

May 13th 2005

Mirror, Mirror

By Paola Lizares



Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
Who's the fairest of us all?

Sit down, close your eyes and answer this question: 'Which is the most interesting invention of all times?' You might think it's fire, the wheel, paper, the printing press, the steam engine or vaccines. I think it's the mirror.

For better or for worse, mirrors have contributed to the development of several fields. For example, if there were no mirrors, there would be no cameras, no microscopes and no telescopes. And think about this: if there were no mirrors, we would hardly know what we look like. Our perception of ourselves would be totally different. We could scarcely be self-conscious.

I am not saying that the mirror is a good invention. I am saying that it is extremely interesting. Perhaps it would even be better to live in a world in which we didn't know what we look like. Would we

ever be ashamed of the way we look? Would we be in paradise, like Adam and Eve before they realised that they were naked?

Yet another question: if we lived in a world without mirrors, would there be so much anorexia, bulimia or vigorexia these days? I don't think so. Neither would there be so many people who suffer from what is known as Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD), a syndrome characterised by distress about physical defects that one *imagines* to have. People with BDD can, for example, be totally sure that they have severe acne when they only have a couple of pimples or, even worse, when they don't have any pimples at all.

As would be expected, people who suffer from BDD are usually insecure, sensitive, obsessive, anxious, narcissistic and introverted. They tend to be hypochondriacal. They spend many hours a day thinking about their 'defects'. Some spend most of the day looking at themselves in a mirror. And some are so afraid of even seeing their 'defects' in a mirror that they avoid mirrors as much as possible. This fear is called *eisoptrophobia*.

A famous fictitious case of BDD is the wicked queen of "Snow White". See how Disney portrayed her in the picture of this Lingua Weekly. She looks beautiful, even with a crossed brow. One could think that she suffers from BDD, looking at herself in the mirror for hours and hours. What's her problem? She thinks that she is ugly because she does not reach the ideal of beauty: Snow White. When she looks at herself in the mirror, she sees a hideous face. The face in the mirror is supposed to belong to a magic spirit, but... couldn't it simply be the wicked queen's perception of herself, and... couldn't the spirit's words simply be the wicked queen's conscience?