Death and the Maiden Study Guide

Death and the Maiden by Ariel Dorfman

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Introduction

Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden* is a moral thriller about a woman, Paulina, who believes that a stranger who comes to her home is the doctor who, under a military dictatorship, tortured and raped her many years before. (The play's title is taken from a piece of music by Franz Schubert; Paulina loved the piece but grew to revile it when it was played repeatedly during her torture sessions.) Dorfman began writing the play in the mid-1980s, when he was in exile from Chile, a country under the rule of the military dictator General Augusto Pinochet. It was not until Chile's return to democracy in 1990 that Dorfman returned to the play and "understood ... how the story had to be told." A workshop production of *Death and the Maiden* was staged in Santiago, Chile, opening in March, 1991, and in July of that year the play had its world premiere at London's Royal Court Upstairs. In November the production, which received the London *Time Out* Award for best play of 1991, moved to the Royal Court Mainstage. Reception of the play was positive, critics finding it both dramatically engaging as well as historically timely (given the number of societies around the world facing painful legacies of repressive regimes).

The play had its Broadway premiere on March 17, 1992, directed by Mike Nichols and starring Glenn Close as Paulina (a performance for which she received an Antionette "Tony" Perry Award), Richard Dreyfuss as Gerardo, and Gene Hackman as Miranda. The casting of three Anglo actors in a play with a Latin American context was protested by Latino organizations and the Actors' Equity Association (the union for American actors). Dorfman's play, ultimately, did not receive as high praise in the United States as it had in England but did create enough interest to inspire a film adaptation in 1994. *Death and the Maiden* is valued as a dramatic work that examines the psychological repercussions of human rights abuses.

Author Biography

Playwright, essayist, novelist, poet, and short story writer Ariel Dorfman was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on May 6,1942, the son of an economist and a literature teacher. His life illustrates the fragmented experience of the modern Latin American exile. At the age of two, his family was forced to flee to the United States because of his father's opposition to the Argentine government of Juan Peron. Dorfman's father was one of the architects of the United Nations, and the family lived in New York for ten years before leaving in 1954, during the McCarthy era, to settle in Chile. Completing a University education, Dorfman became a naturalized Chilean citizen in 1967. Working for the next several years as a journalist and activist, he published several works, including a study of the plays of Harold Pinter *(The Homecoming).*

A supporter of Chilean President Salvador Allende, Dorfman was forced into exile after a military coup led by General Augusto Pinochet seized control of the country in 1973. He intermittently lived in Argentina, France, the Netherlands, and eventually settled in the United States (in 1980), holding a variety of academic posts in each of the countries. In 1984 he became a professor at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, where he maintains a part-time residence. Remaining active in Chile's political and social affairs while in exile, Dorfman first tried to return home to Chile in 1983 yet felt uncomfortable in the environment there. He tried a part-time return in 1986, but the following year, he was stopped at Santiago airport, detained, and then deported. Dorfman returned to Chile again in 1989. Following Pinochet's abdication to apopu-larly-elected president in 1990, the playwright attempted to re-establish a semi-permanent residence in his adopted homeland.

Dorfman's writings have been translated into over twenty languages. Like many other Latin American authors, he is also a social critic who investigates the relationship between politics and culture. He is the author of important essays and works of cultural criticism—*How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic* (1975), *Culture and Resistance in Chile* (1978) and *The Empire's Old Clothes* (1980)—which argue that popular literatures promote capitalist and neo-im-perial ideology and encourage passivity. Dorfman has additionally written literary works in a variety of forms. His collections of short stories include *The Medicine Goes Down* (1985) and *My House Is on Fire* (1979) which examines how people retain a sense of hope living under an oppressive military regime. Dorfman's novels have been praised for their highly original narrative techniques. *The Last Song of Manuel Sendero* (1987) combines several different perspectives, including those of cartoon characters and the unborn. *Mascara* (1988) explores human identity and the paranoia created by authoritarian regimes. Dorfman's many collections of poetry include *Missing* (1982) and *Last Waltz m Santiago and Other Poems of Exile and Disappearance* (1986). In the theater—besides his success with *Death and the Maiden* (1991)—Dorfman has created stage adaptations of his novel *Widows* (1981) and his short story "Reader" (1979).

Plot Summary

Act I

When the play opens,"The time is the present and the place, a country that is probably Chile but could be any country that has given itself a democratic government just after a long period of dictatorship." At the Escobar's secluded beach house it is late at night and an uneaten dinner is laid out on the table. Paulina sits on the terrace, startled by the sound of an unfamiliar car motor. She takes a gun from the sideboard, and stands listening as her husband, Gerardo, speaks to the driver of the car and then enters the house. Paulina is disturbed by the unusual occurrence, and Gerardo explains that he had a flat tire on the way home and accepted a ride from a passing motorist. He blames Paulina for the spare tire being flat and for the jack being gone (Paulina lent it to her mother). The couple argue about these details and then discuss Gerardo's meeting with the country's president, from which he has just returned.

Gerardo has been named to a commission examining human rights abuses under the country's previous government, a military dictatorship. (It is revealed through dialogue that Paulina was arrested and tortured while attending medical school during this dictatorship.) Paulina has mixed feelings; she is suspicious of the commission, which is only to investigate cases of abuse that ended in death. A case like Paulina's own abduction, therefore, would not fall within the commission's jurisdiction. Paulina is still traumatized by the memory of being raped and tortured, but she has never discussed details of her experience with her mother or other people close to her.

Gerardo agrees with Paulina that the power of the commission is limited, but he believes nevertheless that "there is so much we can do... ."Gerardo makes a point of appearing to ask for Paulina's permission to sit on the commission, but the first scene ends with his admission that he has already accepted the president's appointment. An hour later, a knock at the door rouses the Escobars. Gerardo is ill at ease until he opens the door to admit Doctor Roberto Miranda, the man who earlier drove him home. Miranda apologizes for the intrusion, and as the two men speak, Paulina edges closer, listening in on their conversation. As she listens, the sound of Miranda's voice appears to greatly upset her. Miranda explains that he heard a news story about the commission on the radio, only then realizing who Gerardo was, and felt he had to return to congratulate him on the appointment. Miranda appears very enthusiastic about the commission, although he also realizes that the investigations are unlikely to conclude with punishment. Miranda prepares to leave, promising to pick Gerardo up the next morning and help him retrieve his car, but Gerardo insists that Miranda stay the night.

