostre capacità morali (virtù) e come rappresentazione delli intendimenti collettivi e giudizi collettivi” (347).212 To simplify, the masks can be read as personifications of historical forces and of persistent moods in history. Lucini discusses further his poetics of masks in another essay, included in *Il Verso Libero*. He writes: “Noi volevamo signoreggiare l’Essenza delle Forme, noi volevamo, colla cognizione perfetta delle cose, dei fenomeni, comprendere il senso dei prodotti maturi della volontà individuale, collettiva e storica; essere insomma capaci di foggiare dei *Tipi* 210

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210 Your master is with you, in your/consciousness, in your unstable personality; your coppery threads light up/and shake from electricity like a cat’s hair. And I/move the mind, I place the thoughts in your heads.
211 On the importance of *Gian Pietro da Core* in Lucini’s conception of masks, see Giovannetti (11).
212 Social and ethical functions, types that remain constant in us and outside of us in the environment, as an aspect of our moral abilities (virtues) and as a representation of collective judgments and agreements.
It becomes clear that the masks represent historical forces and energies that, to be made intelligible, have to be given a form, to be turned into a type. In *Drami*, Lucini slightly changes his definition referring to masks, more simply, as ideas that come alive to embrace a socialist ideal destined to take place in a not too distant future: “Or il tempo dubio e torbido ci prepara a delle inconscie meraviglie e dei meravigliosi gesti. [...] Delle Forze nuove corrono sotto l’Istoria e la spinta delle Generazioni al movimento generale delle idealità plebee ed a rivolgimenti di libertà sognate ma non ingannatrici” (348).

When discussing his poetics of masks, Lucini mostly defines them as “symbols” but, as Curi has pointed out (72-77), he sometimes talks about them, especially in the *Avvertenza alla prima ora* (1899), as allegories. This confusion, as most scholars agree, could derive from the not too convincing definition that Lucini gives of the two, as he re-proposes a distinction popular since Goethe and throughout the nineteenth century, according to which the symbol is seen as natural, spontaneous and open to infinite meanings, while the allegory is considered a critical label, artificial and rigid (1971, 126-127). Lucini’s definition gives primacy to the symbol and shows nothing of the sensibility by which a few years later allegory was considered a way to illustrate modernity. There has been much discussion among scholars as to whether Lucini’s masks should or should not be read allegorically. Some critics follow Anceschi, who sees in Lucini’s poetry an oscillation between the allegorical and the symbolic that becomes fully symbolic with *Il Verso Libero* in 1908. Others agree with Giovannetti, who reads Lucini’s efforts to politicize symbolism as a refusal of the most interesting part of French poetics (for him the notion of correspondances) and who judges the author’s use of masks as a dated form.

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213 We wanted to dominate the essence of forms, we wanted, with a perfect understanding of things and phenomena, to understand the meaning of the ripe products of individual, collective and historical will; we wanted to be able to create types, or individuals.

214 The use of the masks of the commedia to personify “ideas” appears perhaps less eccentric if we reflect that the Greek meaning for the rhetorical figure is “prosòpōpia,” which initially referred to the practice of staging figures with a mask in order to represent an abstract idea. In Greek, the term for mask is in fact prosōpā (See Arthos, 902).

215 Now confused and turbid times prepare us for unconscious marvels and wonderful gestures [...] New forces are stirring under the surface of history, fomenting the generational drives towards a revolution of plebeian ideals and of desirable, not deceptive freedoms.

216 For a definition of allegory see Benjamin (162 *passim*); see also Luperini, 1990 (102).
of allegory closer to the medieval model than to twenty-century poetics. According to Giovannetti, Lucini’s allegories aim at a reading of immediate facts, such as historical revolutions, and do not lead to the discovery of a reality beyond the appearance, thus differing from the functions assigned to modern allegory (62). Still others argue that Lucini’s masks speak for the tendency of contamination between symbols and allegory common to decadence and symbolism, for the overcoming of a distinction of allegory seen as artificial, and the symbol as spontaneous and natural. This last reading is, of course, only possible if one assumes that Lucini’s writing does not necessarily follow his declaration of poetics and that his rigid definitions do not stop him from experimenting in his writing. Following on this interpretation, it is interesting to point out that in the same essay in which Lucini declares he is using symbols, he also argues that the task of contemporary poetry is to reflect on the changes brought by the industrial era, directing his reader towards an historical interpretation of his figures: “Il mondo fisico, che l’industrialismo aveva trasformato sulla perpetuità della natura, era quanto dovevamo trasportare nel mondo morale, cioè’ nel mondo delle rappresentazioni intellettuali, era l’oggetto delle arti, della poesia, del nostro modo di renderci noti” (1971, 111).

If, in the sense indicated by Walter Benjamin, we define modern allegory as a way to represent the individual’s estrangement from himself and nature in a time of industrial development, and as a means to express the relationship between art and modernity, then Lucini’s figures are not extraneous to this sensibility. The mask itself is first of all an expression of estrangement, and Lucini’s masks are mostly outcasts, unable to feel united with the world surrounding them. More importantly, they are bound to a second, artificial nature. The words of the courtesan in the initial ballad can be read in this light: “Guardatevi nel tondo dello specchio d’argento: voi vi riconoscete? / Io sempre vedo in me la posticcia parrucca e l’occhi finti che mentono” (27).

We can read the melancholy expressed in the exile of Harlequin and Pierrot, the representation of the

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217 See Veronesi (378-89).
218 The Physical world, which the industries had transformed from the perpetuity of nature, was what we had to transport in the moral world (that is in the world of intellectual representations); it was the object of arts, of poetry, of our way to become known.
219 Look in the round looking glass: don’t you recognize yourselves? I always see the fake wig and the fake lying eyes.
*Pagliaccio* as a sad fool\(^{220}\) and the complaints of a disoriented Venetian Lancelot, unable to recognize and find himself in the city, in the same light.

These masks, as indicated, are also *dramatis personae*, forms through which the narrator-puppeteer can assert, contradict himself or use a multiplicity of voices, all representative of the artist. Their estrangement and sense of isolation concerns, as a consequence, the artist himself. In this game of disguises, which lead to a portrait of the poet as a fool, Luperini identifies one of the most modern traits of Lucini’s poetry (1981, 91). This image, new to the Italian literary landscape, had already been explored by authors that Lucini knew well: De Banville and Edgar Allan Poe had associated the poet with the clown and so had Baudelaire in the prose *Le Vieux Saltimbanque* (1861) and Mallarmé with *Le Pitre châtifié* (1864, 67), a poem in which the essence of the poet’s genius is reduced to fake wigs and make up.\(^{221}\) Lucini borrows this image from the French tradition and uses it to expose the social mask that each of us is forced to assume, as well as the process through which art is reduced to a means of entertainment by a society that turns everything into a commercial good.\(^{222}\) Another parallel is established between the vagabond artist and the poet on the basis of their alienation from society; from his detached position, the poet can be a sharp judge of events but is unable to make a direct intervention.

Going back to the use of the commedia masks in Lothar’s *König Harlekin*, we can now argue that Lucini shares a few of Lothar’s concerns. As I have pointed out at the beginning, Lucini gives his masks more than one meaning; like Lothar and the Italian grotesque school, he uses the mask to introduce the contrast between life as an indeterminate flux and the forms which are able to rationalize it and like them, he creates

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\(^{220}\) The role of the desperate actor forced to smile on stage becomes particularly famous, in Italy and internationally, after the success of Ruggero Leoncavallo’s Opera “I Pagliacci” (1892).

\(^{221}\) The influence of Mallarmé’s poem in traceable throughout Lucini’s *Drami*, especially in Florindo’s monologue.

\(^{222}\) On the symbolism of the artist as clown, see Starobinski: “L’artiste doit devenir l’acteur qui se proclame acteur; en s’humiliant sous la figure de l’amuseur, il éveillera le spectateur à la connaissance du rôle pitoyable que chacun de nous joue a son insu dans la comédie du monde” (109).
masks that are aware of their status. Just as in Lothar’s *König Harlekin*, in Lucini’s *Drami*, the commedia characters and the masks of pantomime theatre become the incarnation of the poet and at the same time, of the people and of the spirit of revolution. This is made possible by the particular role that Lucini attributes to the poet, whose status, as Luperini has illustrated (1981, 90), remains ambivalent. On the one hand, Lucini believes that the poet must continue to educate the masses and that, through instruction, he contributes to social renewal. As Lucini had already illustrated in the novel *Gian Pietro da Core*, any political and social revolution, in fact, must be anticipated by education and awareness, and the artist can contribute to changes only through this slow and gradual process. On the other hand, the parallel between the poet and the street actor emphasizes the artist’s isolation and the fact that he is destined to be ignored.

Another important similarity between Lucini and Lothar is that the masks remain connected to death. In his *Drami*, Lucini explains the origin of his masks, linking them to a portrait of a death woman, thus to the memories and sensations that are able to survive the oblivion of death: “Così un giorno come riguardai in una vecchia cornice il ritratto sconosciuto di una giovinetta morta cent’anni fa, ebbi il nome Rosaura sulle labbra, ebbi la Maschera ed il Drama” (345). The quotation, besides underlining Lucini’s fascination with gothic and decadent themes and his enthusiasm for Edgar Allan Poe, brings us back to the medieval meaning of the word *maschera*, which means incubus or male demon. Lucini also makes broad use of the word *larva*, a term that can mean mask, as well as spirit, skeleton, or shadow. His masks are thus closely connected to death and to memories — besides being a disguise for the narrating “I”, they stand, as we have seen, for individual and collective wills, for a historical mood which come to life to strive to reach an ideal: “Il pensiero ristaura quanto la carne dissorse,” writes Lucini in *Viatico*, “ciò che fu riappare, [...] quanto è morto rivive, purificato dalla tomba, dalla dimenticanza.

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223 Veronesi argues for Lucini’s modernity in considering the issue of life and forms: “Non siamo lontani, mi pare, dalla prospettiva di un Focillon, di un Lukács, di un Simmel, intenti, nello stesso giro di anni, ad indagare proprio il dialettico rapporto intercorrente tra il fluire incessante della vita e le sue fisse e statiche manifestazioni e formalizzazioni esteriori” (384).

224 One day I looked again at an old frame, at an unknown portrait of a young lady who died hundred years ago, and I had the name Rosaura on the lips, the mask, and the drama.
As we can see from this quotation, in Lucini, images of death are always accompanied by images of rebirth. His conception of history, just as Lothar’s, while not entirely positive, should not be defined as hopeless; his masks are doomed to be ignored and their revolution to fail, but they die to be reborn in better times. The masks’ message seems to be that the thoughts and ideals once repressed through violence are destined to be successful in different times when the masses have reached greater awareness.

Closely linked to images of death and rebirth is Lucini’s conception of decadence, that he partly derives by a reading of Nietzsche, whom he defines as “una delle guide più sicure” (1971, 128). While he never questions his admiration for Nietzsche, he stands strongly against other “authorithies” of decadence such as Max Nordeau and Cesare Lombroso. In the introduction to Il Libro delle figurazioni ideali, he protests against the negative connotation given to the notion of decadence and argues that it must be seen as a necessary phase in history that will gradually lead to progress and improvement. History, for Lucini, is subject to the natural laws of evolution; it follows that it is necessary for one of its phases to die for another to be born. He sees a possibility for innovation and rebirth both in the poetics of symbolism and in the politics of socialism. In fact, as Manfredini points out (XLVIII), both symbolism and socialism are, in Lucini’s view, a phase of improvement in the living organism of history, a notion that explains why Lucini’s masks are often lit by socialist fervor.

This observation leads us to another similarity between Lucini and Lothar, namely, the motif of an end to the exploitation of the masses and social and political revolution. In both works, revolution, however unrealistic in the present, is shown as feasible in the future, and in both works the mask is turned into an allegory of this possibility. Further, both writers identify laughter as an important tool of rebellion, as exemplified by the

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225 The thought restores what the flesh destroyed. What had existed reappears, [...] what had died comes alive again, purified by the grave and by oblivion, towards the sun of future centuries, for the Idea.

226 “One of the safest guides.”
words of Pantalone who, in the initial parade, calls laughter the “weapon of the people:”
“[...] riso germe di poesia/ arme di popolo riso che cela un profondo pensiero” (31).227

On a metaphysical level, Lucini’s work, as Lothar’s, presents a solution to the nineteenth-century crisis of subjectivity. In Lothar’s play a compromise is reached in the idea that, in the fragmented subjectivity of the twentieth century, a unity can be identified in the ability to create and to love; this remains constant no matter which metamorphoses and disguises the subject adopts through the chaotic and incoherent flux of life. In *Drami*, a similar solution is illustrated in the ability of the narrator to speak through each of his masks while maintaining a unity in his faithfulness to an ideal. As Viazzi writes, “dalla crisi, dalla ‘rovina’ del ‘mito’ della persona, viene il concetto di identità, viene il ricupero della ‘vera’ persona, fedele a sé stessa nel seguire coerentemente la propria evoluzione” (1973, XV).228 The notion of identity is thus linked to an embracement of metamorphosis.

A final feature shared by Lucini and Lothar is their use of commedia masks to indicate a rupture with the conventions of realistic theatre. The play-within-the-play begins in Lucini when, in the initial parade, the masks are introduced as the creations of the puppeteer, and continues as the commedia characters improvise themselves as actors describing their own *drami*. The disruption of a linear plot is further emphasized by the use of dances, acrobatics and jokes of *Intermezzo dell’Arlecchinata*. These intervals play with the notion of *lazzi*, expose theatrical conventions and make the audience aware of their role as spectator. By blurring theatrical boundaries, Lucini suggests that the world of the public is itself a world of masks and reenacts the baroque motif of the *theatrum mundi*, a motif that, according to Clayton, expresses in modernist works the awareness of deep contradictions in society. As Staronbinski argues, the world of masks and pantomime represents, in the industrial era, “un îlot chatoyant de merveilleux, un morceau demeuré intact du pays d’enfance” (8), thus an alternative to the monotony of

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227 Laughter, seed of poetry/ People’s weapon that hides a deep thought.
228 “From the crisis, from the ‘ruins’ of the ‘myth’ of the subject, comes the concept of identity, the retrieval of the ‘true’ subject, faithful to himself in following coherently his evolution.”
daily life in modern cities. As illustrated by Baudelaire’s *Le Vieux Saltimbanque*, this anachronistic dimension sets a distance from the industrial world and attests to the period’s fascination with primitivism. Clayton sees in the merging of these two worlds, that occurs through the breaking of theatrical boundaries, a symptom of societal tension. As an example of a modernist commedia work that dramatizes this tension he mentions “when Block’s Harlequin jumps through the painted backdrop in *Balaganchik*.” As we will see, in *Drami*, the crossing of theatrical boundaries is emphasized by the argument the masks have with the narrator/puppeteer, and by the dark abyss into which the Pierrots fall when they try to climb onto the theatrical stage.

We have seen that in Lothar, the notion of metatheatre is introduced without being exploited in all its potential; that his work points at, but does not introduce a break with realistic theatre. In Lucini, while the break is clearly shown, there are difficulties representing this on stage. In fact, although Lucini pays homage to pantomime and mentions that the dialogues and songs of his masks should be accompanied by gestures and dances, directions describing these movements are completely absent from the work. For the most part, the masks limit themselves to monologues that are often not spoken, but thought. The *Intermezzo dell’Arlecchinata* breaks the monologues into a choir of dancing masks, yet their movements are not described and the musical instructions, such as “chiaro di luna nell’archi e nei legni” (268), “do minore oscuro e violento” (271) “fa maggiore lento e ipocrito” (259) create a fantastic, dream-like atmosphere.

Are *Drami* meant to be theatrical only in the imagination of the reader? While the technical difficulties point at this possibility, we know from a letter written in 1898, in which Lucini specifies the name of the actor who was to interpret the mask of Florindo (Ghidetti 20), that he is aiming to create dramas which are representable on stage. Viazzi suggests that the only way to imagine a stage production of *Drami* is a mute pantomime

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229 Baudelaire’s text puts a great emphasis on the detachment of the world of clowns and street artists from the everyday reality of the metropolis: “En ces jours-là il me semble que le people oublie tout, la douleur et le travail, il devient pareil aux enfants. Pour les petits c’est un jour de congé, c’est l’horreur de l’école renvoyée à vingt-quatre heures. Pour les grands c’est un armistice conclu avec les puissances malfaisantes de la vie, un répit dans la contention et la lutte universelles” (1861).

230 Moonlights in the strings

231 Do minore, obscure and violent.

232 slow and hypocritical Fa maggiore
where the reciting of the monologue is left to an off-stage voice, thus producing a sharp
division between the meanings of words and gestures (1970, LXXIX). Giovannetti argues
that Lucini may have been thinking of the experiments of the Théâtre d’art in Paris,
where poems were often adapted to the scene and recited on stage (44). Whatever
solution was to be applied, the word retains its primacy, unlike what was happening in
the works of other authors who used pantomime and commedia characters to emphasize
gestures, dance and music as an alternative to verbal communication.\(^\text{233}\) Just as in these
works, however, the staging of Drami demands that the viewer “synthesize and
generalize,” as Lucini suggests, in order to read through these figures a representation of
history, while at the same time being aware of the dimension of theatricality and
comparing the drama to his/her own condition.

The importance of theatricality and the allegorical dimension of the work become clearer
when we take a closer look at the three monologues published in Lucini’s lifetime, which
are also the most polished parts of the text. In the monologue of Rosaura, considered one
of the best examples of Lucini’s poetry, the protagonist awaits the appearance of her
beloved Florindo. Prayers, fear mixed with excitement and erotic expectations contribute
to create a decadent atmosphere that Lucini often criticized,\(^\text{234}\) but which fascinated and
influenced him. Ghidetti sees in this monologue one of the few examples of Lucini’s
disengaged texts (Ghidetti 21); however, an allegorical reading can develop in more than
one direction, given the indeterminacy of the characters and the emphasis on their
fictional status. The main theme is the necessity to believe, as stressed by Rosaura’s
words: “Ho bisogno di credere, ho bisogno di fede;/ ho bisogno di credere giliate
apparenze incantate” (172).\(^\text{235}\)

\(^{233}\) Among the authors who at the turn of the century experiment with pantomime as an alternative to verbal
communication we find Arthur Schnitzler, Richard Beer-Hofmann, Hugo von Hofmannstahl, Alexander
Blok, Joris-Karl Huysmans and many others.

\(^{234}\) Lucini was especially active against D’Annunzio. Between 1912 and 1913 he wrote a series of essays
against the poet that he entitled Antidannunziana (one of the volumes was published I 1914, the other only
in 1989, edited by Sanguineti). Lucini’s hate, however, did not stop him from using D’Annunzio’s work as
an inspiration for many of his own books.

\(^{235}\) I need to believe, I need faith
I need to believe in enchanted, lily-like appearances.
Rosaura is in love with a dream, an illusion. If Lucini’s masks, as the author suggests in *Viatico*, can be read as ideas, then Florindo becomes the incarnation of one. The way he introduces himself already points to an allegorical reading and identifies him with Rosaura’s dreams: “Egli mi disse: ‘Sono Florindo, Lelio, il Cavalier di Santa Flora, il principe normanno, il Pascià di Tangeri, Romeo e Cesare;/ sono e sarò tutto quanto vorrete. Son per ora Florindo’” (173). Later in the piece, when a gunshot is heard and Rosaura is already moaning the loss of her lover, Florindo appears under Rosaura’s window: “Oh Rosaura, credete? L’amore non si uccide. Porgetemi la mano. […] / Son l’aspettato che non mancherà mai alla promessa./ Porgetemi la mano!” (176).

The pattern of this little drama is repeated in several other monologues, in which the beloved is often killed only to be born again with a new promise. Valli, commenting on Lucini’s figures, suggests that erotic images, stories of love and longing must always, in Lucini, be read figuratively as the love for the idea, since the latter is “the spiritual flame that animates and burns the flesh of the person like an infinite love” (53, my translation). Yet the description of Florindo as wearing a powdered wig suggests a character aware of his own theatrical role, a figure of artifice that can be read as a personification of the disengaged art that captivates the artist’s imagination. This reading is confirmed by Florindo’s monologue, which is an antithetical response to Rosaura’s. Here, the indulgent details already present in the first monologue grow to become a decadent scenario that re-proposes many common themes: the closeness of love and death, the femme fatale as a vampire, the link between passion and decay. A suffering Florindo laments his fascination with Rosaura, who is stealing his life and energy:

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Che e’ mai la mia pazzia
a volervi vicina?
Voi mi suggete il sangue colle dita
Fredde sul fronte in fiamme (178).
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236 He said: “I am Florindo, Lelio, the chevalier of Santa Flora/The Norman Prince, the Pasha of Tangeri, Romeo or Cesar; I am and will be all you will want. For now I am Florindo.”

237 What is my madness/ of wanting you close? / you drain my blood with your fingers / cold on my burning forehead.
The poem juxtaposes reds and whites, alternating images of blood related to Florindo’s current condition and dreams of a pure landscape of ice and snow, creating a contrast that Ghidetti judges extremely modern (10). This imagery reminds us of Mallarmé’s *Le pitre châtié*; and as in Mallarmé’s poem, the contrast notes the power of nature as opposed to the world of art and artifice. When Rosaura assumes the features of a vampire-like femme fatale, she becomes the personification of art:

Amica, no…lontano, non toccatemi,  
non baciatiemi più, no...  
Oh come siete bella e come mi suggete  
Tutta la vita.—Niente, non sono più... (178)  

Ghidetti argues that, if the monologue of Rosaura represents a disengaged flirtation with literature, this monologue describes the destruction of that world. We can extend her observation and add that the verses express a condemnation of the doctrines of aestheticism (personified in Rosaura), as well as a dream of political engagement, represented by the image of a rising sun, which Lucini often uses to represent the rising of socialism. Sending away Rosaura, Florindo cries in fact:

Il sole, il sole! – Va, va via;  
va cercami il sole, il mio sole, il tuo sole  
codesta sacra e pura idealità  
per la soferente nostra umanità;  
portami qui il sole, il sole di una volta! (179)

Among the masks, the one to which Lucini dedicates more space and attention is certainly that of Pierrot. It is not a coincidence that the poet’s favorite is a foreign mask; this can be explained partly as homage to Verlaine and Théodore de Banville, whose influence is evident in *Drami*, and partly by the fact that the character is farther from an Italian sensibility and therefore more likely to be turned into a symbol. “La mente italica forse mal si acconcia al suo aspetto,” explains Lucini, “i nostri bimbì ne ridono, perché i

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238 My friend, no…away, do not touch me/do not kiss me any more, no…/Oh how beautiful you are and how you drain/all my life. – Nothing, I am no more.
239 The sun, the sun! Go, go away/ Go look for the sun, my sun, your sun, this sacred and pure ideality/ for our suffering humanity/bring me the sun, the sun of once!
papà non conoscono il valore e la potenza di queste figurazioni” (294). For Lucini, who read much of the romantic and decadent literature about the character, the mask gains a plurality of meanings, coming to stand for the people, the poet and the revolutionary spirit.

Through six different monologues full of citations and allusions, Lucini tells the fragmented story of the mask, from its origin as Zanni in the Commedia dell’arte to its transformation in the French Pantomime theatre, where Pierrot acquired his well-known traits in the theatre of the Funambules and where actor Jean Gaspard Deburau turned him into “the mask of the people.”

For Lucini, Pierrot is “the passionate one”:

ha una storia di dolori e di passioni per tre secoli lunga, né morto ancora, aspetta e sogna il suo avvento spirituale nella società futura. Di fronte al poeta appare il corollario umanato dalle idee strambe ed impossibili che pur tanto si fondano sopra ad una indiscussa realtà (294).

Pierrot can be seen as a personification of “the most strange and impossible ideas,” but at the same time as a representation of the people or as an alter ego for the poet. Lucini continues his introduction to Pierrot’s Monologue by carrying on the parallel between the mask, the artist and the revolutionary:

Da Parigi s’incarnano nel simbolo funambesco e protervo dell’arte contro la vita placida e brutta della Borghesia. Da François Villon [ ... ] e da Verlaine antimetafisico, s’impunta di una critica e di una rivoluzione. Ora, nelle taverne della Banlieue, sotto ai pergolati equivoci e polverosi, vicino alle fortificazioni, si ritrovano questi refratti illustri dell’arte, dell’idea, della bellezza (294).

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240 The Italian mind, perhaps, is not made to understand that look. Our children laugh at him, because their parents do not know the value and the power of these configurations.

241 “The link between Pierrot, the poor downtrodden clown, who is always beaten and is always unlucky in love”, writes Douglas Clayton as he comments of the history of the mask, “and the downtrodden social classes is an important one, for it suggests the potential of this character for political as well as artistic subversion and underlines the link between protest against the established art forms and the political attack on established structures” (35).

242 he has a history of grief and passions long three centuries and not death yet, he awaits and dreams his spiritual coming in the society of the future.

243 In Paris it embodies in the acrobatic and stubborn symbol of art against the calm and dull life of the Bourgeoisie. From François Villon [...] to the anthymetaphysic Verlaine, he insists stubbornly in critic and
Pierrot, therefore, is the spirit of revolution and the essence of bohemian art. This mask, more than any other, is able to undergo through the six monologues (organized in a cycle according to the phases of the moon) a continuous metamorphosis and yet remain the same, thus reflecting through *mise en âbime* the adventure of the narrator-puppeteer who, while taking the shape of each of his creations, still maintains a unity in his faithfulness to an ideal. While the first monologue, *Le malinconie di Pierrot*, functions as an introduction to the mask, who describes himself as unable of action (“capo rotondo, come una biglia pazza, che si rigira nell’impotenza!” 299),244 the second, *La casa di Pierrot*, presents the character as a caricature of the decadent poet, shut inside a marble palace with an electric moon hanging from the ceiling. In this episode, Pierrot, following the pattern established by Florindo, dies to be born again, and from a mute mask of pantomime becomes a lucid and eloquent interpreter of history. The episodes which follow are recollections through which Pierrot restages phases of his own history: in *Luna crescente*, he holds a conference to the French Nobility at the verge of the revolution. “Vedran vermiglio un di” (311),245 he prophesizes, and the stage directions, emphasizing theatrical conventions, describe how the powder on the wigs of the nobility turns into ashes. In *Luna Piena*, Pierrot becomes a commentator on the realm of Napoleon III, where he sees history passing in front of him as through the eyes of a camera and laments his detachment from the people, with whom he should be united in his love of the idea:

Eloquente Pierrot
Parlo a gesti per l’altri e per me stesso improvviso monologhi,
quando nessuno più m’ode: ma il Volgo, il mio uditorio,
ha perduto il perché della mia sigla, ha perduto la chiave del simbolo (316).246

In *Luna calante*, another play-within-the-play that reinforces the link between him and the narrator, Pierrot improvises himself as a puppeteer and stages a German phase of his revolutions. Now, these illustrious, resistant defendants of art, of the idea and of beauty meet in the taverns of the Banlieue, under equivocal and dusty pergolas and close to the fortifications.

244 A round head, like a mad bilia, that tosses and turns in impotence!
245 They will see red one day.
246 Eloquent Pierrot / I speak with gestures for the others and for myself I improvise monologues / when nobody can hear me: but the people, my audience / have lost the reason of my signature, has lost the key to the symbol.
existence in which he complains of the decadence of German culture and of the fruitless work of the Marxists. Finally, in the last episode, *Luna Nuova*, the same Pierrot is shown in a typical Romantic pose, dangling on a tree holding a cold and tired Pierrette who personifies the “idea.” Pierrot alternates lullabies for Pierrette with bloody recollections of revolution. In this monologue, he has become one of the heroes of the Paris Commune and recalls the atrocities of the fight. While Pierrette (alias the revolutionary spirit) is dying in his arms, Pierrot continues to rage against his author and creator:

E per ischerno quest’artista buffone, il Demiurgo, 
ci espone fuori, nudi, a contemplar le stelle 
dal pensil divano del bruno pero morto...[..] 
Fu l’artista buffone!? 
O Demiurgo, possente alle vendette, Demiurgo ingannatore, 
é perché noi saliamo in sino a te a gettarti l’accuse 
a viso aperto? Demiurgo, il mio pensiero ti rifiuta ...

(342-343) 247

By turning his Pierrot into a revolutionary and a hero of the Paris Commune, Lucini challenges the way in which the character has been interpreted throughout the nineteenth century. “As the century went on,” writes Storey, in a book dedicated to the mask, “the Pierrot theme became more and more divorced from the flea-pit theatre of its origin, and more and more the property of the aesthete and the poet, a convenient pose with overtones of *dandysme* and perversion, innocence and cruelty” (36). Palacio further reinforces the non-political, elitist contextualisation of the character when he writes: “Pierrot est beaucoup plus à l’aise dans les périodes reculées de l’Histoire, ou le raffinement vestimentaire s’érigeait en système de pensée ou en art de vivre” (52).

Although aware of these trends and by no means immune to them, Lucini remains different from other decadent authors in that, while his Pierrots represent the poet, victim like his contemporaries of a sterile fascination with the artificial, they also unhesitatingly stand for the revolutionary. This combination, as we have seen, is possible because of the

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247 And as a joke this foolish artist, the Demiurge/ exposes us outside, naked, to contemplate the stars/ from the suspended couch of the dark dead pear tree/[..] Was the artist a fool!/? Oh Demiurge, powerful in your revenge, deceptive Demiurge/ is it because we climb up to you to accuse you/ openly? Demiurge, my thought refuses you …
double connotation through which the artist is represented in the work: on the one hand, he is united to the people by a love for ideas and his task of bringing awareness but, on the other hand, in their eyes he remains a fool, a crazy person who provokes and exposes the illness of society but is unable to make a direct intervention.

Although Lucini’s work remains unpolished and offers difficult reading, his importance in a European context is that while for most decadent writers the commedia mask is a trope limited to subjective lyricism, Lucini uses it to express historical change and revolution and at the same time to disrupt the conventions of realistic theatre. *I Drami* closes with the image of Pierrot and Pierrette falling into a dark abyss, yet the introduction to Pierrot’s monologues contains a hopeful call for awareness:

> Or io m’interrogo: “dentro di me, in alcuni giorni d’insoddisfatta mestizia pruriginosa, dentro di voi, amica, nell’ore di un’insolita e grave malinconia, o nei rossi momenti della rivolta, Pierrot e Pierrette non hanno vita e grida?” Risuscitano; da noi prendono forma; noi ci agitiamo come l’intimo daimon Maschera vuole; ed esso e’ tutto. (295)

248 A few years later, in 1906, Meyerhold staged Alexander Blok’s *Balaganchik* in St. Petersburg; in this work, the Commedia characters are used, more explicitly than in Lucini, as a means to mock decadent tendencies and to break with the conventions of realistic theatre. Blok’s play, written after the 1905 revolution, constitutes an attempt to escape from his lyrical isolation. He later abandoned the Commedia characters turning to images that he considered more capable of expressing political engagement. The originality of Lucini lies in the fact that his masks are already a representation of this engagement and anticipate the way in which the mask will be used as a trope for historical change and revolution.

249 Now I ask myself: “Inside myself, in days of unsatisfied and itching sadness, inside you, my friend, in hours of unusual and grave melancholy, or in the red moments of rebellion, aren’t Pierrot and Pierrette alive and screaming? They resuscitate; they take shape from us, we stir and toss as the intimate Demon Mask demands; and he is everything.”
Chapter 3

Figures of Antithesis

Introduction

Among rhetorical devices, antithesis, “the juxtaposition of contraries,” or the “contrast of ideas, sharpened or pointed up by the use of words of opposite or conspicuously different meaning” (Brogan 79), is most representative of the act of wearing a mask, since the mask is first of all defined in relation to the human face and tends to represent artificiality, falsehood, and alterity in opposition to the notions of naturalness, truth, and identity. Traditionally in literature, the masked character stands in contrast to an unmasked protagonist who has nothing to hide. At the turn of the 20th century, this antithetical relationship changes, however, into a more complex figure and becomes an occasion for duplicity. Although they are introduced as opposing elements, a closer examination of the face and the mask reveals that their construction is based on similarity rather than difference. Jean de Palacio identifies this deliberate deception as a fundamental image in decadent poetics. He writes: “Le factice ne vient plus de l’accessoire de carton posé sur le visage de chair, il revient à considérer le visage de chair comme un masque” (151). Like the use of the word “mask” in ancient Greece, when prosopon was used to define both “mask” and “face,” these texts show no clear-cut boundaries between the two. If the face itself is considered a mask, it becomes extremely difficult to differentiate the natural from the artificial, the animate from the inanimate and, most importantly, to define where the self ends and alterity begins.

This chapter is divided into two parts which represent two related anxieties: firstly, the presentiment that when the mask is removed, the reality underneath will uncover yet

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250 The artifice does not derive from the cardboard prop placed on the skin of the face; it is the face that is now considered a mask (my translation).
another mask; secondly, the suspicion that Otherness, as represented by the mask, can be interpreted through a relation of similarity to the self. The works of Marcel Schwob and Henry James represent the first preoccupation; those of Joris-Karl Huysmans, Thomas Mann, Hugo Von Hofmannsthal, and Andrei Bely, the second.

In Schwob’s “Le Roi au masque d’or” and James’ *The Sacred Fount*, selfhood and alterity mirror each other as elements of a particular kind of chiasmus in which human faces and masks are repeated in reverse order. In these texts, the mask, initially presented as the antithesis of the self, is revealed to be an empty signifier that can stand for sameness as well as for difference and thus remains obscure, unavailable to human interpretation, and turns into an allegory of unintelligibility. “Comme les masques sont le signe qu’il y a des visages, les mots sont le signe qu’il y a des choses. Et ces choses sont des signes de l’incompréhensible,” writes Schwob in the introduction to his collection of stories, underlining the ambiguity between the signifier and the referent, the mask and the face (11). In these stories, the mask is both a signifier that can never coincide exactly with a referent nor be fixed to a single meaning and, in less explicit terms, is an attempt to hide an inexorable process of degeneration.

Schwob continues: “Je dirai volontiers que la différence et la ressemblance sont des points de vue. Nous ne savons pas distinguer un Chinois d’un autre Chinois, mais les bergers retrouvent leurs moutons à des signes qui nous sont invisibles” (7). These words indicate a link between the first part of this chapter and the second. Huysmans, Mann, Hofmannsthal and Bely’s texts share a similar preoccupation with difference and sameness, but the anxiety centres on the relationship of the self to an “exotic” Other, and the structure is that of an antithesis that gradually turns into an oxymoron, a device through which two seemingly contradictory elements are yoked in a condensed paradox.

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251 As masks are signs that indicate there are faces, so words are signs that indicate there are things. And these things are signs of the unintelligible (my translation).

252 I would like to say that similarity and difference are points of view. We cannot distinguish one Chinese person from another, but shepherds find their sheep relying on signs that are invisible to us (my translation).
In the literature of this period, the preoccupation with exoticism is one of the forms assumed by a general concern with self-definition, and the encounter with a different culture often coincides with the discovery of hidden aspects of one’s mind. A certain ambiguity takes place, as European traditions and distant places are treated as equally exotic. The ambiguity is further complicated as geography is called into question, and the “exotic” no longer exclusively defines the boundaries of one’s culture but is encountered in liminal zones within it.

In 1882, Max Nordau published *Entartung (Degeneration)*, in which he describes how European society is undergoing a process of decay triggered by and reflected in the work of its artists and intellectuals. At this time, decadent writers contribute to creating an image of the artist as a sterile, sick, often androgynous individual, a description recognizable in the artist-characters of several of Mann’s works. European civilization is represented as weak and exhausted, and this feeling seems confirmed by historical events such as the Russo-Japanese War, in which Russia suffered several defeats at the hands of the underestimated Japan (1904-5). Several writers in this period, echoing Nietzsche’s thought and extending the logic of evolution to paradoxical conclusions, reflect that, if evolution is a continuous process, European culture no longer represents its ultimate development but is merely a temporary stage in a never-ending chain of transformations. Moreover, as Ponnau notes, the notion of competition among species is often used to denote the rivalry among human races (1989 449). The anthropology of the time finds parallels between the way of thinking of primitive men and contemporary aboriginal tribes, and Freud, with *Totem and Taboos* (1913), extends this
parallel to include the mind of the child. Following this logic, “primitive” cultures begin to be perceived in terms of similarity as well as difference, since their ways of thinking, according to Freud’s theories, have been experienced by every individual in an early stage of psychological development. In Bely’s, and to a lesser extent, in Hofmannsthal’s novel, the process of degeneration, as reflecting these theories, implies a regression to childhood which coincides with the discovery of a “savage” side of the self.

Pfister argues, “A culture defines itself by defining other cultures; the self defines itself by defining the other” (5). As long as the Other is shown as opposite, the Self can be sure of its identity. Yet when the barrier between self and otherness begins to fade, and there is a possibility of identification, the definition of the self is threatened. With the undoing of the antithesis, the radically different unexpectedly turns into a familiar image, and what was once familiar becomes uncanny. Thus, Mann’s protagonist discovers in his European neighbours the threats that are expected to belong to the Indian jungle, Hofmannsthal’s hero travels from Vienna to Venice and finds himself in a fantastic, oriental world, and the protagonist of Bely’s Peterbsurg, who delights in wearing Venetian and oriental costumes, recognizes in his reflection the threatening features of a Mongol. “The Other,” Pfister argues, “is not only out there but present within one’s culture” (6).

An analysis of early 20th century texts shows a European fascination with the exotic that is steeped in fear and diffidence, especially when the weakness of their own civilization confronts them. These works also reveal that the boundaries of exoticism are no longer clear-cut, and that uncanny features can be found within one’s culture as well as in far away countries. In both sets of stories, the mask embodies the torment of a divided self as

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257 In Aboriginal Populations of the mind, Brickman argues that Freud’s idea of “primitivity” as an early stage of psychological development was imbued in the colonialist and racial discourse of the time (see Brickman, passim, especially 15-17).

