

# THE MEDICAL MASQUE AND WESTERN PSEUDO-MODERNITY

## ABSTRACT

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On March 18, 2021 before a United States congressional committee addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, Senator Rand Paul accused Dr. Anthony Fauci, Chief Medical Advisor to the President of the United States, of parading “around in two masks for show.” Fauci retorted “let me just say for the record that masks are not theater.” Medical concerns aside, there is irony in Fauci’s assertion since the icon for western theater is the Greek masks for Comedy and Tragedy. Indeed, the French word *masque* from which the English word “mask” derives can also refer to a genre of allegorical Renaissance era dramatic performances similar to the performance that Rand and Fauci portrayed before the media. While both actors used medicine to mask their political agendas, their political agendas mask their mutual desire to portray the authority of medical science. At a deeper level, however, they must mask the inevitability of death. Masks both reveal and conceal. Medical Science must conceal death enough to look successful but reveal death enough to reinforce the perpetual need for the medical superhero. The medical *masque* creates the myth that medical science controls and will eventually defeat death. The *danse macabre* of medieval morality plays provides a stark contrast to the modern medical *masque*. The *danse macabre* displayed the reality of death with all the facticity we expect from the scientific gaze. The modern medical *masque* however must conceal the facticity of death from the modern scientific gaze in order to maintain the myth of control and eventual triumph over death which is essential to the maintenance of its authority. Thus, modern medical science is a pseudo-modernity. This is not a pseudo-modernity as it is usually defined for it is not the retention of premodern thoughts and practices within modernity but is a pseudo-modernity created within modern medical science itself. If medical science is to advance, the show must go on.