The third scene is a brief interlude a short time later, in which Paulina is seen dragging Miranda's unconscious body into the room and tying him to a chair. She gags him with her own underwear, then takes his car keys and leaves. When dawn rises on the fourth scene, Paulina has returned and sits with her gun, watching Miranda. When he awakens, she speaks to him for a long while, playing a cassette of Schubert's quartet

Death and the Maiden which she found in Miranda's car. This music has painful associations for Paulina; it was played while she was in captivity, and Paulina takes Miranda's cassette—along with the familiarity of his voice—as proof that he is the doctor who tortured her. Gerardo enters, aghast at the scene he linds. Paulina explains her discovery, and Gerardo's first conclusion is: "You're sick." Gerardo makes a move to untie Miranda, and Paulina fires the gun wildly. She explains that she has already called a mechanic, and when the latter arrives, she ushers Gerardo out of the house to retrieve their car. The act ends with Paulina's cool statement, "'We're going to put him on trial, Gerardo, this doctor. Right here, today."

Act II

The time is midday; Miranda is still tied and Paulina speaks to him intimately about her captivity and the night of her release. Gerardo enters after retrieving the car, with a new resolve to talk his wife into releasing Miranda. Gerardo appeals to an ideal of law, implying Paulina is no better than the military regime if she will not allow Miranda to defend himself. Paulina says she has every intention of allowing the doctor to argue his case. She was only waiting for Gerardo's return, having decided that her husband will act as a lawyer for the accused. When Paulina removes his gag, Miranda claims never to have seen Paulina before, calling her "extremely ill, almost prototypically schizoid."

Gerardo continues to plead with his wife, and as they argue it becomes evident that Gerardo has difficulty speaking about Paulina's experience. If she can prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that Miranda is the same doctor, Paulina asks, would Gerardo still want her to set him free. Gerardo replies, "If he's guilty, more reason to set him free.... Imagine what would happen if everyone acted like you did." Gerardo argues that if Miranda is guilty of the crimes, they should turn him over to the proper authorities. His wife, however, believes that while the new government calls itself a democracy, many of the same men who were part of the dictatorship are still active in the government. Not only does she contend that the authorities would immediately release Miranda, she states her belief that the doctor is part of the current government and that his encounter with Gerardo was no coincidence.

Paulina explains that at one point she wanted retribution from Miranda but says that now she merely wants him to confess and she will let him go. "What can he confess if he's innocent?" wonders Gerardo. The scene ends on Paulina's reply, "If he's innocent'? Then he's really screwed."

The second scene is at lunch. Paulina watches from the terrace as Gerardo feeds Miranda and the two men talk. Gerardo stresses that a confession, even a false one, is Miranda's only hope of escaping unharmed, while Miranda emphasizes that he is only in his current situation because he stopped to pick up Gerardo and how depends on the lawyer to get him out of mis mess. After another threatening appearance by Paulina, Miranda accuses Gerardo of not being as impartial as he has claimed to be:"She plays the bad guy and you play the good guy ... to see if you can get me to confess that way."

The two men argue but eventually admit they are both scared, and the act ends with Miranda asking Gerardo's help in fabricating a convincing confession for Paulina.

Act III

The final act opens just before evening. Miranda is still bound, and Gerardo, with a tape recorder on his lap, pleads with Paulina to tell him the details of her abduction before he has to hear them from Miranda. Paulina reminds him that she had attempted to tell him these details before, just after she was released, when they were interrupted by the woman with whom Gerardo was involved during Paulina's absence. This memory is a severe blow to Gerardo, and he eventually persuades Paulina to speak instead of her abduction. When she gets to the point in her story of first meeting the doctor and hearing Schubert in the darkness, the lights fade and her voice overlaps with that of Miranda. The lights come up to reveal Miranda making his confession into the tape recorder. He claims that the music was an attempt to alleviate the suffering of the prisoners. He describes how a "brutalization took over my life," and he began to enjoy the torture with a detached curiosity "partly morbid, partly scientific."

The confession over, Paulina sends Gerardo to retrieve Miranda's car. After his departure, however, she changes her tone, saying she was entirely convinced by the doctor's confession and now "could not live in peace with myself and let you live." She informs him that she inserted small errors in her own taped account, which Miranda apparently corrected of his own accord; now Paulina says she will kill him "because you haven't repented at all." On Paulina's unanswered question, "What do we lose by killing one of them?" the action freezes and the lights go down on the scene.

A giant mirror descends in front of the characters, "forcing," as the stage directions state, "the members of the audience to look at themselves." The lights come up on the final scene of the play, in a concert hall several months later. Gerardo and Paulina enter, elegantly dressed, and sit down facing the mirror. When the music ends they rise as if at intermission, and Gerardo speaks to a number of well-wishers who have gathered around him. Paulina observes Miranda entering ("or he could be an illusion," the directions read.) The three characters are seated as the performance recommences, and Schubert's "Death and the Maiden" is heard. Paulina and Miranda lock eyes for a moment, then she looks ahead into the mirror as the music plays.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

The play opens quietly, possibly in Chile, but in any country who has survived a long dictatorship and replaced it recently with a democratic government. Moonlight bathes the first person on stage, Paulina Salas, who is sitting out on the terrace.

The tension immediately picks up when Paulina hears a car, looks out the window and grabs for a gun. When she goes back to the window, she hears her husband, Gerardo, get out and speak to someone in the car, inviting them in for a drink and then, when declined, invites him back on Sunday. She does not hear the other half of the conversation. She puts the gun away again and hides in the curtains before her husband enters the house and turns on the lights after seeing her.