258 Hofmannsthal’s novel is set in Venice, but the city maintains in the novel an uncanny, exotic connotation. Moreover, Hofmannsthal was planning a rewriting in which the action was to be set in Egypt, thus reinforcing the link between Venice, exoticism and the orient.
well as the weakness of European culture and the presentment of a necessary, albeit feared change.
Part 1: Chiasmus

Schwob’s “Le Roi au masque d’or” and James’ The Sacred Fount

The fin de siècle mood: it is the impotent despair of a sick man, who feels himself dying by inches in the midst of an eternally living nature blooming insolently forever. (Max Nordeau, Degeneration, 3)

Marcel Schwob’s short story “Le Roi au masque d’or” (1892) and Henry James’ novella The Sacred Fount (1900) are built around the image of a man with a mask and focus on the act of masking. While Schwob is one of the most famous French symbolists, James by no means belongs to this school. Yet, as Heath Moon has demonstrated,259 he was acquainted with the movement and, in this later novel, he makes extensive use of such symbolist imagery as masks, mirrors, and portraits. Indeed, the similar focus of “Le Roi au masque d’or” and The Sacred Fount indicates James’s interest in symbolism. Both stories juxtapose the mask, the portrait and the “no-face” and make use of a particular chiasmus structure based on an apparent antithesis. For chiasmus, we have in mind “any structure in which elements are repeated in reverse, so giving the pattern ABBA” (Brogan 184). The repeated elements, in this case, are not words, but masks and faces, which are conceived as elements of a semiotic system and placed crosswise in a synchronic or diachronic sequence. The element's inverted position underlines their opposite characteristics, so that the reader tends initially to interpret them as contraries. The same chiasmus structure, however, when read diachronically, demonstrates that these elements can be paradoxically explained in terms of sameness. We can thus talk of an apparent antithesis contained in the chiasmus. The use of antithesis is recommended by Aristotle as a figure of speech because of its property of underlining the contrasts of opposites (393), yet in both Schwob and James’ works, opposite elements, when placed side by side as part of a crosswise structure, acquire a sense of duplicity. The mask becomes a

259 See Moon (306-26 passim).
260 See above, Chapter One. Rilke uses the term “no-face” (Nichtgesicht) to indicate the reality of death, the last of masks.
signifier that cannot be matched exactly with a referent, nor constrained to a single meaning. In addition, in both stories, the mask can be read as an allegory of intelligibility and societal change, and is related to the notion of degeneration.

Schwob’s “Le Roi au masque d’or” is a fairy tale which recounts the story of the last king of a race that has been wearing golden masks for generations. In the court, mirrors have been forbidden, and those who approach the king must wear wooden, cloth, iron, or leather masks that indicate their functions. Thus, the masks of the women are gracious, the masks of the buffoons cheerful, and those of the priests solemn and grave. “Mais le masque d’or du roi était majestueux, noble, et véritablement royal”(13), writes Schwob, emphasizing the king’s power. The masks become, in other words, signifiers for a role.  

Nobody in the court suspects that a sign might have a double nature, that masks are not reality but a means to address it.

The illusion that the courtier’s faces coincide perfectly with their masks, and thus with the functions they perform, is broken by the intrusion of a blind beggar, who dares to enter the court unmasked and whom the king, out of curiosity, allows to speak in his presence. The beggar addresses the question of the mask, suggesting the reality it hides could differ from its appearance and proposing a new and complementary vision: “Or peut être que ceux qui te paraissent des bouffons pleurent sous leur masque; et il est possible que ceux qui te semblent des prêtres aient leur véritable visage tordu par la joie de te tromper; et tu ignores si les joues de tes femmes ne sont pas couleur de cendre sous la soie. Et toi-même, roi masqué d’or, qui sait si tu n’est pas horrible malgré ta parure?” (16)

The beggar’s words are more revolutionary than they seem, since they point out that the masks, just like words, are only signifiers; they indicate a role, but the referent, the concrete person behind the mask, remains unknown. This suggestion triggers the king’s

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261 In this sense, Schwob’s masks follow the evolution of the Latin word *Persona*, which, initially used to indicate the mask worn by an actor, was then applied to the role he assumed.

262 Schwob’s preoccupation with signs is evident; few years before writing these stories, from 1887 to 1889, he had followed the seminar of Ferdinand de Saussure and Michel Bréal at the École pratique des hautes études (Viegnès 270).
suspicion. If the mask is indeed an arbitrary sign, the power system on which the court is based is threatened and the legitimacy of the king is questioned. After the beggar’s speech, the king begins to think obsessively about his face and wants to be reassured of his appearance. When night comes, he runs away from the palace in search of a mirror and meets for the first time an unmasked young woman. Stunned by her beauty and desiring to kiss her, he takes off his mask and is surprised by the cry of the girl, who runs away, covering her eyes. Astonished by her reaction, the king looks at his image moon-lit river and discovers that the golden mask has been hiding the face of a leper. He immediately puts on his mask and returns to the palace, but the revelation has filled him with fear and insecurity. Every time a guard points a torch towards him, lighting up his mask, he fears the man can see white leprous scales on the metal; every time a soldier turns towards him, he moves away, suspecting he might intend to severe his “terrible head.” The king’s panic shows that he is not yet convinced of the arbitrary nature of the mask as a signifier. He continues to believe that it is connected to the object it covers, and that, therefore, it exposes his leprosy.

Once in the palace, the king heads towards the gallery that contains the portraits of his ancestors. The first painting has been isolated from the others; it depicts a scared, pale face, partly hidden by jewels and royal ornaments. “O premier de ma race, mon frère, que nous sommes pitoyables!” he exclaims kissing the portrait on the eyes. He then stops in front of each portrait of the masked kings, tearing angrily the masks from the paintings. “Sous les masques arrachés,” comments the narrator, “on vit la nudité sombre de la muraille.” The bare wall emphasizes the impossibility of knowing the truth, while the attention to the eyes of the unmasked ancestor prefigures the king’s self-inflicted punishment. After this unmasking, the king gathers his subjects and orders them to

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263 In the next chapter, we will see how the fear of decapitation is linked by Freud to the obsession with blindness, and how he interprets both fears as an expression of the fear of castration; for now, we limit to point out that both the severed head and the empty eyes-sockets are visually linked to the mask. In the next chapter, we will see how Lorrain, who was familiar with Schwob’s work, elaborates on this motif, more explicitly linking masks, obsessions with eyes and severed heads, and suggesting that the sense of uncanniness attributed to the mask can indeed be related to the fear of castration.

264 As we will see, the act of tearing a portrait is echoed in Chapter 4, in Lorrain’s Monsieur de Phocas. In this text, the protagonist is tempted to tear out specifically the eyes of the portraits - a gesture that echoes the king’s punishment and that, by carving eye-holes into an image, creates a form of mask.
take off their masks. When the courtiers obey, their appearance echoes back to the beggar’s suggestion, as women reveal hideous faces under their beautiful masks, and the priests’ faces are as cheerful as the buffoons’ are grave and solemn. What is revealed stands in stark contrast to the initial description, in which the look of each person is assumed to correspond to his/her mask. The beggar’s vision, the king now understands, was both prescient and accurate.

To punish his race for hiding illness, the king publicly blinds himself using the hooks of his mask and abandons the palace. He walks for days without eating, until he meets a young girl who, struck by pity, washes the blood from his face and offers to lead him to her city. This girl, the narrator warns us, is leprous, but she is ashamed to confess it to the blind man. The king, on the contrary, thinks that she must be beautiful and feels unworthy to touch her. When they are very close to the city, he confesses that he has the desire to kiss her, but cannot touch her because of his leprosy; before the girl has the time to reassure him, he dies of hunger and exhaustion. For her part, the girl had seen the king’s face clear and beautiful and feared to contaminate it with her illness.

An old man who happens to pass by hears her story and comments: “Sans doute le sang de son cœur qui avait jailli par ses yeux avait guéri sa malade. Et il est mort, pensant avoir un masque misérable. Mais, à cette heure, il a déposé tous les masques, d’or, de lèpre et de chair” (28). By recognizing the king as beautiful, the girl and the old man give a fourth version of facts that is antithetical to both the beggar’s suggestion and the king’s discovery. Paradoxically, it coincides with the first illustration of the court, thereby completing the structure ABBA. As the old man explains, a golden mask can easily hide a leprous one, and the face behind is nothing but a skin mask, which must eventually be removed through the inevitable encounter with death. The old man thus suggests that the skull, just like the mirror and the portrait, is an object linked to the mask. The flexibility of the mask as signifier is proven by the fact that throughout the story, it stands in a

\[^{265}\text{The punishment is the same chosen by Oedipus, who, like the king of Schwob’s story, has sinned without being aware of it.}\]
relation of dependency with each of these objects, while what it represents changes according to its juxtaposition to them.

The act of rage with which the king tears the painted masks from the gallery of his ancestors, and more importantly, the description of the bare wall behind it, suggest that Schwob’s story can be read as a parable of how we are all prisoners of our visions: signs often turn into indecipherable symbols, and reality as such remains obscure to the human intellect. In fact, Schwob addresses this problem in his introduction to the collection of stories of which “Le Roi au masque d’or” is part:

Elles [Les choses] ne sont que des signes, et des signes de signes. Ainsi que nous mêmes, ce sont les masques des visages éternellement obscurs. Comme les masques sont le signe qu’il y a des visages, les mots sont le signe qu’il y a des choses. Et ces choses sont des signes de l’incompréhensible. (11)

We know that Schwob was interested in linguistics, and that, from 1887 to 1889, he followed Ferdinand Saussure’s seminars (Viegnes 270). As suggested above, then, we can read the story as a demonstration of the arbitrary nature of signs. The masks of the king’s court constitute a primary semiotic system upon which rely all subsequent social and political structures. Through the act of unmasking, the arbitrariness of the order is exposed, and the system on which the court is based crumbles.

On the other hand, “Le Roi au mask d’or” is the account of a dying race in which the mask is used as a glamorous tool to hide an inexorable process of degeneration; a notion that often echoes in the literature and philosophy of the time, especially in the works of Nietzsche. The king’s desire to love and his inability to do so, as well as the motifs of decapitation and blinding, which are associated by Freud with castration (1923, 296), contribute to depicting the king as a sick and impotent individual, the exponent of a race that, in Darwinian terms, has long stood at the apex of evolution but is now threatened with extinction. Lastly, the story has been interpreted as a political allegory. In 1982, when the story was published, the journalists Édourad Drumont read it as an allegory of
the scandals of France’s III Republic, while Félicien Pascal made a disturbing attempt to link the story to the author’s Jewish identity: “Sous le masque d’or, le despote voile la laideur de sa lèpre, comme les milliardaires juifs cachent, sous leur luxe insolent, la misère de leurs monstrueux égoïsmes et la terreur des expiations imminentes.” While this troubling interpretation belongs to a time of growing anti-Semitism, the fact remains that the story can be read on several levels; the mask can be interpreted allegorically and also relates to impending societal change.

In Henry James’ *The Sacred Fount*, the painted mask at the centre of the novella assumes a function similar to the mask in Schwob’s work: it indicates the arbitrariness of a semiotic system, is juxtaposed to the portrait and to images of death, and is also an allegory of the estrangement felt by a social class in a time of change. In this novella, the central image is a portrait of a man with a mask in his hand; the mask and the face so closely resemble one another that the category of the natural and the artificial, as well as the notions of truth and falsehood, become ambiguous. In effect, James has created an *ekphrasis*, a device in which a visual image is described verbally. Since the characters also interpret the painting as a reflection of their own vicissitudes, the artwork can, most importantly, be read as a particular kind of chiasmus in which elements of a painting and characters are compared in a crisscross pattern. In addition, four subsequent, inverted interpretations of the story, which follow the pattern ABBA, echo the notion of unintelligibility and expose the mask as a flexible signifier that addresses the limits of human knowledge. Finally, the mask, as exemplified by the chiasmus and by the undoing of the antithesis contained in it, continues to relate to death and to the notion of degeneration.

James spoke of the story as “a flight into the high fantastic,” and indeed it is based on a hesitation between a realistic and a fantastic interpretation, depending on whether we chose to believe or disbelieve the protagonist’s theory. The theory can be easily summarized: an unnamed and anonymous protagonist/narrator postulates a peculiar case

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266 Quoted by Goudemare, 133.
267 Quoted in Edel (6).
of “vampirism” in any couple passionately in love. Having noticed that his acquaintance Mrs. Brissenden has rejuvenated, while her husband looks much older, he wonders whether she has not drawn the energy from him and whether couples do not always hide a victim and a beneficiary. Moreover, he tries to find out if there might be a woman behind an acquaintance’s sudden improvement when he notices that Long, a man whom he had always thought rude and stupid, seems now changed into a friendly and clever person.

The “sacred fount” of the title stands for the source of energy that one character draws from another; it causes one member of a couple to profit and the other to suffer, and can be considered a metaphor typical of a narrator whose reasoning, as Andreach argues (202), functions mainly in terms of opposites. After creating this metaphor, the narrator, with the collaboration of his acquaintances, “arranges” four individuals according to a chiasmus that takes into account their roles as members of a sentimental relationship and as beneficiaries/victims. The pattern is ABBA, male victim/female beneficiary; male beneficiary/female victim. A second chiasmus is introduced through the interpretation of a painting of a man with a mask, in which the characters recognize a reflection of their acquaintances, and which they interpret through another ABBA pattern which juxtaposes female victim/painting; painting/male victim. However, these structures are challenged by the diachronic interpretations that they undergo in time. In fact, a diachronic pattern corresponds to these synchronic patterns: the female victim, to whom the narrator pays particular attention, is recognized initially as Lady Jones, then twice as Mrs. Server, and, finally, again as Lady Jones.

The text abounds in theatrical references, makes extensive use of dialogue, and, like a play, reduces to a minimum the number of characters and maintains an extraordinary unity of time, place, and action. The narrative begins at Paddington Station, where the narrator is about to take the train to Newmarch, an estate to which he has been invited to spend the week in the company of a group of London high-society socialites. Here he meets Gilbert Long and Mrs. Brissenden, the objects of the metamorphosis, elaborates his theory, and, once in Newmarch, begins the search for the person whom, he believes, must
be responsible for Long’s remarkable change. In the process, he shares his theory with others, among them the painter Obert and, ironically, Mrs. Brissenden herself, who enthusiastically helps the narrator in the search without becoming aware that it alludes to her own case. Mrs. Brissenden first suggests that Long’s lover might be the plain and boring Lady John, but then turns her attention to Mrs. Server, a beautiful widow who seems unexpectedly agitated. The narrator, who feels a deep sympathy for Mrs. Server, is alarmed by Mrs. Brissenden’s enthusiasm and realizes that his theory could possibly cause harm and discomfort, but is encouraged by the other characters to believe that Mrs. Server has remarkably changed for the worse and, in order to hide her relationship to Long, is flirting with all the men. Finally, the narrator finds himself alone with Mrs. Server and dares to ask what has happened to her. He interprets her resulting confusion as a sign of degeneration, perceives that she is aware of how she has changed, and concludes that the victims, unlike the beneficiaries, are fully conscious of the miracle.

At the end of the second day, both Obert and Mrs. Brissenden suddenly repudiate the narrator’s theory. Obert claims that Mrs. Server has “changed back” and is “all right.” For her part, Mrs. Brissenden declares that she has radically altered her opinion: Mrs. Server is not the woman they are looking for, nothing has happened to Long, whose lover, as she suggested at the beginning, is the plain Lady John. The narrator, who has recently seen her consulting with Long, wonders if he has inadvertently communicated a conscience to the beneficiaries of the sacrifice and whether Mrs. Brissenden is lying to defend her position. He is unable to argue with her, and he leaves the house the subsequent morning.

The work is constructed as a detective story, and scholars have had years to try out all possible combinations to solve the mystery: Blackwell suggests that the man Mrs. Server is in love with is the narrator himself (62); Tintner argues that the mystery lies in the fact that the couples searched for are not heterosexual (224); Folsom asserts that the narrator is himself “the vampire whom he so carefully pursues,” and Furbank claims the narrator’s interpretations are false, and the reader will discover that Mrs. Brissenden and Long are having a relationship (374). The paradox is that while these readings are contradictory,
they are equally plausible. Perhaps the mystery offers no single solution but many, depending on which clues the reader chooses to emphasize and which to reject. Rimmon has demonstrated that the narrator encounters as many confirmations of his theory as repudiations, thus creating an atmosphere of ambiguity that makes it impossible to solve the mystery (*passim*, especially 117). The ambiguity is exemplified by the painting which stands as a central image; through the structure of chiasmus, this portrait of a man with a mask illustrates how the novel’s structure is based on crisscross opposites that, upon examination, are unmasked as analogies.

At the beginning of Chapter Four, the narrator has just learned that a change has occurred in Mrs. Server and has considered the possibility that she could be Long’s lover. He has already observed the precocious aging of Guy Brissenden, who, throughout the story, is mostly referred to as “poor Briss” and who, not yet thirty, looks at least sixty. Wishing to verify the inanity of Long’s alleged partner, he invites her to walk with him to the house’s gallery. “Poor Briss” and Mrs. Server are thus considered in analogous positions as “victims,” while Mrs. Brissenden and Long are “beneficiaries.” The respective couples, placed next to one another, form in the narrator’s mind the structure of a chiasmus based on sexual difference and on the attributed roles as victim or beneficiary.

In the gallery, the narrator and Mrs. Server meet a small group of people intent on listening to Gilbert Long who, with his newly acquired wit, is improvising a lecture about a painting. The painter Obert, who is among the listeners, comments that Long is “perfectly amazing,” and Mrs. Server and the narrator, who are too far away to hear the explanation, hurry to join the group. To the narrator’s surprise, Mrs. Server immediately recognizes the painting that Long is discussing and calls it “The man with the mask in his hand” (49). The action of naming, of giving a title to the painting, is the first step in the building of an ekphrasis, a verbal description of a visual content that soon develops into a second chiasmus. This process continues as the narrator adds a second definition: “the picture, of all pictures, that most needs an interpreter” (50). The painting recalls the pallid
clowns of Watteau and baroque allegories such as Lorenzo Lippis’s “Allegory of Pretending.”

The figure represented is a young man in black—a quaint, tight black dress, fashioned in years long past; with a pale, lean, livid face and a stare, from eyes without eyebrows, like that of some whitened old-world clown. In his hand he holds an object that strikes the spectator at first simply as some obscure, some ambiguous work of art, but on a second view becomes a representation of a human face, modeled and colored, in wax, in enameled metal, in some substance not human. The object thus appears a complete mask, such as might have been fantastically fitted and worn. (51)

Mrs. Server recognizes the dark meaning of the portrait as she finds a third title, “The Mask of Death” (51). The narrator immediately contradicts her with a title which offers an opposite interpretation. “Why so?” he asks. “Isn’t it rather the Mask of life? It’s the Man’s own face that’s Death” (51). The narrator, who is a connoisseur of art appreciates the artificial, finds the mask “blooming and beautiful,” while Mrs. Server sees an awful grimace. He begins to construct a narrative explaining that the character is in the process of putting the mask on, or that he has just put it off, thus establishing a close relationship between the character and the mask. “The artificial face,” he continues, “is extremely studied and, when you carefully look at it, charmingly pretty. I don’t see the grimace” (51). Mrs. Server asks Long for his opinion, but the latter, who until a moment earlier has been giving a lecture on the picture, remains strangely silent.

Just as in the larger narrative of the book, in which the narrator and Mrs. Brissenden offer alternatively two different explanations of the mystery, the reader is presented with dichotomous interpretations — yet neither, upon a closer look, is completely consistent. The narrator refers to the mask as the “artificial face,” thus implying that the face of the character in the portrait is the natural one, even though it is “without eyebrows” and “like that of whitened old world clown.” Mrs. Server identifies the mask as a mask of death —

268 See Lippi, Lorenzo, Allegory of Simulation: Woman holding a mask and a pomegranate. (1606-1665, Musee des Beaux-Arts, Angers). In this painting, a woman is holding a mask and a pomegranate, a symbol of death but also of falsity and deception (Leuscher 344).
she initially sees an awful grimace – yet her later exclamation “he’s dreadful, he’s awful,” as Blackall points out (130) must refer to the man in the painting, as is clarified when, looking at the face, she says, “This face is so bad.” (52). She therefore identifies in both the face and the mask a dreadful representation.

The contrast between the clown face and the mask is merely superficial: the narrator tries to read the image according to the opposing categories of the natural and the artificial, but does not realize that in the picture, these classifications blend together. Mrs. Server identifies in both the clown face and the mask a “dreadful and awful” vision, conflating them into a single object. The painter Obert proffers another opposition, noting that the mask looks like “a lovely lady,” thereby suggesting a contrast with the manly face. The narrator leaps at Obert’s suggestion and completes it: “It does” he argues, “look remarkably like Mrs. Server.” Mrs. Server laughs and teasingly extends the metaphor stating that “the gentleman’s own face is the image of a certain other gentleman’s” (51). Her comment is taken very seriously by Obert and the narrator, who linger in front of the portrait trying to identify the resemblance until Long, who has walked on, comments without turning: “The resemblance, which I shouldn’t think would puzzle anyone, is simply to ‘poor Briss’” (52). While Obert enthusiastically agrees, Mrs Server comments, “Ah – I do see it” but is “speaking rather for harmony” (53). The narrator doesn’t believe she has seen the resemblance and hesitates before claiming to have seen it himself.

If we accept Long’s suggestion that the face in the painting constitutes a resemblance of “poor Briss,” the alleged victims become elements of a new chiasmus, whereby the four elements repeated in reverse are the mask and Mrs. Server and the clown face and “poor Briss.” This creates an ABBA structure based on a pattern of painting (mask) /person; person/painting (clown’s face). In fact, while the narrator first observes the mask in the painting and then identifies a resemblance with Mr. Server, poor Briss is selected for his similarity to Mr. Server and forced into a comparison with the painting. This way, the

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Rimmon, in her essay on ambiguity in James, identifies chiasmus as an essential element of The Secret Fount’s style, pointing out that the narrator and the other characters often use it as a stylistic device in their speech. “When used in an unnatural grammatical construction,” writes Rimmon, “chiasmus can intimate the fallacy of taking symmetry for granted” (216). The same, we can add, happens when chiasmus becomes, as we argue, a thematic category.
apparent opposites can be read as similar; the mask and the face are united as an image of death, as are the victims Mrs. Server and poor Briss, who in the eyes of the narrator are undergoing a process of degeneration.

Yet if the mask is an “indeterminate object” that only upon a second glance reveals a human face, how can the narrator and Obert so clearly distinguish the features of Mrs. Server? Ironically in this narrative, the unreadable becomes not only intelligible but extraordinary clear when the characters, led by a suggestion, decide what they want to see. If one reads carefully the description of the mask and the character’s interpretations, the mask and the clown face in the painting become flexible signifiers that could stand for any of the characters, and Mrs. Server and poor Briss become victims of an identification created by their companion’s imagination. The image is as deceiving as the story’s mystery; the narrator, who likes to describe himself as “awfully clever” and who often talks of his “supernatural acuteness,” does not pause to wonder at Long’s behavior, nor does he consider that if, as he himself suggests, the man and the mask represent opposites implicated in a reciprocal relationship, Mr. Long, and not poor Briss, should be the one to appear in the painting. Although the narrator filters the facts through his perspective and has the power to control, omit and twist the information reported, he misses clues, is subject to the influence of the other characters, and bases his interpretations on their theories and suggestions.

Considering the narrator’s desire for a beautiful and symmetric structure, Blackall identifies in him a representation of the writer (90), and Ranald, more specifically, sees in him the artiste manqué (241). The only real evidence of the narrator’s artistry is found in the narrative he presents to the reader, but we know he is obsessed by the art of rhetoric and the use of figures. “The interpretation of my tropes and figures isn’t ‘ever’ perfectly simple,” he brags to Mrs. Brissenden (118). He takes prides in his gift of speech, often stops to contemplate the metaphors he has created, and loves to observe how other people are astonished “in the presence of the rising magnificence” of his metaphors (215). Yet in the course of the book, his eloquence becomes disturbing. “It strikes me,” Mrs. Briss
points out in Chapter Five, “that the way you get hold of things is positively uncanny” (60).

Carrying on the identification of the narrator with the failed artist, Ranald suggests that the narrator wishes to direct and control the lives of his friends and hopes they will fit in the pattern that he creates (246). In a series of repeated metaphors, the narrator refers to Newmarch as “an ample stage,” to his friends as “actors” (121), and to their situation as an “irreducible drama” (80); other metaphors refer to the estate as a gallery in a museum and to his friends as “pieces of a collection” (18). These present important evidence of the narrator’s preference of an artificial order over a disorderly and asymmetrical reality. We know that he is, to a certain extent, aware of this habit, since he comments that “things in the real had a way of not balancing” and that “it was all an affair, this fine symmetry, of artificial proportion” (130). Yet he is not the only one to order things around – he is highly influenced by the views of his friends; they, too, continually attempt to force reality into an artificial system. All the inhabitants of Newmarch share a love for the arts, prefer intellectual occupations to sport and exercise, and take extraordinary care of their appearance. As the narrator notes, they take much more enjoyment in their costumes than in the beauty of nature, and they prefer their crystal lamps to the light of the stars: “We were all so fine and formal,” writes the narrator, “and the ladies in particular at once so little and so much clothed, so beflounced and yet so denuded, that the summer stars called to us in vain. We had ignored them in our crystal cage, among our tinkling lamps; no more free really to alight than if we had been dashing in a locked railway-train across a lovely land” (114).

This quotation leads us back to the portrait of the man with the mask. The obsession with the artificial, just like the mask in the painting (and as in “The Roi au masque d’or”) can be read as an attempt to hide something shameful (the ugly face of the clown) by covering it over with glittering beauty. The metaphor of the passing train suggests that the characters’ preoccupation with their own world has a dark aspect; their time is limited and so much has been missed. Moreover, since the clown face is itself a mask that the man is about to cover with another mask, the painting represents the impossibility of
knowing reality as such, before the act of masking. So too, the reality of the relationships between Newmarch’s guests, under their glittering masks, remains unknown to the reader.

It is important to note that when the narrator meets the characters to whom he attributes a metamorphosis, he fails to recognize them. Although this can be attributed to the extent of their change, we should remember that he has not seen them for years, and his failure might be the simple consequence of never having known them very well. Significantly, some characters never recognize any change: Gilbert Long never notices the sudden aging of poor Briss, nor does he see that something extraordinary has happened to Mrs. Briss except that she looks remarkably well for her age. The narrator does not notice a change in Mrs. Server until Obert points it out. Just as in the portrait of the man with the mask, in the narrator’s version it is impossible to identify the “natural,” to glimpse the characters except through the narrator’s theory. In the course of the book, the characters receive increasing attention, and their descriptions change as the narrator becomes convinced of their metamorphoses. But because we never know their initial condition, we are unable to judge whether there has been a change. This is particularly evident when we look at the characters whom the narrator and his companions recognize in the painting and place in the role of victim.

The narrator notices the metamorphosis of Guy Brissenden as soon as he meets him, yet his impression is influenced by the previous conclusion that “when people were so deeply in love they rubbed off on each other” and by the favorable impression made by his wife, whom he finds “as fine, as swaddled, as royal a mummy” (33). However, as with Mrs. Brissenden, the narrator knows him so little that he fails to recognize him (29), thereby rendering his assessment a little suspect. When he points out to Long that something extraordinary has happened to Briss, Long fails to see it and asserts: “Nothing in him, that I know of, ever struck me in my life” (31).

As for Mrs. Server, the narrator finds her at the beginning “extraordinary pretty, markedly responsive, conspicuously charming” (24). Yet after catching a look from
Obert, who begs him to save him from her company, he begins to find her “a little hapless and vague,” as if she hadn’t “organized her forces” (27). Even so, he is surprised by Obert’s assertion that she has changed for the worse. When Mrs. Brissenden confirms Obert’s opinion stating that Mrs. Server is “all over the place” and “as nervous as a cat” (64), the narrator defends her: “She’s the reverse of inane” he argues with Mrs. Brissenden, “she’s in full possession. [ ... ] She’s perfectly natural” (62). Only much later, when he has had time to reflect on the opinions of his friends, does he begin to talk of “the snapped cord of her faculty to talk,” of “her whole compromised machinery of thought and speech,” and of her “wit half gone” (76). After Guy Brissenden confesses to him that Mrs. Server “does not have any talk,” the narrator must face the fact that three people are aware of her metamorphosis. He becomes convinced of the tragic consequences of her sacrifice: “She was the absolute wreck of her storm” he sadly concludes “but to which the pale ghost of a special sensibility still clung, waving from the mast, with a bravery that went to the heart, the last tatter of its flag” (102).

If we consider that much of the book deals with the transformation that Mrs. Server gradually undergoes in the eyes of the narrator, it appears natural that he should recognize her in the allegory of change represented by the painting of the man about to put on (or cast off?) the mask. Initially an attractive, beautiful, natural person, she changes to such extent that, by the end of the book, she has become an example of “final simplification”(121). It is important to reiterate that the narrator does not know her very well, that he has never been very close to her, knows nothing of her personal history, and has not seen her for years. As in the case of Gilbert Long, the narrator talks at length of her supposed “inanity,” but no proof is offered other than the reactions of Obert and the complaints of Brissenden, who seems to dislike pretty much everybody. What she says in the dialogues reported in the narration is not particularly striking, and when she sounds awkward, it is often in response to the irrational behavior of the narrator. When the narrator runs into her in the woods he begins, with the intention of soothing her, a long speech and interprets her comment, a simple “I think you are very kind,” as a sign of complete idiocy. “What is it that has happened to you?” she asks on this occasion, and he promptly replies “What is it that has happened to you,” a question to which Mrs. Server
does not respond. “It was a supremely unsuccessful attempt to say nothing,” explains the narrator, but as readers, we wonder whether she is not simply surprised by his extravagant behavior or by the exaggerated attention being paid to her. We are never given a chance to see what is going on in Mrs. Server’s mind; she does not speak except through the narrator’s summaries of her speech.

Along with references to theatre, the book abounds in painting metaphors: Newmarch is frequently compared to “a beautiful old picture” with “gilded tree tops and painted skies” (99), and before the narrator becomes convinced of her idiocy, Mrs. Server is described as “all Greuze tints, all pale pinks and blues and pearly whites and candid eyes” or more darkly and revealingly as “an old dead pastel under glass” (48). As we have seen, her change is mentioned by Obert and Mrs. Brissenden, but it is interesting that their impression is based on a comparison between her present self and the portraits that Obert painted of her. Obert claims she is different from when he painted her; Mrs. Briss comments, “She used to be so calm – as if she were always sitting for her portrait” (63).

We have seen that the narrator, in front of Newmarch’s painting, recognizes Mrs. Server’s features in those of the mask, and claims that the object is “blooming and beautiful” and a symbol of life. Mrs. Server, instead, sees in it an “awful grimace” (51). Blackall argues that Mrs. Server recognizes herself in the picture (134), but one can also argue that the narrator, from this moment, is influenced by her interpretation and begins to see her according to the picture, just as Obert and Mrs. Brissenden see her in contrast to her portrait. In fact, before being exposed to the portrait of the man with the mask, the narrator finds Mrs. Server’s smile gentle and beautiful, but after listening to the interpretations, he begins to recognize a terrible grimace. “Her lovely grimace, the light of the previous hours,” he explains, again comparing her to a painting, “was blurred as a bit of brushwork in water-color spoiled by the upsetting of the artist’s glass” (99). As the narrator becomes convinced that Mrs. Server is the agent of the sacrifice, her grimace is becomes a “heartbreaking facial contortion,” a “mere mechanism of expression” (109). She is soon degraded to the status of an object, and her gentle smile becomes “terrible;” it comes back “with an audible click, as a gas-burner makes a pop when you light it” (109).
To summarize, in the eyes of the narrator, through the influence of his companion’s comments and the power of his own suggestion, Mrs. Server is transformed in a few hours from a “graceful, natural, charming woman” (44) to a “wasted and dishonored symbol” (102). “God grant I don’t see you again at all!” he exclaims after their meeting in the woods. “I left her behind me forever, but the prayer has not been answered. I did see her again; I see her now; I shall see her always; I shall continue to feel at moments in my own facial muscles the deadly little ache of her heroic grin” (140).

The last remark hides an important clue; the narrator identifies with Mrs. Server and with the change he has been imposing on her. The constant allusions to painting, as well as her identification with the mask, make Mrs. Server, as Blackall argues, an emblem of death (130). Her metamorphosis, imposed on her by a very impressionable narrator, transforms her into an allegory of the fatal change that awaits all of us – something also symbolized by the mask. Brissenden argues that Mrs. Server’s happiness is only on the surface: “Her circumstances are nothing wonderful” he acknowledges, but neither are the circumstances of the entire group at Newmarch. The narrator declares:

We existed, all of us together, to be handsome and happy, to be really what we looked — since we looked tremendously well; to be that and neither more nor less, so not discrediting by musty secrets and aggressive doubts our high privilege of harmony and taste. We were concerned only with what was bright and open, and the expression that became us all was, at worst, that of the shaded but gratified eye, the air of being forgivingly gratified by so much luster. (114)

Yet this “shaded” vision can also be a masked one, and the “stage,” as Newmarch is often called, is a dark and depressing one. There is only one young person present, and this person, according to the narrator, looks at least three times his age. When the narrator tries to look at the company through the perspective of a person in his/her twenties, he comments: “Lady John was a hag, then; Mrs Server herself was more than on the turn; Gilbert Long was fat and forty; and I cast about for some light in which I could show that I – à plus forte raison – was a pantaloon” (85). The characters are sometimes compared
to children, but none of them, as far as we know, has any, a detail that adds a note of sterility to an already dubiously happy landscape. By the end of the book, Guy Brissenden has emerged as a depressed, prematurely aged and questionably intelligent individual, Long as a fat and stupid bachelor, Mrs. Server as a mere mechanism without a brain, Mrs. Brissenden as a vindictive “mummy” who strives to look young, and the narrator as a “crazy person,” a “lover of horrors,” an old bachelor who, like the protagonist of Schwob’s “Le Roi au masque d’or,” is unable to love.

It is no wonder that most characters follow the narrator in his fantasy and prefer to believe in a magical, incredible change rather than in their own condition. The Sacred Fount is the work of an aging writer, and as Moon points out, it treats degeneration “as an absolute condition, inexorable, beyond the power of human control, arbitrarily affecting representative victims of a privileged class” (12). In this light, like Schwob’s “Le Roi au masque d’or,” The Sacred Fount can be read as the story of the end of a “race,” namely the minor aristocracy represented by the people at Newmarch. And as in Schwob’s story, the chiasmus structure according to which James arranges both the relation among characters and their interpretations in front of the painting emphasizes the analogy of relationships initially perceived as contrasting. By the end of the story, the mask becomes an arbitrary signifier, and any of Newmarch’s aging characters can be identified with it. By naming Mrs. Server and poor Briss as victims, the narrator avoids acknowledging this reality. Mrs. Brissenden is perhaps aware of this as, in the end, she accuses the narrator of being carried away. “Don’t you sometimes see horrors?” she asks him (206).

To avoid acknowledging the horrors, Mrs. Briss decides to repudiate the narrator’s theory that Mrs. Server is Long’s partner, even though she initially suggested it; she reverts to her original idea that Long’s lover is the plain Lady John, thereby bringing the story back to the initial account and completing the ABBA structure. Just as in Schwob’s story, the structure of the narrative is thus a chiasmus in which the elements repeated in reverse begin and end with the same image. Mrs. Brissenden is, however, not a reliable witness.

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270 “What’s the matter with them?” comments at the beginning of the book the narrator observing Mr. Server and Mr. Long. “I don’t know anything but that they are young and handsome and happy-children, as who should, of the world; children of leisure and pleasure and privilege.” (54)
Her new theory (a repetition of the first one) has the advantage of leaving her own position out of the structure. Yet we wonder whether she has realized that her attempt to look young is only a “golden mask,” whether she is more aware than the narrator that looking too deeply into things unveils a disagreeable reality, and that a mask imposed on others can possibly become a mirror.
**Part 2: Oxymoron**

**Huysmans’ “L’Émailleuse”**

**A brief Introduction to Oxymoron**

“L’Émailleuse” (“The Enamel Artist”) is part of the collection *Le drageoir aux épices*, which Huysmans published in 1874. While we are used to think of the mask and the face as antithetical elements, this tale, in which an artist carefully modifies the face of a French girl in order to give her an oriental appearance, merges them as elements of an oxymoron; thus a juxtaposition of opposites becomes, through the work of an artist, a figure "which jokes together two seemingly contradictory elements," and "a form of condensed paradox" (Warnke 873). Moreover, a second antithesis is created and undone as a painter first falls in love with the girl's oriental features and then realizes that his love rested on an illusion. This recognition leads to the acknowledgement that the girl he fell in love with was simply the fruit of his imagination. Thus the oriental mask becomes a mirror for the Self, and Self and Otherness are merged into a second oxymoron. Written much earlier than Mann’s, Hofmannsthal’s and Bely’s works, this tale uses of the mask to express a fascination and diffidence towards Otherness that, as we will see, is still reflected in works written thirty years later.

