

The Masquerade

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by [Edward Curtin](#), [Behind the Curtain](#)

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“They didn’t act like people and they didn’t act like actors. It’s hard to explain.”

J.D. Salinger, [The Catcher in the Rye](#), 1951

There’s a reason that *Catcher in the Rye*, published 70 years ago, has become such an iconic book, praised and condemned in equal measure. It is because it is about lying, phoniness, acting, Hollywood, theater, plagiarism, and at its core, a society of liars. Actors in a masquerade willing to don masks and face other faces with the veiled glances of the defeated. It is about the massive social confusion that entered American life in an intense way following World War II, a world of propaganda and performance. Although the book seems to be directed at adolescents, it is for adults, and while annoying many of them with its adolescent lingo, it cuts to the heart of our current life-the-movie society. Adults have become kids, and Holden Caulfield knew that they would. Or were. Maybe he wanted it. We now live in a society of costumed children, asking to be tricked.

“If you want to know the truth,” Holden keeps repeating, knowing that most people don’t, since they prefer the Show.

It is also a fall book with echoes of falling leaves in a dying land. Football and war, Halloween and all souls drifting down in the crepuscular light of late October and the coming November remembrance of Veteran’s Day, once called

Armistice Day, when the mad slow action film of WW I, the war to end all wars with millions dead in rat infested trenches, is commemorated, as if anything has changed and such memories are not secret celebrations of the heroic sacrifices the gullible make for their masters. [War is a racket](#); the ultimate racket.

[Liam Clancy](#) reminds us of this truth regarding the “Great” War and all the others that have followed. Millions of deaths brought on by lying government bastards. Actors in the mass masquerade.

But it goes deeper than lying leaders. For lying is the leading cause of living death in the USA, and the [pharmaceutical companies have no prescription for it](#). If they did, and if they cared, which they don't, they would have manufactured such a drug long ago. It would have killed them of course, but since their business is profits not suicide, they don their masks of solicitude and bank the spoils, while producing poison to shoot people with.

The great English writer, D. H. Lawrence, warned us long ago to not let the living-dead eat us up. Yet we are still being devoured by a refusal that knows no name since it is not just them but us – victims and executioners, both in a mutual deadly game.

Death is a big hit, as everyone knows. It fascinates far more than does life. One glance at the mass media will confirm that. Fear, death, and disaster are the daily menu, interspersed with kitsch uplift. Propaganda feeds on it. Up down all around spin that wheel and rattle your brains.

But the ghosts of fall remind us to beware of this necrophilia. The dead return and wander among us, masked children wandering through the streets looking for handouts. Adults laughing those tight grim laughs. How cute!

Nietzsche said that “all things are entangled, ensnared, and

enamored.” I find this especially true during the autumnal season, especially the Halloween weekend of ghosts, death, and masks. It is enchanting and disturbing if you give it thought. Its symbolism explains the Covid propaganda and panic more than a thousand factual articles. It explains the warfare state and adults’ refusal to defiantly oppose it. It explains the nihilistic underpinning of society and children’s fears and wishes to use a magic wand to change the world to one that celebrates life not death. That is the true treat that their unconscious playacting requests. But the candy the adults give them conceals the poison the adults can’t face. The poison that they have ingested.

I think of how all persons are, by definition, masked, the word person being derived from the Latin, *persona*, meaning mask. Another Latin word, *larva*, occurs to me, it too meaning mask, ghost, or evil spirit. The living masks light up for me as I think of ghosts, the dead, all the souls and spirits circulating through our days, swirling like dead leaves in the wind.

While etymology might seem arcane, I think it offers us a portal into our lives, not just personally, but politically and culturally as well. Word usage is at the heart of linguistic mind control, and we are in a world where the minders of the public’s mind have become adept at fashioning language to their devious ends. Orwell predicted this in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with [his explanation of Newspeak](#):

The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible. It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak forgotten, a heretical thought – that is, a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc – should be literally unthinkable, at least as far as thought is dependent on words.

A quick check of the latest dictionary updates will corroborate Orwell's point about the future dictionary when Newspeak has been fully established, the meaning of words will be so changed that anything can mean anything, even its opposite.

Shakespeare, the ultimate wordsmith, was right, of course, to tell us that "all the world's a stage," though I would disagree with the bard that we are "merely" players. It does often seem that way, but seeming is the essence of the actor's show and tell. But who are we behind the masks? Who is it uttering those words coming through the masks' mouth holes (the *per-sona*: Latin, to sound through)?

Halloween. The children play at scaring and being scared. Death walks among them and they scream with glee. The play is on. The grim reaper walks up and down the street. Treats greet them. The costumes are ingenious; the masks, wild. It's all great fun, the candy sweet. So what's the trick? When does the performance end?

As Halloween ends, the saints come marching in followed by all the souls. The Days of the Dead. Spirits. Ghosts walk the streets. Dead leaves fall. The dead are everywhere, swirling through the air, drifting. We are surrounded by them. We are them. Until.

Until when? Perhaps not until we dead awaken and see through the charade of social life and realize the masked performers are not just the deadly politicians and celebrities, not only the professional actors and the corporate media performers, but us.

And while these days of the dead and children's games can bring us to wonder whether we act like people or actors – "even if it's hard to explain" – whether behind the double masks we realize we can be genuine actors if we go deep enough, the celebration of Veterans/Armistice/Remembrance Day

a few days later should emphatically remind us of the Masters of War and the need to see through their masks, as Bob Dylan [tells](#) us. The evil performers who “play with my world like it’s your little toy” with their endless lies.

Norman O. Brown so well describes our stage set:

Ancestral voices prophesying war; ancestral spirits in the danse macabre or war dance; Valhalla, ghostly warriors who kill each other and are reborn to fight again. All warfare is ghostly, every army an exercitus feralis (army of ghosts), every soldier a living corpse.

It seems to me that Albert Camus was right, and that we should aspire to be neither victims nor executioners. To do so will take a serious reevaluation of the roles we play in the ongoing national tragedy of lie piled upon lie in aggressive wars around the world and in election farces that perpetuate them. The leading actors we elect are our responsibility. We produce and maintain them. They are our mirror images; we are theirs. It is the *danse macabre*, a last tango in the land of bad actors, our two-faced show. This masquerade ball that passes for political reality is infiltrated by the ghosts of all those victims we have murdered around the wide world. We may choose not to see them, but they are lurking in the shadowy corners. And they will haunt us until we make amends.

“Do you not know there comes a midnight hour when everyone has to throw off his mask?” warned Kierkegaard. “Do you believe that life will always let itself be mocked? Do you think you can slip away a little before midnight in order to avoid this? Or are you not terrified by it?”

“Whenever I take up a newspaper,” [Ibsen added](#), “I seem to see ghosts gliding between the lines. There must be ghosts all the country over, as thick as the sands of the sea. And then we are, one and all, so pitifully afraid of the light.”

Yet the children and the eloquent voices of the genuine actors I have so liberally quoted here remind us of what is possible if we chase the light and stop the masquerade. That would be cause for a real holiday celebration.

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