Gerardo is apologetic. We learn that he is quite late for dinner. Paulina tries to hide her tension and asks who it was in the car who brought him home. He doesn't answer her directly but explains that a nail punctured his tire, and because she hadn't fixed the spare, he couldn't replace the tire. She bridles, asking why she has to take care of everything. She takes care of the house, and he is supposed to take care of the car. The argument is mild and Gerardo stops it, calling it an "absurd discussion."

He then mentions that the jack was also missing. Paulina confesses to lending it to her mother, who was traveling south. Another small argument ensues, during which Gerardo mentions the name of the man who gave him a ride home, Roberto Miranda.

The conversation then turns to matter of Gerardo being named as an official to a government commission. The name of the position is not mentioned, nor is the name of the commission until the next scene. He initially claims that he told the president he would need time to discuss the appointment with his wife, but that he needs to go back to the city on Monday. Paulina tells him she heard about the invitation for a drink on Sunday.

Through the remainder of the scene, we learn that the commissions purpose is to seek out those who are now considered criminals from the previous dictator's regime. The oppressors are to be given trials, and judges, who were also presiding over courts during the dictatorship, will decide how they shall be punished. Paulina works herself into an excited fervor over the prospect of these individuals being punished or executed. She also coaxes the truth out of Gerardo. He has already accepted the president's offer, but had wanted to let Paulina feel that she had some say in the matter.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

The conversation between Gerardo and Paulina begins to give the audience some insight into Paulina's nightmarish past and Gerardo's support and love for her. The

beats of the conversation are very natural — sometimes stilted, as when Gerardo is apologetically explaining why he is late, and sometimes stepping on each other's words and repeating phrases, as when Gerardo is sputtering as Paulina tries to explain why she lent the car jack to her mother for her travels.

The changes in mood from calm to tense and back again are always broadcast visually in this scene, not first by tone of words. The stage direction calls for a particular movement before the first line is delivered, whether it is standing and crossing the stage, or Gerardo taking Paulina into his arms to calm her and comfort near the end.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

It is an hour later. The stage is dark again. Gerardo and Paulina have had dinner (or, at least, put the dinner things away) and have gone to bed. A car pulls up to the house (offstage), and someone gets out and knocks insistently on the door.

Gerardo assures Paulina that everything is all right as he turns on a light (also offstage) and cross the room to open the front door. Roberto Miranda, Gerardo's "good Samaritan" from earlier, is the unexpected visitor.

Gerardo admits to Roberto that he had scared them. It hasn't been long since being awoken in the middle of the night only meant being taken away by police for questioning. In the meantime, Paulina slips out into the room and onto the terrace, unseen by the two men. Roberto apologizes and says that he stopped by for a visit on the way back to his own beach house. Gerardo offers him a cognac before he continues to say that he heard about Gerardo's appointment to the Investigating Commission. It took him a moment to remember Gerardo's name, but he also remembered he had their spare tire in his trunk, so he wanted to offer his help the next day in patching the tire and retrieving their car. He also seems very respectful of the role Gerardo will play, in that he will have many duties and worries on his hands shortly, and wants to help remove the trouble with the car.

Roberto also asks after the whereabouts of the jack, to which Gerardo replies that Paulina gave it to her mother. They joke briefly about never understanding women before returning to the subject of fixing the car in the morning and then toward what Gerardo will be doing as part of this Investigating Commission.

Roberto confesses that his real purpose for coming was to congratulate Gerardo on his appointment. He goes on and on about how these people the commission will be seeking out will be punished, despite the established amnesty, how he would like to see them all dead. Gerardo is only able to get a few words in now and then.

They suddenly realize how late it is, and Gerardo invites Roberto to stay the night instead of driving all the way to his own house and back again. Roberto attempts to decline, mentioning patients and saying that his wife and kids are away at her mother's and that he enjoys being alone. However, he is persuaded at Gerardo's mention breakfast from Paulina. At this point, Paulina slips back to the bedroom.

After jesting about not sharing toothbrushes, each man walks to their respective bedrooms, and stage is returned to the remaining moonlight. Paulina pretends that Gerardo has awakened her when he tells her that Roberto is staying the night, comforts her fear and asks her to make them breakfast in the morning.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

The character of Roberto seems an earnest and almost jovial one in this scene. He seems to be very honest, helpful and full of respect for someone who will soon help the country to "shut the door on the divisions and hatreds of the past." He spends a considerable amount of time making it known that he is all for punishing the criminals Gerardo's commission will be seeking out.

There is very little involvement from our heroine, Paulina, but by the very act of slipping into the room to hear and see the conversation after only a few words from Roberto, and then by slipping back to the bedroom and pretending to be half-asleep, we get a strong hint that she may recognize Roberto. Because she slips in and out so secretively, she obviously fears or distrusts him. Otherwise, she may have strolled in to say "Hello."

Gerardo is a complete innocent in this matter. The character is written so that he clearly doesn't have the presence to be a force of punishment. In this way, we know that the Investigating Commission will probably be very good at the investigating, but will have no power to make any real change toward the punishment of evil deeds of the past. Perhaps Roberto thinks he is exempt or safe in some way, and his assertions mock the commissions future efforts.

Act 1, Scene 3

Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

This is an extremely brief scene without dialog, written all in stage directions. The stage is darker still, when a cloud has passed over the moon. Paulina slips onto stage again. She cross to the drawer where the gun is hidden, takes out the gun and some articles of clothing which appear to be stockings. She then crosses to the door to Roberto's room, pauses as if listening, then enters. We hear a muffled struggle, a cry of some kind, then nothing.