The story begins with a peculiar dialogue between the poet Amilcar and his friend, the painter José, who after some hesitation, acknowledges he is suffering from an incurable passion. “Je suis amoureux d'une Chinoise” (75), José confesses, and explains to his incredulous friend how, as he followed the girl one evening, he discovered that she lived in the same building as he did, precisely in the room next to his own. “Oh ! si tu savais comme elle est belle,” he cries, “un teint d'orange mûrie, une bouche aussi rose que la chair des pastèques, des yeux noirs comme du jayet !” (75) Overwhelmed by José’s excitement, Amilcar concludes that he has gone mad and hurries away. As soon as he is alone, José makes a little hole in the wall in order to spy into the adjacent room. He is left bewildered by what he sees; his beloved Ophélie appears suddenly different, at once familiar and unfamiliar: “C'était elle et ce n'était pas elle, c'était une Française qui
ressemblait, autant que peut ressembler une Française à une Chinoise, à la fille jaune dont le regard l'avait bouleversé. Et pourtant c'était bien le même œil câlin et profond, mais la peau était terne et pâle, le rouge de la bouche s'était amorti; enfin, c'était une Européenne!” (80)

Deeply upset by the discovery, José hurries downstairs in search of an explanation, but the old receptionist bursts out laughing at the painter’s confusion and, holding up a mirror to her wrinkled face, teases him exclaiming: “Comment, pas Chinoise ! Ah çà ! est-ce que j'ai une figure comme elle, moi qui ne suis pas née en Chine?” (80) At the same moment, José hears a voice asking for Ophélie and finds himself in front of a woman with a bucket of oil paint. Intrigued, he attempts to follow her, but when the woman shuts the door against his face her returns to his own room and begins to spy through the little hole in the wall. In the circle of light that opens in the darkness, he sees Ophélie standing in front of a mirror in the company of the old woman, who has taken out of her suitcase a collection of little boxes, stumps and brushes and who is now ready to begin her work:

Soulevant la tête d'Ophélie comme si elle la voulait raser, elle étendit avec un petit pinceau une pâte d'un jaune rosé sur la figure de la jeune fille, brossa doucement la peau, pétrit un petit morceau de cire devant le feu, rectifia le nez, assortissant la teinte avec celle de la figure, soudant avec un blanc laiteux le morceau artificiel du nez avec la chair du véritable ; enfin elle prit ses estompes, les frotta sur la poudre des boîtes, étendit une légère couche de bleu pâle sous l'œil noir qui se creusa et s'allongea vers les tempes. La toilette terminée, elle se recula à distance pour mieux juger de l'effet, dodelina la tête, revint vers son pastel qu'elle retoucha, resserra ses outils et, après avoir pressé la main d'Ophélie sortit en reniflant. (81)

Upset by the discovery, José understands that he had been in love with a painting, with “a disguise for a masked ball” (81). He hurries down the stairs to meet the old woman and, stamping his feet and screaming, demands an explanation. The latter proudly introduces herself as an enamel painter and explains that an old rich stranger has agreed to leave Ophélie all his fortune on the condition that she let herself be painted every morning and that he should never see her unmasked. This old man, the enamel painter continues, had
once been married to a Chinese woman who abandoned him, and found in Ophélie something that reminded him of his wife. The story closes with a comic encounter between José and Ophélie, in which the girl behaves so vulgarly that the painter is immediately sobered from his passion.

However bizarre, the story is not entirely paradoxical. In France, at the end of the nineteenth century, it was common to mask oneself as Oriental; a photograph taken by Paul Nadar in 1891, in the occasion of the mask ball of the Princesse of Léon, shows four men out of nine disguised in Chinese costumes.\(^{271}\) Louis Gonse, an expert in Japanese art and a collector of Noh masks, loved to disguise himself as a Japanese actor,\(^{272}\) and the sculptor Antoine Bourdelle posed in a photograph dressed as a Chinese man as late as 1925.\(^{273}\) Huysman’s story's characterizes the protagonist as naive and exaggeratedly passionate and maintains a comic tone throughout, but it also introduces several serious issues linked to the topic of masks, some of which were to play an important role a few years later. The first is a concern with art and aestheticism; just as the texts analyzed in chapter one, this story addresses the primacy of the artificial over the natural and the position of the individual who, used to the world of artifacts, is incapable of returning to a more natural perception. José is first of all an artist, and in this light it appears quite natural that he should fall in love with a painting, while the real Ophélie cannot compare to the work of art that had been the cause of his obsession. The mask itself consists of oil paint, wax\(^ {274}\) and other artistic media that the enamel painter is careful to merge with the skin; it is thus a mask of artifice that becomes one with the face upon which it rests.

Through this process, the natural and artificial are merged into one and create a first oxymoron. Ophélie is treated like a canvas, turned into an object, and, most importantly, into an image of alterity. Moreover, a second oxymoron takes shape as José realizes that Ophélie's oriental appearance was only a mask. In fact, two apparently antithetical

\(^{271}\) Adams, 82-83.
\(^{272}\) Shimizu, 2008, 80.
\(^{273}\) Lemoine, 2008, 124.
\(^{274}\) Among these means wax, as we will see in chapter four, deserves a particular attention as a material of organic origin that, being particularly useful for representing human texture, creates an ambiguity between a living-not living figure.
characters (the European José and Ophélie as an oriental) are merged into one image as the oriental mask is recognized as an illusion, as the creation of José's imagination.

Finally, “L’Émailléuse” addresses the theme of mirrors and portraits. These objects are related to the mask as they provide a double of the self and introduce the question of similarity and contrasts. Ophélie's transformation into an oriental takes place in front of a mirror, the receptionist holds the mirror high to compare her wrinkly face with the girl's delicate features, and Ophélie and her Chinese disguise can be seen as distorted mirror images of one another. Finally, as an oriental, Ophélie is an unknown, blank surface that, like a mirror, reflects José's and the rich man's desires.

When Ophélie washes off her mask, José must face the fact that his expectations were based on a common French girl and that they derived from his imagination, and the desired, idealized Other is thus unmasked as a simple reflection of the self. In the text of Mann, Huysmans and Bely, mirror and masks continue to play an important role, as the protagonists watch their self transformed into a double that is at times attractive and charming in its difference, but that becomes threatening when it menaces to replace the self. The protagonist of Death in Venice observes through the mirror how his face is turned into a cosmetic mask; in Andreas, Maria watches herself transformed into the masked character of Mariquita and in Petersburg, Nikolai sees himself transformed first into a demon and then, through the mirror-figure of his father, into an Oriental.

Huysman’s very short story provides an introduction to the use of masks as a token that stands for fear and fascination with Otherness. Its basic structure, as we will see, is repeated in Mann’s novella and in Hofmannsthals and Bely’s novels as late as thirty years later. A comparison among these texts shows that the preoccupation with Otherness, which in the nineteenth century remains bound to an exotic, oriental imagery, emerges at the beginning of the twentieth century within a European dimension in which the Other becomes a projection for any dark, unknown aspect of the self, as well as a prophesy of an approaching historical change.
Masks in Venice: Mann’s Der Tod in Venedig

There is no literal mask in Thomas Mann’s *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912), but we find two cosmetic camouflages and a series of faces bearing the same imprint. The protagonist’s encounter with these masks and his own masking at the end of the story mirror the structure of the narrative, which is built on antithetical elements gradually brought into relation and eventually yoked in an oxymoron. Like James’ *The Sacred Fount*, Mann’s novella plays with the reader’s hesitation between a natural and a supernatural/mythical explanation. The narrator never betrays himself nor incorporates in the narration details that explicitly refer to the otherworldly, yet, as Reed argues, “any pattern of repetition begins to create meaning” (1994, 44), and the facial deformities and recurrent “ill matched” features of the strangers who appear throughout the novella build up a “cumulative effect” (Reed 33) which encourage us to visualize them as a series of masks. The references to exoticism and the mythical subtext of the story turn these masks into doubles of the protagonist and messengers of death; thus, the discourses of death and exoticism are brought into relation and become one through the state of alterity represented by the mask. Moreover, the masked characters and the protagonist, initially perceived as opposites, are gradually connected and finally merged into one. By the end of the novella, death and exoticism, Self and Otherness are united in one figure that we can conceptualize as an oxymoron. In addition, the undoing of the antithesis and the merging of contraries into the oxymoron are reflected in the use of space in the novella. On the one hand, the masked characters gradually break the distance that separates them from the protagonist. On the other, distant, “exotic” locations are initially juxtaposed to familiar places, but gradually brought into relation as the boundaries become blurred, and the familiar merges with the unfamiliar.

275 For oxymoron, as stated above, we intend a figure which “yokes together two seemingly contradictory elements, […] a form of condensed paradox” (Warnke 873).
Why go all the way to the tigers,\footnote{\textit{Gerade bis zu den Tigern} (67). All the parenthetical references to Mann’s original text refer to the following edition: Thomas Mann, \textit{Der Tod in Venedig}. (ed. T.J. Reed. Bristol: Bristol Classical press, 1996). I am using the translation into English by David Luke, but I occasionally modify it to bring attention to the literal meaning of the German (\textit{Death in Venice}, ed. Naomi Ritter. Boston: Bedford Books, 1998).} wonders Gustav von Aschenbach, and embark on an expedition to India when a “moderate” version of exoticism can be found within Europe? In the beginning of the 20th century, the city of Venice, literary setting \textit{par excellence}, seems the perfect destination for the German traveller desiring a mild, “southern” diversion that will exclude unpleasant surprises. Close and easily reachable, Venice is, however, the city of water, reflected images, illusions, and, most importantly, of masks. Pfister argues that in this period, Italy loses any connotation of Otherness for European travellers, yet in Mann’s story, we find traces of what he calls “European Meridionalism” as the country is seen both as “the origin of culture” and a kind of “European third world” (6).\footnote{For other examples in which Italian culture maintains a connotation of unexpected “meridionalism” see Mann’s short story \textit{Mario und der Zauberer, ein tragisches Reiseerlebnis}. The short story, like \textit{Der Tod in Venedig}, has an allegorical dimension and can be interpreted as an analysis of the causes of Italian fascism.} Aschenbach discovers that there is no moderate exotic: in fact, Venice is the gate to the Orient and hides the dangers he has imagined in the Indian jungle.

Masks are an ambiguous yet essential presence in the narrative. Their importance is emphasized by the frequent use of the word “Maske,” by the references to Greek tragedy\footnote{According to Dierks, the narrative structure and the plot of the novella are built on Euripide’s \textit{Bacchae} (130-49 \textit{passim}).} and to Dionysus, god of masks, by the Venetian setting, and by the attention given to the mirror — an object that, as we have seen, is strictly related to the mask. Moreover, Aschenbach’s intellectual role is unveiled from the second chapter as a form of masquerade, and prefigures a second masquerade that assumes an allegorical connotation.

It is important to remember that masks are also, in this period, the form in which African and Asian art are discovered and acknowledged by Europeans. In the paintings of French and German Expressionists, mask-like figures are equally reminiscent of exotic objects and a divided, alien self.\footnote{The most famous example is the mask-like face in \textit{Picasso’s Les Demoiselles d’Avignon} (1907), but we can also mention numerous works by German Expressionists, such as Erich Heckel’s painting “Hude” (1910), Max Pechstein’s sculpture “Head” (1913), Karl Schmidt-Rottluff’s brass relief “Four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John” (1912), Nolde’s Mask of Energy (1896) and “Mask Still Life” series. On the influence of African masks on European art see, among numerous studies, Goldwater and Foster (45-70 \textit{passim}). On the influence of “primitive art” on German Expressionism, see Ettlinger and Lloyed (\textit{passim}).} Mann’s story hints only briefly at a dimension of global
orientalism, but incorporates several references to Greek myth and the Orient and reflects on how Otherness, as exemplified by the masks, becomes a screen for the Self’s impulses and desires.

As Symington points out, hints of Venice are already present in Munich (133). Here, Aschenbach, a renowned German writer, meets the first in a series of “not quite ordinary” (24) strangers, close to a mortuary chapel built in a Byzantine style that is out of place in Bavarian architecture. The first thing he notices about the stranger, who seems to have appeared from nowhere, is that he is obviously not from Bavaria and has the exotic look of somebody from far away. The description, filtered through Aschenbach’s perspective, emphasizes his “ill matched” features and “permanent facial deformity,” leading us to interpret the face as a mask. Moreover, the stranger’s defiant and ferocious expression, as well as his sharp bone structure, turned-up nose, retracted lips, and prominent, long teeth — reminiscent of a skeleton’s grimace — have the threatening connotation of a harbinger of death.

Through the mythical subtext, the foreigner, who is wearing a rucksack and using a caduceus, can be identified with Hermes, psychopomp and protector of travellers. He thus anticipates Aschenbach’s own journey in a landscape characterized by allusions to Greek mythology and the Orient, which is also a descent to the realm of Death. Aschenbach never overtly makes the connection, but the same facial deformity is described on a series of striking figures that he meets in the story. Since they are in no way shown to be the same person, we can consider them masked embodiments of alterity as well as masks of death.

The stranger, we are told, is placed in contraposition to Aschenbach in an “elevated and elevating” location (“erhöhter and erhöhender Standort,” 63) which, symbolically, positions him in a liminal territory between the human and the otherworldly. Besides being juxtaposed to Aschenbach, the figure represents all that the writer is not: a traveller,

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280 For references on the mythological subtext, see Von Gronicka (115-129) and Brunel (69-109). Brunel’s study identifies in the strangers representations of Aschenbach’s double, and aims to demonstrate that Tadzio, like these figures, is a personification of Hermes, the writer’s double and the child he once was.
a foreigner, someone who bases his experiences on the impressions of the senses rather than on conceptual reflection. Aschenbach and the “masked” character are thus initially presented as antithetical. And yet the possibility of an opposite way of life, which comes in a moment of intellectual exhaustion, is appealing to the writer, who is suddenly taken by a longing to travel. He begins to dream of a luxurious, dangerous, and exciting tropical landscape, a sort of Indian jungle complete with a crouching tiger (65).

As readers, we wonder how a pale, fair man wearing Bavarian clothes can trigger this exotic dream in the writer. Perhaps, perceiving the traveller as his opposite, Aschenbach, who in the second chapter has been characterized as Germany’s national writer, also assumes that he must be “not German” and comes from far away. The fascination with difference is powerful but lasts only a moment; Aschenbach’s imagination is immediately cured of this contagion and directed to a safer, more familiar destination. He decides to spend a couple of weeks on an island on the Istrian coast, not far from Pola. “Was er suchte,” comments the narrator, “war das Fremdartige und Bezuglose, welches jedoch rasch zu erreichen wäre” (77). This stern and strict intellectual is looking for a change in his routine, yet he merely reinforces it. Just as he takes a daily walk in order to be able to sit and write for the rest of the day, so too he is planning a holiday of three or four weeks in a southern location (“an irgendeinem Allerweltsferienplatze im liebenswürdigen Süden”); his longing to travel is thus unmasked as vaccination against the disease of Wanderlust; it is a trip that will allow him to go back to his work with reinforced work ethic and stronger tenacity.

Aschenbach is soon disappointed by the Istrian island; the weather is not the best, and he is irritated by the numerous Austrian tourists. He desires a foreign and unfamiliar place, and is therefore upset by the island’s monotony and predictability. His decision is, however, surprising. Instead of leaving for a location further south, in search of landscapes not yet captured by the tourism industry, he takes a ferry to Venice, the oldest and more banal of the tourist traps. Moreover, he settles down in Lido, an island

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281 Mann uses the word “Anfechtung” (literally, contagion) (66).
282 “What he sought was something strange and random but in a place easily reached” (34).
283 “… at some popular holiday resort in the charming south” (27).
separated from Venice that since the 18th century has been a renowned sea resort. In this tourist location, he can relax and enjoy the company of an international upper class in which the only Italians are hotel staff who speak French and are trained to deal with foreigners. In what way do Aschenbach’s exotic fantasies and his longing to travel match such a destination?

The answer is simply that they do not match at all. Aschenbach’s longing for exoticism, just like the idea that he will happy when he can completely dedicate himself to his work, is one of the components of self-delusion that the story unmasks as a construction. The digression of the second chapter, in which the narrator steps back to report Aschenbach’s endurance, and the intellectual success which turns him into a national figure, can be read in its obvious pomposity as an ironic comment on how his dedication is nothing but a mask. So too, Aschenbach’s wanderlust can be downgraded to a search for what we can define as the “moderate exotic”; he is fascinated by anything that looks different but is obviously scared of anything that might really be different. And yet the vision conjured by the stranger is both prescient and accurate; from the beginning, the jungle and Venice have a number of similarities. Like the imaginary tropical landscape, Venice is built on a series of islands; moreover, it is part of lagoon that can be associated with a swamp (“ein Sumpftgebiet”) and consists of water channels (“Schlamm führenden Wasserarmen”). Lastly, during the cholera epidemic, Venice becomes a savage, uncivilized place; like the tropical landscape; it turns into a sort of “primeval wilderness” (“eine Art Urweltwildnis”). These two locations, initially presented as antithetical, are gradually merged into an oxymoron, as the exotic landscape is recognized in Venice and as Venice eventually becomes this imaginary landscape.

Aschenbach’s uneasiness in a new environment emerges when, on the ferry from Pola to Venice, he is forced to deal with the Italian crew. As he embarks, he is approached by a hunchbacked sailor who pushes him into a dark cabin where a shady bearded man, in which we recognize a version of Charon, avidly collects the money for the trip or, as the

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284 For a reflection on the ironic comments of the narrator and his distance from the character, see O’ Neill (13-48) and Eichner (30-48).
reader recognizes through the subtext, his fare to arrive to at land of death. Aschenbach’s fellow travellers are mostly ethnic Italians from Pola who have gathered loudly and excitedly for a trip to Venice. One boisterous youth in particular, dressed in a colourful and extravagant outfit, attracts his attention. When he takes a closer look, however, he realizes with horror that this youthful behaviour is illusory, and that his features have been transformed by a grotesque cosmetic mask:

Das matte Karmesin der Wangen was Schminke, das braune Haar unter der farbig umwundenen Strohhut Perücke, sein Hals verfallen und sehnig, sein aufgesetztes Schnurrbärtchen und die Fliege am Kinn gefärbt, sein gelbes und vollzähliges Gebiß, das er lachend zeigte, ein billiger Ersetzt. (80)

Aschenbach is not only displeased and surprised, but truly appalled at the disguise of the old man and his behaviour. The fact that he is mixing with the other youths as if he were one of them and that none seems aware of the masquerade leaves him disgusted.

This fake youth is at once different from and similar to the stranger encountered in Munich; his features are not reminiscent of a skull, but his masquerade is an attempt to hide aging and degeneration and makes of him another image of death. Moreover, like the stranger in Munich, the old man from Pola represents indulgence, lack of dignity, and disorderly excitement, characteristics that are the antithesis to Aschenbach’s stern and controlled conduct. 

Ironically, this antithetical image merges into an oxymoron with Aschenbach’s stern figure when the writer, under the hands of the Italian barber, wears same colourful outfit and cosmetic mask at the end of the story.

285 “His cheek’s faint carmine was rouge, the brown hair under his straw hat with its coloured ribbon was a wig, his neck was flaccid and scrawny, his small stuck on moustache and the little imperial on his chin were dyed; his yellowish full complement of teeth, displayed when he laughed, were a cheap artificial set” (36).

286 We can also identify this man as a representative of the Dionysian principle as illustrated by Nietzsche in Die Geburt der Tragödie. Nietzsche’s influence was acknowledged by Mann and has been widely explored by critics. The first to clarify the parallels between Der Tod in Venedig and Die Geburt der Tragödie was Manfred Dierks, who also recognized the role of Euripides’ Bacchae as a subtext in the novella and explained the role of the Aschenbach’s Dionysian dream as a prophesy of the imminent collapse of the Bismarck regime. On the importance of the Dionysian and the way in which images of classic mythology are incorporated and transfigured in Mann’s novella, see also Astrachan (35-78 passim, especially 37). According to Astrachan, the Novella portrays “the nature of the Dionysian experience as it has degenerated and became corrupted, sickened and diseased for and by the twentieth century man” (37).
While in the previous chapter, the narrator maintained an ironic distance from the protagonist, the two voices now get closer through an indirect speech that occasionally slips into free indirect speech. The narrator’s presence, however, can occasionally be detected in the slightly ironic tone of the text and in the use of adjectives and comments which could not belong to the protagonist.\textsuperscript{287} An example of this tendency can be seen in the way in which the narrator informs us how, on the ferry to Venice, Aschenbach begins to be afflicted by a form of sickness and by hallucination. We are told that he is suffering from lack of sleep and has the feeling that the world is undergoing a strange metamorphosis: “Ihm war, als lasse nicht alles ganz gewöhnlich an, als beginne eine träumerische Entfremdung, eine Entstellung der Welt ins Sonderbare um sich zu greifen, der vielleicht Einhalt zu tun wäre, wenn er sein Gesicht ein wenig verdunkelte und aufs neue um sich schaute” (80).\textsuperscript{288}

On the one hand, the “dreamlike alienation” refers to Aschenbach’s malaise on the boat, but on the other hand, it can be read as alluding to the transfiguration of reality that takes place in Aschenbach’s mind and turns his travel destination into a projection of his fear and anxieties. Scholars usually identify the meeting with Tadziu as the trigger for a subjective and delusional interpretation of the circumstances,\textsuperscript{289} yet Aschenbach is already suffering from hallucinations in Munich, where he sees the first stranger (or death mask) mysteriously appearing and disappearing, is already feverish on the boat, and, although the cholera contagion is mostly recognized in the over-ripe strawberries that he eats at the end of the novella, he feels sick during his whole stay in Venice. But there is reason to suspect that his intoxication begins much earlier. While Aschenbach is trying to avoid a contagion with Otherness and take refuge in the “moderate exotic,” he already carries alterity within himself both in the form of repressed desires and a sickness that leads him to his death. The encounter with Otherness is introduced in the title, which

\textsuperscript{287} For an analysis of the use of free indirect speech in the novella and of the separation between the voice of the protagonist and the narrator, see Cohn (223-45 \textit{passim}).
\textsuperscript{288} “He had the feeling that something not quite usual was beginning to happen, that the world was undergoing a dreamlike alienation, becoming increasingly deranged and bizarre, and that perhaps this process might be arrested if he were to cover his face for a little and then take a fresh look at things” (36).
\textsuperscript{289} See Reed (1994: 150-177) and Symington (127-151 \textit{passim}).
refers to death, the utmost state of the different and the unknown, and to Venice, which in
the protagonist’s view is both a “dead” and a “foreign” city. In addition, the exotic
masks that he repeatedly encounters introduce him to cultural Otherness, to the
“southern” spirit onto which Aschenbach projects a passionate, uncontrolled enjoyment
of life that opens up numerous possibilities – a dimension that is closer to the chaotic flux
of life but also, as the end of the novella illustrates, to the reality of death.

While the stranger in Munich remains confined to his elevated location, the fake youth,
when the writer descends from the boat, makes a move towards him and, terribly drunk,
gives him the honour of helping him. His position, the way he lowers his head, and his
incoherent song can all be read as a proleptic mirror image of how Aschenbach is
described by the narrator at the moment of his death; the last image, in which the narrator
describes the false teeth falling out of the false youth’s mouth, is one of the most
grotesque descriptions of the text and parallels Aschenbach’s final transformation at the
hands of the barber. The novella’s themes of fraud and falsehood are close to the mask
and are as distanced as possible from Bakhtin’s theory of carnival, according to which the
mask provides protection and authorizes the freedom to upset social hierarchies. The
masks of this novella do not protect the self; on the contrary, they efface it. Masks of
artifice, they are not simple additions to a natural precondition; rather, they become one
with the face, depleting it of its original surface. The reader is, therefore, never allowed
the sense of relief that comes from the lowering of the mask, a satisfaction that Tonkin
(242) relates to the game of covering and uncovering, to the children’s game Fort!Da!
described by Freud in Jenseits des Lustprinzips. If the mask cannot be taken off, this
creates a hybrid figure that incorporates in the self a component of alterity. Aschenbach
feels uncomfortable in the presence of the masked characters because, although he
perceives them as his opposites, they reflect elements that are already present within him,
and, like an evil double, they threaten to obscure what he believes to be his current and
constant self.

As Reed points out, the original title (“Der Tod in Venedig”) can be read as referring to the cholera
epidemic, to Aschnbach’s individual death, and to a personification of death (1996, 12).
For the notion of carnival, see Bakhtin, Rabelais and his World, passim.
See Freud’s Jenseits des Lustprinzips (1921 passim, especially 14).
On the gondola Aschenbach takes to the Lido, that, for once, he recognizes as a symbol of death, he encounters another strange character who, like the man in Munich, has fair features, curled lips, and prominent, long teeth. The narrator limits himself to suggestions, and does not commit himself to stating the faces’ identity, yet his hints, combined with the character’s wild and malicious expression, are enough to encourage the reader to interpret his features as a death mask. While the stranger in Munich simply looks bold and ferocious, this stranger demonstrates his ill intentions by refusing to take Aschenbach to the steamboat pier. Like the man in Munich, he is identified as a foreigner, someone whose features do not display an Italian origin. Moreover, in relation to Aschenbach, the gondolier is twice a foreigner; first, he is not German, and second, he is foreign to the Italian environment he lives in. He does not belong to the familiar, sheltered environment of Lido but to the city of Venice; this hints at the connection of the city with a deeper, threatening form of exoticism.

Geyer Ryan calls Venice “the archetopos of the uncanny” (157) and underlines its geographical ambiguity, its location as neither Orient nor Occident, and its special status between land and water. What she does not take into consideration is that Lido and Venice are two different places, that Venice, although a tourist attraction, remains (or at least remained in the last century) a local city, while Lido is one of the oldest tourist retreats. From the beginning, Aschenbach makes a clear distinction between the beach resort and the urban space; in fact, he comments on the marvellous combination: “Welch ein Aufenthalt in der Tat, der die Reize eines gepflegten Badelebens am südlichen Strände mit der traulich bereiten Nähe der wunderlich-wundersamen Stadt verbindet!” (112).293

The contraposition of Venice/Lido parallels the distinction that Aschenbach has already made between global travel/ southern Europe. Lido is a reasonable and safe option for someone who is looking for the moderate exotic; its beaches recreate an artificial

293 “What a place was this indeed, combining the charms of the cultivated seaside resort in the south with the familiar ever ready proximity of the strange and wonderful city!” (58).
environment populated exclusively by tourists, and a strict daily plan is programmed for the visitor’s wellness. The repetition of the holiday routine becomes precious to Aschenbach, especially since it enables him to follow the movements of the young boy who catches his attention. As long as the writer is confined to this environment and follows the resort’s monotonous routine, he is able to convince himself that his attraction to Tadzio is only a consequence of his admiration for beauty. Yet his holiday plan includes taking the ferry and going for a daily walk in the city. While the sheltered and controlled environment of Lido allows him to retain the mask of dignity and endurance, the city works against it.

We have already seen that, for Aschenbach, the “wunderlich-wundersamen”\(^\text{294}\) is charming and fascinating as long as it is kept at a familiar distance. What happens when the distance is effaced and the “wunderlich” begins to invade the controlled, enclosed space of the tourist resort? Geography becomes, in the novella, both a means to express the boundaries of the self and its attempt to differentiate itself from Otherness. We have seen that Aschenbach has his first encounter with alterity in Munich, where the stranger is perceived as the antithesis of the self and where this difference makes Aschenbach curious to travel to far away, exotic lands. As he is planning his trip, however, he becomes more reasonable and chooses a more familiar destination in southern Europe, first an island close to Pola, then Venice, and finally an international hotel in Lido. Yet elements of alterity have been within him since the beginning; they not only follow him and penetrate these sheltered environments but are unmasked as a component of them, just as they are part of Aschenbach himself.

Evidence that alterity is a contagion which occurs on both a geographical and a psychological level corresponds to the rational motivation of the plot, namely, the contagion of cholera. Aschenbach’s ambivalent relation to the city is exemplified by his first walk in its inner streets after drinking tea at San Marco. He has so far only looked at the city from the sea, seeing it as a beautiful work of art; walking through its inner

\(^{294}\) In German, these words, translated by Luke as “strange and wonderful” are both based on the root “wunder” and therefore display a strong emphasis on the familiar becoming unfamiliar and causing “wonder” or, in other words, the familiar becoming Uncanny.
districts, he is bothered by the poverty, the strong and unpleasant odours, and the unruly confusion. Moreover, he is affected by the sirocco, the warm wind blowing from south-east, and begins to sweat and to feel sick.

The contrast between the carefully kept tourist resort and the dirty, disorderly, smelly city could not be greater. This aspect is often associated with the Dionysian, the principle introduced by Nietzsche in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, characterized as “disorder, chaos, sex, and unreason” (Sygmington 127). For our purposes, it is important to consider that Dionysus, who is repeatedly invoked by Aschenbach, is both a foreign god and the god of masks. Aschenbach’s mistrust of the “local” Venice derives from his fear that the “ever ready proximity” that keeps it at a distance could be suddenly cancelled and that Otherness could contaminate the controlled, enclosed space of the resort. Venice had been part of Austro-Hungarian Empire until fewer than 50 years earlier, and through Aschenbach’s thoughts, we know that its citizens are expected to act very differently from the Italians of the south. Aschenbach becomes, however, gradually aware that a “southern” behavior is still very much present, perhaps in an even more dangerous form, since it is less evident and thus more difficult to recognize and avoid.

He soon realizes that his health is endangered by Venice’s climate, but he deceives himself, explaining his resistance to leave with the thought that he will never see Venice again. This lie constitutes an attempt to maintain the mask of dignity that he has constructed during his life and that, as a consequence of contamination with Otherness, is gradually falling to pieces. His self delusion becomes clear when, at the end of the fourth chapter, he finally makes the attempt to address Tadzjui. He is just about to lay a hand on his shoulder when he becomes afraid that the boy may notice him walking too closely behind. The narrator, who has so far followed Aschenbach’s point of view, suddenly allows himself a commentary: “Zu spät! Jedoch war es zu spät? Dieser Schritt, den zu tun er versäumte, er hätte sehr möglicherweise zum Guten, Leichten und Frohen, zu heilsamer Ernüchterung geführt.

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295 The cult, at the time when Mann wrote the novella, was believed to have reached Greece from India.
This reminds us of the narrator’s tone when he comments, while Aschenbach is sitting on the ferry to Venice, that the world is undergoing a transformation and that “perhaps this process might be arrested if he were to cover his face for a little and then take a fresh look at things” (36).

As the narrator makes clear, Aschenbach no longer wishes a sober vision of reality. The intoxication has become too important to him; the boundaries have been crossed, the safe distance broken, and he not only keeps an eye on Tadziu in Lido but follows him through the streets of Venice. At the same time, he develops a lucid, uncanny understanding of what is happening in the resort, as the number of guests diminishes and a strange smell of disinfectant is detected in the air. The odours, the sickness, and the lack of order spreads from the city to the sea resort, and the two places, as the antithesis becomes an oxymoron, cease to be distinct entities, just as the protagonist ceases to struggle with the alterity that is growing within himself.

Aschenbach soon realizes that the Venetian authorities are trying to keep the epidemic a secret in order to protect the tourist trade. He experiences a bizarre sense of satisfaction in asking questions and getting people to lie about the city’s secret, as he himself is lying about his feeling for Tadziu. All the Italians whom he interrogates deny that anything unusual is happening, and the hotel manager, answering Aschenbach’s questions, confirms that the disinfection is a simple precautionary matter. Aschenbach, who knows something about masks and fraud, immediately recognizes him as a hypocrite. On the same day, the lie is restated by a group of street singers who come to give a performance at the hotel. The star of the group is a guitarist, a musician with little voice but with a remarkable comic talent who plays his instrument gesticulating with “südliche Beweglichkeit” (135).

In the description of his features, the reader recognizes the recurrent tight, reddish mask, an interpretation reinforced by the narrator’s definition of his behaviour as a “mask” (141). Just like the stranger in Munich and the gondolier, he is...

296 “Too late! He thought at that moment. Too late! But was it too late? This step he had failed to take would very possibly have been all to the good, it might have had a lightening and gladdening effect, led perhaps to a wholesome disenchantment” (63).
297 The original text talks of “unheimliche Wahrnehmungen” (268).
298 “Southern vivacity” (75).
very thin, has prominent, long teeth, and his facial traits are sharp and aggressive (137). More importantly, he is foreign to his setting (“nicht venetianische Shlages”) and sings in a mysterious, incomprehensible dialect. With this figure, the definition of the exotic becomes more specific; the man in Munich has the look of “somebody from far away” and the gondolier is “not of Italian origin,” but the musician is more precisely “not venetian.” While all these references characterize the strange figures as strangers, the geographic boundaries are gradually narrowed. This structure parallels Aschenbach’s travel plans, his dreams of an oriental landscape, his choice of a “not German” destination, and his arrival in Venice and landing in Lido. The limits of the “unfamiliar” are thus adjusted to more specific settings and progressively narrowed.

The musician erases the distance between Aschenbach and the mysterious strangers by actively mingling with the hotel’s public. His performance can be interpreted as a foreboding of death’s approach, also hinted at by the pomegranate juice that Aschenbach drinks during the show. Aschenbach alone, among the tourists, can in fact smell the stench of disinfectant emanating from the musician’s body. In addition, the figure can be read as a personification of Otherness penetrating and contaminating Lido’s familiar environment. By climbing on the terrace to ask the public for an offering, the comedian breaks the distance between local resident and tourist and is perceived with curiosity, but also with a little disgust; the public is careful not to touch his hat and drops only a few coins (138).

This scene constitutes a *mise en abîme* of the “exotic and different” and its treatment in the novella. Alterity is appreciated as long as it maintains a proper distance, but becomes unpleasant, even menacing, once the boundaries are not observed. Approached by the musician, Aschenbach asks him why Venice is being disinfected and receives the usual answer. The artist goes back to the stage and, with the distance restored, recovers his impudence and begins to laugh at the public. He is clearly laughing at the tourists, not

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299 In Greek mythology, pomegranate is associated with the myth of Persephone, who is punished for eating six pomegranate seeds and detained by Hades in the realm of death. Pomegranates were, moreover, common offerings to the god Dionysus.

300 mit Neugier und einigem Abscheu (138).
with them, but the hysterical laughter soon infects everyone on the terrace. Moreover, it prefigures the Dionysian dream that upsets Aschenbach shortly afterward and the fall of the once dignified writer. It is not surprising that the only honest man whom Aschenbach meets in Venice, the only one who tells him the truth about the epidemic, is an Englishman. In contrast to the Italians he has met, this young man has honest, innocent manners that Aschenbach perceives as strangely out of place in the “southern” environment. Through this man, the protagonist learns how the cholera has arrived—just like Dionysus, the god of masks—from India, from the “Inselwildnis, in deren der Tiger kauert” (142),301 a place similar to the exotic landscape Aschenbach had conjured up in Munich when he was absorbed in travel fantasies. Yet we have seen that this exotic fantasy already contains the description of Venice, which, as Aschenbach discovers through the Englishman, has become a dangerous, wild city. The Englishmen confesses that the sanitary conditions have upset the Venetians, causing an increase in delinquency and extravagant crimes more typical of the south and Oriental countries (144).

Aschenbach is slowly learning that there is no “moderate exotic” and no borders for Otherness, since the latter can be perceived only in contrast to the Self and is, thus, a creation if it. Through the cholera epidemic, “familiar” and “exotic” places are merged into one image, and Venice becomes the perfect setting for Aschenbach’s uncanny transformation. Disgusted by the sight of his gray hair and the signs of age on his face, he visits the hotel barber, who is ready to put his cosmetic art at his service. In front of the mirror, the old writer witnesses a surprising transformation and watches as his face cosmically takes on the features of a young man:

Aschenbach [...] sah im Glase seine Brauen sich entschiedener und ebenmäßiger wölben, den Schnitt seiner Augen sich verlängern, ihren Glanz durch eine leichte Untermalung des Lides sich heben, sah weiter unten, wo die Haut bräunlich-ledern gewesen, weich augetragen, ein zartes Karmin erwachen, seine Lippen, blutarm soeben noch, himbeerfarben schwerben, die Furchten der Wangen, des Mundes, die Runzeln der Augen unter Creme

301 “…that primitive island [ ... ] where tigers crouch” (78).

This scene contains two elements through which one can modify the self: the mask and the mirror. While the mirror doubles the self by reproducing it, the mask creates a variation of the person. As has been noted, the mask cannot be seen as an addition, an object which signifies independently and is then added to the self, but must be considered an element of alterity that is joined to the self and becomes one with it, thereby creating a third entity which is no longer the original self nor the Other but a hybrid of the two. In this case, the mask consists of make-up — thus, the aesthetic transformation is a fusion rather than a simple addition and becomes a form of oxymoron. The reflection in the mirror enables the old self to observe his own transformation but multiplies the reproduction of alterity, recalling the series of strangers with similar features and the cosmetic mask of the old fop. Just like the other masks, this one cannot be lowered: Aschenbach dies with the rouge on his lips, but not before having undergone a form of metaphorical unmasking, through which the steady, serious, and dignified writer is revealed as a “farce and a lie” ("Lüge und Narrentum" 153), and his role as a moral icon is disclosed as the biggest of the frauds.

