

# Delusional misidentification syndromes: influences in the literary fiction work of a Portuguese writer

Lady of Shalott  
John William Waterhouse, 1888

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## BACKGROUND

Delusional misidentification syndromes (DMS) are complex psychopathological phenomena that may occur within the context of psychiatric and neurological illnesses, in which a patient misidentifies people, places, objects or events. The most common and best known DSM is Capgras syndrome, in which the patient believes that a close relative or friend has been replaced by an identical double, an impostor. Other known types of DMS are Fregoli (hiperfamiliarity or the belief that a familiar one is physically disguised), Intermetamorphosis (belief that someone changes both physical and mental identity into others), Subjective Doubles (belief that exists a double of oneself living a separate life) and mirrored-self misidentification (belief that one's mirror reflection is another person) along with other less recognized types. They share features and can be interchangeable, sometimes classified into hypoidentification or hiperidentification syndromes. DMS are enigmatic and poorly understood entities, and therefore attractive concepts for fiction authors to explore in their novels.

## THE WRITER

Ana Teresa Pereira is a Portuguese writer, born in Madeira island in 1958. She studied Philosophy, before devoting her lifework to literature. Has written dozens of novels, most of them crossed-by the motifs of the double and identity fragmentation. Characters move between plots, sometimes keeping their names although with a different existence and biography, the most remarkable being named Tom. Mixed feelings of nearness and strangeness define the relationships between characters, who sometimes believe they've been related in a previous life, with a different physical appearance. The ambience is often disquieting, recalling delusional mood and perception.



## SHATTERED SELF IN THE MIRROR

The 2016 awarded novel named Karen tells the story of a woman who wakes up in a house that she doesn't recognize, surrounded by strangers who claim to know her as Karen, the wife of the householder, who is a writer. She doesn't recognize herself by that name, as well as her image in the mirror, remembering a different past. However she pretends to be that person, believing they will hurt her if she tells the truth. She experiments feelings of insecurity and persecution, suspecting everyone knows she's an impostor, still the plot gets so tangled that she even doubts her own identity. The whole story recalls an intriguing and intense psychotic experience.

## References:

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