Paulina reemerges and crosses the stage again, this time with a purpose. She locks her bedroom door, with her husband still inside. She then returns to the spare bedroom and drags a body into the living room. She moves a chair closer, lifts the body onto it and ties it to the chair. When she goes back to the spare bedroom again, she comes back with Roberto's jacket and takes out a set of keys. Before leaving the house, she stops, takes off her panties and stuffs them in Roberto's mouth. She leaves the house, and we see headlights panning across the stage and hear the sound of a car leaving. The headlights show that the body is indeed an unconscious Roberto tied to the chair and gagged with a pair of panties. The car leaves, and the stage returns to darkness.

Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

Actions can speak more loudly than words. By the end of this scene, assuming we don't already know the story, we know that Paulina is either crazy or desperate. Perhaps it is a combination of both. Some audience members may also be shocked by Paulina's act of taking off her panties and stuffing them in Roberto's mouth. It is a moment that defines the disgust she feels for him. It is also a kind of smug revenge, as we shall see in later scenes, or a display of her new-found feminine power, now that she has the upper hand.

Act 1, Scene 4

Act 1, Scene 4 Summary

Dawn light is beginning to show, and Roberto awakes, only to discover he is tied to a chair. Paulina is seated in front of him, calmly holding the gun. She addresses him as Doctor Miranda. He says nothing, since he is still gagged. She says she had a friend at university by the name of Ana Maria Miranda, who went on to get her diploma and become a doctor. She then says that she didn't have the opportunity to finish her own studies (also in medicine) and get her diploma, implying that Dr. Miranda was responsible for that.

She explains that Gerardo was waiting for her outside the university. This was fortunate, as she had an aversion to the field of medicine. She is considering reapplying and finishing her studies, as it seems that students who were "kicked out" while the military was in control are being asked to applying for readmittance.

Paulina then slyly mentions breakfast. Would he like a ham sandwich instead? She remembers that he liked them with mayonnaise. They don't have any mayonnaise, but they do have ham, which Gerardo also likes. She says she doesn't want to remove the gag until Gerardo is awake, and then Roberto may have his say. She has also phoned the garage from a pay phone, and someone will be arriving shortly.

Paulina then unlocks and opens the bedroom door. She has a tape of Schubert's Death and the Maiden in her pocket, which she pulls out, inserts in the cassette player and turns on. Apparently, the tape came from Roberto's car. She tells Roberto about how she has not been able to listen to Death and the Maiden for such a long time. She would turn the radio off if they played it. She was even physically ill when she and Gerardo heard it at a friend's dinner party, after which they had to leave suddenly.

She calls out to Gerardo, commenting on the lovely music, and goes on to talk about Schubert being a homosexual. But he already know that, didn't he, after telling her as much over and over. Gerardo stumbles sleepily in from the bedroom, at which Paulina apologizes for breakfast not being ready yet. Roberto struggles frantically, attempting to untie himself before Gerardo registers what is happening.

Gerardo is astonished, asks Paulina what is going on and moves to untie Roberto. Paulina commands him not to touch the man, aiming her gun at him, and he stops. She tells him that this is the doctor who terrorized her. It takes Gerardo a few beats to realize who she is referring to, but questions her memory based on a voice. Paulina knows it's his voice, his laugh, his manner of speaking. She points out that the senses become stronger when one is lost. She also imitates a few lines from the doctor and his assistant in a torture session.

Gerardo asks Paulina for the gun, and she refuses. He refuses to continue the conversation until she gives it to him. She knows that the conversation will be over anyway as soon as she gives him the gun. Gerardo threatens her with "serious consequences" if she continues. She mocks him. Gerardo begins to apologize to Roberto, but Paulina stops him again. He makes another attempt to untie him, but Paulina fires the gun (we don't know where), betraying the fact that she's never done so before as she recoils from the shot. Gerardo steps back, and Roberto looks even more desperate than before.

Gerardo begs her not to shoot again, telling her she "can't do this." Paulina is angered over being told what she can and cannot do. He starts to say that all they can accuse him in front of a judge is stopping on the road to help someone.

Paulina laughs at the mention of a judge, then remembers to tell Gerardo that someone will be coming from the garage at any moment. She explains that she called from a pay phone when she hid Roberto's car. Gerardo begs her to return to reason, but she challenges him saying that they never did anything to him.

Gerardo tries again to console her, agreeing that yes, they did things, but it's not a competition. He still does not believe that Roberto is the doctor from Paulina's memory. Just then, the tow truck arrives, and Paulina runs to the door and opens it halfway to let them know her husband is on his way out. She shuts the door, tells Gerardo to get dressed. The spare tire is waiting for him outside, and she has taken Roberto's jack from his car so they can have their own again.

Gerardo mentions going to the police, but Paulina says he believes in his own powers of persuasion to do that. She also threatens to shoot the doctor if he does bring the police. She wants the doctor's trial to be done by herself and Gerardo.

Act 1, Scene 4 Analysis

Paulina finally speaks, and her first monologue presents the full force of her hatred for the man calling himself Roberto Miranda. It is as if the flood gates have opened, and all of her pent-up anxiety and fears are being released and resolved. Anger fuels her. She appears casual and comfortable with the gun, even waving it "playfully" at the bound man and later at her own husband. Once she fires it, however, it appears she is not as comfortable with the gun as she portrayed, but recovers again via her anger.

The fact that this scene is set just before dawn could be symbolic of the dawn of realization that Roberto is not exempt from retaliation for his past deeds. Through Gerardo, however, we have yet more proof that the Investigating Commission will probably have very little power and influence over its actions.

Act 2, Scene 1

Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

It is now midday, and Roberto has not moved. We join them in the middle of more of Paulina's remembrances of the horrors she suffered in the doctor's "care." She had estranged herself from her parents, so when she was released, she had very few choices of where to go.

Roberto makes a movement as if he wants to speak, but she makes him wait, thinking he's hungry, and imitates the doctor's voice for a moment. She then explains why he wouldn't have known about Gerardo and made the connection to her. She had not mentioned Gerardo in all the time that she was being tortured, but his house is where she went as soon as she was released.