When Aschenbach returns to Lido, he falls unconscious on the seashore and is carried to his room. The narrator dryly comments on his death: “Noch desselben Tages empfing eine respektvoll erschütterte Welt die Nachricht von seinem Tode”(157). Cohen argues that this last comment, in its concision, marks the distance of the narrator from Aschenbach’s perspective and thus the end of his perception of reality (245); but we can also argue that, from the moment when a mask of make-up applied, the writer is already in the hallucinatory space between life and death, in the intermediary state associated with the mask, and is unable to formulate coherent speech; seen in this light, the

302 “Aschenbach [ ... ] gazed at the glass and saw his eyebrows arched more clearly and evenly, the shape of his eyes lengthened, their brightness enhanced by a slight underlining of the lids; saw below them a delicate carmine come to life as it was softly applied to skin that had been brown and leathery; saw his lips that had just been so pallid now burn burgeoning with cherry-red; saw the furrows on his cheeks, round his mouth, the wrinkles by his eyes, all vanishing under face cream and an aura of youth – with beating heart he saw himself as a young man in his earliest bloom” (83).
303 Like the old fop, Aschenbach is wearing colourful clothes and a large panama hat.
304 “And later in the same day, the world was respectfully shocked to receive the news of his death” (88).
unveiling of Aschenbach’s masquerade and his coherent, long monologue comes to us by way of the narrator.\textsuperscript{305}

Aschenbach’s death puts an end to his journey and his repeated encounters with masks. We have seen that the strangers that he encounters are almost the same, but not quite, and that they prefigured or recalled one-another. The concept of repetition and its connection with masks deserves further consideration. The word “mask” is repeatedly used to refer to metaphorical disguises, the faces bearing the imprint of death masks form a series of repetitions with slight variations, Aschenbach is obsessed by routine and repetition, has the tendency to get lost and find himself in the same place, and the mask of the false youth that so appals him is eventually stamped onto his own features by the craft of the Italian barber. In the essay \textit{Das Unheimliche} (1919), Freud argues that repetition is an essential feature of uncanny phenomena. For example, while getting lost and ending up in a particular place could be a common event, getting lost a second time and finding oneself in same place has an unavoidably disturbing connotation.\textsuperscript{306} In \textit{Jenseits des Lustprinzips}, written in the same year of the essay on the Uncanny, Freud explores further the concept of repetition and connects it to the death instinct. He distinguishes constructive repetitions that, by allowing a person to take an active stand, serve the pleasure principle, and compulsive repetitions that are characteristic of anxious individuals and connected with the desire to return to an inorganic state. The children’s game \textit{Fort! Da!} in which the child throws an object away and pulls it back to enact his mother’s departure and return is constructive because it allows the child to pass from a

\textsuperscript{305} Reed argues that Aschenbach’s final monologue “goes beyond literary realism,” since the writer, who is “at the end of his physical and moral tether” is lucidly drawing a “coherent overview, and exact and bitter recognition” (1994 68).

\textsuperscript{306} Freud gives a general definition of the Uncanny as “jene Art des schreckhaften, welche auf das Altbekannte, längstvertraute zurückgeht” (1919, 231) and argues that uncanny experiences occur in life “wenn verdrängte infantile Komplexe durch einen Eindruck wieder belebt werden, oder wenn überwundene primitive Überzeugungen wieder bestätigt werden” (1919, 263). Cixous has demonstrated that these definitions are constantly challenged by the author’s contradictions and narrative turns, and that the Uncanny cannot be conceptualized as a defined concept (1876, 352-48). Kofman elaborates further on the elusive nature of the Uncanny, and argues that Freud’s reductive definition of the uncanny as the return of the repressed is itself a repression of the death drive. Moreover, she analyses the connection between author, protagonist, and the concept of Doppelgänger, and emphasizes how writing itself has an uncanny effect (1991, 128-132). Cixous’s and Kofman’s analyses both underline how Freud’s search for the “Uncanny” begins from the analysis of Hoffmann’s story and continues to be related to, and depend on, fiction.
state of anxiety to one of satisfaction and to turn a passive role into an active one; meanwhile, compulsive repetitions in which a subject re-enacts a traumatic experience without taking an active stand are a manifestation of the death drive. 307

If we look at Aschenbach’s encounter with the peculiar strangers, we see a repetition with variations; these characters are almost, but not quite, the same; they are both familiar and unfamiliar, a series of figures wearing the same mask. While the stranger in Munich is introduced as an antithesis of the writer, the other masks, as symbolized by their gradual approach, bring self and Other into relation. Like the gondolier, the musician, and the old dandy masked as a youth, Aschenbach is eventually unveiled as a cheater who has based his moral authority on a fraud.

Yet this connection is made by the narrator and by the reader, not by the character himself. Aschenbach continues to perceive the characters as uncanny, but is not able to take an active stand, to recognize in the Other the illicit components of his inner Self, and thus to transform this repetition into a productive experience. On the contrary, he continues to fight Otherness until he is overwhelmed and annihilated by it. His final transformation into a make-up mask, the last in the series of repetitions, merges alterity with the Self, and is a repetition that embodies the victory of death drives over pleasure. In this fashion, the discourses of death and exoticism merge into one another; death is shown as the moment at which the fight with Other stops, the self is no longer present and is replaced by the Otherness of a dead body. As we have argued from the outset, the novella is built on several antitheses that turn into oxymora, as sets of opposite elements are brought into relation and merged.

Lastly, given the status of Aschenbach as a German national figure, we wonder if his death can be read allegorically as the end of a stage of German history. The opening line of novella reminds us that the year of Aschenbach’s death (“19—”) is a year of a “grave threat” to the peace of Europe, and as Reed comments, “besides being filled with ominous figures and happenings, Death in Venice is also a kind of omen itself” (1994,

307 Both Cixous (352-48) and Kofman (128-132) argue that Freud’s thoughts on the death instinct are already implicit in the essay on the Uncanny.
From Mann’s biography *Betrachtung eines Unpolitischen* (1918), we know that the writer identified the novella as a product of his time: “Auch sehe ich wohl, wie etwa die Erzählung ‘Der Tod in Venedig’ in der Zeit steht, dicht vor dem Kriege steht in ihrer Willensspannung und ihrer Morbidität: sie ist auf ihre Art etwas Letztes, das Spätwerk einer Epoche, auf welches ungewisse Lichter des Neuen fallen” (204). In the same work, Mann explains that the character of Aschenbach, with his endurance and his strict work ethic, is representative of the German bourgeoisie, and the novella constitutes an attempt to reflect over decadence and overcome it (193). Shookman reports that in a lecture at Princeton University in 1940, published in 1966 as “On myself,” Mann explained that his novella marked a turning point in European history, corresponding to the problems of a middle class that led to the First World War and hinting at elements of a post-bourgeois way of life, while taking them to an absurd level.

In an essay published in 1945, Lukács interprets the novella as foretelling the imminent downfall of the German middle class, an “unmasking” (33) of its inner weaknesses, and a foreboding of the First World War; he also observed that the novella could be read as a warning of the elements of “dark barbarism” that degraded German civilization (36). More recently, (1994) Reed notes that the most prophetic factor in the novella is the identification of the roots of fascism with a tradition of irrationalism: “[Mann’s] story,” writes Reed, “traces the fate of an all-to conscious master-artist who has grown impatient with psychology and analysis, desired a simplified view of the world and the human mind, attempts a new “resoluteness” beyond moral complexity – and as a consequence has no defense against destructive self abandon” (92)

Through an allegorical reading, we can identify Aschenbach’s passive behaviour, his sense of exhaustion, and the crumbling of his rigid mask as the collapse of the values he represents as a middle-class, German cultural icon. Through the replacement of Aschenbach’s features with the farcical make-up mask, these values are substituted by

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308 “I also see very well how the story, *Death in Venice*, stands chronologically just before the war in its tension of will and its morbidity; in its fashion, it is something final, the late work of an epoch, on which uncertain lights of a new era are falling” (152, Trans. W. Morris)

309 See Shookman (73).
irrational, grotesque ones. In this light, the mask is an allegory of decadence and prefigures an unknown (and possibly dangerous) socio-political transformation. Under this interpretation, the mask once again becomes a means to address both the personal and the general – the adventures of the self as well as its contextualization in a historical era. On a structural and thematic level, the gradual building of the oxymoron and its final conceptualization in Aschenbach’s cosmetic transformation demonstrates that Otherness, which Aschenbach has always seen in antithetical terms, is not an independent concept but is strictly related to Self-perception. Any allegorical reading must be based on an anxiety for change and transformation, reminding us that Otherness is more disturbing when it cannot be clearly recognized as such, when it is closer to us and reflects aspects of our culture or our troubled interiority.
Masks in Venice: Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s Andreas

“So kommt er darauf die Masken das Unterscheidende zu finden” (Andreas, 16). 310

While Thomas Mann was writing Der Tod in Venedig, Hugo von Hofmannsthal was working on Andreas, an unfinished novel about a journey from Austria to Venice. He began the novel in 1907, wrote the main section between 1912 and 1913, continued noting down ideas for it until 1925, and worked on the project occasionally for the rest of his life. Like Mann’s novella, Andreas is structured on opposing couples that are gradually brought into relation and eventually merged into a figure that “yokes together two seemingly contradictory elements” (Brogan 873) and that we can thus conceptualize as oxymoron. As in Mann’s work, masks play a crucial role in the unveiling of the series of oxymora through which the Other, from its originally antithetical position, becomes gradually related to the Self. The novel illustrates how the mask functions as an embodiment of repressed fears and desires, as a tool of role-play and as a liminal object that transcends the threshold of life and death. Further, it is associated with the novel’s “exotic” characters and helps turn them into Doppelgängers. There are a number of commonalities between Hofmannsthal’s unfinished novel and Mann’s novella, including their use of masks as a trope for death and rebirth; this analysis of Andreas thus reiterates many of the points already made in our discussion of Der Tod in Venedig, but also emphasizes the meaning of the different ending.

Hofmannsthal’s novel is set in 1778 and tells the story of a journey from Vienna to Venice, at a time when Venice was still an independent state; importantly, for our purposes, masks were used in daily life, and masked balls were popular among Venetian high society. 311 The young hero, Andreas von Ferschengelder, belongs to the minor

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310 Masks are the distinguishing factor (139).
311 For the use of masks in Venice in the eighteenth century, see Urban Padoan (242).
Austrian aristocracy, is confused about what he wants, and lacks both confidence and ambition. He is sent by his parents on an expensive journey in the hopes that he will gain social recognition and complete his education: “um fremde Menschen kennen zu lernen, Landesgebräuche zu beobachten, um sich in den Manieren zu vervollkommnen” (63). The journey, as planned by his parents, is, thus, a momentary diversion to provide a taste of Otherness as a vaccination against further Wanderlust, something that echoes back to the trip planned by Aschenbach in Der Tod in Venedig. Limited contact with the exotic is supposed to reinforce the hero’s Austrian identity, allowing him to go back to Vienna with better manners, a repertoire of stories, and no desire to repeat the adventure. Yet this plan is upset by the hero’s encounters with masked and deceptive strangers who gradually introduce him to the world of the irrational, the Orient, and the mysteries of the Self.

Andreas meets the first disguised character at the beginning of his journey. During a stop in Villach, he unexpectedly finds at his door an unpleasant-looking man who insists on offering his services as a lackey. The servant, who introduces himself as Gotthelf, has bad manners and unpleasant, pale, and wrinkled features. Arrogant, greedy, and repulsive, he stands in strong contraposition to Andreas’s character. He is as confident and determined as Andreas is insecure and hesitant, as greedy for money as Andreas is heedless of it. He is mysteriously well informed about his master, knows his name, his destination and his weaknesses, which he uses to manipulate him into accepting him into his service. He brags of having served the high nobility whom Andreas admires but has never had occasion to meet and is particularly loquacious about his sexual conquests, while Andreas is self conscious about his lack of experience and fears that the servant might discover his weakness. If this were to happen, Andreas is certain that he would react and challenge the servant. Yet he never openly faces him: on the contrary, Gotthelf gains more influence, rides his horse so close to Andreas that his legs are touching the master’s knees (194), turns any possible conversation into bragging of his success with

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312 “To see foreign peoples to observe foreign costumes, to polish his manners” (51). In this sense, as Broch, Martini and Miles note, Andreas can also be considered a Bildungsroman.
313 In English, “God Help.” The name is often spelled differently as “Gotthilf,” both in Hofmannsthal’s version and in Hottinger’s translation.
women, and convinces Andreas to change his route and to go to Italy through Carintia rather than Tyrol, thereby determining the outcome of his journey.

When Gotthelf’s horse falls ill and collapses, the two are forced to stop for a few days at the Fizzener farm to let the animal rest. The farmer and his wife are kind and hospitable, and their daughter Romana especially impresses Andreas with her confidence, beauty, and harmonious relationship with the world that surrounds her. Andreas feels himself completely at ease, “so heimlich, so wohnlich wie nie in seinem Leben” (62). 314 This pleasant atmosphere is tainted only by Gotthelf’s insolent and lusty behaviour, for which Andreas feels ashamed and responsible. He and Romana spend a day together and grow closer, but on the night they kiss for the first time, the house is shaken by terrible screams. Andreas hurries downstairs and discovers the whole household in front of the stable. Gotthelf, he learns, has run away with his horse and the money sewn into the saddle. The screams are coming from a stable servant who has been tied half naked to a burning bed. As the farmer comes to rescue her, she reports how Gotthelf tied her up, gagged her and locked her in, stopping to look once more from the window laughing amused at her panic. In the notes from 1911-1912, Hofmannsthal adds that Gotthelf tortured the girl because as the two were undressing, she saw a prisoner’s mark on his shoulder and tore a wig from his head (12).

As a runaway criminal disguised as a lackey, Gotthelf is the first of a series of deceitful figures whom Andreas encounters in his journey. His similarity with the masked servant and the painter in Venice suggests that the elements of alterity that Andreas ascribes to the atmosphere of the “ancient” and “oriental” city (145) are already with him at the start of the journey. In fact, although Gotthelf is introduced as an antithetical image of the protagonist, he soon unveils a secret bond. The violence represented by Gotthelf is, we discover, latently present in Andreas. Although he never raises his voice against the servant, he feels on several occasions a desire to confront him physically — once, he imagines pulling him down from his horse and hitting him “savagely” (50), and later, as Gotthelf is behaving inappropriately at the dinner table, he considers hitting him in the

314 “He felt more at ease, more at home than ever before in his life” (50).
face until he falls unconscious (54). Moreover, while Gotthelf’s boastful stories about his sexual adventures alarm and disgust Andreas, they also stimulate his fantasy and imagination, and he often envisions himself in his servant’s place, repeating Gotthelf’s vicissitudes. At the Fizzaner’s farm, Gotthelf’s affair with the stable maid parallels and foretells Andreas’ adventure with Romana; it begins and ends exactly at the same time, it follows parallel stages, and, in a dream Andreas has on the night of the crime, Romana appears with torn clothes, just as Gotthelf’s maid were.

When Andreas sees the stable maid tied to the bed, he recognizes the servant who was supposedly preparing a remedy for the horse, and understands that the mixture was meant to poison the Fizzener’s dog. As he catches a hint of the dog agonizing in the courtyard, he is overcome by sadness and compassion (50). Yet shortly afterward, in a series of nightmares, he remembers an act of cruelty that he committed against an animal in his childhood, when he broke a cat’s back with a car shaft. A similar memory emerges when, after the discovery of Gotthelf’s flight, Andreas is left alone at the farm to wait for a carriage; wandering around the fields, he wishes he had a dog for company, but then recalls the suffering that he caused his little dog as a child, when he kicked the animal so violently that he broke his back and had to step on the dog’s back to end his torment. In Andreas’ confused memories, the dog and the cat merge into one figure, and the narrator’s use of the subjunctive, in addition to the way in which several sentences are introduced by “Ihm war als ob…” create uncertainty as to whether he has actually committed the crime (71). This ambivalence can be interpreted in two ways: Andreas could have really committed the act but, unable to accept it, could have been trying to forget it; alternatively, the dream could represent an expression of a repressed desire that has troubled his consciousness. In both cases, the image of the tortured animal relates to Gotthelf’s crime, as emphasized by Andreas’s thoughts shortly afterwards.

Unable to endure being alone in the valley, Andreas finds refuge in the thick neighbouring forest. He takes pleasure hiding behind the trees and finds a strange sense of relief in imagining himself in other people’s roles: “endlich war sich selber

315 “It seemed to him that…”
entsprungen wie einem Gefängnis,“ comments the narrator, “bald meinte er, er wäre Onkel Leopold, der wie <ein> Faun in Wald sprang einer Bauerdirn nach, bald er wäre ein Verbrecher und der Mörder wir der Gotthelf, dem die Häscher nachsetzten” (71). Andreas sees himself at first as his Uncle Leopold, who was also cruel to animals (61), then as a murderer, precisely as Gotthelf.

Throughout the previous episode, Andreas worries about the saying “Wie der Herr, so der Knecht” (67) and is appalled by the idea that the servant’s reputation might cast a shadow on his own. In the forest, however, the association with Gotthelf loses any dreadful connotation and becomes the inspiration for a strangely pleasurable role-play which brings him a certain relief. This serenity is sharply juxtaposed to the sharp guilt Andreas feels shortly afterwards, as he comes across a servant burying the Fizzener’s dead dog. Devastated, he drops to the ground and mourns the animal as if he were guilty of killing it himself:

Hier! Sagte er vor sich hin: Hier! Das viele herumlaufen ist unnütz, man lauft sich selber nicht davon, bald zerrt einen dahin, mich haben sie diesen weiten Weg geschickt, endlich endet er auf irgendeinem Fleck, half auf diesem! Zwischen ihm und dem toten Hund war as, er wußte nur nicht was, so auch zwischen ihm und Gotthelf, der Schuld an dem Tod des Tieres war. (72)

Later that night, Andreas dreams again of Romana, whom he has not seen since the discovery of Gotthelf’s crime. In the dream, the girl asks him where the dog is buried and steps back from him in fear. Once again, Andreas sees himself in the position of the servant and feels unsure about his identity: “Er war dicht bei ihr und fühlte sie hielt ihn für den bosen Gotthelf — und doch wieder nicht für den Gotthelf. Ganz sicher war er auch nicht wer er war [sic]. Sie flehte zu ihm, er solle sie doch nicht nackt vor allen

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316 “He had escaped himself, as from a prison. [...] Now he thought he was Uncle Leopold pursuing a peasant girl like a faun in the forest, now that he was a criminal and murderer like Gotthilff, with the sheriff’s men after him” (64).

317 “Like master, like man” (57).

318 “‘Here!’ he said to himself. ‘Here! All this wandering about is futile, we cannot escape from ourselves. We are dragged hither and thither, they sent me all this long way — at last it comes to an end somewhere — here!’ There was something between him and the dog, he did not know what, just as there was something between him and Gotthilff, who had brought about the dog’s death” (65).
Gotthelf is first of all a stranger, a criminal in disguise. He has no past, as his stories are clearly an invention, and no future, as he never appears again, except in Andreas’ memories. Yet he is at the same time familiar, in that his actions reflect Andreas’ inners fears and desires. Introduced as Andreas’ opposite, in the course of the narration, the two seemingly contradictory characters are gradually brought into relation and joined in one figure, creating the effect of an oxymoron. Alewyn suggests that Gotthelf stands for the principle of evil, and that Andreas suffers a dissociation that leads him to see life divided between the corrupt, as represented by the servant, and the pure, as represented by Romana (131). Bergengruen carries this further, notes that Andreas’s childhood memories of suffered and inflicted violence are to be read as symptoms of repressed sadistic and masochistic tendencies, and argues that Gotthelf should not be seen as a real character but as a dissociation of Andreas’ personality (207).

Yet the relationships among the characters are far more complicated, especially if we do not limit ourselves to the main fragment but consider the notes for the episodes that Hofmannsthal intended to develop. In fact, Alewyn’s argument does not take into account that Romana herself is split in the narrative into a pure and a lustful, corrupt component. In Andreas’ dream, for example, she first kisses him tenderly and then aggressively strikes him with a rake (73). Moreover, she merges in this episode, through a series of dreams which stand ambiguously close to reality, with the Fizzener’s maid (repeatedly called “a wench”), and in Venice, she becomes one with the courtesan Nina. In this light, Romana, as a character, is herself an oxymoron, a paradoxical union of opposites.

Bergengruen’s argument that Gotthelf is not a real character but a dissociation of Andreas’s psyche may explain Gotthel’s reflection in the masker whom Andreas meets shortly afterwards, but it does not account for the fact that his actions have real consequences, or that his crime is attested to by the stable maid and could not possibly be

319 “He was close to her and felt that he took him for the wicked Gotthilf [sic], and yet not for Gotthilf either, and he himself was not quite sure who he was. She besought him not to tie her naked to the bed in front of all the people, and not to run away on a stolen horse” (67).
committed by Andreas. My contention is that Hofmannsthal is deliberately playing with the reader’s hesitation between explanations, and that Gotthelf, like other characters, must be seen both as a disguised Doppelgänger of the protagonist and as a real character who, in turn, is reflected in the masker in Venice. In fact, on the one hand, many of the main characters appear to be split, divided into two opposite personalities, and, on the other, most of the split halves can be read in contraposition to an external double. As we will see, the double, following the scheme conceptualized here as a progressive building of the oxymoron, is initially presented as the antithesis of a character and gradually reveals a secret bond to him/her. Moreover, the Doppelgänger often materializes through the use of a mask.

Andreas’ arrival in Venice coincides with a series of strange phenomena associated with the cunning of the city’s dwellers and their habit of taking advantage of strangers. The young man is left alone with his luggage when the boatman abandons him, leaving him disoriented and not knowing where to go. “Als ließe man einen um 6h früh auf der Rossauerlände oder unter den Weißgärbern aus der Fahrpost aussteigen, der sich in Wien nicht auskennt,” he complains, comparing the civility of the residents of his native city to the wild carelessness of the Venetians: “Ich kann die Sprache, was ist das weiter, deswegen machen sie aus mir, was sie wollen!” (40). Andreas’ vulnerability is emphasized by his bare features in a city of maskers, and by the notion that as a foreigner, he cannot and should not enjoy the confidence of the local people.

In the 1911-1912 versions, Andreas first meets a company of actors in Venice (7); in the main fragment from 1912-1913, he is greeted by a masked domino. Subsequent masked characters are introduced through an intermittent repetition in which each mimics the previous one or anticipates the next. The man in domino, for example, foretells the masked figures of Nina and the Spanish woman whom Andreas soon meets and at the same time recalls the figure of Gotthelf. As the domino lifts his mask, Andreas is relieved to recognize friendly and trustful features and hurries to identify himself as a foreigner.

320 “You might as well turn a man out of the diligence on the Rossauerlände or under the Weissgärbern at six in the morning when he doesn’t know his way about in Vienna. I can speak their language – what good is that? They’ll do what they like with me all the same” (11).
and to specify the way in which he has arrived in Italy, (40); he then immediately regrets having given too much information. Andreas does not notice the pattern by which the domino, who is alternately referred to as “Der Fremde”321 and “der Maskierte” (40-42), repeats the actions of Gotthelf. He immediately offers his services, and to convince Andreas, just like Gotthelf, he mentions his connection to a number of the Austrian aristocracy whose names fill Andreas with respect and confidence. Like Gotthelf, the masker assures Andreas that he can meet all his needs, and Andreas is unable to refuse. As they are talking, the masker’s cloak accidentally opens and reveals an almost naked man under the domino, but Andreas’ sympathy is such that, instead of pondering the reason for this eccentricity, he too opens his cloak in the chilly morning air. In the 1911-1912 version, as Andreas is being led by the stranger to his future lodging, he notices a nobleman intent on putting on a Harlequin costume (8); in the same version, we learn that Andreas “geht hauptsächlich (wenn er auf den Grund geht) darum nach Venedig weil dort die Leute fast immer maskiert gehen” (13)322 and that “Nach dem Abenteuer mit der hochmuth<igen> Gräfin auf dem Land die ihn wie einen Bedienten behandelt hatte ist in ihm halb geträumt die Vorstellung erstanden, dass dies Abenteuer herrlich gewesen wäre wenn er maskiert gewesen wäre” (13). 323

From this note, we know that Hofmannsthal was planning another adventure in which Andreas would take on the role of Gotthelf, since the episode with the countess belongs, in the main fragment, to the servant’s repertoire of sexual adventures. This reversal shows that Andreas and Gotthelf’s actions are to a certain extent interchangeable, but they remain juxtaposed. Moreover, the note demonstrates that masks play a crucial role for Andreas, and that he identifies the act of wearing a mask with role-playing, with the possibility of losing oneself and becoming a second self. According to Miles, Hofmannsthal saw masks as dangerously ambiguous objects – on the one side, as “an expression of pure childlike delight in disguise and metamorphosis,” and on the other, as

321 The word “Fremde,” which frequently appears in the novel, can be translated into English both as “stranger” and “foreigner.”
322 “Andreas (if he goes to the bottom of it) goes to Venice chiefly because the people there are always masked” (115).
323 “After the adventure with the Countess, who had treated him like a lackey, the idea, half dreamed, had taken shape in his mind that the adventure would have been glorious if he had been masked” (115-116).
dangerous tools that could lead to “losing one’s true personality among the different poses” (46). In Hofmannsthal’s short drama “Vorspiel zur ‘Antigone’ des Sophocles” (1900), the mask that appears to a student during the staging of a Greek play is revealed as a spirit able to cross the boundaries of the human and the divine, and in Andreas, a mask is among the few objects found in the room of the character Sacramoza after his suicide. It is reasonable to assume that masks can be read in Andreas not only as a representation of the unconscious and the triumph of the senses over reason, but that they have a darker connotation linking them to death and a loss of the Self – and also with the possibility of rebirth.

After having introduced Andreas to his new landlords, the domino (who is at this point referred to as “der Demaskierte” ) disappears and leaves Andreas with the painter who was temporarily occupying the room, and who seems closely connected to the family. Looking out of the window, Andreas discovers that it has a very good view of the theatre; the painter, himself a theatre decorator, introduces himself as Zorzi and explains that Nina, the daughter whose room he is occupying, used to be an actress and has found for each member of the family a position in the theatre.

The masks, the theatrical setting, and the exaggerated importance of gestures and movements in the narrative have been pointed out by several critics, particularly Martini, who describes how Venice turns into a crowded and colourful Theatrum mundi (317). Hederer carries this further, pointing out that all the characters whom Andreas encounters in this city are either masked or mysterious figures with a disintegrated self; he argues that they embody the “illicit” in Andreas’ soul, and Venice becomes a stage on which to perform Andreas’ inner drama (Hederer 273). For his part, Miles notes that Andreas’ adventures in Venice are presented in a dreamlike manner, and the city becomes “a dream-theatre of the inner self, a sort of narrative dream set in the novel, a fictional stage upon which Andreas’ dream-self can act out its shadowy existence” (179).

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324 In this sense, Andreas’s role play reminds us of Malte’s experiments with masks in “Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge” (see Chapter One).
325 The “unmasked,”
Andreas often expresses his admiration for the theatre, and his childhood dream of living next to one is realized as he settles down in Venice in the room found for him by the masker. He discovers that each single member of the family is involved with the theatre, and the stage is soon extended to the city’s streets, where he encounters several exotic, masked characters, who, as Hederer argues, are also a reflection of the repressed components of his inner Self. This dream-like atmosphere, which Miles associates with the Venetian experience, is, however, already present in Austria, and the Venetian characters appear uncanny, at once familiar and unfamiliar, partly because they recall the disguised criminal Gotthelf.

As soon Andreas has settled in the room, the painter warns him that he should not trust the masker who has led him to the house, and confides that he has just lost all his clothes by gambling. Moreover, he recommends that, if he should need something, the only honest messengers are the men from Friuli, whom he will recognize by their country costumes: “Es sind zuverlässige Leute und verschwiegene merken sich Namen und erkennen auch eine Maske an ihrem Gang und an den Schuhschnallen” (44). Through this advice, the painter states plainly that there is no person to be trusted in Venice, and that the only reliable messengers are foreigners. This impression is reinforced when Andreas finally comes downstairs and meets Zustina, the younger daughter of the family. The girl contributes to Andreas’ confusion, warning him not to get to close to the painter and not to leave any money in the house. She then begins to talk of a mysterious lottery for which, on account of Andreas’ status as a foreigner, she is unable to offer him a ticket: “Sie sind ein Fremder und in einem solchen Punk sind unsere Protektoren genau” (78).

The painter, who is in charge of showing Andreas around the city, explains that the lottery has been organized by the girl to save her family from poverty; the first prize is her virginity, and tickets are available only to the best Venetian society: “Eine solche Sache,” he clarifies, “kann sich <nur> in einem Kreis von vornehmen Leuten abspielen

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326 “They are trusty and close, they remember names, and can even recognize a mask by his walk and his shoe-buckles” (18).
327 “You are a foreigner, and our patrons are very particular in these things” (75).
und die den Anstand haben, nichts davon verlauten zu lassen andernfalls würde die Behörde sich reinmischen” (81). 328 The lottery’s story confirms Andreas’ suspicion that the city is full of shameful secrets. He is so embarrassed and shocked by this, to him, barbaric and savage arrangement that he stops watching his steps and almost slips on a squashed pomegranate. This fruit, which is associated with the myth of Persephone and her detention in the realm of death, plays a symbolic role in the novel and remains close to the meaning of the mask which, as we have seen, can be a tool for role-playing but can also lead to a definite loss of the self. The pomegranate, as a symbol of death, anticipates the characters of Maria and the knight Sacramozo, both of whom suffer a fragmentation of the Self and are destined to die.

“Wie kommen Sie dazu die Geheimnisse aller Leute zu wissen?” (86) 329 Andrea asks Zorzi, as he continues to relate the city’s gossip, but the latter only laughs and answers evasively, confirming that the life of Venice remains a secret for strangers. Zorzi leads Andreas to the house of Nina, the older daughter of Andreas’ landlord, and asks him to wait for him downstairs. Andreas wanders to a little square and, as he is trying to read the inscriptions on a chapel, he is surprised by the appearance of a woman in a dark, modest dress who seems to have materialized from nowhere and who enters the church from a side door just as Andreas is crossing the main entrance. The woman moves close to the altar to pray, and Andreas, judging that she must be afflicted by a great pain and not wishing to disturb her, heads carefully towards the exit; as he looks back once more he finds in the place of the grieving woman a completely different person, wearing a similar dress but without a shawl and with a very different manner and posture.

When Andreas heads back to the square, the woman rushes out of the church and passes him, running so carelessly that Andreas wonders whether she is not a masked man who has taken the opportunity to mock a foreigner. In the 1991-1912 version, the strange

328 “An affair of this kind […] can be arranged in a circle of men of breeding who have the decency not to let it get abroad, otherwise the authorities would intervene” (81).
329 “How do you contrive to know everybody’s secrets?” (89).
woman, who suffers from a dissociation of personality, comes to visit Andreas masked and tries to lure him into a gambling place (31). In the main fragment, the character, whom Andreas comes to know as Maria-Mariquita, is not masked, although Andreas continues to refer to her as “Die Maskierte” because of her masculine and impudent behavior and because of Zorzi’s suspicion that she might be a man in disguise or an escaped nun. Andreas, entering Nina’s house, sees her again, this time climbing over the vine-clad roof. As she suddenly disappears, he asks Zorzi where this masker could have come from, but the painter encourages him to forget her: “Lassen Sie jetzt Ihre Verkleidete — in Venedig werden Ihnen noch ganz andere Dinge begegnen” (92).

As Alewyn notices, the two are referred to by different names: Maria is alternatively “die Dame, die Marqueza, die Gräfin, die Baronin,” while Mariquita is referred to as “die Cocotte, die Kurtisane, die Maske, die Spanierin” (109). From the notes which follow the main fragments, we know that Hofmannsthal wanted Maria and Mariquita to be opposites: he describes Maria as somebody who wishes to be old and to die, who loves old people and has a horror of sex; Mariquita is frightened of death, attracts children, is restless and a libertine, and is always busy with a “puppet-like activity” because of her fear of disappearing and being replaced by the Other. Her exaggerated manners are identified with pantomime and theatrical performance: “The mixture of pantomimic gestures and acrobatics, erratic mischievousness and eroticism suggest a stock comic figure out of a contemporary Venetian comedy,” writes Frye, who interprets many of the grotesque facial descriptions of the characters, including Sacramozo’s “toad-face,” as a distortion of the commedia dell’arte (155); he also notices that Hofmannsthal tends to let “only a pair of overt doubles on the stage at the time” (154). From Hofmannsthal’s notes, we know he was planning several episodes in which Maria would be able to observe her metamorphosis into Mariquita through the mirror (191); thus, she would be able to

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330 The way in which contemporary studies on the unconscious, on hysteria and dissociation are reflected in the novel has, since 1956, been carefully documented by Alewyn, who recognized Morton Prince’s *The Dissociation of a Personality* as one of the main sources for Hofmannsthal’s novel (105-141 passim).

331 As Frye argues, the mask is often associated with gender inversion: “The mask gives the effect of gender inversion, the doubling of a personality inversion” (Frye 154). Yet masks and doubling, as we have seen, are themselves strictly related.

332 “Leave your climbing man-woman—you’ll see more than that in Venice” (99).
observe Self and Other united into one image, or the realization of the apparent paradox of the oxymoron.

After the second meeting with the masked woman, Andreas is introduced to Zustina’s sister Nina, a courtesan whom both family and strangers seem to regard as a saint. Next to her, lying on the floor, Andreas sees an unframed portrait with a slash in the canvas. “Wie finden sie übrigens die Ähnlichkeit?” (93) asks Zorzi, its painter. Just as in the case of the two women in the church, the portrait appears to be “the same and not the same;” it is remarkably accurate, but it turns its beautiful model into an ugly mask: “Das Bild war was ein grobes Auge sprechend ähnlich finden mochte: es waren Nina’s Züge aber kalt, gemein. […] Es war eines von jenen peinlichen Porträts von denen man sagen kan daß sie das Inventarium eines Gesichtes enthalten, aber die Seele des Malers verraten” (93). 334

Andreas asserts that the portrait is very similar to its model and yet very ugly, thereby creating an oxymoron, since he finds Nina “unspeakably charming” (93). Confused, and not knowing how to explain, he expresses his feeling that it represents a different person from the Nina who stands in front of him, thus turning the portrait into an image of her double. While he imagines himself as “another self,” a “different Andreas,” not a casual visitor but Nina’s legitimate lover, the young woman undergoes a subtle metamorphosis before his eyes, appearing for a moment as Romana. As Andreas reaches out to hold her hand, she changes into the dark image of her portrait: “ihr Blick verschleierte sich und das innere ihrer blauen Augen schien dunkler zu werden: die Ahnung eines Lächelns lag noch auf ihrer Oberlippe, aber ein vergehendes, beinahe angstvolles Lächeln schien einen Kuß dorthin zu rufen. Nicht konnte ihn tiefer erschrecken als diese Zeichen” (96). 335

333 “What do you think of the likeness?” (101).
334 “The portrait was such that a coarse eye would have been struck by the likeness. Nina’s features were there, but they looked cold and mean. […] It was one of those painful portraits of which it can be said that they contain the inventory of a face, but reveal the soul of the artist” (102).
335 “Her look was veiled, and the depths of her blue eyes seemed to darken; the hint of a smile still lay on her upper lip, but a fading, almost anxious smile that seemed to call for a kiss. Nothing could have startled him more deeply that such signs” (107).
In the notes from 1911-1913, Nina is merged with Maria and finds her Doppelgänger in Mariquita, the Spanish woman. In this version, Andreas meets Mariquita for the first time as she, masked, enters his room; she tries to drag him to a gambling place and hints maliciously at his visit to Nina (31). In another note, as the masker talks about Nina, Andreas suddenly understands that they must somehow be the same person. In main fragment from 1912-1913, Nina and Maria become two different people, but like Maria, Nina is divided and subjected to mysterious metamorphoses, as exemplified by her portrait. From the notes that follow the manuscript from 1912-1913, we know that Hofmannsthal was planning a chapter in which Andreas sits for Zorzi for a painting but maliciously ends the sittings (117) when he discovers in Zorzi the “Entwicklung des Mephistophelischen” (156). In this light Zorzi, just like the masked servant, becomes a reflection of Gotthelf.

The frequency with which the mask, the mirror, and the portrait are juxtaposed in the novel suggests a strict relation among these objects. Just like the portrait, the mask offers a second, modified version of the Self; and in this narrative, the portrait, as exemplified by Nina’s picture, can turn into an ugly mask. Unlike the portrait, however, the mask can be used as a tool of role-play to allow the pleasure of a temporary evasion from the Self, or it can lead to a definite loss of identity, as shown by the case of Maria/Mariquita. Through its frequent juxtaposition to the mirror, the mask is multiplied in a game of reflection that prefigures the complicated chain linking doubles to one another.

Another key character who is mysteriously linked to Andreas is the Knight of Malta, Sacramozo. Zorzi introduces him to Andreas in a coffee house, where, according to Zorzi, the knight spends all time writing letters to a half crazy woman. Andreas is positively stuck by the knight, and finds him kind and pleasant, notwithstanding his toad-like face and awkward features. Like Gotthelf, from Andreas’ perspective, the knight is both familiar and unfamiliar. He is twice a stranger, since he has lived in Venice for a long time and is originally from Malta. Yet he seems to know a great deal about Andreas

336 “Development of the devilish” (my translation; not all Hofmannsthal’s notes are translated by Hottinger).
and addresses him in perfect German. While Andreas is young and good looking but yet unsure of every step, the knight is ugly, long past youth and confident that nothing in his life has ever happened in vain.

When Sacramozo drops a letter, Andreas hurries to give it back to him, but the knight, assures him that the note is not addressed to him nor is it written in his writing and that it must therefore belong to Andreas. The letter is probably from Mariquita, the split personality of the woman with whom he is in love, and since the knight hands it back to Andreas, the scene can also be interpreted as a sign that Sacramozo, just like Gotthelf, can be read as Andrea’s Doppelgänger. In the main fragment, Sacramozo has only a small role, but his importance is emphasized by the numerous notes in which Hofmannsthal indicates his plans for the character. These notes shed light on Sacramozo’s relationship to Andreas, on his role as Andreas’s double, and on his key function for further developments for the novel, which Hofmannsthal was planning to move to a more “exotic,” extra-European setting. From the notes, the role of Sacramozo seems a liminal one, since he is characterized a traveller, at once knowledgeable of Venice and of Oriental and Southern lands. Thus, he is, once again, juxtaposed to Andreas, who knows very little of foreign countries (206).

The relationship between Sacramozo and Andreas becomes clear as Hofmannsthal notes their opposites qualities (144), just as he does with the split personalities of Maria and Mariquita, and as, in more than one fragment, he refers to the knight as “der Doppelgänger” (144, 188). Just like Andreas, Sacramozo feels divided and suffers from a double nature. “Le plus grand des plaisirs, c’est de sortir de soi meme” (155) is, in fact, the motto that Hofmannsthal provides for him. Moreover, the character of Maria-Mariquita, who develops a relationship with both characters, claims to have never seen them together. In his notes, Hofmannsthal envisioned that a key episode of the novel should take place at a masked ball. In it, Andreas was to be symbolically initiated, Maria to become for an instant to become one with Mariquita, and Sacramozo to remain unknown, masked in a secret costume (146). In the 1907-1911/12 version, Hofmannsthal notes that Sacramozo has realized the importance of masks through the awareness of
Maria’s second personality: “In ihren Augen die ‘andere’ zu sehen — das hat ihm zum Philosophen gemacht. Ebenso war sein Vater kurz vor seinem Tod so merkwürdig verändert. So kommt er darauf die Masken das Unterscheidende zu finden” (16).  

For Sacramozo, masks are liminal object associated with death but also connote the belief in rebirth. At the moment of his suicide, he accepts that he must disappear in order to make Andreas a whole person, and as indicated earlier, a mask is among the few objects found in his room. In this light, Andreas and Sacramozo, as opposites joined into one figure, form an oxymoron similar to the oxymoronic unions of Andreas/Gotthelf and Maria/Mariquita. Some of the characters bound as a pair of opposites are, then, reflected in a third double, and the novel’s structure becomes an intertwined chain of oxymora, in which the masks, as if caught in a game of distorting mirrors, are reflected, almost the same, but not quite, in a multiplicity of directions.

Just as Mann does in Der Tod in Venedig, Hofmannsthal plays with the reader’s hesitation between a supernatural and a psychological explanation, and like Mann’s novella, Hofmannsthal’s novel can be read on several levels; on the one hand, Andreas tells the story of a journey from the Alps to the Mediterranea and describes a series of encounters with unusual, exotic characters. On the other hand, as Broch phrases it, the trip to Venice turns into a “mythical journey,” into a downfall from purity to a state of confusion (104). In both Mann’s novella and Hofmannsthal’s novel, the journey south is planned as a temporary diversion which should lead to a reinforcement of the hero’s German/Austrian identity, but through the encounter with a series of masked or deceitful strangers, the trip turns into a journey into the mysteries of the Self, and Venice becomes the stage upon which to perform the heroes’ inner drama.

337 “To see the other in her eyes—that has made him a philosopher. In exactly the same way, a strange change came over his father just before his death. Thus he comes to believe that masks are the distinguishing factor” (139).

338 Alewyn sees a similar chiasmus in the relationship between Gotthelf/Romana; Maria and Mariquita, and recognizes in it the principle that Hofmannsthal described in the essay Ad me ipsum as “Das Allomatische” (102), a magical square that allows a reciprocal transformation. Alewyn argues further that in order to overcome the dualism from which he suffers, Andreas must learn to recognize and accept both principles, just as the split personalities of his friend will have to accept one another (131).
Moreover, in Der Tod in Venedig and Andreas, elements of alterity that the characters ascribe to the atmosphere of the foreign city are already with them at the beginning of the journey, and the double, initially presented as the antithesis of the Self, is finally joined to the Self through a repeated structure conceptualized here as oxymoron. Stylistically, like Mann, Hofmannsthal makes wide use of the subjunctive to create an ambiguity between real and unreal, playing with the reader’s interpretation and blurring the boundaries of experience and hallucination. In fact, just like Aschenbach, Andreas often has the impression that the distortion of reality could be arrested if he only had the will to stop it with a deliberate action (50).

Both Aschenbach and Andreas begin the trip with some hesitation, make an intermediary stop in a different location, and only later reach Venice, the wonderful city that appears to both as “Fusion der Antike und des Orients” (145), at once attractive and deserving of suspicion. On the one side, they admire the city’s beauty, but on the other, they are appalled by the wildness and backwardness of its inhabitants, feel vulnerable and are aware of their status as foreigners. They are both tricked by a boatman upon their arrival, and throughout the respective narratives, they retain their conviction that Venetians are hiding guilty and shameful secrets; in both narratives, the only reliable figures are other foreigners. The two stories even resemble each others in the smaller details, as the heroes have the tendency to get lost in little squares and both stop to read the inscriptions in a chapel. In both works, the mask is associated with the pomegranate, which is a symbol of death and is juxtaposed to the mirror. Most importantly, just as Aschenbach does not recognize the similarity between the gondolier, the street player, and the stranger he encounters in Munich, Andreas does not notice the pattern by which the Domino, who is alternatively referred to as “Der Fremde” or “der Maskierte” (40-42) repeats the actions of Gotthelf.

The endless repetition tortures Andreas in the form of a recurrent childhood nightmare: “hungrig hatte er sich in die Vorratskammer geschlichen, sich ein Stück Brot abzuschneiden, er hatte den Laib Brot an sich gedrückt, das Messer in der Hand aber

339 “Fusion of the antique and the Oriental” (76).
This dream conjures up the image of Gotthelf, who continues to be evoked through his similarity with other characters. The difference, compared with Aschenbach, is that Andreas becomes slowly aware of the pattern of repetition. He notices that the female characters whom he meets are often a reflection, or the double of one another, fears he is continuously reliving the same scene and equates all these women into a single figure: “Er könne ein Kamel eher durch ein Nadelöhr gehen als er zu einer richtigen Liebschaft kommen mir der Spanierin, der Zustina, der Nina. Jeder andere könnte er eher” (26).

While Aschenbach does not recognize the uncanny pattern and suffers repetition without taking an active stand, for Andreas, “zwei dasselbe tun ist es nicht dasselbe” (80), and each repetition carries with itself a transformation that slowly develops into a productive awareness. In fact, Andreas’ main feature is his ability to empathize, to place himself in the identity of each character he encounters: “der andern Leben ist in ihm rein u. stark vorhanden wie wenn man einen Tropfen Blutes oder ausgehauchte Luft eines andern in einer Glaskugel dem stanken Feuer aussetzt, so in Andreas die fremden Geschichte” (102). Hofmannsthal’s notes reveal that Andreas is at times tortured by this ability, and that his continuous empathy, which throughout the novel is associated with masks and role-play, leads to excessive compassion: “Ihm ekelt über seine Fähigkeit, sich in alle, sogar den Spion Zorzi, dann einen alten buckligen Zubringer etc. Mit Verständnis hineinzufühlen” (118). Yet this process allows Andreas to recognize in the maskers repressed elements of his own psyche, and to accept them.

Aschenbach becomes obsessed by Tazdiu, but does not accept the imperfection of the human soul: for him, the boy becomes a mirror of a higher reality; the masked characters

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340 “He had crept hungry to the pantry to cut himself a piece of bread; he had pressed the loaf to him, knife in the hand, but again and again had cut past the loaf into the void” (106).
341 “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for him to become, in the real sense of the world, the lover of the Spanish woman, of Zustina, or of Nina” (157).
342 “If you do the same thing the result is worlds apart” (80).
343 “He is open to influences from others; the life of others is present in him in the same purity and strength as when a drop of blood, or the breath exhaled by another, is exposed to powerful heat in a glass ball – even so the fates of others in Andreas” (178).
344 “He is disgusted by his ability to place himself in the role of anybody, even of the spy Zorzi and of an old hunchback messenger, and to empathize with them” (my translation).
he meets fill him with horror and disgust. The narrator, as we have seen, denies Aschenbach the possibility of recognition. There is no growth, no real development in his character. For Andreas, however, the “half crazy” woman and her companions become more human because of their imperfections. While Andreas is constantly involved in role-playing in which he continuously exchanges masks, empathizing with each of the characters that he encounters, Aschenbach’s mask is the kind that takes over, cancels the self, and leads to annihilation.

Hofmannsthal never finished his novel, but his notes reveal that, following the pattern of any Bildungsgroman, he was envisioning a growth in Andreas who, through the Venetian adventures, was to find a unity in his fragmented subjectivity and to continue his journey “nicht mehr so steif und dumpf als er von Haus fortgegangen war” (130). Despite their differences, neither character is able to return to Vienna. In Der Tod in Venedig, Aschenbach finds in the infested Venice the Oriental landscape of his fantasies, while Andreas discovers a world that is tightly bound to the Orient, to the extent that, in the notes from 1929, Hofmannsthal indicated his plan to move the main action to a city of West Africa (196). Moreover, a merging of boundaries occurs as Venice, with its pantomimes and maskers, is compared to the “puppet-like” (14) world of conventions of Vienna.

Finally, both stories deal, albeit in different ways, with the notion of degeneration and use the mask as an allegory of death and rebirth. Reed reports how Mann, looking at other writers of his generation, including the author of Andreas, found that “they were perceptibly edging towards health and regeneration” (Reed 6). After the First World War, when he wrote the last notes for Andreas, Hofmannsthal lamented the social and cultural disintegration of Europe, but continued to believe that the Austrian culture could be restored to greatness through a process of renewal. Just as Mann’s novella has been interpreted as the representation of an end of an epoch, so too the “Bildung” of Andreas can be read as a reference to the transformation that Hofmannsthal thought necessary for

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345 “Not anymore as rigid and dull as when he had left” (my translation).
346 Hofmannsthal’s nostalgia for the past went so far that he was hoping in a restauration of the Hapsburg Monarchy. (Gottfrief 508-19)
the men of his time (Martini 320), and the mask can be conceived as an allegory of this process. Considering the use of symbols in Andreas and in Die Frau ohne Schatten, Broch observes that because Hofmannsthal could not find an immediate and natural association between language, symbols, and referents, he resorted to piling them up, creating a “freezing of symbols,” and turning them into allegories:

Eine gewisse Symbolerstarrung ist eingetreten, und um die Mitteilung verständlich und flexibel zu erhalten, müssen immer mehr Symbole ins Spiel gebracht werden, freilich in ihrer Überfülle nun erst recht den Erstarrungsprozess fördernd, da sie - und das ist der Übergang vom Symbol zur Allegorie - überhaupt nicht mehr Verständlich wären, wenn sie nicht in eine fixen, eben allegorischen Kanon gebracht werden würden, das Gegenextrem zur unmittelbaren Mittelbarkeit. (Broch 109) 347

In this light, it is important that Andreas approves Sacramozo’s plans to travel (195) as a “natural way to bring a renewal to Europe.” 348 While in Mann’s novella, contact with the unknown “Orient” leads to intoxication with the irrational and to death and destruction, in Hofmannsthal’s work, this exposure retains a mystical, magical dimension that leads Europe to rebirth and regeneration. 

In both Der Tod in Venedig and Andreas, the mask represents an encounter with alterity and its ultimate fusion with the Self; while Aschenbach is unable to change and grow, Andreas learns through love and compassion to read the encounter with the Other as a type of recognition, escaping the dreadful trap of compulsive repetition, taking an active stand, and turning his repeated encounters into a positive transformation that results in a stronger Self. Andreas’ positive development shows that, in a labyrinth of masks,

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347 “The stream of symbols, no doubt, has began to flow again, but the natural direct connection between association, linguistic expression, symbol, and object has not been restored; a certain freezing of symbols has taken place, and in order to keep communication comprehensible and flexible, more and more symbols must be brought into play, further intensifying with their superabundance the process of freezing, since - and this is the transition from symbol to allegory- they would no longer be at all comprehensible were they not ordered into an established and consequently allegorical canon, the opposite extreme to direct communicability” (Broch, Introduction, Selected prose, 35).
349 While stressing the need for a new German national consciousness and advocating for cultural conservatism, Hofmannsthal did not lose sight of an European perspective (Gottfried 508-19)
deceptive mirrors, and distorting portraits, a definition of one’s Self can be achieved only through the acknowledgment of the secret components of one’s soul and through their embracement, as illustrated by the merging pattern of the oxymoron.
Masks in the “Venice of the North”: Bely’s *Petersburg*

In 1911, when Thomas Mann completed *Der Tod in Venedig*, and Hugo von Hofmannsthal was working on *Andreas*, Russian writer Andrei Bely was beginning the novel *Petersburg* which was published in 1913 in the almanac *Sirin* and republished in a shorter edition in 1922. We have already seen how, in Mann and Hofmannsthal’s narratives, the mask functions as an embodiment of unsettling, “Eastern” elements discovered within European culture; in *Petersburg*, the link between masks and exoticism is made explicit as they represent tension and fear of the East and an equally threatening Otherness growing both within Europe and within the individual Self. Like *Der Tod in Venedig* and *Andreas*, the novel is built on a system of apparent antitheses. “Everything in the world is built on contrasts” (114),350 exclaims the character Alexandr Ivanovich Dudkin, as if commenting on the novel’s structure; yet as Elsworth reminds us, “all the apparent alternatives on which the novel is built are reducible to identity” (1983, 100), and all paired opposites are eventually merged into one figure, thus transforming the antitheses into a series of oxymora.351

To explain the role of masks in the unveiling of these oxymora, I will first address the novel’s setting and explain how the Russian aristocrats and Eastern terrorists can be seen as opposite elements gradually brought into relation and finally merged. I will then focus on two forms of masks and their roles as Doppelgängers for apparently opposite characters. Lastly, I will point out how the masks transform the characters into puppets moved by greater historical forces.

The narrative is set in St. Petersburg during the 1905 revolution and is partly based on autobiographic material.352 The plot centres on Nikolai Apollonovich Ableukhov, a

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351 For oxymoron, we refer to a figure “which yokes together two seemingly contradictory elements” and is thus “a form of condensed paradox” (Warnke 973).
confused university student who becomes involved with a terrorist party and who, in a moment of frustration after romantic disappointment, promises that, if the party required it, he would do away with his father, Senator Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov. Nikolai soon forgets about this promise and is seen around the city wearing a red domino, a costume with which he intends to scare Sophia Petrovna (the woman who has rejected him), but which is interpreted by his fellow citizens as an emblem of revolutionary terror. One day, he is approached by the agent Alexandr Ivanovich Dudkin, who entrusts him with a mysterious object, later revealed as a bomb, for safekeeping in the name of the terrorist party. Mesmerized by the bomb and the possibilities it entails, Nikolai falls into a deep trance and activates its mechanism. When he comes back to his senses, he is suddenly terrified and, wishing to take back his rash promise, he seeks help from Alexandr Ivanovich, who is tormented by visions of “yellow faces” with the imprint of Eastern revolutionaries. Alexandr promises to speak to the person who has delivered the instructions, a certain Lippanchenko, who, however, is not sympathetic and threatens to destroy both young men if a crime is not committed. The bomb explodes at night in Apollon Apollonovich’s studio, leaving no victims. Alexandr, who has been tormented by terrible hallucinations, goes mad and murders Lippanchenko with a pair of scissors. Nikolai leaves for Egypt and does not return to Russia until the death of his parents.

This brief summary shows a relatively simple plot, yet the limited action is not as important as the extended use of symbolic leitmotifs or the numerous visions, dreams, and hallucinations that fill the narrative and transform it into a nightmare of apocalyptic proportions. Just like Mann and Hofmannsthal’s Venice, Bely’s Petersburg is a magical city where anything may happen, where the thin layer of appearance can be broken anytime and replaced by an occult, mystical dimension. Like Venice, Petersburg was built artificially and represents the defiance of nature by human forces. Like Venice, it is a city that has been described so many times that it can no longer be perceived.

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352 On the biographical material in the novel see Elsworth: “the direct autobiographical material is derived from the month of September 1906. The triangular relationship with the Blocks and the night spent wandering the street with ideas of suicide are used as the basis of the hero’s motivation” (1927, 81).
independently from a literary tradition. And like the Venice of Mann’s novella, it is an insalubrious, unwholesome place prone to epidemics of typhus and cholera, with a strong tendency to alcoholism among its inhabitants. In the Russian imagery Petersburg, often called the Venice of the North, is a city of water and mirrors, a place of reflections that can lead to introspection or to a belief in the existence of illusionary figures; while Venice is the threshold to the East, Petersburg was built as a “window to the West,” but beneath its Western appearance reveals an Eastern, irrational world.

In Der Tod in Venedig a threat of contamination comes from India, spreads initially to the city and later to the more sheltered resort of Lido. In Bely’s novel, Petersburg is similarly divided in its geography between a mainland and an unfamiliar island and threatened by chaos and uprisings that begin in the eastern territories of the Russian empire, spreading first to the island, and then to the more privileged mainland. In Der Tod in Venedig the oxymoron becomes geographical as the Indian jungle imagined by the protagonist merges by the end of the novella with the infested Venice; so too in Petersburg; the Manchurian fields eventually become one with the city’s mainland.

The geographical divisions are reflected in the relationships among the characters. The rich Senator Ableukhov and his son Nikolai, along with Nikolai’s friend Sergei Sergeich Likhutin and his wife Sofia Petrovna, live on the mainland, while the extremely poor agent Alexander Ivanovich Dudkin, the powerful terrorist party leader Lippanchenko, and the double agent Voronkov/Morkovin are all island residents. The inhabitants of the island are identified as a hybrid race, “neither men nor shadows,” and, as happens in Hofmannsthal’s Andreas, they have the faculty of being at once real characters and Doppelgängers for the figures of the mainland. As Maguire and Malmstad explain, in the novel, there are “no private thoughts or private actions” and “even something as concrete

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353 Bely’s novel reenacts and partly parodies the myth of the city as represented in the nineteenth century by Pushkin, Gogol, and Dostoyevsky, while other allusions are parodies of Tolstoi’s Anna Karenina or of elements of Nietzsche, Solovyov, and Steiner’s philosophies (Elsworth 1983, 103; Maguire and Malmstad XII). For the influence of Solov’ev and Nietzsche, see Keys (162).
354 See Maguire (XIV).
355 “ублюдочный род” (253), “ни люди, ни тени” (253).
as a tic or a gesture might be shared by a number of otherwise seemingly different personages” (XIII).

Alexandr Ivanovich is both an independent character and the double of Nikolai Apollonovich. He is introduced as a contrast to Nikolai, since he is a destitute alcoholic and a revolutionary, while Nikolai belongs to a rich, aristocratic, and conservative Russian family; but he is gradually brought into relation with him as we learn that the two share habits, fragments of memories, a state of obsession and confusion, and a commitment to a terrorist party. Moreover, Alexandr is haunted by terrible yellow faces “with the same imprint” just as Nikolai is obsessed by the domino. So too, Senator Ableukhov and Lippanchenko, initially presented as opposites in their respective roles as representative of the Russian State and head of a terrorist organization, are brought into relation by the destructive effect of their orders and by the fatherly role they play towards Nikolai and Alexandr Ivanovich; they eventually merge into one image as one is killed in a murder envisioned and planned by the other.

To complicate things, we are informed by a metafictional digression that all characters suffer from the same “cerebral game”\(^{356}\) and that they are nothing but the result of the author’s imagination. The “author” has first imagined Senator Ableukhov, and this character, in turn, has imagined the other figures. The Senator imagines (and thus creates) the agent Alexandr Ivanovich Dudkin; the latter imagines the yellow, Mongol features of the terrorist leader Lippanchenko, which he sees in a damp spot of his attic’s wallpaper. The game of correspondences among the characters is thus extended: if Alexandr Ivanovich is a figure born out of Apollon Apollonovich’s imagination, he can be read as the senator’s spiritual son and Nikolai’s illegitimate brother.\(^{357}\) In addition, the Oriental-looking Lippanchenko (64), a creation of a creation, can be traced back to the senator — in this way, the Russian aristocracy is shown to contain the element that leads to its own destruction. The cerebral game, however, does not prevent the figures from existing

\(^{356}\) “Мозговая игра” (38)
\(^{357}\) See Elsworth (1983, 97).
independently and being capable of actions with concrete consequences. Moreover, the narrator warns us that the cerebral game is “only a mask” that is limited and controlled by higher, mysterious forces, identifiable in the powers embodied by the masks.

As in Hofmannsthal’s Andreas, the masks exemplify the characters’ inner divisions, an irremediable disintegration that is justified as a symptom of degeneration. Nikolai Ableukhov’s soul is, for example, split into opposites components identified as “godlike ice” and “froglike slime.” The first turns Nikolai’s face into the “marble profile” of an “ancient mask,” a metaphor that is reiterated when we are told that Nikolai’s gaze sometimes changes to stone, and his features resemble a divine image. The second component is associated with a frog’s grimace and is a changeable and grotesque skin-mask. In this dichotomy, scholars have read a division between reason and feeling, between West and East. Since both components are defined as “masks,” it is impossible to understand which one is the hero’s “true” face, and Nikolai becomes an oxymoron, a figure formed by opposite elements.

The recurrence of masks and the exaggerated importance given to gestures are situated in a narrative in which verbal exchange is almost irrelevant, and real communication occurs at the level of gestures (Maguire and Malmstad XVI). The characters are often unable to

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358 “ибо каждая праздная мысль развивалась упорно в пространственно-временной образ, продолжая свои -- теперь уже бесконтрольные -- действия вне сенаторской головы” (38). (“Every idle thought obstinately developed into a spatio-temporal image, continuing its new uncontrollable activities – outside the senator’s head.” 45)
359 “Мозговая игра – только маска; под этой маской совершается вторжение в мозг незнакомых нам сил” (65). (“Cerebral game is only a mask; beneath this mask precedes the invasion of the brain by forces unknown to us” [74].)
360 “богоподобный лед” (76).
361 “лягушечья слякоть” (76).
362 “мраморный профиль...” (62).
363 “Античная маска...” (156).
364 “когда ж е он погрузился в серьезное созерцание чего бы то ни было, то взгляд этот медленно окаменевал: суходо, четко и холодно выступали линии совершенно белого его лица, подобного иконописному, поражая особого рода благородством аристократизма” (50). (“When he immersed himself in the contemplation of something, however, that glaze gradually turned to stone: the lines of his completely white countenance, which resembled the face on an icon, stood out dryly, sharply, coldly, with a striking aristocratic nobility of a specific kind” [57].)
365 “из-под маски, ужимок, лягушечьих уст” (73). (“Beneath the mask, the grimaces, the frog-like lips” [85]).
366 See Matich (45) and Eslworth (1983, 96).
express themselves verbally and illustrate their feelings by means of pantomime and grimaces; moreover, the recurring gestures characterize their figures and become a means to identify their *Doppelgänger*. The prominence of signs reminds us that Bely’s Petersburg, like Mann and Hofmannsthal’s Venice, can be read as a “theatre of the soul,” where the illicit components of the inner self take the shape of real characters and wander around the streets of the city, only occasionally recognizable by their masks.

The central role of masks in the narrative is underlined by the fact that Bely considered calling his novel *The Red Domino*. 367 This costume is introduced at the beginning, when Nikolai is waiting for a costume-maker, long before his rejection by Sophia Petrovna or his promise to the terrorist party. Only later does the reader learn that, in the course of an argument, Sophia, in love with Nikolai’s marble profile but disappointed by his frog-like mask, had called him a “red clown,” 368 and that, deeply offended by her words, Nikolai had decided to take his revenge by terrifying her. The costume consists of a small black mask with a lace beard and a crimson, silk hooded robe. 369 Nikolai wears it for the first time in a private ceremony that leads to a deep sense of estrangement:

Скоро он стоял перед зеркалом — весь атласный и красный, приподняв над лицом миниатюрную масочку; черное кружево бороды, отвернувшись, упало на плечи, образуя справа и слева по причудливому, фантастическому крылу; и из черного кружева крыльев из полусумрака комнаты в зеркале на него поглядело мучительно странно — то, само: лицо — его, самого; вы сказали бы, что там в зеркале на себя самого не глядел Николай Аполлонович, а неведомый, бледный, тоскующий — демон пространства. (52) 370

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367 See Elsworth (1983, 88) and Burkhart (18).
368 “красный шут” (79).
369 Like many other details in the novel, the costume has an autobiographical origin. “In his later memoirs,” writes Maslenikov, “Bely confessed that in the fall of 1906 […] he spent hours in his apartment, alone, disguised from the world and even form himself by a black mask and a red robe” (42).
370 “Soon he stood before the mirror — all satin and red, with a tiny mask poised over his face; the black lace of the beard, twisted aside, fell on to his shoulders, forming to right and left of him a pair of outlandish, fantastic wings; and from the black lace of those wings, from the semi-darkness of the room, there gazed at him in the mirror, tormentingly strange — that very thing: his own face; you might have said that it was not Nikolai Apollonovich gazing at himself from the mirror, but an unknown, pale and languishing — demon of space” (60).
The mirror image gains autonomy as Nikolai, through the impaired vision of the mask, is no longer able to recognize his features and interprets the reflection as the manifestation of a diabolic double. As a realization of Sophia’s metaphor, he appears first in her unlit doorway and later at the masked balls that Sophia is in the habit of attending in the company of a journalist friend who soon begins to publish articles about real and fictional apparitions of the red masker. Intrigued by these stories, Petersburg’s inhabitants gossip about the domino and interpret it as a symbol of revolutionary terror. When Alexandr Ivanovich comes to visit Nikolai to deliver the mysterious object, later revealed as a sardine tin containing the bomb, he is astonished by the mask and expresses his admiration for the expensive crimson silk spread on Nikolai’s armchair. Nikolai blushes deeply, tries to cover the cloth with the tartar gown that he is in the habit of wearing in his apartment, and hurries to put it away.

Under the protective concealment of the domino, Nikolai is bold and confident, yet when Alexandr relates it to Nikolai’s daily life, he refuses to acknowledge a connection with it. We must not forget that Alexandr Ivanovich is the terrorist party’s messenger, that the domino enters the scene directly after Nikolai’s involvement with the party, and that its red colour therefore has a bloody connotation. Moreover, Nikolai’s decision to wear the costume to scare Sophia Petrovna takes place in the place where he makes his promise to the party – on the bridge connecting the mainland and the island. This position attributes a liminal status to the domino. Covered by the red silk, Nikolai stands at the threshold of geographical boundaries as well as of the natural (the mainland) and the supernatural (the island, or the realm of shadows). Sophia Petrovna, who has no time to understand the prank, identifies the domino as a satanic messenger. She is, however, only frightened until a gust of wind blows Nikolai’s cloak’s open and reveals his trouser straps. With the exposure of a familiar element, the terrible demon turns into a grotesque, ridiculous figure that leaves Sophia outraged and disgusted. Seeking revenge, she recounts the event to her husband, Sergei Likhutin, who is even unable to utter the word domino, because it fills him with strong sense of nausea.  

371 Likhutin’s disgust emerges clearly from his outburst: “Красное домино!.. Гадость, гадость и гадость! (160). “Red domino! … It was foul, foul, foul!” [176].)
The identity of the masker under the red domino is publicly revealed during a masked ball, and just as Hofmannsthal intended for *Andreas*, it brings the action to its highest point of tension. The revolutionary leader Lippanchenko and Sophia Petrovna are both present, masked respectively as a Spaniard and Madame Pompadour, and it is through the hands of Sophia Petrovna, who has come into possession of it by a series of coincidences, that Nikolai receives the letter with the terrorist party’s instructions to commit a crime against his father. At the ball, Nikolai has the feeling that the costume has intoxicated him; his androgynous, sexless self is replaced through the act of masking by an ardent sexuality, and he perceives that he has turned into the ugly red clown he intended to play. This impression is reinforced by the fact that, as soon as he enters the ballroom, a number of darkly masked characters join the dance. He is surrounded by black capuchins with skulls embroidered on their chests; as in a *dance macabre*, they whirl around him, and at the end of the ball, they gather to sing a song in which they announce an imminent era of terrorism. Senator Apollon Apollonovich, who is at the ball, associates these dances with violence and revolution, and the “blood red domino” fills him with an immediate, instinctive feeling of revulsion. He does not recognize his son, but thinks at first that some one might be terrorizing him using red as a symbolic color; he later turns away in disgust, identifying in the costume an emblem of the revolutionary chaos that, in his opinion, is destroying Russia. Thus, the domino, which Nikolai initially wears to scare Sophia, gradually transcends the personal and begins to represent a socio-political threat.

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“тут над всем стоял аромат каких-то сатанинских эксцессов, отравлявших душу навек, как синильная кислота” (165). (“Over all this hung the smell of satanic excesses which could poison the soul forever, like prussic acid” [181].)

Сам себя он забыл; забыл свои мысли; и забыл упования; упивался собственной, ему предназначенной ролью: богоподобное, бесстрастное существо отлетело куда-то; оставалась голая страсть, а страсть стала ядом. Лихорадочный яд пронизал его мозг, выливался незримо из глаз пламенеющим облаком, обивая липнущим и кровавым атласом: будто он теперь на все глядел обугленным ликом из покуюшихся тело огней, и обугленный лик превратился в черную маску, а покующие тело огни – в красный шелк. Он теперь воистину стал шутом, безобразным и красным (193-94). (“He had forgotten his own self; forgotten his thoughts; and forgotten his hopes; he was intoxicated by his own predestined role: the godlike, passionless creature had flown away; naked passion remained, and passion turned to poison. A feverish poison penetrated his brain, poured unseen from his eyes in a cloud of flame, entwining him in clinging blood-red velvet: as though he now looked at everything with a charred face out of flames that seared his body, and that charred countenance turned into a black mask, and the flames that seared his body – into red silk. He had now become a clown, an ugly red clown” [212].)
When Nikolai reads the note with the terrorist party’s instructions, he takes fright and, with a gesture that can be interpreted symbolically, takes off his mask, thereby confirming that the domino and the act of terror are closely associated. He publicly reveals his identity, ending the mystery of the red domino, and leaves a gossiping ballroom and an upset father wondering about his son’s degenerate blood. In the meantime, Sophia is escorted home by a tall, white domino who seems mysteriously informed about her vicissitudes. His words vaguely recall Christ’s warning to Peter, with the difference that they are not directed to a single person but to an unspecified humanity: “Вы все отрекаетесь от меня: я за всеми вами хожу. Отрекаетесь, а потом призываете…” (232). In this sad, peaceful but powerful figure, scholars have read a reference to the second coming of Christ awaited by Rudolf Steiner and by the Anthroposophist movement, as well as a parody of Nietzsche’s Übermensch. Bely leaves its meaning deliberately ambiguous, but for our purposes, it is important to note that the implicit association with Christ links the domino to the sphere of the sacred and confirms the affiliation of its red counterpart with the demonic. Thus, the red domino, too, is associated with the supernatural and becomes a liminal, magical tool that transforms Nikolai into a diabolic messenger.

While Nikolai experiences the Self’s division brought about by the domino, the agent Alexandr Ivanovich Dudkin suffers from a similar dissociation and is haunted by visions of fearful yellow faces with Oriental features:

в этих снах его обступали все какие-то хари (почему-то чаще всего татары, японцы или вообще восточные человек); эти хари неизменно носили тот же пакостный отпечаток (107).  

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373 In the Gospel, Peter’s denial is reported in Matthew 26:34, Luke 22 :34, John 13 :38 and Mark 14:72. The resemblance is vague, and yet the reference is emphasized by the sacred atmosphere that surrounds the masker.
374 “You all deny me: but I keep watch of you all. You deny me, and then you call me…” (232).
375 See Burkhart (52).
376 The association with the sacred is reinforced by the original meaning of the word domino, which referred to the dark, hooded cloak worn by cathedral canons (Agnes, 425).
377 “In these dreams he was surrounded by terrible faces, (most often for some reasons, Tartars, Japanese or oriental persons in general); these faces always bore the same foul imprint” (117).
These faces are all alike, as if they were created from the same woodcut, and their narrow eyes remind us of the slits of the domino’s mask. Since they are “worn” by several characters who are at once “the same” and “not quite the same,” we can consider them a form of mask. The domino and the Eastern faces are initially presented as antithetical; the domino, in fact, is a typical Western mask that Nikolai uses for personal reasons and that is associated with the masked balls of the Russian aristocracy, while the “yellow faces” belong to the revolutionaries, are associated with poverty and exploitation, and have a political connotation. Yet the domino, too, is interpreted as an emblem of a political threat, and in the course of the narrative, the domino and the yellow faces turn out to be closely related. Remember that Nikolai Apollonovich and Alexandr Ivanovich, introduced as opposites, are gradually brought into relation: their fear of and attraction to masks can thus be read as complementary.

The Eastern masks torment Alexandr Ivanovich mostly in his dreams, yet even when he is awake, he is taunted by a strange hallucination in which a Mongol face “with narrow eyes” stares at him from a damp spot of his wallpaper. When he meets his instructor Lippanchenko to receive the package he is to hand over to Nikolai Apollonovich, Alexandr recognizes in the man’s yellow, fat, greasy features the face that is tormenting him and, a few pages later, we are told that Lippanchenko looks like a “mixture of Semite and Mongol,” as if he is wearing a mask based on Alexandr’s visions. Just as Alexandr is the creation of Senator’s Ableukhov’s imagination, Lippanchenko becomes the materialization of Alexandr’s fears and acquires the features of the face in yellow wallpaper. Alexandr cannot refrain from asking for a confirmation of Lippanchenko’s origins, but the latter answers evasively, as he states that Mongol blood is a common feature in the Russian population. Later, the narrator comments that Lippanchenko has become Alexandr’s personal fabrication, a chimera that gradually assumes Oriental

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378 “одно роковое лицо с узкими, монгольскими глазами” (48)
379 “Во всех русских ведь течет монгольская кровь...”(947)
features and grins at him from the wallpaper “like a real Mongol.” In short, the yellow mask emerges from the wallpaper, is further delineated on Lippanchenko’s features, and returns, in a more defined form, to torment Alexandr in his attic.

Both the domino and the yellow masks exacerbate the sex drives of Nikolai and Alexandr and transform their androgynous, sexless nature. We have been informed by the narrator that Nikolai’s duality is a feminine trait, since the symbol for the male is unity (76), and it is perhaps no coincidence that he chooses a domino, a Venetian mask often worn by women to protect their identity. We have also observed how Nikolai’s sexless, marble features are changed, upon wearing the domino, into “naked passion” caused by an intoxication that turns “into poison” (212). For his part, when the yellow masks materialize, Alexandr, described as a young man of delicate features who could be mistaken for a woman, begins to suffer from a fetishist tendency related to the novel’s concern with fragmentation: “был влюблен,” he confesses, “как бы это сказать: в отдельные части женского тела, в туалетные принадлежности, в чулки, например” (111). Later, Alexandr relates this fetishist tendency to satanic practices, the destruction of European cultures, and a return to “healthy barbarism:” “в сатанизме есть грубое поклонение фетишу, то есть здоровое варварство” (360). Alexandr’s fetishism is also related to his psychological state; he suffers from a dissociation which is explained as a symptom of degeneration. The ambiguity of his sexual orientation is reflected in the features of Lippanchenko, who, as we have seen, is wearing a mask created by Alexandr’s imagination. Throughout the narrative, Lippanchenko is referred to as “the person” (in Russian, the word is feminine and often substituted by the feminine pronoun “она”) and displays ambiguous, androgynous traits.

380 “Химера росла – по ночам: на куске темно-желтых обой усмехалась она настоящим монголом” (338). (“A chimera that grew with every night: on a patch of the dark-yellow wallpaper it grinned like a real Mongol” [368].)
381 Ober argues that Dudkin, in the 1916 edition, can be seen as a woman in disguise (passim, especially 85-86).
382 “I was in love … how shall I put it: with specific parts of woman’s body, with articles of her toilet, stockings, for instance’ (212).
383 “In Satanism there is a vulgar worship of the fetish, that is to say a healthy barbarism …” (392).
Matich argues that androgyny symbolized in the Russian Silver Age an ideal of perfection, and was seen to offer the possibility to transcending the masculine-feminine polarity. “The mask hides sexual ambiguity and makes the experience of androgyny possible” (44), she writes, noticing that Nikolai’s role as a masker is both “sexually ambiguous and Dionysian in its symbolic revolutionary statement” (46). However, we have seen that Nikolai is identified as a “marble,” sexless “mask” before wearing the domino. The domino is thus a second mask worn on a mask of androgyny; it exposes Nikolai’s sexuality and turns it into a dangerous frenzy. The same madness befalls Alexandr Ivanovich, leading to the murder in the end of the novel.

In the novel, sexual impulses are associated with irrationality and linked to both Eastern forces and the terrorist threat. The red costume, initially worn for a personal reason, is soon interpreted, against the will of Nikolai, as an emblem of revolutionary terror. The yellow faces, meanwhile, are connected to “mysterious Japanese visitors” (122) and to the Manchurian hats worn by the demonstrators who crowd Petersburg’s streets; Alexandr Ivanovich, Sophia Petrovna and Apollon Apollonovich all recognize them in the protesting crowd. Through this uprising, revolutionary chaos spreads to the island and to the more privileged mainland, which, through the geographical oxymoron noted earlier, becomes one with the Manchurian fields. Caught in the middle of the demonstration, Alexandr stops to stare at the equestrian statue of the founder of Petersburg, and is enlightened by a prophetic glance into European history:

… желтые полчища азиатов, тронувшись с насиженных мест, обагрят поля европейские океанами крови; будет, будет – Цусима! Будет – новая Калка!..
[… под монгольской тяжелой пятой опустятся европейские берега, и над этими берегами закурчавится пена; земнородные существа вновь опустятся к дну океанов -- в прародимые, в давно забытые хаосы.. (121-122) 385

384 “желтые, монгольские рожи” (122).
385 “…yellow hordes of Asiatics, moving from the places they have settled, will turn the fields of Europe into crimson with oceans of blood; there will be – Tsushima! There will be – a new Kalka! […] the shores of Europe will sink under the Mongol heel, and above those shores foam will froth; the creatures of the earth will sink again to the bottom of the oceans – into primeval, long-forgotten chaos …” (132).
Tsushima refers to a battle in which the Russian navy was crushed by the Japanese during the Russo-Japanese war (1905), and Kalka is the name of a thirteenth-century battle (1223) in which the Russians were defeated by the Mongols and which opened the way for a subsequent conquest of Russia (Maguire and Malmstad, 325). In the yellow faces, Alexandr recognizes the prophesy of a new Mongol invasion which will destroy Russia and spread to the rest of Europe. At this point, the reader begins to understand that everything yellow, slimy, or fishy (like the sardine can in which the bomb is hidden and the lips of the fat Lippanchenko) is connected to an unclear danger coming from Asia that threatens to destroy Western culture, a threat later called “the Mongol business.” Nikolai Apollonovich, with the plan of murdering his father, one of the most important bureaucrats of the Russian State, becomes associated with this strange and unspecified Eastern phenomenon. Even his red domino, a typical Venetian mask, is in fact linked to exotic, Eastern motifs.