Gerardo then returns to the house, and Paulina enquires how it went and whether the flat was fixed. He doesn't answer. Instead he makes another attempt to make his wife see reason. He begins by saying that the one thing that revolted him under the previous government was false evidence against innocent people, and that those people did not have the opportunity to explain their side.

Paulina interrupts him. She, of course, had every intention of allowing Roberto to have his say, but she had been waiting to record his words once Gerardo returned. She takes the gag out of Roberto's mouth, and informs him that everything he says will be recorded. Gerardo is still pleading with her when she turns on the tape recorder.

Roberto first asks for water, which Gerardo fetches for him. Paulina comments that it's better than drinking your own piss, isn't it? Roberto's first words are to condemn Gerardo. Once he gets these words out, Paulina stops them, rewinds the tape, and plays the words back. She then begins recording again.

Roberto continues to deny that he has ever seen, let alone done anything to, Paulina. He goes on to claim that he was also persecuted under the previous regime and begins to say that she will have pay the consequences of her actions.

Paulina stops him by putting the gun to his temple and asking if he was threatening her. He denies it, of course. Paulina reasserts her command of the situation, after which Roberto simply asks to go to the bathroom. Paulina asks if he needs to stand or sit for it, and Gerardo is shocked and apologizes for her language, but she persists. She has Gerardo untie his legs so she can take him to the bathroom. Gerardo is again shocked, but she reminds him that it's not the first time he's take his "instrument" out in front of her. They leave, and Gerardo paces in their absence.

Roberto takes care of his business, and they return. Paulina has Gerardo tie up Roberto's legs again. Gerardo insists on speaking privately with Paulina. They go out to

the terrace to talk. Roberto busies himself loosening the ties on his legs while they are absent.

Gerardo asks Paulina what she thinks she's doing. She reminds him that she wants the two of them to put him on trial, giving him all the guarantees she never had while held by the doctor and his colleagues. Gerardo asks whether she's going to kill him after the so-called "trial." She replies that they didn't kill her, so that wouldn't be fair.

Paulina then forces Gerardo repeat what they did to her – raping her many times. Paulina had previously told Gerardo that she had lost count, but in reality, she kept a very careful count. She reminds him what he told her when she came to him after being released, that he would put these men on trial and make them listen to her story. Isn't that what the purpose of his commission was? Gerardo replies that he will have to resign, though, since there is no doubt that the events here will be made public. He begs her again to release Roberto and apologize. Paulina assures him that it will never be made public, that he has nothing to worry about.

Paulina returns to the other room and discovers Roberto trying to free himself, which he ceases immediately. She imitates another line from the doctor, asking what was wrong with the hospitality. She then passes her hands all over, as if caressing him, then stops and returns to Gerardo on the terrace.

She says she remembers his skin and smell as well as his voice and asks if he still wants her to set him free if she can prove he's guilty. Gerardo is still concerned about someone finding out.

Paulina suggests a compromise. She admits her first thought when she heard Roberto's voice was to do to him every last thing that was done to her – electrocutions, rapes, near-drowning in feces. She tells Gerardo that she has had to fake orgasms all these years, so that he doesn't know what she's remembering. She even discusses how to go about raping Roberto. But then, she stops and says that all she wants is Roberto's written and signed confession in her hand. Then she will agree to let him go.

Gerardo is doubtful, but Paulina doesn't give him an alternative. She wants Gerardo to convince Roberto that she will kill him if he doesn't confess.

Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

As Gerardo says, Paulina is still a prisoner. She is half-crazed with all of the pent-up memories and emotions that she had only bared shared with Gerardo. Gerardo is only beginning to realize how much it has been affecting her, having been passing it off as just being "nervous" all these years. (The turning point may be when Paulina mentions how the doctor used to quote Nietzsche, which is something that Roberto had done earlier.) Paulina needs help in freeing herself, and is asking her husband for that help, much like a prisoner might ask someone who delivers the food each day to assist in the escape.

Paulina has only barely begun. We are still only getting hints of the horrors she endured while held against her will. It is not only women who will be able to commiserate here, however. The playwright included a discussion between Paulina and Roberto about raping Roberto with a broom handle, which should elicit similar reactions from the male half of the audience. But she is also to the point where she doesn't care whether he is innocent or not. If he is guilty, she will be avenged; if innocent, "then he's really screwed."

Act 2, Scene 2

Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

Gerardo and Roberto are seated at the table with lunch in front of them. Roberto is still tied, but with his hands in front of him now, so he can eat. Paulina is out on the terrace, able to see the men but not hear their conversation. Gerardo addresses him as Doctor Miranda and refuses to address him as Roberto when asked. He prefers to treat him "as a client." He begins spooning soup to Roberto between his own mouthfuls, occasionally cleaning his mouth with a napkin.

Roberto asserts that Gerardo's wife needs psychiatric treatment. Gerardo assures him that he is her treatment. Roberto asks if she'll kill him, which Gerardo aggress with, unless he confesses. At this point Paulina interjects a comment that the secret police did use doctors in their torture sessions. Roberto says that the medical association looked into these situations as they learned of them.

Gerardo tells him that she remembers his voice, skin and smell. Roberto seems skeptical and claims that she could say that about any man that walked in the door. Gerardo reminds him that it wasn't any man who walked in; it was him. He then begins asking Roberto to humor Paulina. Roberto becomes upset, continuing to maintain that he has nothing to confess.

Paulina comes into the room at this and asks if everything is all right. She talks about being a good housewife and offering coffee, but then says that she remembers that the doctor doesn't drink coffee. She mentions his mother, which he resents loudly, and Paulina agrees that his mother has no responsibility for his actions. She wonders about the phrase "son of a bitch," but is asked to leave by Gerardo, so they can continue their conversation. Paulina returns to the terrace, telling him to just snap his fingers to take Roberto to the bathroom again. Gerardo continues his plea to indulge Paulina, as she is one of many who feel they need vengeance for past wrongs. Roberto begins to think that Gerardo and his wife are playing "good cop, bad cop" to wear him down into confesses something. He questions Gerardo's manhood in failing to defend his wife from her supposed rapist.