Very early in the novel, the reader is informed that Nikolai has the habit of wearing a colourful Bukhara robe, tartar skullcap, and fur slippers; in addition, he has furnished one of his rooms with an Oriental couch, an Arab stool, and a multicoloured leopard skin, and filled it with ornaments such as African shields, Sudanese spears, and incense burners. The narrator notes that this accumulation of details signifies a transformation of the “brilliant young man” into an “Oriental.” Nikolai preserves the library for his books and a bust of Kant, an arrangement that symbolizes his inner division between East and West, between feeling and reason. From the beginning, the domino finds its place in the Oriental room, in conjunction with miscellaneous exotic objects. The costume is, importantly, brought into existence by the previously cited metaphor used by Sophia Petrovna, who had called Nikolai a “red clown.” To this, Nikolai had promptly responded with another insult: “Если я — красный шут, вы — японская кукла...” (88).

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386 The name itself, as Maguire and Malmstad remark, contains the morpheme lip- which recalls the Russian word for “sticky” (xiii).
387 “монгольское дело” (315).
388 “блестящий молодой человек превратился в восточного человека” (50).
390 “If I’m a red clown, then you are a Japanese doll” (88).
As Sophia’s metaphor’s, Nikolai’s metaphor, too, reflects reality. Sophia Petrovna, a woman of Petersburg’s middle class, shares in fact Nikolai’s infatuation with exotic objects. Her walls are draped with Japanese prints and decorated with fans and ribbons; her rooms crowded with Japanese chrysanthemums, and she strolls about the apartment in a pink kimono. “она была настоящей японочкой” (71), comments the narrator. The “red clown” is thus, from an early stage, related to the “Japanese doll,” and after Nikolai’s offense, both metaphors are literally realized: Sophia receives a yellow doll from Lippanchenko, and Nikolai begins to wear his red domino. Nikolai’s link with exotic motives had, moreover, been suggested from an early stage, since the narrator had already informed us that his ancestors come from a “Kirgiz-Kaisak Horde” (10), and that his father is the last of an ancient Mongol race.

Before discovering that his son is behind the scandal of the red domino, Senator Ableukhov has a dream in which he recognizes Nikolai as a Mongol, or more precisely, in which he sees a Mongol he once met in Tokyo wearing a “mask” of his son:

— там какой-то толстый монгол присваивал себе физиономию Николая Аполлоновича — присваивал, говорю я, потому что это был не Николай Аполлонович, а просто монгол, виданный уж в Токио; тем не менее физиономия его была физиономией Николая Аполлоновича. (170)

In the dream, Senator Ableukhov perceives that the Mongol is attempting to penetrate his Self, to conquer his body and to replace him, and feels his hands sinking in the sticky and smelly substance associated both with the “Mongol business” (187), that begins to stand also for a loss of the Self.

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391 “She was a genuine Japanese lady” (79). As Maguire and Malmstad comment, “around the turn of the century, Japanese art was extremely fashionable in Russia and also in Western Europe” (317).
392 “— there a fat Mongol had appropriated the face of Nikolai Apollonovich — I say appropriated, because that was not Nikolai Apollonovich, but simply a Mongol previously seen in Tokyo; nevertheless his face is Nikolai Apollonovich’s face” (186).
Nikolai and his father are initially presented as antithetical: they have opposite lifestyles, beliefs, habits and political views, and they hate each another. Throughout the novel, however, they are gradually brought into relation. We are informed that they look the same, to the extent that they are indistinguishable in photographs; they share habits such as talking to themselves; they even suffer from the same heart condition. Moreover, both are often presented as androgynous and asexual. Finally, through recurring allusions and in two symmetrical dreams, they see and identify each other as Oriental. We have seen that Apollon Apollonovich, before the ball, dreams of a Mongol with the face of his son. Meanwhile, Nikolai Apollonovich, after the ball, feels a sense of disgust towards “anything Oriental and towards his father,” 393 plays with the bomb, activates its mechanism, falls asleep, and has a similar dream. In it, he sees a huge head that he recognizes as a carved idol worshipped by his Kirgiz-Kaisak ancestors. When the Mongol enters the room in a colourful dressing gown, Nikolai identifies him as his ancestor Ab – Lai, “the old Turanian,” whose features, surprisingly, merge with those of his father (291). Just as Alexandr Ivanovich, in his prophecy, sees Europe reversing, almost devolving, to “primeval, long-forgotten chaos,” so too Nikolai fears that his aristocratic blood is degenerating, vitiated by “yellow blood corpuscles;” he is regressing to Mongol roots, and this alien, Eastern component is growing and about to crush the Russian aristocratic counterpart. Thus, in both aristocrats, Apollon and Nikolai Apollonovich, a lurking Eastern, destructive component becomes explicit in the dreams in which they see each other as Orientals.

Another important similarity between the domino and the Eastern mask is that both are labelled by Nikolai and Alexandr as hallucinations. The domino is a creation of Nikolai as much as the yellow masks are creations of Alexandr Ivanovich, and both are destined to become chimeras, mental fabrications that expand into delirious visions. Nikolai’s domino is introduced as a real costume, but is later explained as a compulsion, the result of nervous stress; Alexandr Ivanovich’s yellow faces begin as hallucinations but are worn by Lippanchenko and later materialize in the character of Shishnarfne.

393 “ко всему татарству и барству” (289).
Nikolai Apollonovich wakes up from the dream of the ancient Turanian, realizes that the bomb’s mechanism is ticking, and hurriedly searches for Alexandr Ivanovich. When he finds him, in a confused stream of thought, he tells him of the “delirious sensation,” both “familiar and unfamiliar,” that has been repressed but has now re-emerged from his memory. He explains that this sensation has tormented him since he first knew of the mysterious package, and he has the strange impression of having swallowed the bomb. He recalls how, as he stood by the bomb, he experienced a sense of division in his self, something he saw projected into an enormous head: “я там стоял – не я же, не я же, а какой-то, так сказать, великан с преогромною идиотскою головою” (319).

Finally, he describes an experience of violent fragmentation: “мощное чувство, будто тебя терзают на части, растаскивают члены тела в противоположные стороны” (319).

Alexandr Ivanovich has a simple response. He tells Nikolai that he has shared the torment of Dionysus, and adds that the modernist definition for the experience is “the sensation of the abyss” (324). He then dismisses all other phenomena as pseudo-hallucinations.

In the confused speech about his sensations, Nikolai does not mention the domino, but when he encounters Sergei Likhutin, Sophia Petrovna’s enraged husband, he automatically justifies the costume as a particular case of hallucination: “Врач сказал: рредкое такое – мозговое расстройство, такое-такое: домино и все подобное там... Мозговое расстройство...” (441).

Alexandr Ivanovich explains the yellow masks and their embodiment in Lippanchenko in the same way as he attributes the visions to an excessive consumption of alcohol and a mental ailment: “Ну, чтб такое монгол на стене? Бред. […] Э, да болен он, болен” (349-50).

394 “I was standing there over it…Only it wasn’t me standing there — it wasn’t me, it wasn’t me, but… a kind of, how shall I put it, giant with a huge idiotic head and a skull that hadn’t grown together” (348).
395 “…a powerful feeling, as though you are being torn to pieces, as though all your limbs are being pulled apart in different directions” (347).
396 “ощущением бездыни” (324). Just like Aschenbach in Der Tod in Venedig, Nikolai experiences a Dionysian dream in which the Self is reduced to fragments through the use of violence.
397 “The doctor said: a very rare …mental indisposition, all that business of the domino and suchlike… a mental indisposition …” (482).
398 “What was the Mongol after all? Delirium. […] Oh he was ill, ill!” (381).
Both Nikolai and Alexandr thus attribute their obsessions to an external condition, to illness and alcoholism, but as Nikolai’s “swelling” sensation indicates, they already contain in themselves the germs of these phenomena and are bound to acknowledge them. For Alexandr Ivanovich, this recognition takes place when the Eastern mask, already worn by Lippanchenko, materializes on the features of Shishnarfne, a Persian revolutionary whom Alexandr meets in his doorway. Shishnarfne, whose name is an anagram of Enfranshish, the whisper that Dudkin has been hearing for a long time from the yellow faces, has “hook-nosed,” “oriental” features, but, a detail that particularly surprises Alexandr Ivanovich, he has no trace of accent when he speaks Russian. He announces that he has long been looking for Alexandr and explains that he has come from Helsingfors, Finland. Alexandr Ivanovich remembers that in this city he once preached, with theories seeming almost to parody Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals*, the necessity of destroying European culture and embracing an age of “healthy barbarism:”

период историей изжитого гуманизма закончен и культурная история теперь стоит перед нами, как выветренный трухляк: наступает период здорового зверства, пробивающийся из темного народного низа (хулиганство, буйство апашей), из самой буржуазии (восточные дамские моды, кэк-уок — негрский танец; и — далее); Александр Иванович в эту пору проповедовал сожжение библиотек, университетов, музеев; проповедовал он и призывание монголов (впоследствии он испугался монголов). Все явления современности разделялись им на две категории: на признаки уже изжитой культуры и на здоровое варварство, принужденное пока таиться под маскою утонченности (явление Ницше и Ибсена) и под этой маскою заражать сердца хаосом, уже тайно взвывающим в душах.

Александр Иванович приглашал посиять маски и открыто быть с хаосом. (360)

399 Burkhart reads the name as derived from “Shish” and “Shishka”— sounds that in Russian are related to the words “obscenity” and “provocation” (148).

400 “The era of historically outlived humanism was at an end. All cultural history stood before us like an eroded ruin: a period of healthy barbarism was beginning, emerging from the depth of ordinary people (hooliganism, the riotous behavior of the apaches), from aristocratic high society (the uprising of the arts against established forms, love of primitive culture, the exotic), and from the bourgeoisie itself (oriental ladies’ fashions, the cakewalk – a negro dance; and – so on); at the time Alexandr Ivanovich advocated the burning of libraries, universities, and museums; he advocated the summoning of the Mongols (later he
Alexandr Ivanovich shares with many contemporary Russian anarchists and writers a longing for Russia’s purification through the “destruction of culture.” He explains the link between the domino and the yellow masks in the following way: if “symptoms of outlived culture” and “healthy barbarism” are the double face of the same reality, then the domino (as a symptom of degeneration) and the Eastern masks (linked to “barbarian” tribes) are part of the same force and are geared towards the destruction of European culture. Moreover, if the mask is used to reveal, rather than to hide, then the domino, just as the Eastern masks, exposes a wild component awakening in the Russian population through an inverted evolutionary pattern that leads to their progressive degeneration.

Shishnarfne argues that Petersburg now belongs to the otherworldly, information that, he specifies, is not found in any tourist guides, not even in “the venerable Baedeker.” Moreover, he warns Alexandr that even France is arming “black skinned Papuan hordes” who will soon take over Europe, and he claims that it all connects to Alexandr’s theories of “bestialism.” Alexandr soon notices that Shishnarfne’s voice is nothing but a sound in his own throat. When the outline of the Persian disappears, he tries to escape by jumping out of his room, but the narrator warns us that his attempt to escape is useless, as he comments ironically: “глупый, — нужно было вскочить не из комнаты, а из тела” (369).

became afraid of the Mongols). All contemporary phenomena were divided by him into two categories: symptoms of outlived culture and healthy barbarism, which was compelled for the time being to conceal itself under a mask of refinement (the appearance of Ibsen and Nietzsche); and under that mask to infect the hearts of men with the chaos that was already secretly calling in their souls. Alexandr Ivanovich called on people to remove their masks and live openly with chaos” (392).

See Maguire and Malmstad (345).

Beer notes that since the 1870s, fear of degeneration was part of the Darwinian controversy: “… fears that decadence may be an energy as strong as development, and extinction a fate more probable than progress” (135).

“столичный наш город […] принадлежит к стране загробного мира, — говорить об этом непринято как-то по составлении географических карт, путеводителей, указателей; красноречиво помалкивает тут сам почтенный Бедекер” (364). (“The fact that our capital city […] belongs to the world beyond the grave — it somehow isn’t done to talk about that when composing maps, guidebooks, catalogues; even the venerable Baedeker maintains an eloquent silence of the score” [397].)

“Франция под шумок вооружает черные орды и введет их в Европу — увидите: впрочем, это вам на руку -- вашей теории озверения и ниспровержения культуры: помните?” (365). (“France is arming the black hordes on the quiet and bringing them into Europe — you’ll see: anyway, that’s all grist to your mill – your theory of bestialism and the destruction of culture: do you remember?” [397].)

“Silly man – he needed to spring out of his body, not his room” (401).
Alexandr Ivanovich suffers from the same fragmentation as Nikolai, namely an increasing polarity that leads to the creation of doubles. The encounter with Shishnarfne leads to a temporary recognition, through which Alexandr identifies in himself a component of the threatening Otherness which he has been trying to escape. As he merges into one image – Russian Self and Asian Other – he completes another oxymoron, and recognizes that Otherness exists only in relation to Self. More specifically, it is a means by which the Self defines its own identity: “И просто Иванов там – японец какой-то, ибо фамилия эта, прочитанная в обратном порядке – японская: Вонави” (368). 406 Alexandr Ivanovich’s realization coincides with Nikolai’s acknowledgement that he is the source of the evil that surrounds him; his blood is bound to an irreversible process of degeneration, and he has lived for years under a mask, cultivating monsters:

Вот именно: при нем кровью шутили, называли "отродьем"; и над собственной кровью зашутил – "шут"; "шут" не был маскою, маской был "Николай Аполлонович"...
Преждевременно разложилась в нем кровь. (408) 407

According to Burkhart, masks function in the novel as an expression of Bely’s neo-romantic, anthroposophist philosophical views and reflect the notion that the world, as we perceive it, is always only a mask of the truth, of a deeper and hidden reality (166). However, since Nikolai’s face is alternately a tragic or a frog-like mask, the domino can be understood only as a mask over the mask, as an illusion over an illusion that exposes, rather than hides, Nikolai’s inner self. Moreover, if under the domino, there is another mask, there is no real Self to be lost or gained, only irremediable dualities and fragmentations.

406 “And a simple Ivanov [sic] there is a Japanese, for the real name, read backwards, is a Japanese one: Vonavi” (401).
407 That’s how it was: they joked about his blood and called him ‘sprog’ and the ‘clown’ – joked about his own blood; the ‘clown’ was not a mask, Nikolai Apollonovich was the mask ... His blood was prematurely decomposed. (446)
Lastly, both the domino and the Eastern faces create fearful doubles that threaten to replace or to take over the self and have no potential for transformation because they are exclusively designed for destruction and are moved puppet-like by greater, historical forces. This becomes clear when, after the ball, Nikolai comes home and must face the Senator in his red costume. As has happened earlier with the mirror, the costume creates a division. He sees himself projected into an indefinite third person, to whom he refers as “a scoundrel” 408 and imagines severing his father’s neck with a pair of scissors. The narrator, using Nikolai’s point of view, does not narrate the episode in the subjunctive but recalls the vision in the past indicative, as if the image was real and Nikolai a third party witnessing, as on a stage, a patricide committed by the domino (272). The fantasy not only stages Nikolai’s hidden impulses, but prefigures the murder later committed by Alexandr Ivanovich. As Nikolai enters the house, he is, moreover, transformed through a game of mirrors into the marionette Petrushka (298). If the mask reveals the characters’ repressed wishes, the mirror reflects an even higher truth in which the characters are a puppets manipulated by greater forces. We must point out that Nikolai has, in this episode, just had a drink in the company of a Dutchman and a giant with a metallic voice, both references to the Bronze Horseman, the statue representing the founder of Petersburg. Clayton notes that the name of the fairground marionette “Petrushka” (little Peter), like Dutchman and the giant, is an allusion to Tsar Peter the Great (12); further, Petrushka is often used in Russian folklore to denote “a sinister clown” or a “devil” (312). Transformed into the clown Petrushka, Nikolai appears as one of the Horseman’s puppets; so too, at the end of the novel, Alexandr is controlled by the animated statue and led to commit a murder that, given the fatherly role of Lippanchenko, is also a symbolic patricide. On the one hand, Nikolai’s white, powdered face prefigures Alexandr’s clownish features in the moment he murders Lippanchenko. On the other, Nikolai’s reflection in the mirror creates a miniature balagan for the reader, a mise en abîme that alludes to the chaos governing the city: “[Petersburg] was,” writes Clayton, “as Block and others suggest, a balagan dominated by clowns, reflecting by baroque extension the Russian empire itself and, further still, a world in which the director/creator of the puppets – God – was dead and the clowns had run amok” (14).

408 “негодяй” (272).
While Nikolai encounters the Bronze Horseman in the island’s tavern, Alexandr summons him after his encounter with Shishnarfne and is guided by the animated statue to commit a murder with a pair of scissors, the weapon that Nikolai, dressed in his domino, has envisioned for the murder of the senator. As he is spying on Lippanchenko, he is described as a little figure with the face of a clown: “там! – стояла фигурочка, в пальтеце, с меловым застывшим лицом: будто – клоун; и белыми улыбалась губами”(476). After the murder, he is found straddling the body in the pose of the Bronze Horseman, with “eyebrows arched without eyebrows” and with a cockroach on his face, a second version of Nikolai’s buffoon. The clownish disguise exemplifies how Nikolai and Alexandr, initially opposites, are gradually brought into relation and finally merge into one image as one commits the murder planned by the other.

The figure of the Bronze Horseman, who manipulates both Nikolai and Alexandr and eventually leads the latter to murder Lippanchenko, is, as Elsworth points out, a “symbol of the terrible might of the Russian state” (1983, 98), and could thus be interpreted as a force that battles against “the Mongol business” on the side of European culture. Yet his legend is in the novel associated with the horsemen of Chingiz-Khan through the recurrent sound of galloping, which is used to announce the Bronze Horseman and also to foretell an Asian invasion of Russia (486). Thus, the original antithesis between East and West fades as the Bronze Horseman and Chingiz-Khan merge into one image, and the Horseman is revealed as an exponent of the forces inside European culture, that are working towards their own destruction.

In the epilogue, the narrator relates that Nikolai moves to Egypt, studies the book of death, and sits for hours in front of the mouldering head of the Sphinx, indicatively, a ruin about to collapse in the sand. The Sphinx’s head recalls two important and recurring motifs: severed heads and exotic masks. The stony head symbolizes the annihilation of

409 “There! — a little figure stood, in a shabby overcoat, with an impassive face, as white as chalk: it seemed – a clown; smiling with chalk-white lips” (519).
410 “надбровные дуги безброво” (477).
411 A similar element is found in Le Gallienne’s story: the cockroach found on the mask exemplifies its link to death and degeneration (see Chapter One).
culture that was expected by many Russian intellectuals at the turn of the century; but the obsession with severed heads, as Freud reminds us (1919, 227-268), can also be related to the fear of castration – after all, *Petersburg* is a novel geared towards patricide; 412 furthermore, castration can be read symbolically as the privation of fertility and of creative sources associated with decadence and degeneration (Palacio 124).

*Petersburg* reflects the revolution and the uprising of 1905. The fear of and attraction to the East, demonstrated in numerous historical references in the novel, can be explained by Russia’s political situation at the beginning of the twentieth century. As Bely began to conceive his work, Russia was striving to extend its domains to Manchuria, witnessed the local uprisings of the Boxer Rebellion (1900), and suffered a humiliating defeat in the Russo-Japanese war (1904-05). As Maguire and Malmstad point out, an important influence is also traceable in the poem “Panmongolism” (1894) by Vladimir Solovyov, which predicts an invasion of Russia by eastern forces (325). Ljunggren notes that Bely and Blok often discussed “the yellow temptation” (33) 413 and argues that the novel’s plot reflects Bely’s impression that “the revolutionary movement, which had strong connections in Finland, had been infiltrated by a destructive eastern element” (33). Along with Maguire and Malmstad, he recognizes in the characters references to real people, such as the terrorist Azef, who worked as a double agent and was known for his Mongolian appearance. 414

To understand the role played by masks in the approach to this Eastern threat, it is worth pausing on the final appearance of the domino in the novel. Apollon Apollonovich glances at the almost-forgotten costume and the little black mask, spread out among a miscellanea of exotic objects:

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412 Burkhart (129) and Ljunggren (*passim*, especially 9) interpret the novel as a manifestation of the Oedipus conflict.
413 Ljunggren points out that Dudkin suffers from the same sort of hallucinations and paranoia as Solovyov (41).
414 See Ljungreen (33) and Maguire and Malmstad (310). The latter explain that the terrorist Azef used the pseudonym “Lipchenko” while he travelled abroad, a reference to the character Lippanchenko; Bely, however, disagrees, claiming that he chose the character’s name because the sound of it “rang in his ears as the phonetic equivalent of chaos” (310).
Apollon perceives this vision as “absurdity;” in fact, these object’s arrangement juxtaposes east and west, as well as the personal and the general, thus symbolizing both an “external” and an inner threat. The mask and the Sudanese arrow are both linked to the “bestialism” that is attacking Russia from the outside (the Mongol forces) and, more subtly, from inside, through a degenerated component that grows within Russia’s aristocracy. Moreover, the image suggests an analogy between a fragmented, dissociated Self and the “primitive” mind; an association further explored by Freud when, in Totem and Taboos, he compares the modes of thoughts of “savages” and neurotics. Further, by conceiving the phenomenon of degeneration as a temporary death that will lead to a new beginning, Bely formulates a relationship between the primitive/neurotic psyche and humanity’s childhood. This new phase of history, however, no longer concerns the irremediably lost western culture, as summarized by Nikolai’s thoughts in front of the Sphinx:

в двадцатом столетии он провидит – Египет, вся культура, — как эта трухлявая голова: все умерло; ничего не осталось (516).

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415 “He saw – absurdity: from the stool in all directions spread the seething scarlet folds of the flamboyantly discarded domino, like leaping flames and flowing antlers – right up to the head of the spotted leopard, spread-eagled on the floor with snarling jaws; Apollon Apollonovich stood there a while, sucking his lips, scratched his chin that seemed sprinkled with hoar-frost and spat in disgust (he knew the story of that domino); it lay there, headless and preposterous, in satin folds and empty sleeves; on a rusty Sudanese arrow the little mask was hanging” (488).

416 Both Totem and Taboo and Petersburg were originally published in 1913. Brickman, in her discussion of Freud’s Totem and Taboos, has shown how Freud’s conception of “primitivity” both as a psychological and anthropological meaning echoes the colonialist discourse in which it was embedded. Moreover, she emphasizes regression (a important notion in Petersburg) as the mechanism that links primitivity, race and psychopathology. (65-74 passim).

417 The invasions, the second coming of Christ and the second childhood of humanity are all beliefs preached by Rudolf Steiner.

418 “in this twentieth century he discerns – Egypt, the whole of culture – is like this mouldering head: everything is dead; there is nothing left.” (562)
Chapter 4
Jean Lorrain and the Game of Rhetoric

Commedia Masks, Exotic Masks, Death Masks.

Le masque, c’est la face trouble et troublante de l’inconnu, c’est le sourire du mensonge, c’est l’âme de la perversité qui sait corrompre en terrifiant; c’est la luxure pimentée de la peur, l’angoissant et délicieux aléa de ce défi jeté à la curiosité des sens. (Lorrain, Histoires des masques, 18).

No artist was obsessed by masks as much as Jean Lorrain, alias Paul Duval, a fin de siècle French journalist and writer close to Huysmans and Wilde who found much of his inspiration in the symbolist school and in the fantasy tales of Edgar Allan Poe and E.T.A. Hoffman. Lorrain’s extravagant dandyism, his ether addiction and the complacency he took in the cult of his image have turned him into an icon of depravity and corruption. If he failed to be acknowledged as a writer, he certainly succeeded in becoming a character: “assisted by an affectionate mother, this chronic invalid crawled about in the sunshine of Provence, disguised as a werewolf,” writes Mario Praz in The Romantic Agony (338). As an example of how writing can reflect pathology, Praz found Lorrain more interesting than Wilde and defined him as “a case of ‘virility complexity’ in a being of feminine sensibility, a hysteric, with homosexual tendencies” (338).

Monsieur de Phocas (1900) is a curious novel in which masks play a central role. Skin masks, cosmetic masks, death masks, Venetian masks, commedia masks, Noh masks and even the cast of the famous Inconnue de la Seine are all present, often juxtaposed in a way that puzzles the reader. Androgynous and exotic, they are linked to the motif of severed heads, to fragmentation and to the expression of violence. The novel parallels, and in many ways prefigures the Freudian approach, as it uses mythical references to explain the protagonist’s urges and the repressed components of his personality.
Moreover, just like Hofmann’s *Sandmann*, the short story that Freud takes as an example to elaborate the concept of “uncanny,”419 Phocas links disjointed bodies to a fixation with eyes. Contemporary scholars, with an approach similar to Freud’s reading of Hofmann’s *Sandmann*,420 often shift the attention from bodily fragmentation to the protagonist’s search for a “look” and interpret it as an expression of repressed homosexuality.421 However, the mechanical, disjointed body is in *Phocas* an extreme extension of the mask, and this reading ignores the importance of masks in the text, their ritualistic role and their multiple meanings and configurations. In the previous chapters we have seen how masks, in dramas and narratives between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, tend to be conceived and described according to certain rhetorical devices. We have also seen that different rhetorical figures are often used with specific kinds of masks, and that all of them remain strictly bound to images of death which, read in an historical perspective, present us with the record of the end of an epoch through allegories of degeneration, decay and, in some cases, of a radical rebirth. In this chapter we will see how Lorrain is, on the one hand, representative of this trend and, on the other, departs from it insofar as his understanding and representation of masks does not follow a main trope, but changes constantly, almost mocking the reader as soon as he/she has began to understand its function.

The reader is left with the impression that the text refers on the one hand to masks as objects, and on the other to notions that should not be taken literally, nor read according to a single figure. In fact the accumulation of rhetorical devices leads to a point in which the metaphorical meaning becomes autonomous from the literal one, as “a symbol that takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes” (Freud 1955, 244) and thus as a configuration of the uncanny. Moreover, we will see how, like Freud’s concept of “uncanny,” Lorrain’s masks remain bound to language and representation. We will also see how Lorrain’s narrative strategy turns the story into a mystery tale with no solution,  

419 See Freud, *Das Unheimliche* (1919).  
420 In his analysis of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Sandmann*, Freud begins by analyzing the fragmented body of Olympia and then shifts attention to the threat to the eyes posed by the Sandmann. Critics of Lorrain’s text (which shares many features with Hofmann’s tale) tend to do the same, as they shift their attention from the mask, in this novel related to the severed head and to the fragmented body, to the “look” that obsesses the protagonist.  
421 See Bernheimer, *passim*, especially 120, and Du Plessis, *passim*, especially 77-78.
in which the reader is constantly invited to an interpretation and obliged to shift from one understanding to another and continually to adjust his/her expectations. In this sense, the search for masks in Lorrain’s text are as elusive and deceitful as Freud’s hunt for the “uncanny,” since as soon as an understanding of the mask is achieved, it is immediately negated by a juxtaposition to a new meaning.\

As scholars have remarked, Monsieur de Phocas incorporates aspects of Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891) and of Huysmans’ À rebours (1884) and, besides these main influences, shows the use of numerous other sources. Often accused of plagiarism, Lorrain was a busy and not very careful writer who filled his work with quotations that he does not always reference and who did not hesitate to recycle his own writing. Monsieur de Phocas (1900) consists of an assemblage of previously published stories, such as “L’homme aux têtes de cire,” “Un Démoniaque,” “Haricot vert,” and incorporates several art reviews that he had written as a journalist in the previous decade. In addition, it resumes the theme already explored in his collection of stories Histoires des masques (1900), in which the notion of masks undergoes the same semantic shift and is attributed a multitude of meanings. The choice of writing the novel as a journal allowed Lorrain to accumulate material without worrying about editing or adaptations; the result is a fragmented, not always coherent text that reads more like a collection of episodes than as a novel.

The plot revolves around the Duke of Fréneuse, who at the end of the novel changes his name to Phocas. This bizarre character is the last heir of an aristocratic family who,

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422 Sarah Kofman, commenting on Freud’s conception of the Uncanny, argues that “The Uncanny is a text dominated by an investigation which is not, at any moment, complete without being immediately invalidated” (Kofman 13). On the elusive nature of the uncanny, see Cixous (525-548) and Kofman (119-158). For more information about Freud’s essay and its readings, see above, Introduction.

423 On Lorrain’s evident debt to Huysmans and Wilde see Praz, 338; Ponnau, 1991, 84, and Jullian, 267. On the question of intertextuality in Monsieur de Phocas in general, see Zinck, 303-314: "Ainsi, au fil de son journal Fréneuse égrène vingt-trois noms de poètes, conteurs ou romanciers, divers titres d'œuvres et noms de personnages; il cite cent seize vers qui ne sont pas de Lorrain, quelques phrases de Gide, deux paragraphes d'un conte de Charles Vellay et même ... un couplet de chanson." (303) Zinck notes that intertextuality is used by Lorrain as a form of quotation (as in the case of Swinburne, Musset, Baudelaire, Gide); as reference and allusion (to Catulle Mendes, Octave Mirbeau, Barbey d'Aurevilly); as parody (of Huysmans, Pierre Louÿs) and as plagiarism.
although not yet 30, has aged prematurely and is affected by constant neurosis. The novel is based on his encounter with two men who exercise on him a considerable influence: the painter Claudius Ethal who, just as the painter of Wilde’s novel, is eventually killed by the protagonist, and the just as mysterious Sir Thomas Welôme. Fréneuse is haunted by a fascination and a fear of masks that leads him to a series of visions, discoveries and recognitions that build up the atmosphere of a mystery tale and that demand from the reader constant engagement and flexibility to change his/her interpretation.

Metonymy

Animal masks, cosmetic masks

Like the protagonist of Rilke’s *Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, Fréneuse suffers from a second sight, an extraordinary lucidity through which he sees the people around him transformed and disfigured in terrible masks that expose their original animal instincts. The mask thus takes the shape of a metonymy which exposes a causal relationship, explained in humankind’s closeness to the animals realm from which it originates. Fréneuse initially imagines the masks as an attribute of the lower classes who, oppressed by harsh living conditions and by the inhuman rhythm of the modern metropolis, are engaged in a ruthless, beastly fight for survival:

La vie moderne, luxueuse, impitoyable et sceptique a fait à ces hommes comme à ces femmes des âmes de garde-chiourme ou de bandit: têtes aplaties et venimeuses de vipères, museaux retors et aiguisés de rongeurs, mâchoires de requins et groins de pourceaux, ce sont l’envie, le désespoir et la haine, et c’est aussi l’égoïsme et c’est aussi l’avarice, qui font de l’humanité un bestiaire où chaque bas instinct s’imprime en trait d’animal. (95)

Modern life – luxurious, pitiless and sceptical – has formed the souls of these men, and their women likewise, into those of prison guards or bandits. It has given them the flattened heads of venomous snakes, the pointed and twisted muzzles of rodents, the jaws of sharks and the snouts
of pigs. Envy, desperation, hatred, egoism and avarice have re-created humanity as bestiary in which every low instinct is imprinted with anima traits... (68-69)

Through this vision, human beings are transformed into animals and adopt a beastly mask that reveals their primitive, savage instincts behind an appearance of civilization. As Ponnau notes, we can read in this nightmare a sign of the panic with which Darwinist theories were received and elaborated in their implicit consequences by pessimist fin de siècle writers, who understood that man was not the final aim of evolution but only a temporary stage of a chain governed by a ferocious fight for reproduction and survival (1991, 89). We can also see reflected in this description the basic principle of caricature, according to which facial features are deformed to reflect the moral characteristics of the individual; in particular, we can recognize the tradition of the French caricaturist J. I.I. G. Grandville, who drew animal faces on his characters to mock their vicious behavior (Rapetti134). Metonymically, the twentieth century human being is substituted, through the mask, by the beast from which he evolved and which is still reflected in his base urges.

Frénéuse’s visions concentrate on the human face, on the features through which the human being expresses his/her interiority. While human faces often hide the soul, presenting beautiful, charming features that cover vicious identities, the masks that Frénéuse is able to discern reveal the moral character of people in all their ugly reality: “Mon hallucination n’est qu’un sens de plus, c’est l’innommmable de l’âme humaine remontée à fleur de peau qui prête à tous ces visages les apparences de masques” (94), he declares, confirming that the masks of his visions have the function to reveal, rather than to hide.

424 Unless otherwise indicated, English translations are by Francis Amery and refer to the following edition: Jean Lorrain, Monsieur de Phocas, trans. Francis Amery (Langford Lodge: Dedalus, 1994).

425 My ‘hallucination’ is only an extra sense: it is some unnameable facet of the human soul which is brought forth to bloom upon the skin, and which lends to every face the semblance of a mask. (68)
Soon he realizes that these terrible masks are not limited to the anonymous mass of the lower classes, but that they can be seen on anybody. He first catches a glimpse of distortion in the features of his lover, the acrobat Willie Stevenson, when he discovers that, in his absence, she spends his money in the company of an ill-intentioned crowd: “le masque cynique et voyou de la fille apparu dans le pli tout à coup crapuleux de la bouche et le vice des yeux quêteurs!” he laments. “L’âme lui était remontée au visage” (76). He later begins to recognize masks among his fellow aristocrats. “Je vois des masques dans la rue, j’en vois sur la scène au théâtre, j’en retrouve dans les loges. Il y en a au balcon, il y en à l’orchestre, partout des maques autour de moi” (91), he complains, unable to suffer the company of Parisian high society.

These masks are often, but not exclusively, animal masks. It is often the thick layer of make up that women use to hide the signs of age that causes Fréneuse’s horrible hallucinations: “Le maquillage! C’est là d’où vient mon mal” (91), he desperately cries identifying the cause of his distress. Just as protagonist of Hoffmanstahl’s Andreas, Fréneuse tends to describe himself as the only unmasked and vulnerable one, surrounded by malicious groups of maskers. “C’est une chose vraiment par trop effroyable que de se sentir seul,” he confesses in the journal, “à la merci de toutes ces faces d’énigme et de mensonge, seul au milieu de tous ces ricanements et de ces menaces immobilisées dans des masques” (91). Fréneuse remains isolated as he opposes to this beastly humanity the ostentation of an unnatural – and we can add, typically decadent – celibacy and thus the refusal of the reproductive instinct (Zinck 21).

Along with the perception of animal and cosmetic masks, which deform, change and substitute the face with a reflection of a corrupt soul, comes the awareness of how the maskers have been reduced from a life of vices to puppets, to inert beings who, no longer

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426 The cynical and streetwise mask of the whore appeared in the suddenly crapulous crease of the mouth and the depravity of those beggar’s eyes! Her very soul had risen to her face. (48)
427 I see masks in the street, I see them on stage in the theatre, I find yet more of them in the boxes. They are on the balcony and in the orchestra-pit. Everywhere I go I am surrounded by masks. (65)
428 Cosmetics: there is the root cause of my illness! (65)
429 It is truly too much to bear: to feel that one is alone and at the mercy of those enigmatic and deceptive faces, alone amid all the mocking laughs and the threats embodied in those masks. (65)
held together by the unifying principle of a soul, appear as loose, lifeless automatons. Fréneuse experiences “les côtés de spectre et de poupée des êtres” (99) for the first time in a dream in which, walking randomly in a deserted city devastated by a plague coming from the orient, he finds himself lost in a street of prostitutes who have been turned into terrifying automatons:

On eût dit de grandes marionnettes, de longues poupées mannequinées oubliées là dans la panique, car je devinais qu’une peste, quelque effroyable épidémie rapportée d’Orient par les navires avait balayé cette ville et l’avait faite vide d’habitants; et j’étais seul avec ces simulacres d’amour abandonnés par les hommes au seuil des maisons de joie et déjà, depuis des heures, j’errais sans pouvoir sortir de ce quartier morne, obsédé par les yeux vernissés et fixes de tous ces automates, quand une soudaine idée me venait que toutes ces filles étaient des mortes, des pestiférées ou des colériques pourrissant là, dans la solitude, sous des masques de plâtre et de carmin, et mes entrailles se liquéfiaient de froid.

Et malgré le froid, m’étant approché d’une fille immobile, je voyais en effet qu’elle avait un masque; et l’autre fille, debout à la porte voisine, était aussi masquée, et toutes étaient horriblement pareilles sous l’identique coloriage brutal. (90)

They might have been huge marionettes, or tall mannequin dolls left behind in panic – for I divined that some plague, some frightful epidemic brought from the Orient by sailors, had swept through the town and emptied it of its inhabitants. I had already been wandering for hours without being able to find a way out of that miserable quarter, obsessed by the fixed and varnished eyes of those automata, when I was seized by the sudden thought that all these girls were dead, plague-stricken and putrefied by cholera where they stood, in the solitude, beneath their carmine plaster masks... and my entrails were liquefied by cold. In spite

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430 Amery translates as “spectres and mannequins” (73); more literally, Lorrain writes: “the spectral and the doll-side of human beings.”