Gerardo explodes and threatens to shoot Roberto himself. He denies being some soft coward just because he doesn't rape a woman tied to a cot. He is all for the concept of "an eye for an eye" now. Roberto quails, surprised by this new Gerardo, and pleads with him not to leave. Gerardo calms himself eventually, Roberto admits to his fear. Gerardo also admits to being afraid, but he is going to tell Paulina that Roberto doesn't want to cooperate anyway. Roberto tries to find out what it is he did. Gerardo denies him, not wanting to deceive his wife. He leaves to tell his wife that Roberto needs the bathroom again.

Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

Gerardo gains his power in this scene. Roberto finally pushes the wrong button to cause Gerardo to flip his top and truly begin to defend his wife. At the same time, he no longer wants to be a part of this. He is perfectly willing to leave Roberto to Paulina's desire for revenge. We also get a glimpse into the depths of Roberto's character, as his anger begins to show.

Paulina is only involved at this point to remind the men of why they are still sitting there. She floats in and out, biding her time until Roberto is ready to confess, willing to let her husband have a go at him quietly, letting him learn on his own that it won't work.

Act 3, Scene 1

Act 3, Scene 1 Summary

It is now getting on toward evening. Gerardo and Paulina are out on the terrace with the tape recorder. Roberto is still tied up in the living room. Gerardo is trying to get Paulina to tell him something she had started to tell him years before. The interruption then was a woman who Gerardo had been sleeping with while Paulina was imprisoned. The woman had claimed to be able to help Gerardo find Paulina.

Paulina had forgiven him this, though, and they had made a new start. However, she still wants to know how many times Gerardo slept with the other woman. He finally admits to doing so a total of 5 times. He asks if she truly wants them to torture each other in this way. Does she want him to leave?

Paulina wants him to stay. She wants them to be husband and wife, with no ghosts in the bed with them, and to listen to Schubert. She wants him to defend the truth on the Investigating Commission. She wants to adopt a child and take care of him in the same way he has cared for her. Gerardo asks her again to tell him. He turns on the recorder and begins prompting her, as if she were in front of the commission. As the story is told by Paulina and Roberto, the lights begin to fade, and Schubert's Death and the Maiden begins to play again.

In April of 1975, when she was still single, she was taken at gunpoint. She was too afraid to call out, though that was what she had been told to do. After not being fed for 3 days, she was taken to Doctor Miranda. The doctor played Schubert to put himself in the role of the good guy, to gain the prisoners' trust, to ease their suffering. The lights come up as if the moon were out, and Roberto is now confessing to the tape recorder. The lights begin fading again halfway through his speech.

The doctor initially became involved to save people's lives. He was asked to sit in on interrogations to tell how much electric current the prisoner could take, and then he could tell the interrogator when to stop before the person died. However, he began to be excited by it, and by the time Paulina was brought to him, he was too far gone. It had become a game for him. How much could she take? Was she able to have an orgasm while an electric current was going through her? The soldiers taunted him as well, convincing him that the women enjoyed the treatment, even saying it in front of the women. He never killed a single person. The lights come up again, and it is dawn. Roberto's voice now comes from the tape recorder. Roberto is transcribing his own words by hand as they are spoken.

His recorded voice is explaining that he took part in the interrogation of 94 prisoners and asks forgiveness. He hopes that the confession shows real repentance, and that just as the country is becoming peace, he should be allowed to live for the rest his life with this secret as his punishment. Paulina then asks him to write that the confession was not

under duress, but Roberto balks. She threatens "real" pressure, and Roberto writes what she asks and signs the document.

Paulina takes the tape out of the recorder, puts another in and plays it. It is the beginning of Roberto's confession again. Gerardo stops her, saying it's over. Paulina gets up and moves toward the terrace, speaking as if she is not going to let Roberto go. At an exclamation from Gerardo, she stops and is happy that she doesn't have to convince him now that he also knows that Roberto is guilty. She hands over the keys and asks him to go get Roberto's car and put his jack back. Gerardo reminds her to return Roberto's Schubert cassette as well, since she has her own.

Once Gerardo leaves, Roberto unties his ankles and asks to use the bathroom, assuming that she will no longer need to accompany him. She makes him wait. She wants to kill him so she can enjoy the rest of the day and listen Schubert free of any ghosts. Roberto reminds her that she gave her husband her word, but she says she still had doubts at the time that he was really the doctor. Now that she knows he is, from his confession, she feels that she couldn't live with herself if she let him live.

Roberto begins to try to tell her that her husband told him what to write, that his confession was false. She mentions the assistant he named, Stud. He claims that her husband gave him the name to use, but she had given him the name "Bud." Roberto had unconsciously corrected the name. There were also little lies that she had inserted into her own confession, but Roberto had corrected those as well. Paulina says she is going to kill him, not because he's guilty, but because he hasn't repented. She can't forgive him otherwise. She starts a 10-second countdown.

Roberto says she is going to kill him anyway and still proclaims his innocence. Paulina questions why it always has to be people like her who make the sacrifices. What is lost by killing someone like him?

Mozart's Dissonant Quartet begins to play and a mirror is lowered so that the audience has to look at themselves while it plays and a spotlight passes over individuals in the audience.

Act 3, Scene 1 Analysis

The bulk of this scene, as horrifying as the confession is, serves as a breath of relief for all three characters. Finally, the truth is out and all can rest. Roberto will be left in peace now that he has confessed. Paulina has the recorded, written and signed confession she so desperately wanted. Gerardo has the wife he knows and loves again, and together, he and Paulina return to their playfully loving relationship.

Once Gerardo leaves, however, Paulina decides to take her revenge. She has proven that Roberto is truly the doctor by way of small lies in her own confession. She knew Gerardo would deceive her out of love and feed the information to Roberto for his own confession, but Roberto inadvertently corrected the lies, proving who his real identity was.

What a striking ending to the scene. We are left wondering whether she would actually shoot him. Or would Gerardo forget something in the house and return to stop her? We are then forced to literally look at ourselves and those around us. What would each of us do in the same situation? Would we shoot, or let him live the rest of his days with his terrible secret? Would we have put ourselves in this situation in the first place? What vengeances do we have to carry out against those who have wronged us?

Act 3, Scene 2

Act 3, Scene 2 Summary

The scene is a concert hall, several months later. Gerardo and Paulina arrive, dressed elegantly and sit facing the mirror, their backs to the audience. We hear music, as well as the typical audience noise. When the music ends, Gerardo applauds, and the sound of general applause rises with him. Paulina does not applaud. They both get up and walk as if making their way to the foyer amidst a throng of departing listeners.

Gerardo begins thanking invisible spectators. He has apparently released an important report through the commission. Paulina leaves him as he is speaking and buys some candy from a nearby bar area.

As she pays, Roberto enters. According to the stage direction, he may be real, or just in Paulina's head. A bell sounds, indicating that the concert is about to recommence. She returns to Gerardo's side, and they make their way back to their seats. They do not appear to see Roberto as he watches them. Roberto takes a seat some distance from them, continuing to look at them. Schubert's Death and the Maiden begins. Gerardo looks at Paulina, who does not return the look, takes her hand and looks forward. Paulina turns to look at Roberto and meets his gaze for a moment. Then she turns to look forward at the mirror again. The stage goes dark.

Act 3, Scene 2 Analysis

This is another powerful scene where no dialogue, or at least no meaningful dialogue, is spoken. We are still forced to watch ourselves to some extent while the scene is playing itself out. We are also still left to wonder whether Roberto is alive and is following Gerardo and Paulina, boldly and quietly, or whether this scene is symbolic of their actions toward Roberto will always be hanging over their shoulders, dead or alive.

Characters

Gerardo Escobar

Paulina's husband, he is a lawyer about forty-five years of age Gerardo has recently been appointed by the president to a commission that will examine human rights abuses during the military dictatorship. Gerardo has a high ideal of justice which he invokes in an attempt to persuade his wife to release Miranda. Paulina is ethically motivated, too, but she stresses repeatedly that corruption in the country's legal system leaves considerable doubt that the military's abuses will be properly rectified. Gerardo maintains his faith in the government's ability to do the best it can do under the circumstances, while Paulina feels pushed to take matters into her own hands. Undoubtedly, her more personal resolve is the product of her abduction and torment, which Gerardo seems to find almost unfathomable on a personal level, despite the nature of his work.

Gerardo has always had great difficulty discussing Paulina's experience, a guilt that is compounded by the fact that when Paulina went to him following her release, she discovered that he had been having an affair in her absence. Gerardo's suggestion that Paulina make a tape recording may be a way of addressing his problem, putting words to something he has not wanted to face.

Doctor Roberto Miranda

A doctor, around fifty years old. Roberto— Doctor Miranda—remains indignant at Paulina's accusations. He repeatedly reminds Gerardo of his place on the human rights commission and that it is his duty in that capacity to command his wife to release Miranda The doctor denies having had any role in torturing military abductees and offers a confession that he claims to have fabricated in the hopes that Paulina will release him unharmed Miranda, however, corrects details in the narrative of Paulina's experience which she recorded for Gerardo; this is enough proof for Paulina that her prisoner is the doctor who raped and tortured her. Miranda does not succeed in convincing her to the contrary but without having to make a direct and true confession he does somehow convince Paulina to spare his life with his plea, "Oh Paulina—isn't it time we stopped?"

Miranda is a mysterious character who Dorfman never fully reveals to the audience. While there is considerable evidence presented that seems to incriminate the doctor, the possibility remains that it is merely coincidence that he fits the profile of Paulina's tormentor. His guilt appears to be further cemented by his decision not to report his kidnapping to the authorities, yet his silence may be attributed to a fear that Gerardo may use his position on the commission to discredit Miranda. Dorfman does not offer explanations for any of these situations. Miranda's fate at the play's conclusion is ambiguous: he may be a guilty man tormented by the atrocities he committed during wartime, or he may be an innocent man terrified by the threat of an unbalanced woman.

Paulina Solas

As a young student in the early days of the military dictatorship that ruled her country (the specific location is never given), Paulina worked with Gerardo helping people seek asylum in embassies and smuggling them out of the country. Paulina's activism, and her medical studies, were cut short, however, when she was arrested by the government. She was tortured and raped repeatedly before finally being released. This devastating experience which so altered her life continues to affect her seventeen years later, when the action of the play occurs.

Paulina has suppressed the worst details of her incarceration. Her paranoia has prevented her from sharing this information with Gerardo or her mother—for fear that the knowledge might place them in danger. While her country has replaced the dictatorship with a free, elected government, she suspects that many in power are from the military and only pretending to be democratic and fair-minded. She lives with acute fear, as can be seen from her defensive actions when Roberto Miranda's unfamiliar car first pulls up to the house. Since her ordeal, Paulina has also stifled a great deal of anger, which surfaces with the opportunity to exact revenge on the man she believes was her primary tormentor. Sure of herself after "trying" Miranda, Paulina appears set to kill the doctor but ultimately chooses to be merciful. This action seems to suggest that she ultimately rejects the idea of an eye for an eye. Yet her humane gesture comes at a price to her piece of mind. The tense final image of the play suggests that Paulina may never be able to achieve a satisfying resolution to her lingering pain.

Themes

Atonement and Forgiveness

While there exists no acceptable rationale for the violence of the military regime, Paulina implies that she can forgive the individual for being fallible: she promises to release Miranda if he will confess to torturing and raping her. Miranda does not genuinely appear to ask for forgiveness; he does so only in the context of a confession which may be falsified. Paulina, although she ultimately chooses not to kill Miranda, does not forgive him, either. The play suggests that despite the lingering pam of political oppression, there is no concrete act that can atone for past wrongs.