431 The device of the sickness coming “from the Orient” reminds us of Mann’s and Bely’s narratives (see chapter three).

432 Fréneuse’s dream resembles the experience described by Freud in his essay on the Uncanny: “I found myself in a quarter of whose character I could not long remain in doubt. Nothing but painted women were to be seen at the windows of the small houses, and I hastened to leave the narrow street at the next turning” (Freud 1919, 237). Freud quotes the example to illustrate the principle of involuntary repetition, since he finds himself several times in this part of the city. Phocas also wanders for hours without being able to find a way out, and the factor of repetition is activated when he recognizes in the singer at the theatre the features of the prostitutes. The similarity of the two narratives leads us to wonder whether a sense of “uncanniness” is not already present in the description of the painted, rigid cosmetic mask worn by the prostitutes and by their association with death.
of that harrowing chill, I was drawn closer to a motionless girl. I saw that she was indeed wearing a mask... and the girl in the next doorway was also masked... and all of them were horribly alike under their identical crude colouring...(63-64)

If the satirical animal mask reduces the human being to an animal, the cosmetic mask turns women into marionettes, into mechanical beings. As in the case of the animal mask, the deformation induced by this vision merges the mask with the face and its removal unveils a frightful vision similar to what Rilke calls *das Nichtgesicht* (the no-face) a living death carried through life by the principle of inertia. “J’étais seul avec des masques,” Fréneuse continues, “avec des cadavres masqués, pis que des masques” (90). The cosmetic mask, like the animal mask, continues to be a reflection of the soul, as the inner selves of the prostitutes, which have been corrupted, lacerated and destroyed by lust and greed, are recognizable in the immobile rigidity of their features. The extreme forms through which the mask can materialize, its reduction to a mask of make up and its extension into a mechanical puppet are thus reunited into one image as the make up becomes a symptom of psychological death that leads to a mechanization of the human being, and as the undoing of the mask no longer reveals a face but only the image of a skull.

Fréneuse soon encounters the cosmetic masks of the dream on the features of a singer performing at the Théâtre des funambules, in whom he sees an animated corpse wearing a cosmetic mask awkwardly placed on a disconnected, mechanical body: “je n’écoutais pas chanter une femme vivante, mais un automate aux pièces disparates et montées de bric et de broc. Peut-être pis encore, une morte hâtivement reconstituée avec des déchets d’hôpital” (92). If the soul has been destroyed and the person is nothing

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433 See Above, Chapter 1.
434 I was alone with masks, with the masked corpses, worse than masks...(64)
435 *Les Funambules* is the theatre in which the artist Deburau becomes famous for performing with the mask of Pierrot, to which Lorrain, along with Huysmans and many contemporaries, attributes a sinister meaning (see above, chapter two).
436 I did not hear the singing of a living woman, but of some automaton pieced together from disparate odds and ends – or perhaps even worse, some dead woman hastily reconstructed from hospital remains (66).
but an animated corpse, the rest of the body is only loosely held together and can be
separated, fragmented, torn to pieces as an anatomical mannequin. “Heureux suis-je,
maintenant, quand ce ne sont que des masques!” concludes the miserable Fréneuse,
“Parfois, je devine le cadavre dessous, et ce sont souvent plus que des masques, puisque
ce sont des spectres que je vois” (91).  

In chapter two we saw how, in Lothar’s play, Harlequin’s mobile, ever changing mask is
substituted by a rigid mask that imposes on him a role and that carries a connotation of
death and criminality. In Lorrain’s text, the prostitutes of the dream and the singer
become prisoners of the roles created by a life of vice and are changed into automatons
and living cadavers. In both cases, the mask carries a fearful connotation from which
Fréneuse sees himself as extraneous. Through his journal entries, Fréneuse introduces
himself as a visionary able to see the truth beyond appearance, as the only unmasked
being in a world of maskers. He identifies in the mask the other, the unnamable, the
corrupted, the opposite of his self, therefore implying that his bare face is the antithesis of
the mask. And yet he is attracted just as much as he is repelled by these visions. “J’ai la
fascination du masque,” he confesses. “L’énigme du visage que je ne vois pas m’attire,
c’est le vertige au bord du gouffre […] les yeux entrevus par les trous du loup ou sous la
dentelle des mantilles ont pour moi un charme, une volupté de mystère qui me surexcite
et me grise d’une fièvre d’inconnu” (89).  

The obsession with masks is related to an ambiguous “chose bleue et verte” (67) that
Fréneuse calls the look of Astarté, “le Démon de la luxure et aussi le Démon de la Mer”
(55), and of which he catches only illusory, deceptive glimpses in jewels, statues and
in the eyes of certain portraits. Fréneuse thinks that this look can be found behind the

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437 I am happy, now, when there are only masks! Sometimes, I detect the cadavers beneath, and remember
that beneath the masks there is a host of spectres (65).
438 Except for a brief, initial introduction by the journalist to whom Phocas entrusts his journal, the only
perspective the reader is given in the journal is that of Fréneuse himself.
439 I have always loved masquerades; masks fascinate me. The enigma of the face that I cannot see attracts
me strongly; it is the vertigo of the brink of the abyss […] eyes glimpsed through the holes in black velvet
loups, or beneath the lace of the mantillas, have for me a particular charm, a sensual mystery which excites
me and intoxicates me with an occult fever. (62)
440 Blue and green something. (41)
441 The Demon of lust and also the Demon of the sea. (29)
mask — and yet, as indicated, the mask hides only a *Nichtgesicht*, a living dead. “La *chose*”, writes Zinck, explaining the apparent contradiction, “est d’abord un non dicible. […] Car la *chose* fait office de terme générique mis là pour ne pas dire la luxure, le meurtre, l’homosexualité: toutes ces pulsions qu’on ne doit jamais (s’) avouer” (39). In metaphysical terms, this “*something*” stands for all things that lead to the destruction of the soul and thus to the exposure of the *Nichtgesicht*, of the skull which lurks behind the mask.

Claudius Ethal, a mysterious Englishman and painter who has stopped painting, soon begins to exasperate the duke’s obsessions. This ambiguous character approaches Fréneuse as an ally, declaring that he has suffered from the same atrocious lucidity and is able to cure him. Fréneuse is immensely relieved to be no longer alone, and soon discovers that Ethal’s visionary quality is even greater than his own; not only can he perceive the animal masks on people’s faces, but like a sorcerer, he is able to evoke, to materialize the masks and to lead other people to recognize them. Declaring that his appearance is remarkably similar to the monstrous dwarf painted by Antonio Moro, Ethal summons his own mask and sends Fréneuse to discover it. “Je n’ai découvert toutes ces choses qu’une fois averti,” wonders a confused Fréneuse, who notices Ethal’s horrible features only once he is in front of the painting, “et c’est lui qui m’a envoyé au Louvre, lui qui m’a fait remarquer l’effrayante analogie qui existe entre ce nain et Lui!” (108).

As for the characters of James’ *The Sacred Fount*, the interpretation of the image becomes not only noticeable, but extraordinarily clear once that it has been explicitly pointed out. The identification of Ethal in the monstrous dwarf of the painting can be considered a recognition that happens through an ekphrasis, since Fréneuse goes through the process of describing at length both the dwarf and Ethal, before coming to the

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442 I had not noticed all these hideous and repugnant things during our previous encounters: the spirit of that devil of a man exerted such imperious power on me! […] and yet it was he who sent me to the Louvre, he who caused me to observe the horrible analogy which can be drawn between that horrible dwarf and himself! (81)

443 See above, chapter three, Chiasmus.
conclusion of their identity, but is also a metaphor created by the painter. Ethal wants Fréneuse to believe that he is the dwarf of the painting, and achieves his aim by evoking the mask and exerting on his new friend the power of suggestion. If Fréneuse still ignores it, the reader begins to suspect that Ethal is not only a “visionary” but a terrible mask maker, and that the masks he helps to materialize are nothing but the fruit of his imagination. Ethal continues to exercise his influence as, one by one, he introduces to Fréneuse a series of terrible masked characters that, according to the scheme of the roman à clefs, are caricatures of Lorrain’s contemporary society. Many of these figures are unknown today, and their unraveling constitutes an independent field of research. For our purpose, it is sufficient to indicate that Lorrain is deliberately amusing himself with the concept of mask and that his game is not limited to the narrative frame, but extends beyond it.

Not only can Ethal recognize and evoke people’s masks, but he is also a passionate collector of masks as literal objects and is eager to share his repertoire with Fréneuse. The latter is so amazed and terrified by the collection that he takes care of enumerating every component of it in his journal:

Des masques de Deburau, faces pâles de Pierrot aux narines pincées, aux sourires minces; masques japonais, les uns de bronze, les autres de bois laqué; masques de la comédie italienne, ceux-là de soie et de cire peinte, quelques-uns même de gaze noire tendue sur des fils de laiton, des masques de Venise énigmatiques et légèrement horribles comme ceux des personnages de Longhi; c’était toute une guirlande grimaçante posée autour de l’eau dormante du miroir. (99)

There were Deburau masks: the pale faces of Pierrots with pinched nostrils and tight smiles. There were Japanese masks, some in bronze and others in lacquered wood. There were masks from the Italian commedia, made of silk and painted wax, and a few of black gauze stretched over brass wire. There were enigmatic and cleverly horrid Venetian masks, like those of the characters of de Longhi.

In the same way, the characters of James’ Secret Fount describe at length the painting of the man with a mask before identifying in it Mrs. Server and poor Briss (See above, chapter three, Chiasmus). Fréneuse himself is a caricature of Robert de Montesquiou, who is also caricatured in the character of the Count of Muzarett. Ethal is partly a caricature of Whistler. For references to the historical figures hidden behind the other characters, see Zinck, Le roman à clefs, 314-327.
An entire garland of grimaces had been posed around the sleeping pool of the mirror. (73)

Divested of their dramatic function and turned into decorative objects, these masks are placed around the mirror in an arrangement that exemplifies Fréneuse’s fears, since the masks, which have so far been understood as the reflection of the soul, can possibly reflect only the emptiness of their eye holes and since, through the mirror, they create a structure in which the sense of horror vacui is filled by infinite multiplication.

Ethal praises at length the Japanese masks, eager to display the knowledge gathered in years spent in the country, and is equally enthusiastic about the Venetian masks, which remind him of the animal traits that he is able to divine in people’s features. “C’est tout le carnaval de Venise qui défile et parade devant nous sous le camail et le domino, embusqué derrière ces masques,” he explains laughing, while Fréneuse, terrified, perceives through the masks’ eye holes’ “affreuses lueurs de soufre” (101).

The painter suggests a cure that resembles a homeopathic treatment; he encourages Fréneuse to handle the artifacts as much as possible and argues that becoming familiar with their ugliness will help him to endure human hideousness. His words demonstrate that there is a strong link between these ornaments and the metaphorical masks that Fréneuse is able to discern through his visions. Moreover, as part of the cure, Ethal suggests that Fréneuse familiarize himself with a series of paintings, thus reinforcing the implication that a deforming portrait can and should be considered as a form of mask. Among the “grands déformateurs,” he mentions Rowlandsom, Hogarth, Goya, Rops and Ensor. In the course of the therapy, he sends to Fréneuse a number of paintings by these artists, and the duke fills his journal with long and detailed descriptions which, as Ballestra-Puech notes, also depict the influence of Ethal on his patient and that, rather than constituting a pause in the text, lead to moments of great dramatic intensity (84). In

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446 The whole Carnival of Venice is put on parade before us beneath the cape and the domino, lying in ambush behind these masks ... (74)
447 Frightful gleam of suffering. (75)
448 Amery translates as “Great caricaturists” (75). More literally, “the great deformers.”
all the paintings, Fréneuse recognizes alternatively the ruthless fight for life or the lure of the green-blue eyes under whose charm he suffers.

In one case the image, as happened with the dwarf of Antonio Moro at the Louvre, functions as a mirror through which the character experiences a recognition. The etching is a gift that has been sent, through Ethal, by James Ensor, a painter whom Ethal considers a fellow visionary and who shares Fréneuse’s and Ethal’s obsession for masks. The duke discerns his own features in one of the characters and attributes the alteration to the hand of Ethal, who becomes thus explicitly, along with the painters that he holds in high esteem, one of the “great deformers.”

**Synecdoche.**

**Wax heads; death masks.**

As the journal continues, we discover that Ethal is not only a visionary and a collector, but also a mask maker who, by sculpting an artifact in the moment between life and death, is able to seize in the mask the model’s soul and thus to transform the masks into a synecdoche, into a fragment that captures the unifying principle of the person. Just as he had introduced Fréneuse to his collection of masks, Ethal now introduces him to a selection of wax heads of which he is, this time, the very author, a series of sculpted portraits of women and effeminate adolescents in front of which Fréneuse feels the same discomfort that he had felt handling the theatrical masks:

> C’étaient les yeux vitreux et les lèvres fanées de plus de vingt bustes de mortes, vingt cires aux coiffures historiées et historiques sous les paillons piqués dans la soie terne de leurs cheveux; et parmi ces têtes, toutes de femmes ou de jeunes hommes adolescents, j’en reconnaissais d’illustres et de classées dans les musées: celle du musée de Lille, entre autres, et sa douceur résignée, et la femme inconnue et le mystère de son mince sourire; et des profils historiques, comme ceux de Marguerite de Valois, d’Agnes

449 See above, chapter one.
Sorel, de Marie Stuart et d’Elizabeth de Vaudémont: un boudoir de mortes (125-126).

I saw the vitreous eyes and faded lips of more than twenty death-masks: twenty waxen images with historical and historiated hairstyles modeled in colorless silk. Among these heads – all of which were women or adolescent males – I recognized renowned and classical images from the museums: one from the museum of Lille, resplendently gentle; the unknown woman and the mystery of her thin smile; and the historic profiles of Marguerite de Valois, Agnes Sorel, Mary Stuart and Elisabeth de Vaudemont. There was, in fact, a whole harem of dead women (99).

Like the animal and the cosmetic masks, which are most spectacular and frequent on women, these wax heads are mostly portraits of female subjects. Like the cosmetic masks, which are perceived as alienated from the broken, disjointed bodies of their subjects, they are also related to the notion of fragment. One of these woman, Mary Stuart, is famous for having been beheaded, while another, the femme inconnue — in whom we recognize the cast of the Inconnue de la Seine, the unknown woman drown in Paris — is known exclusively through her death masks. By representing a series of characters condemned to a painful or violent death, these heads thus implicitly link fragmentation to an act of brutality.

In one of the waxes that Ethal hands over to Fréneuse with particular care, the duke recognizes the same glance of sadness and suffering which he had perceived though the eyes holes of the masks: “une face douloureuse et souffrante d’enfant tragique, une tête de mutisme et de défi, belle par le silence de lèvres minces et renflées…” (126).

This wax does not portray the features of a woman, but of an effeminate, young adolescent.

450 Amery translates bustes de mortes (busts of dead women) as “death-masks” (99). Lorrain does not use the word mask in this quote, but the connection is implicit.
451 This collection had already appears in the short story L’Homme aux têtes de cires, that Lorrain published in 1892.
452 The popularity of the Inconnue de la Seine was at the time at its height [See above, Chapter one, in particular The Worshipper of the Image]. This bust is also read as an allusion to a “femme inconnue” that Lorrain attributed to Donatello and of which he kept a “beheaded version” in his living room (Zinck 126). Jumeau-Lafond, however, observes that there is no work by Donatello corresponding to Lorrain’s description (51).
453 It was the dolorous, suffering face of a tragic child: a stubborn and defiant head, handsome by virtue of the silence of thin and pouting lips. (99)
Ethal explains that it was modeled after Angelotto, a Neapolitan child whom he had found shivering in front of his atelier. He recounts how, fascinated by the child’s thinness and by the signs of consumption, he had forced him to pose for him and had worked passionately on the sculpture until the model had died of exhaustion, and how he felt that the soul of the child was being captured in the portrait: “Je m’acharnais sur cette cire avec une joie sauvage, une plénitude de volupté que je n’ai jamais retrouvée car je sentais que j’y pétrissais une âme, tout un passé de misère et de souffrance dont je fixais la synthèse à chaque coup d’ébauchoir, toute une âme indigène et rétive, dont les sursauts de révolte enfiévreraient magnétiquement mes doigts” (128, my italics).

The head of Angelotto is a death mask that, like the masks of Crommelynck, Okamoto Kido and Gance, is modeled not right after death but in the threshold between life and death and that, like the latter, must destroy its model in order to achieve artistic perfection. Wax, the material that Ethal uses for the portrait, was traditionally used for the technique of moulage to create death masks, and has particular properties that contribute to the ambiguity of the images that it creates. Analyzing the use of wax for casting, Schnalke comments on its adeptness to reproduce a texture and a tone similar to that of skin, both in the cast of a life or death model (109). Dottin Orsini, who also underlines the ambiguity of wax used as a material for representations, links the highlight of wax statues in the 1880s to the use of anatomical mannequins in medical practices and to creation of “Vénus anatomiques se détachant en quarante parties” (104).

In chapter one, we examined how, according to mask makers of the early twentieth century, a respectable death mask must remain a simple, clearly artificial object and avoid resembling life too closely. The acts of coloring the mask, the addition of hair and

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454 With a different name, the wax portrait of Angelotto is already present in L’homme aux têtes des cire,” where its gender is left ambiguous: “tête de femme ou de jeune garçon, à la fois obstinée et endolorie avec ses lèvres d’un rose fané, la transparence de ses chairs un peu fiévreuses et la terreur de ses yeux fixes, vivait et souffrait d’une intense souffrance …” (131)

455 I worked unceasingly on the wax effigy, with a barbarous joy and a plenitude of sensuality that I have never found again, for I felt that I was moulding a soul which had passed utterly beyond the reach of misery and suffering. Every blow of the chisel contributed to the synthesis of that indignant and obstinate soul, whose rebellious urges animated my fingers with their electricity. (101)

456 See above, chapter one, The Mask Maker.
of any organic material are seen as “monstrosities, a violation and a false counterfeit of life” (Kolbe 45). The use of wax for Angelotto’s head creates an ambiguity and contributes to the impression that the sculpture could have been created through molding; moreover, wax gives to the bust the texture and tone of skin, recalls experiments used for medical practices and, most importantly, blurs the boundaries between reality and representation and turns the artifact into a fetish. Ethal, who later in the journal is called a “Barbe bleue,” a “sorcerer” (264), moulds these death masks with the intention of capturing in them the human soul, of snatching it from their models. His power not only over the boy, but over his spirit is exemplified by the way in which his hand, heavy with jewels, rests on Angelotto’s head “comme une serre, en vérité, une serre d’oiseau de proie”(129). A lot of attention is paid to Ethal’s hands and to his ring, which is shaped after an eye and contains a powerful Indian poison that will eventually kills him; an image that reinforces the connection throughout the novel between eyes, jewels, exoticism and death.

The look of agony that Fréneuse recognizes in the waxes and through the eye holes of the masks recalls in his memory two related images: “la paleur de cire” (135) of an anguished Venetian woman and the syphilitic look of a kabyle performer in Smyrna. In both foreigners, Fréneuse had thought to identify for a moment the green look of Astarté. “Coïncidence étrange,” he reflects drawing a parallel between these characters, “deux regards d’agonie, puisqu’elle et lui étaient déjà frappés, destinés a mourir!” (136). He later links these dying exotic figures to Angelotto’s bust, and recognizes them as

457 “truly vice-like grip, like the talon of some bird of prey” (102). Du Plessis reads the body parts that are emphasized in the text (head, wrists and hands) as synecdoche standing for a desire for the man’s body, as “gay male desire which is never located in a body as such but only in parts of a body” (73). One interpretation, as we will see, does not exclude the other; on the contrary, Lorrain seems to be deliberately provoking ambiguity.

458 See Winn, 168: “Chez Phocas les joyaux rappellent les yeux. […] L’eau glauque, et la beauté fatale de la pierre précieuse se réunissent dans cet objet dangereux qui se transforme en arme.” Bernheimer argues that gems and jewels in decadent literature are “not merely decorative objects but, more significantly, emblems of the subject’s attraction to death” (109).

459 Pallor of wax. (108)

460 A strange coincidence: two expressions of death-agony. Both she and he were already stricken and destined for death! (109)
displying the same attraction: “Le petit danseur kabyle, l’agonisante de Venise, le petit modèle phtisique de Montmartre, c’est la même série …” (137).

From animal and cosmetic masks to death mask, the concept undergoes a fundamental shift. While the first is mainly metonymic, since the mask is an exposure of the original, ruthless instincts of men, the second should be read as a synecdoche; it is no longer the reflection of the soul but the soul itself, stolen through the terrible skills of the mask maker and trapped into a fragment that reflects the violence perpetrated on the original model. These wax heads become therefore death masks, fragmented portraits of the person in the moment of death, and are linked in Monsieur de Phocas to an obsession with severed heads that have a similar function. “Avez-vous remarqué,” wonders Kristeva reflecting on the cult of skulls, “que le masque, faux visage, terrifie les jeunes enfants, même quand ses traits rient? C’est sans doute qu’avec lui s’insinue un décollement intrinsèque” (117).

In Monsieur de Phocas, the wax heads have the intermediary function of linking the motif of masks to that of severed heads. The latter are the personal obsession of Sir Thomas Welcôme, the handsome, tall Irishman who appears as a friend and rival of Ethal and who proposes to Fréneuse an alternative therapy to heal his obsessions. He shares with Fréneuse (and Ethal) the same supernatural perception, but in a slightly different form: “les masques qui vous hallucinent se précisaient en moi dans une tête coupée,” he explains, “cela m’était devenu une maladie, une déséquilibrante obsession; oh! J’ai souffert. J’en voyais partout; partout des rictus de décapités me raillaient, me sollicitaient” (178).

Welcôme’s words explicitly link masks and severed heads, but the connection was already indicated by the fact that Fréneuse, besides being haunted by masks, is obsessed

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461 The Kabyle dancer, the dying woman in Venice and the consumptive little model of Montmartre are elements of the same series. (110)
462 The hallucinatory masks which haunt you took the specific form in me of a severed head. Oh, how I suffered from that malady, that disequilibrating obsession! I saw it everywhere; on every side that rictus of decapitation was railing at me, taunting me. (152)
by his lover’s neck and that he pays an exaggerated attention to high neck pearl collars. Just before meeting Welcôme, during a Chinese tea held at Ethal’s, Fréneuse has an opium nightmare in which he witnesses a woman’s beheading. After meeting the Irishman, while contemplating a painting, he suffers a vision in which he is transported in front of the guillotine of the French revolution and recognizes its victims the severed heads that obsess Thomas Welcôme: “Je vois monter dans le ciel de plomb une tête coupée, une tête exsangue aux yeux éteints et fixes, le masque de décapitée qui hantait les nuits de Welcôme” (212). As in the previous visions, the head is specifically that of a woman: “la tête de la princesse de Lamballe, que les septembriseurs viennent de faire coiffer, friser, poudrer et raviver de fard avant de la porter à l’hôtel de Penthièvre et de là au Temple, sous les fenêtres de la reine” (212).

Welcôme and Fréneuse, just like Fréneuse and Ethal, are bound by their sixth sense and by a common fixation. The Irishman, trying to extract Fréneuse from Ethal’s influence, makes him see that the painter is exasperating, rather than curing his obsession in order to derive aesthetic pleasure from his suffering. He confesses that he himself had once fallen into Ethal’s hands and had spent more than ten years searching for the same impossible look in the Orient. He finally recalls how he thought he had caught a glimpse of it only once when, in the company of Ethal, he was sailing the Nile and had seen a figure leaning on the luminous shape of the Sphinx:

“C’était une forme jeune et svelte, vêtue, comme les âniers fellahs, d’une mince gandoura bleue, avec des anneaux d’or aux chevilles, la forme adolescente ou d’un Prince ou d’une esclave, car l’attitude de ce sommeil offert était à la fois royale et servile: royale de confiance, servile de complaisante et abandon.

“La gandoura s’ouvrait sur une poitrine plate, d’une blancheur d’ivoire; mais au cou saignait, comme une large entaille, une cicatrice ou une

463 The same obsession is emphasized in Histoires des masques (Lorrain, 1900).
464 I see raised towards the leaden sky a severed head: a head drained of blood, with fixed and extinguished eyes; the image of decapitation which haunted Thomas Welcome’s nights. (187) [Amery translates masque de décapitée as “image of decapitation” — but Lorrain uses the term “mask”].
465 It is the head of the Princesse of Lamballe, which the revolutionaries powdered and revived with make-up, setting the hair in curls, before they carried it to Penthièvre, and from there to the Temple, parading it under the queen’s windows… (187)
plaie! Quant à la face, je la devinais délicieuse, rien qu’à l’ovale aminci du menton; mais, appuyée en arrière, elle baignait toute dans l’ombre.” (175, my italics).

It was a slender figure, dressed like donkey-driver, in a thin blue robe, with rings of gold at the ankles. It was an adolescent male, but I could not tell whether he was a prince or a slave, for the attitude of the sleeper seemed both royal and servile, embodying royal confidence, servile complaisance and conscious abandon.

The robe was open at the neck, exposing a flat chest, as white as ivory – but there was a gaping bloody gash across the neck: a huge scar or an open wound! As regards the face, I found it quite delectable, with the sole exception of the narrowed oval of the chin – but it was all steeped in shadow, by virtue of the figure being supported from behind. (149).

In chapter three, we encountered the Sphinx in the conclusion of Bely’s Peterburg, in which the protagonist contemplates a huge head of stone as the symbol of the end of an historical era, and compares this ruin with what will be left of Western culture after revolutions and invasions. In Lorrain’s novel, the Sphinx is no more a fragment, but alive and shining; the severed head belongs instead to the exotic creature which is resting on its neck. The reader familiar with symbolist paintings will recognize in this vision Felicién Rops’s frontispiece for Les Diaboliques, with the difference that the creature that is lying languidly on the neck of the Sphinx is in Rops’ drawing a woman, while in Lorrain’s text (although not in Amery’s translation) the figure is left deliberately of ambiguous gender. The same vision had been described in Un Démoniaque (1895), a story previously published by Lorrain, and is here copied word for word, except for one variation: the change of article un (un esclave) into une (une esclave). This detail modifies the image significantly. While in the short story, the figure is a young male, in Monsieur de Phocas it could stand for a flat-chested woman or for an effeminate adolescent.

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466 Amery’s translation modifies the text considerably. "la forme adolescente ou d’un Prince ou d’une esclave” means rather “the adolescent shape of a Prince or of a female slave.” Lorrain leaves the gender deliberately ambiguous.

Ethal, we must remember, is famous for his women’s portraits, and the terrible animal and cosmetic masks that both he and Fréneuse perceive (and shape) on the women of their society are significantly more numerous and spectacular than the men's masks.

With Angelotto and with this Egyptian figure, the severed head, which we had known as a representation of violence inflicted on a female subject, begins to change, and the mask acquires androgynous traits. Péladan had called the Sphinx “première représentation de l’androgyne, synthèse plastique de la reconstitution primordiale de l’unité sexuelle.”

Just as Angelotto interrupts the series of woman’s masks, the beheaded figure on the sphinx transforms the severed head of a woman into a genderless vision.

In the essay “Das Unheimliche,” Freud reads bodily fragmentation, and specifically the image of severed heads, as a metaphor for the castration complex (Freud 1919, 244). In “Die Infantile Genitalorganisation” (1923, 296), he then argues that the child’s shock in seeing his mother’s genitals and the ensuing interpretation of women's genitals as having been subjected to castration are embodied by the severed head of the Gorgon, the Greek's symbol for terror. In the essay “Das Medusenhaupt” (1923), he develops this topic further as he argues that the Goddess Athena, who wears the severed head of Medusa on her shield, symbolizes the sexually unapproachable woman, that is the figure of the mother.

In decadent imagery, the severed male head immediately evokes the myth of Salomé, “la femme sublime, la castratrice dont rêve le mâle qui éprouve quelques difficultés à jouir, c'est-à-dire plutôt tout le monde” (Kristeva 127). Fréneuse invokes repeatedly Salomé’s name as he is watching the performance of the dancer of Izé Kranile, and is

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468 See Jouve, 99.
469 The essay "Das Medusenhaupt" was originally written in 1922 and published in "Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse." (Vol. IX, n. 1, 1923)
470 "Ich möchte hinzufügen, daß im Mythos das Genitale der Mutter gemeint ist. Athene, die das Medusenhaupt an ihrem Panzer trägt, wird eben dadurch das unanhäbliche Weib, dessen Anblick jeden Gedanken an sexuelle Annährung erstickt." (Freud 1923, 296)
471 See Dottin Orsini: “Une zincographie sarcastique du Viennoise Julius Klinger, datée de 1909, montre une Salomé accompagnée de la traditionnelle panthère noire, mais brandissent une faucille sanglante et un énorme phallus coupe.” (1996, 41)
later sent by both Etahl and Welcôme to the *Musée Gustave Moreau*, where he stops to admire the paintings that made Salomé a *fin de siècle* myth.\(^{472}\) Du Plessis suggests that severed heads in Lorrain’s texts are synecdoche standing for an inexpressible desire for the man’s body (73); Bernheimer reads the references to Salomé as “the subject’s desire to see his own castration” (122); and Dottin Orsini reminds us that, in Lorrain’s *Monsieur de Bougrelon*, the masochistic tendencies of the protagonist are made explicit as, in front of Luini’s *Salomé,\(^ {473}\) he fantasizes about seeing the head of the saint replaced by his own (127).

In *Monsieur de Phocas*, however, the severed head does not belong to a man but either to a woman or to an effeminate young man. This reversal of the myth, as Dottin Orsini argues, is problematic because it evokes at once Salomé and, by the logic of the *lex talionis*, the punishment that she deserves (154). She notes: “Le chef tranché féminin est un étrange objet, il matérialise la collusion entre Salomé et la Méduse, il fait coïncider peur du féminin, blessure sanglante et volonté de punir ou de se defendre” (159). We can add that, along with Medusa and Salomé, the severed female head also recalls the myth of Jezabel, the biblical sorceress famous for putting on make up before being killed and for the fragmentation that her body mysteriously undergoes after her death.\(^ {474}\)

Kristeva extends further Freud’s interpretation as she argues that the cult of skulls and severed heads evokes both the fear of castration and the anxiety of the child having lost his mother: “Nous pourrions alors y déchiffrer une double célébration: celle du père rival phallique, et celle de la mère qui nous abandonne, et dont il reste à labourer la figure […] autant que le visage” (29). Gamboni offers an alternative to psycho-analytic criticism arguing that the theme of beheading, in symbolist paintings, represents the sacrificed

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\(^{472}\) See Dottin Orsini: “Grâce à Huysmans, Moreau devient un jalon primordial du mythe: il est désormais impossible d’évoquer Salomé sans citer ses toiles ou ses aquarelles, sans compter les innombrables dessins conservés dans La Rocheafoucauld, qui montrent que la danseuse de l’Evangile fut pour le peintre un motif obsessionnel” (1996, 39). Among Moreau’s numerous paintings of Salomé, see: Moreau, Gustave. *The Apparition*, ca. 1876. (Musee Gustave Moreau, Paris) and *Salome* (Musee Gustave Moreau, Paris).

\(^{473}\) Luini, Bernardino, c.1475-1532, *Salome with the head of Saint John the Baptist.* (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna)

\(^{474}\) See 2 Kgs. 9: 30, 37 (The Bible designed to be read as Living Literature, 343).
creativity of the artist on the altar of art (96), and Jumeau-Lafond agrees and sees in Lorrain’s obsession with women’s heads a personification of art and an emblem of the separation that has occurred between the soul, represented by the head, and vital energy, represented by the body (53).

In the context of the works examined in this dissertation, in particular of the stories examined chapter one, the death mask expresses a desire for revenge against a woman, a forced, painful separation that creates the perfect object of desire as it transforms the living model into an artistic object which is created and filled exclusively by the subjectivity of the artist.475 In Monsieur de Phocas, through the magical, ritualistic process of mask-making, otherness is gradually changed into sameness; while the mask-maker is always male, the mask is typically that of a woman and, as the artist uses mask-making to control a threatening femininity, it acquires androgynous features. The process of mask-making becomes an opportunity to give shapes to what the artist sees or wishes to see, as the mask becomes a reflection of his interiority and an empty screen for his desire.

As well as the question of gender, the question of masks and their relationship to exoticism has been explored in the previous chapters, especially in chapters one and three. We have seen that masks are often given an exotic name or connotation, that they become a trope for alterity and that this alterity, in turn, becomes a surface on which to project the self’s fears and desires. In Monsieur de Phocas, the exotic mask is strictly connected to Evil, and, in particular, to the temptations of sensuality. As one of the men of Fréneuse’s society comments, nothing is as harmful for the European as the Orient,476 and Fréneuse is known for having brought with him all its vices. Lorrain is quick to specify what these vices are: opium, hashish, collections of precious stones and dangerous poisons, but also an admiration for the male body and an aesthetic taste for agony. “En France, l’admiration seule des statues est permise,” comments Fréneuse, who

475 Lorrain’s interest in masks and severed heads extended beyond his writing: he kept in his living room the head of a statue that he had beheaded and decorated himself, and had built a little altar for it (Gamboni 96).
476 “Rien n’abîme l’Européen comme l’Orient.” (57)
defines himself as “oriental”; “les pays du soleil n’ont pas ces préjugés” (57). Welcôme exalts India as the realm of liveliness, virility and health, and compares it to the inexorable decadence of Europe: “Ce peuple est jeune, quoique millénaire […] Oh! Que nous sommes loin ici de la vieille Europe! […] L’Inde vous sera une délicieuse convalescence” (248). By prescribing the journey as a remedy for Fréneuse’s neurosis, Welcôme also draws its geographic boundaries. The “Orient,” which coincides in the novel with the “lands of the sun,” begins in Monsieur de Phocas on the coast of Italy and extends to the Far East: “Vivre la vie de son âme et de ses instincts loin des existences artificielles, surchauffées et nerveuses des Paris et des Londres, loin de l’Europe surtout! … Et pourtant l’Italie, l’Espagne, certaines îles de la Méditerranée …” preaches Welcôme, “loin des Baedeker et des Cook …” (176).

Ethal, who has spent just as much time in the Far East, has instead brought back only dangerous drugs, collections of frightful masks, poisons and a subtle taste for aesthetic perversion. “Allez en Sicile, à Venise et même à Smyrne, ah!” he warns Fréneuse, “Malade que vous êtes, vous emporterez votre mal avec vous” (137). He advises Fréneuse to search for corners of the orient within European cities, and thus reinforces Welcôme’s innuendo that the “orient,” more than just a physical location, stands for the realm of the unknown, for the inadmissible in European society and in Fréneuse’s soul.

Through his relationship to Ethal, Fréneuse is introduced to exotic masks in the literal sense, as he contemplates Ethal’s collection of Noh masks, but also in the shape of a series of exotic characters, among whom are two Javanese dancers who had performed at

477 In France, it is only permissible to admire statues but tropical countries have no such prejudices. (43)
478 The race remains youthful, although it is a thousand years old […] Oh, how far away we are, here, from ancient Europe! India will be a delicious convalescence for you/ (224)
479 To leave at last the life of the soul and the instincts, far from the artificial, overheated and hysterical existence of Paris and London: far from the whole of Europe … And yet, there is in [sic] Italy and in Spain, and certain Mediterranean islands […] far from the realms of Baedeker and Thomas Cook. (150)
480 The text is slightly incoherent since, according to the time spend traveling, both characters would have to be quite much older.
481 Go to Sicily, or to Venice, or even to Smyrna, but sick man that you are, you will carry your sickness with you. (110)
the Exposition Universal of 1900. These “oriental idols” (157) are not only exotic but also androgynous, since, according to Ethal, “le sexe est si ambigu dans cette race” (157). In the course of a Chinese tea organized by Ethal, Fréneuse, through a synecdoche created by the fumes of hashish, sees the bodies of the Javanese dancers disappear. Two faces separated by the body emerge and turn into dangerous, threatening masks which are subsequently transformed into bloated bladders:

Je voyais ricaner les faces singulièrement gonflées de deux Javanaises. Elles flottaient sans corps comme deux vessies transparentes et vernies; diadèmes de longs vers blancs, leurs yeux mi-clos laissaient filtrer, comme par deux fentes, un regard huileux et mort. Les deux vessies riaient, tandis qu’approchées de mon visage, leurs quatre mains sans bras, quatre mains molles et exsangues menaçaient mes yeux de leurs ongles aigus (167).

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*In the description of the Javanese’s dancers, whose faces are perceived through the effect of the drug as two masks separated from the body, we find, along with the motif of severed heads, the threat to the eyes that Freud interprets as an expression of the fear of castration. The exotic, androgynous head, which in Welcôme’s dream, in the shape of the beheaded figure on the Sphinx, represent the look of Astarté and thus the incarnation of desire, become in this episode threatening synecdoche. How can the same image stand at the same time for irresistible attraction and for a merciless threat?*

To explain this apparent contradiction, we can recall that the same inversion of the mask from a fetish to an image of evil is present in “The Worshippers of the Image,” the short

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482 These dancers had performed with Hanako, the Japanese actress who had charmed Rodin (see above, chapter one).
483 Amery translates as “their sex was as ambiguous as their race” (128). The meaning, however, is rather “the sex is so ambiguous in this race.”
story by Le Gallienne examined in chapter one. In this story, the protagonist grows tired of his “imperfect” wife and falls in love with a plaster cast that reproduces her features, finding in it an undemanding object which can be filled by his imagination and desire. The association with its original model gradually disappears, and the cast gains androgynous features and becomes a reflection protagonist’s interiority. This narcissism is punished by the terrible features assumed by the mask, which at the end of the story is transformed into a frightful image of evil. As Dottin Orsini observes, the love of images carries in this period a connotation of self-love, and the latter remains a taboo and the worst of sins, much graver that homosexuality and necrophilia (1993,15).

Lorrain’s story shares the same concerns and, as Le Gallienne's, can be read as an expression of narcissism and of its condemnation. Fréneuse is attracted by statues, masks and portraits and is unable to love another human being without the intermission of an image: “Il n’y a de vraiment beaux que les visages des statues,” he writes. “Leur immobilité est autrement vivante que les grimaces de nos physionomies. Comme un souffle divin les anime, et puis quelle intensité de regard dans leurs yeux vides!” (61).

While statues, masks and portraits are attributed a human sensibility, women are reduced to objects by the imposition of terrible masks and are treated as anatomical mannequins: “elles n’ont jamais été pour moi que des chairs à expérience, pas même à plaisir,” Fréneuse confesses in his journal, “avide de sensations et d’analyses, je me documentais sur elles comme sur des pièces anatomiques” (216). Fréneuse’s dilemma is at this point easy to summarize: human beings cannot compete with the perfection of a work of art; portraits, masks and statues can function as fetish objects, but to worship them means to adore a screen of one’s desires and represents a dangerous perversion. “On devrait crever les yeux des portraits” (74), Fréneuse concludes bitterly, realizing the impossibility of his desire. “Pour en faire des masques?” wonders Papet in his analysis of masks in symbolism (41), emphasizing that the boundaries between masks and portraits, in this

484 True beauty is only found in the faces of statues. Their immobility is a kind of existence very different from the grimaces of our features. It is as if a divine breath animates them sometimes — and then, how intense the gaze of their eyes become! (35)

485 Women have never been anything for me but flesh to be experienced — not even a pleasure! Avid for sensations and analytical by temperament, I have studied myself in association with them as if they were so many anatomical models. (191)

486 The eyes of portraits ought to be plucked out. (46)
period, become permeable. Self-love is tempting, but it remains a sin and must be punished. Thus the androgynous, exotic heads of this text are both the perfect screen for the self’s desire and tokens of evil that, as in Le Gallienne’s story, directly threaten the life of the protagonist. 487

Fréneuse’s masks-

Oxymoron

As in the text analyzed in chapter three, we can identify in Phocas a structure in which the Self and a masked Other are presented as opposites that eventually merge into one image, in a form of condensed paradox that we have defined as oxymoron. We have seen that the duke initially perceives himself as the only vulnerable, unmasked person surrounded by a world of maskers. Gradually, however, he begins to suspect that he may be wearing a mask himself. This feeling is accompanied by the doubt that there may be in him a double creature. “Un démon me torture et me hante” (55), 488 he confesses, and wonders “Y aurait-il en moi un être double?” (64) 489 “Un autre homme est installé en moi … et quel homme!” (85) he later cries after savagely beating a dog in an attack of unsuspected cruelty. These torments are attributed to an external cause, to an evil

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487 We can also argue that the transformation of the Javanese dancers into masks becomes threatening because it exposes a pattern of repetition of which the masks, the wax busts and the severed heads of these texts are part; a pattern that Freud, as indicated, relates to castration anxiety. Samuel Weber, elaborating on the reflections of Derrida and Lacan, argues that this pattern of repetition is an integral part of the uncanny: “the distinctive character of the uncanny […] involves the recurrence and repetition of castration, which however, is itself […] a form of repetition and not to be confused with a unique, visible event.” Weber argues further that “castration is not a pure form either, and indeed bound to certain determinate events, situations, constellations: the primal scene, the symbolism of the female body, but also the laws of articulation in which repetition consists not in the re-presentation of the identical but rather in the indefinite, incessant and often violent displacement of marks and traces never entirely reducible to a signified significance: a process of reference without ultimate or fundamental referent” (1123). If castration is itself a trope entwined in language, the mask, rather than as a trope for castration anxiety, can then be seen as a trope that reflects another trope, and that is thus caught into the same “process of reference without ultimate or fundamental referent.” The desire to undo this pattern and to find this ultimate referent, as Weber argues, and as Fréneuse finds out in his search, is itself uncanny.

488 A veritable Demon tortures and haunts me. (28)

489 Might there be a second self lurking within me? (38)
influence, to a demonic possession or to a Doppelgänger, yet Fréneuse at times lets slip how they have been with him for a long time. “Je me souviens”, he reflects, “qu’enfant j’aimais à torturer les bêtes, […] la palpitation de la vie m’a toujours rempli d’une étrange rage de destruction”(64). Fréneuse’s memories of committing acts of cruelty against animals remind us of the childhood crimes of Hofmannsthal's Andreas, and like Andreas, Fréneuse will encounter a reflection of his divided self in the form of several disguised doubles.

When Ethal enters the scene, he begins to function as a screen on which Fréneuse projects all his terrible passions. With his deformed, dwarfish features, the painter becomes an embodiment of the monstrous qualities of Fréneuse’s soul. His morbid curiosities and fixations — his obsession with masks and cruelty, his love of jewels, knowledge of the orient and contempt for women — are Fréneuse’s very own. “Ce sont mes pensées, même les plus lointaines, les pas encore nées, celles que je ne soupçonnais pas, que sa parole évoque et fait naître. Ce mystérieux causeur me raconte à moi-même, donne un corps à mes rêves, il me parle tout haut, je m’éveille en lui comme dans un autre moi plus précis et plus subtil …” (109) admits Fréneuse, and yet this awareness, rather than to a recognition, leads to a denial and a progressive distance from the painter, in whom he continues to see “l’effarant sosie du gnome encapuchonné du maître flamand” (107), otherness in an ugly, dwarfish disguise and the unique cause of all his problems.

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490 See Winn: “Ce qui lui importe c’est la suggestion que le mal dont il souffre est extérieur à lui, ou de moins la notion que la maladie lui est venue d’ailleurs – dût-il même être question d’une tare héréditaire” (160).
491 I remember that as a child I liked to torture animals […] The palpitation of life has always filled me with a strange destructive rage. (38)
492 See above, chapter three, oxymoron.
493 His words evoke and bring into being thoughts which are my very own, although not yet fully formulated: thoughts still distant from my consciousness; ideas of which I had as yet no suspicion. This mysterious provocateur is telling me about myself, putting flesh on my dreams. He speaks to me so distinctively that something like him is awakening in him. It is as if another self more precise and more subtle, born of his conversations, has taken root within me. (82-83)
494 Ethal is the frightful double of the Flemish master’s hooded gnome. (80)
Welcôme’s appearance complicates things further. Fréneuse immediately recognizes that the two men share a bond: “Je sens bien qu’il existe comme une complicité, quelque chose d’irréparable et d’obscur entre ces deux hommes!” (171) he exclaims, and yet fails to see that this obscure link concerns first of all himself. Welcôme is initially presented as Ethal’s antithesis: if the first is a monstrous dwarf, the second is a beautiful giant, who contrasts Ethal’s fascination with death with a passion for exotic beauty and travel. Yet a careful reading reveals that Welcôme is, from the beginning, closely related to Ethal. He is introduced as Ethal’s best friend, like him his hands are covered with jewels and, during the hashish fumerie, the narrator insinuates a deliberate confusion as to whose hand is holding Fréneuse’s. Moreover, both Ethal and Welcôme encourage Fréneuse to visit the musée Moreau. It is to the pictures of Moreau, especially the Massacre des prétendants, which depicts the agony of a group of adolescent men, that Fréneuse attributes the final corruption of his soul.

Like Ethal, Welcôme is accused of a dreadful crime and of a dark past, and like him, he has his own idol. Ethal adores a little wax doll in which he recognizes a personification of death; Welcôme is said to be part of an exotic cult which worships an androgynous, black statuette in which the genitals are substituted by a skull. Ethal, who has mysteriously come into possession of Welcôme’s statue, sends it to Fréneuse as a gift: “Permettez donc de vous l’offrir en souvenir de Welcôme et de moi,” he writes, “ce sera un chaînon de plus dans l’invisible et forte chaîne qui nous unis tous les trois” (240).

Finally, the last important resemblance between these two figures is that, just as Ethal mirrors the dwarf of Antonio Moro, Welcôme is also reflected in a double. Fréneuse

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495 I have a definite feeling that there is some kind of complicity, some obscure and unbreakable bond between the two men. (144)
496 See Moreau, Gustave. Les Pretendants or The Suitors (Musee Gustave Moreau, Paris).
497 While his wax heads capture the souls of his models, this little doll of wax has, according to Ethal, “l’âme exquise et tragique des siècles;” and is thus a personification, an allegory of the past and of a forgotten era. “Ma déesse à moi,” he cries on another occasion. “La mienne est vêtue de la déroque des siècles, mais aucune tête de mort ne grimace sous sa robe: c’est la Morte elle même, la Mort e avec son fard et la transparence de ses décompositions.” (210)
498 This image, like the threatening nails of the two Javane's dancers, suggests a relation between Fréneuse's fears and a castration complex.
499 Permit me, therefore, to offer her to you to remind you of Welcôme and of me. She will be one more link in the invisible but strong chain which unites all of us. (217)
identifies Welcôme’s mirror image in Jean Destreux, a young, handsome farmer whom he used to adore as a child and who was killed in an accident, run over by a cart. Through a series of flash backs, we learn that Fréneuse recognizes in Welcôme’s eyes the farmer’s look, or more precisely, the way in which the farmer looked in his death agony. “Comme Thomas Welcôme lui ressemble!” (227) Fréneuse cries as he becomes aware of the identity.

The revelation that Fréneuse feels in front of Moreau’s painting, as well as the resemblance of Welcôme to Jean Destreux have lead scholars to interpret Fréneuse’s fascination with death as a metaphor for homosexual attraction, and the relationship among these three figures as one of sexual desire. The attraction that Fréneuse felt for Jean Destreux and Welcôme’s desirability are far from hidden in the text; moreover rumors about Welcôme’s past include a homosexual relationship with the man that he is accused of having murdered. Yet Ethal, Welcôme and Fréneuse are at the same time separate characters and the same person, as is confirmed by the first version of the novel, the short story Un Démoniaque (1895), in which the three are united into one figure. If Ethal and Welcôme can be seen as Fréneuse’s masks, then the desire which binds together the three men leads us back to the question of narcissism. Moreover, if the threshold between life and death becomes the magic instant in which alterity, as exemplified by Ethal’s mask-making, becomes a reflection of the self, Fréneuse sees in Destreux’s (and by extention, in Welcôme’s) dying eyes nothing but a reflection of his own soul — and the remembrance becomes another expression of self love.

After Ethal’s murder, Fréneuse writes of the impression of being on a stage: “J’étais comme dédoublé,” he confesses, “et il me semblait assister en spectateur à un drame judiciaire dont je dirigeais moi-même l’intrigue, les jeux de scène et jusqu’aux gestes d’acteurs” (279).

Just as in Hoffmansthal’s Andreas and in Bely’s Petersburg, Monsieur de Phocas can also be considered a theatre of the soul, in which the figures

500 How he resembles Thomas Welcome! (203)
501 See Du Plessis, passim, especially 80.
502 It was as if I was split in two. I seemed to be a helpful witness in a judicial drama whose intrigue – all the scenes and gestures of the actors – I was also directing. (257)
which enter the scene are both real characters, materializations of the protagonist’s interiority and an illustration of the possibilities of his destiny. And, as in Petersburg, each character can be read as the double of another who can, on his/her turn, have his/her own double; thus Ethal and Welcôme can be respectively read as the double of Fréneuse but also find second masks in the dwarf painted by Antonio Moro and in Jean Destreux. Fréneuse never explicitly acknowledges the link that binds him to Ethal and Welcôme, but recognizes how the monstrous features of Ethal have spread to his own face when a gipsy guesses his murderous wishes, and proposes to him an deal that he considers worthy of the Orient: “En être venu là, porter imprimé sur mes traits un tel masque qu’on arrive à me chuchoter, en plein Grenelle et Vaugirard, les propositions murmurées dans les rues du Caire et sur les quais de Naples!” (261) Fréneuse cries indignantly.

According to the metonymy that explains the mask as a reflection of the soul, he realizes that his soul is dead and that he is nothing more than a living automaton. “Tous et toutes sentent en moi un être hors nature, un automate galvanisé de convoitises, mais un automate, c’est-à-dire un mort, et je leur fais peur avec mes yeux de cadavre,”(216) he writes in his journal.

Ethal and Welcôme can thus be considered as Fréneuse’s masks. They reflect opposite possibilities in Fréneuse’s destiny, and merge into one figure in a form of apparent paradox. This implies another shift in the way in which the concept of masks is developed in the novel. Contrary to the animal masks, to the cosmetic masks and, most importantly, to the death masks, Ethal and Welcôme are not objects created by the fantasy of the mask-maker with the aim of reducing difference to sameness, but take the opposite route, since they are based on similarity but identified and explained in terms of difference. They are also masks that Fréneuse sees materialized beyond his will and against which he cannot react.

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503 To carry imprinted on my features such a mask that they come forth to whisper to me, in Grenelle and in Vaugirard, the kind of propositions that are murmured in the streets of Cairo and in the quays of Naples! (238)

504 Everyone, man and woman alike, senses that I am a being somehow set outside nature: an automaton galvanised into some simulacrum of life by covetous desires, but an automaton — that is to say, a dead man — nevertheless. My cadaverous eyes make them afraid. (191)
Allegory

In the context of the works examined in chapter 2, we can read Ethal’s mask as a decadent disguise that is imposed on Fréneuse and that constrains him into a role, becoming one with his face. In the mask of Welcôme, we can instead identify a positive, Dionysian mask that constantly changes and that embraces metamorphosis and a fluctuating identity: “La guérison, le secret du bonheur est là: aimer l’univers dans ces aspects changeants et leur merveilleuse antithèse et leur analogie plus merveilleuse encore,” (177) is Welcôme’s epicurean suggestion, which underlines that a sense of self can be found in the acceptance of continuous metamorphosis. If Fréneuse is “le type extrême et définitif de la race qui se meurt” (Gilbart 33), Ethal can be read allegorically as the period’s indulgence in decadence, while Welcôme represents an alternative to decadence and a positive transformation.

Fréneuse’s adventure closes with Ethal’s murder and, as in Bely’s Petersburg, with a departure for Egypt. “Le duc de Fréneuse est mort, il n’y a plus que M. de Phocas” (53), the duke announces to the Parisian journalist to whom he entrusts his journal. In the change of the name of the protagonist from Fréneuse to Phocas, scholars have identified a symbolic rebirth, a decision to follow Welcôme’s advice, a refusal of decadence (Zinck 25) and a replacement decadent femininity with vigorous masculinity. Santos points out that the name Fréneuse has a feminine ending, which stands for sexual ambiguity and contrasts with the typical masculine ending of the names Phocas and Destreux (50). Yet, as Zinck points out, “le nom propre est un masque” (24), and this mask is as deceiving as the previous one, as indicated by the introduction that the journalist provides to the duke’s journal. This introduction is placed at the beginning of the book and has the proleptic function to makes us acquainted with the character of Phocas after his “transformation.” He is described as a bizarre, sickly and exotic character who spends his winters in Egypt and only rarely makes a visit to Paris. His

\[505\] The cure, the secret of good fortune is this: love the universe in all its changing aspects, in its marvellous antithesis and still more marvellous analogy. (151)

\[506\] The Duc of Fréneuse is dead; there is no longer anyone but Monsieur de Phocas. (27)

\[507\] On the symbolism related to the protagonist’s change of name, see also Ponnau 1991, 89.
features suggest influences that go beyond rational comprehension: “Un personage de conte d’Hoffman! Vous êtes-vous jamais donné la peine de bien le regarder? Cette pâleur pourrissante, la crispation de ces mains effilées, plus japonaises de formes que des chrysanthèmes, ce profil d’arabesque et cette maigreur de vampire, tout cela ne vous a jamais donné à refléchir?” (58)

The reader has not yet read Fréneuse’s vicissitude, and is thus unable to immediately draw a connection with the exotic, androgynous masks that Fréneuse discovers under the influence of Ethal and Welcôme. This connection requires an effort of memorization, and suggests that Fréneuse’s transformation into Phocas is nothing but a mask over a mask. Has Welcôme really won over Ethal? Has not Fréneuse (now Phocas) been transformed into one of the androgynous, exotic items of Ethal’s collection? The name Ethal is, after all, an imperfect anagram of the Greek word for truth, alêtheia. “Je faisais partie de sa collection,” (273)

Fréneuse had realized just before the murder, and after the murder, his features still indicate Ethal as a supreme mask-maker. Moreover, in the name Phocas we can trace another imperfect anagram: the name of the great Pharaoh Khéops, (spelled in French as Chéops), builder of the pyramid of Giza, whom Herodotus accuses of having lead his realm into decadence and forced into prostitution his own daughter. At the end of his adventure, Phocas is about to leave for Egypt, yet the wonderful “Orient” preached by Welcôme is still, as Fréneuse’s new name indicates, imbued by decadence. With another shift, the text makes us wonder whether a way out of decadence is at all possible.

All the themes explored in the previous chapters are summarized and treated, however briefly, in Monsieur de Phocas, in which we can find once again the questions of masks and consciousness, masks and death, masks and exoticism. We have seen how the mask becomes a synecdoche, a metonymy, and how it is represented through the structure of an antithesis which eventually becomes an oxymoron. The mask finally taken by Fréneuse,

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508 Him, an invalid? No — a character from the tales of Hofmann! Have you never taken the trouble to look at him carefully? That pallor of decay; the twitching of his bony hands, more Japanese than chrysanthemums; the arabesque profile; the vampiric emaciation – has all that never given you cause to reflect? (32)
509 I was part of the collection myself. (251)
510 See Herodotus II. 125 (144-7).
as he changes his name to *Phocas*, can be read as an allegory of death and of rebirth, as a historical trope for a period that sensed its own end; and yet this optimism is also contrasted by a darker interpretation which makes us wonder whether an alternative to decadence is at all possible. *Monsieur de Phocas* is detective a story, as well as a journal, which constantly invites the reader to guess the meaning of its masks. The reader is tempted to ascribe a single meaning to them, to identify the key that would lead to a coherent interpretation of the story; and yet the very intention of its author leaves the notion of mask open to various interpretations. Thus the mask becomes a trope that constantly builds on other tropes, that is linked through a pattern of repetition to the wax busts, the severed heads and to the figure of the Doppelgänger but that, as Fréneuse own search shows, avoids to be tracked down to a single meaning, maintaining its own ambiguity.  

511 In this sense the mask, as a literary trope, is not only an image of Freud’s “uncanny” but functions in a similar manner to the uncanny itself. In fact, it involves a quality of doubt which is inherent to its nature, and it can never be tracked down to a single referent. Fréneuse (and by extension, the reader) tries to understand the connection between masks, wax busts, severed heads - but all these interpretations are continuously negated by new meanings and connections. Furthermore the mask, like Freud’s concept of uncanny, is not identical with indecidability but involves, as Weber underlines that the uncanny does, a fight against this ambiguity, “the desire to uncover the façade and to discover what lurks behind…” (1132).
Conclusion

This dissertation considers whether, at the turn of the twentieth century, the mask, in European literature, could be considered a trope for death and rebirth. To examine themes of death and rebirth as they appear in connection with the mask, I formulated in the Introduction the following three interrelated questions, all of which circle back to the dissertation’s overriding concerns. Firstly, in the years being examined, does the mask re-acquire a traditional ritualistic value? If so, how is this related to an understanding of death and/or rebirth? Secondly, does the mask become a type of portraiture, and, if so, how does this relate to the text’s representation of subjectivity? Thirdly, do the references to "exotic" traditions indicate an encounter between familiarity and strangeness, between Self and Other, and how is the notion of alterity reflected in the use of the mask in dramatic texts and in literature?

With respect to the first question, a close reading of the texts of the era shows that the mask – almost fulfilling the expectations of Gordon Craig – is “taken seriously” as an image of death and rebirth. It unquestionably has ritualistic value in that it functions as a magical object able to cross the boundaries of the natural and the supernatural. In Le Gallienne, Rilke, Crommelynck, and Lorrain, the mask is magically animated when it captures the life of its model; in Lothar and Chiarelli, it acquires independent life and transforms the individual wearing it into a puppet. Lucini gives it the power to defy death and cross time and history, while for Schwob it defies human intelligibility. Mann and Hoffmannsthal imbue it with magic as it anticipates the Self's transformation and death, and Bely, by transforming its wearer into a demon, uses it as an omen of death and destruction. The Romantic analogy between madmen, poets, and lovers acquires a new connotation, as the artist becomes not only a lunatic, but a powerful magician who maintains a link with the supernatural; this is often emphasized through references to ancient Greece or to contemporary “exotic” traditions.
And yet, if we take a different perspective, the same masks can be interpreted as ritualistic tokens of rebirth. In Le Gallienne, Rilke, Crommelynck, and Lorrain, the mask, as the work of a great artist, becomes a sublime artifact that defies death, continuing to capture the essence of life after the disappearance of the subject it portrays; in Lothar, Chiarelli and Lucini, it is linked to life as much as to death, it relates to the ideas of revolution, renewal, and rebirth, and it gives a positive answer to the crisis of subjectivity by embracing creative multiplicity. In the works examined in Chapter Three, the mask is closely related to death, but here, death is a phase leading to change, and hence can be considered as a type of rebirth. In Mann, this transformation remains unclear and acquires grotesque features. Hofmannsthal, by contrast, is more optimistic, while Bely hints at an unknown phase that will follow the destruction of Western culture. In Lorrain, images of rebirth are linked to the character of Welcôme, but the possibility of a future beyond decadence remains uncertain.

Thus, while the mask’s relation to death is incontestable, its function as an image of renewal, while nonetheless present, is hesitant and suggests a dark and pessimistic perception of the future. In both cases, however, it harkens back to an ancient as well as to "primitive" or "exotic" context in which the masks assumed apotropaic value and associations with demons and magic.

The second question concerns the relation between the mask and the portrait, which is also evocative of the preoccupation with themes of death and/or rebirth. The Introduction notes that in the visual arts of the period, the mask is often related, compared, or juxtaposed to the portrait or conceived as a form of self representation. Subsequent chapters show this to be the case in dramatic and literary texts as well. In Le Gallienne, Crommelynck, Rilke, and Lorrain's texts, the mask is a form of portrait, a last (and lasting) image that provides a duplicate of the face just before the decay of the body. In Lothar's play, the mask constitutes a perfect likeness of the person killed, while in Lucini's Drami, the author allegedly creates the first of his commedia masks as he contemplates a woman's portrait. In Schwob, James, Hofmannsthal, and Lorrain's works,

512 And here, we hearken back to the overriding theme of death/life.
the mask is either contained in a portrait or compared and juxtaposed to it; in Mann, Hofmannsthal, and Bely, it constitutes a distorted portrait of the protagonist and brings to light hidden aspects of his subjectivity.

Yet a reading of these texts also shows that the portrait is only one of the mask’s several representations: others include the mirror and the skull, both of which are frequently evocative of death. The mirror relates to death as it confronts the individual with the change of his features in the passing of time, and thereby with his/her own mortality. As noted, the cult of skulls, in several cultures, is linked to the origin of the mask. To this, we can add that the visual impact of both skull and mask has certain important similarities, including void sockets, fixity, symmetry, and anonymity (Weihe 21). The masks of Le Gallienne, Rilke, Crommelynck, and Lorrain, as death masks, are fragmentary portraits that mostly reflect an act of violence, and their association with the skull becomes clear when they are juxtaposed to “real” works of art of the age, as, for example, the fragmentary portraits of Carriès and Rodin. In Rilke's Aufzeichnungen, the mask is, on the one hand, a skin-mask that stands in close relation to a flayed face, and on the other, a terrifying object that is animated and takes independent life through its reflection in the mirror. In Lothar's play, Harlequin acts as mirror-image of his double and must stare every day in the mirror at the “image of death” as he puts on his mask, while, in Lucini's Drami, the masks of the commedia dell'arte contemplate their artificial nature in the mirror and reflect on their isolation from the surrounding environment. In Mann, Hofmannsthal, and Bely, we have a transformation in front of a mirror by means of which a character acquires a mask, and in Lorrain, the mask is constantly juxtaposed to the mirror, the portrait and the severed head, the latter acting as another instantiation of the skull.

Throughout we have seen the many shapes of the mask, including a blank surface (a veil), a hollow portrait, and a three dimensional sculpted head. We have also seen its reduction into make-up and extension into a puppet. These ambiguous configurations,

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513 See Weihe 21; Kristeva passim, especially 15-21.
and the frequency with which it is juxtaposed to the portrait, the mirror, and the skull, suggest that the mask does not work as an independent signifier; rather, its meaning is often determined in relation to these objects. The mask's closeness to the mirror and the portrait indicates its function to reflect aspects of the self and its confrontation with alterity; its juxtaposition to or identification with the skull shows that, as in baroque iconography, it continues to function as a *memento mori*, a reminder of man's mortality.

The skull, the portrait and the mirror are also tools that accompany the mask's transformation into a *Doppelgänger*, a “familiar and strange” figure; this leads us to the last question concerning the encounter with familiarity and strangeness, Self and Other, and, in general, the use of the mask to represent alterity. The Introduction notes Rank and Freud's conception of the “double” as an uncanny phenomenon; subsequent chapters, a Doppelgänger appears in the form of a mask closely related to the self but which threatens to replace it through an act of destruction. As indicated in the Introduction and Chapter Two, on the theatrical stage, the mask introduces alterity by juxtaposing the mobility of the face to a rigid and inert surface. In the texts examined, it continues to display the encounter of the familiar and the strange, and does so by taking the characteristic of a double.

In Le Gallienne and Lorrain, the mask is initially conceived as the portrait of a woman, but it gradually changes, assumes androgynous features, and takes on aspects of the male protagonist. In Rilke's fictional journal, the mask is a Doppelgänger born from the self and part of it; in Lothar's play, it is initially a tool through which the Doppelgänger takes shape, but, eventually, it acquires independent life and becomes the Doppelgänger itself; and in Lucini, it acts as the double of the author-puppeteer. In Mann, Hoffmansthal, and Bely, masked characters are initially perceived as the opposite of the self, but gradually reveal similar characteristics to the Self and eventually merge with it. The first chapter examines how the Doppelgänger often takes an exotic name or features, as in Le Gallienne and Crommelynck's works, but also how it mirrors the self's fears and desires and, especially in Rilke's *Aufzeichnungen*, the estrangement felt by the individual in the anonymity of the modern city. The texts examined in Chapter Two show the mask taking
on a greater social and historical significance, becoming an artificial tool of constriction or acting as an image of a temporal transition. In the mask found in Mann, Hofmannsthal, and Bely's works, we can see at once a reflection of the self, an embodiment of an exotic “other” and an allegory of historical change.

Thus, all these texts confront, through the mask, an external Other that relates both to an individual and to a historical dimension, reflecting the protagonist's interiority, as well as the perception of the exotic and a specific historical, social condition. These aspects are neither independent nor unrelated. The fear of otherness seen in Der Tod in Venedig and Andreas is linked to the fear of death, which continues to be the ultimate form of alterity. Common to most of these texts is, moreover, the contemplation of a declining phase of Western culture, a phenomenon of “degeneration” which operates in the psyche of the individual and in a greater social and historical dimension. In addition, in some of these works, as in Bely and Lorrain, the decay of Western culture is caused or accelerated by the intervention of alien, “exotic” forces, which are themselves a reflection of the time's historical events. The mask, simply stated, reflects the personal as well as the general, the psychological along with the historical.

Just like the Doppelgänger, to which it is related, the mask has a dual purpose. It can be understood as positive or negative, an image of life or a harbinger of death. Like the Doppelgänger, it is a literary, dramatic and aesthetic phenomenon known from antiquity to the present, appearing most frequently in times of instability and historical transformation, and acquiring characteristics to suit the era.

At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, then, the mask is addressed in literary and dramatic works on several levels. Firstly, all texts mentioned here engage, to a certain extent, in a game with the “mask” as a signifier, playing with its different meanings and configurations. Secondly, the texts use the mask as a tool to explore the complexity of the self and the discovery of the unconscious. Finally, they

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514 The “yellow faces with the same imprint” that appear in Petersburg, for example, reflect the victory of Japan over Russian in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5).
attribute to the mask an allegorical significance that reflects the estrangement felt by the individual in a rapidly changing and unstable society.

The structure of the dissertation and its division into chapters named after rhetorical figures are designed to reflect the flexibility of the mask as a signifier. Synecdoche, metonymy and antithesis are devices through which the mask relates to death and rebirth, but they also develop autonomous meanings for the mask and relate it to the notion that it acquires in visual art, to its function as theatrical prop, and to its use as a token of alterity. An allegorical reading which confronts historical and social interpretations of the mask is valid in all texts studied here. “The imagination of man, owing to industrialism, is not very brilliant,” says Gordon Craig, in advocating the use of masks (1919, 99). Seeming to heed Craig's claim, these texts protest a suffocated imagination and homologation to industrial criteria. Moreover, in several of these works, the mask transforms the individual into a puppet moved by greater, historical forces, and the world itself becomes a stage, a “masquerade” about to be swept away by great change. The mask is thus bound to the contemporary perception of history, often used to embody a sense of instability and a foreboding of a harsh transition.

A link between an allegorical perception of history and its representation through a face, a skull (a mask?) is noted by Walter Benjamin in Ursprung des Deutschen Trauerspiels, when he says that “everything about history that, from the very beginning, had been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face or rather in a death’s head” (166). Further, he defines mourning as “the state of mind in which feeling revives the empty world in the form of a mask, and derives an enigmatic contemplation in contemplating it” (139). Neil Hertz, in his essay “Medusa's Head: Male Hysteria Under Political Pressure,” follows Benjamin's allegorical approach when he argues that in post-revolutionary France, the representation of faces, specifically women's facial features, takes on synecdochical value and becomes an image of history: “The question is why should revolutionary violence be emblematized this way, as a hideous and fierce but not exactly sexless woman?” (Hertz 162). Elaborating on Freud's interpretation of Medusa’s head, Hertz sees these images as a threat that is both sexual and political, based on fear of
sexual difference and political change. From the texts examined in this dissertation, it is reasonable to say that a similar phenomenon takes place at the turn of the twentieth century, a period on the verge of political crisis when history is once again seen “through the features of a face” (Hertz 161), or more precisely, through a mask with the threatening gaze of Medusa.

Can the masks in these texts, as we first asked in the Introduction, be considered uncanny in terms of Freud's understanding? Indeed, certain masks can either be read as natural phenomena or magical tools, depending on perspective. If we choose to regard the mask as something related to the supernatural and as a messenger of death, rather than the fruit of the protagonists' neurosis, it acquires frightening and demonic features. As a magical, ritualistic tool, it functions as a deviation from the “reality” of the narration that, as shown in “The Worshipper of Image,” is emphasized by the assumption of different perspectives. By portraying the protagonist's interiority, the mask also embodies his (hardly ever her!) repressed desires. Moreover, the connection between masks and bodily fragmentation, not to mention the link with the deadly gaze of Medusa, provides the necessary ingredients for associating the terrifying side of the mask with the threat of castration. As recurring motifs in several texts, the obsession with the mask's eye-holes, the threat of blindness, the unsettling appearance of severed heads can all easily be related to Freud's most important fear. In Lorrain's Monsieur de Phocas, for example, the image of a small statue with a skull in the place of the genitals is related to severed heads and the masks' empty eye-holes—a detail indicating that the association between masks and castration is neither an unlikely nor a merely subjective interpretation.

Jean de Palacio, reflecting on images of decapitation in French decadent literature and on Freud's analogy (decapitation and blinding = castration), argues that one does not

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515 By creating a hesitation between a rational and a supernatural explanation, several of these texts echo Todorov's definition of the “fantastic.” According to Todorov's well known definition, the fantastic is linked to a feeling of uncertainty: “l’hésitation commune au lecteur et au personnage, qui doivent décider si ce qu'ils perçoivent relève ou non de la “réalité”, telle qu'elle existe pour l'opinion commune”(46).

516 The figure of Maria/Mariquita in Andreas is an exception in this sense.
necessarily need to embark on a Freudian reading to understand this symbolism, and that “castration” should be understood as a symbolic deadening of man's fertility and his creative potential (Palacio 124). We can choose to adhere strictly to Freud's definition or, as Palacio suggests, we can consider this threat metaphorically, especially as some of the authors discussed here were informed by the discoveries of psychoanalysis while others were not. Through the exercise of magical actions attributed to “primitive,” ritualistic beliefs, and through the staging of repressed aspects of the protagonist’s psyche, these texts can be classified as “uncanny” and either refer to or prefigure the contemporary psychoanalytic discourse. But the "uncanny" dimensions in many of these texts maintain a strict relation to a transitional state between life and death, between the animate and the inanimate, and continues to be linked to the "intellectual uncertainty" that Freud dismisses in his essay. 517 Thus, the texts can be read as alternative forms of revisionary processes, which, as Freud also does, relate repression with the fear of difference, but that focus on the crossing of boundaries and do not necessarily link these fixations to a child's traumatic experience, or to Freud's “primal scene.”

Just as a purely historical perspective, an “uncanny” reading of these masks, too, shows its limitations. As illustrated in Chapter 4, in Lorrain's novel, the mask can be alternatively read as a synecdoche, a metonymy, an oxymoron and an allegory; it finally remains open to a variety of interpretations, refusing to be restricted to one meaning. The perception of reality, in many of these texts, becomes a mask; the mask functions as a trope linked to both death and rebirth, but maintains a flexibility that lends it a happy ambiguity and thus continues to reflect multiples possibilities. In James and Schwob, it introduces the notion of relativism; in Lothar and Lucini, it addresses the nature of human consciousness, and, in Hoffmannsthal, it remains linked to the conception of the world as a theatre. Moreover, in Le Gallienne, Crommelynck and Lorrain, while the masks are frightening, they are arranged in grotesque contexts and have qualities and actions that

517 In her reading of Freud's Das Unheimliche, Cixous wonders why the question of "intellectual uncertainly" is quickly cast aside by Freud, and whether the confusion between life and death is not in itself uncanny. Moreover, she links this hesitation to the one represented by castration: "The phantoms of the men buried alive represents the confusion of life and death: death within life, life in death, nonlife in nondeath. And what about castration? It is the notch and also the other self of the man buried alive, a bit too much life in death, at the merging intersection" (Cixous 545).
we cannot help perceiving as funny. Our laughter may be the fruit of a late-twentieth
century perception. Yet we can ask whether the authors intentionally inserted a touch of
irony, something confirmed by the meta-narrative comments that several let slip among
the decadent imagery.

We can also wonder why all these texts are written by men. Further, what are the
implications of transforming a woman's features into a mask? Does the mask of the
Medusa related to female representation in this period? How would the act of mask-
making be portrayed if it were the work of a woman? Are female “mask-makers”
represented in this period at all?

Lastly, a glimpse at masks after the First World War confirms that their ongoing use is
both psychological and political. It is well known that Meyerhold staged Lermontov's
drama Maskarad on the evening when the October revolution began, and that he later
used the notions learned in his experimentations with the commedia dell'arte to develop
the theory of biomechanics – the basis of a new “communist theatre.” It is perhaps less
commonly known, but equally significant that Gordon Craig wrote to Stalin asking for
funding for a collective farm to train his Übermarionetten (Le Bœuf 2009, 19). But in
other hands, the mask takes on psychological significance. Pirandello used the mask to
indicate meta-theatre in the 1925 staging of I sei personaggi in cerca di autore, while
Evreinov, who had experimented with the Commedia dell'arte, made use of masks for a
“therapeutical” theatre informed by psychoanalytic notions.

All these works belong to a later stage of the mask's revival, a period in which the mask
ceases to function as a trope for death and rebirth, acquires new meanings and
connotations, and is used for theatrical experimentation. It would be interesting to
discover whether, in any period after the First World War, the mask harkens back to the
works examined in this dissertation. A significant use of masks can be found in the
French, German, Italian and Russian avant-gardes, and a connection between theatre,
visual arts and literature is especially achieved in surrealism. How this connection
functions, and how it compares to the works analyzed here, is a question that remains open and deserves to be explored in further research.
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**Works of Art Cited**


**Films Cited**


L’Inconnue de la Seine. Anonymous. ca.1898-1900 (Saint-Denis, atelier de moulages de la Réunion des musées nationaux.).
Masques

Un groupe de trois, tous les trois célébrant la mort de la pollution et la vie de la nature, se rassemblent autour d'une statue de béton. La sculpture est le symbole de la vieillesse et de la résistance. Les trois figures sont représentées avec des masques, chacun portant un masque différent, chaque masque transmettant une histoire différente.

Le masque du milieu, représentant la mort de la pollution, est un masque de feu, symbolisant la destruction et la transformation. Les couleurs sombres et le feu balayant le visage transmettent l'idée de la mort et de la décadence.

Le masque du côté gauche, représentant la vie de la nature, est un masque de fleur, symbolisant la beauté et la vie. Les pétales délicats et les couleurs vives transmettent l'idée de la splendeur et de la vitalité.

Le masque du côté droit, représentant la résistance, est un masque de roche, symbolisant la force et la persévérance. Les formes rugueuses et les couleurs sombres transmettent l'idée de la lutte et de la détermination.

Ensemble, ces masques transmettent une histoire de résilience et de transformation, de la mort à la vie, de la destruction à la création.
Les plus récents Travaux de la Manufacture de Porcelaine de Sèvres

Les plus récents Travaux de la Manufacture de Porcelaine de Sèvres...