Death and the Maiden

The title of Dorfman's play comes from the quartet by Schubert which Paulina associates with her abduction and torture. She finds a cassette of this music in Miranda's car. The piece, String Quartet No. 14 inD minor (D. 810), takes the name "Death and the Maiden" from a Schubert song that is quoted in it. The theme is common in folk music such as the English song "Death and the Lady," in which a rich lady who has failed to bribe Death into granting her a few more years of life sings of having been betrayed by him. The theme of the song (hence the dramatic context for Schubert's quartet) is reflected in the characters themselves, with the shadowy doctor who raped and tortured Paulina existing as a kind of Death figure in her memory. However, Dorfman's play presents a reversal on the theme— if the audience agrees that Paulina has found the right doctor, that is—for in the present circumstance it is the Maiden (Paulina) who holds the power of life over Death (Miranda).

Doubt and Ambiguity

Paulina does not doubt that Roberto Miranda is the doctor who tortured and raped her years before or that he deserves to be tried and punished for these crimes. She is also convinced that she is the only person who can administer a punishment to fit the crime. One of the related themes of *Death and the Maiden,* however, is the lingering ambiguity which troubles a society attempting to rectify wrongs from a turbulent era in its past. Nagging questions re-mam: who can be sure the correct people are being tried, and what constitutes just punishment? The play examines the consequences of such justice, provoking questions as to the effects such a process will have not only on the accused but on the accuser.

Freedom

The play contrasts the present era to the repressive military regime which has recently ended. At the same time, it makes the complex point that in this fragile period of political

transition, the legacy of the past still haunts people, preventing them from being truly free. Paulina mockingly questions the value of freedom in a society which has only provisionally returned to democracy: "Isn't that what this transition is all about? The Commission can investigate crimes but nobody is punished for them?... There's freedom to say anything you want as long as you don't say everything you want?" While political freedom is one major issue in the play, there is also the theme of emotional freedom. "You're still a prisoner," Gerardo tells Paulina, "you stayed behind with them, locked in that basement." Gerardo encourages her to "free yourself from them" in order to put her mind at rest. Paulina, however, is insulted by the implication that her only option is to forget her pain. Yet her solution is no less absolute: she feels she can only put her mind at rest by seeking punishment for her tormentors. In the end, however, she stops short of administering the ultimate punishment of death. It has been speculated that while this action does not liberate her from the pam of her torture and rape, it does grant her freedom from the savagery that afflicted her tormentors.

Justice and Injustice

Death and the Maiden contrasts ideal and practical concepts of justice. Both Paulina and Gerardo perceive the considerable injustices exerted by the former military regime, but they differ in their ideas of how justice can best be served under present circumstances. Gerardo believes in the efficacy of the commission to which he has been appointed, feeling that justice will be served by faithfully investigating human rights abuses and then turning the findings over to the country's courts. Paulina, however, is suspicious of the loyalties of those "same judges who never intervened to save one life in seventeen years of dictatorship." To her mind, justice cannot possibly be served through the channels which presently exist, so she resolutely takes the law into her own hands. The brutality of her past experience is undoubtedly at the root of her position; when Gerardo pleads with her at one point to be "reasonable," she bitterly responds: "You be reasonable. They never did anything to you."

Memory and Reminiscence

Dorfman commented in an interview with Carlos Reyes on the Amnesty International homepage: "Memory is a constant obsession for me," observing that a memory of the past is a counter against those, like the military rulers, "who would obliterate others, who would forget them, ignore them, neglect them, erase them from the earth." Dorfman's "obsession" shows in his characterization of Paulina, whose strong memories of being raped and tortured still haunt her and provide a challenge to the historical revisionists who would claim that such events did not take place. Establishing a history of the victims will be an important step towards national reconciliation, but the question of just how satisfying such a process can be to Paulina and others like her is one of the more difficult issues presented in the play.

Morality and Ethics

The immorality of the past military regime is not debated in *Death and the Maiden;* the discussion of Paulina's torment and the mention of other cases of extra-judicial abduction, torture, and murder are enough to establish the context. The central ethical issue of the play is whether Paulina, by choosing to try—and punish—Miranda herself, is merely replicating the same injustices of the military regime. "We can't use their methods," Gerardo comments. Paulina agrees in concept but feels that the circumstances are different. She also argues that she is giving Miranda the opportunity to defend himself, a privilege she was not granted.

Style

Death and the Maiden is highly realistic in form and structure, with a plot that rapidly unfolds in linear progression, characters that are fully-realized individuals, and a fixed, recognizable setting. Dorfman breaks with this basic structure only at the end of the play, when the setting jumps to a concert hall several months later. At this point, the playwright introduces an expressionistic device, a mirror aimed at the audience, to bring thematic unity to the piece. A fully realistic play would present some kind of resolution to the dramatic conflict but this is hardly possible in *Death and the Maiden.* Indeed, the play suggests precisely the difficulty of resolving the social issue which is at its heart: how can a society reconcile itself with its violent past and, somehow, move forward?

While it is the tendency of most theater critics to compare the work of different playwrights in order to give their readers a point of reference for a particular work, this has rarely been the case in the published criticism *of Death and the Maiden.* Critics have not been so focused on applying labels to Dorfman's theatrical technique, perhaps because they do not consider Dorfman—an intellectual and academic internationally known for his essays, novels, and poetry—to be primarily a playwright. Additionally, the content and political context of *Death and the Maiden* being so novel to English and American audiences, critics have focused more on these elements than on categorizing Dorfman's dramatic style.

As an exception to this tendency, one playwright with whom Dorfman is often related is Harold Pinter. The British playwright has remained an important touchstone for Dorfman; his first book was an academic study of the politics of oppression in Pinter's early play *The Room,* and he dedicates *Death and the Maiden* to Pinter. The connections between the two writers, however, are related more to their political investments than their dramatic techniques. An article by Stephen Gregory in *Comparative Drama,* for example, suggested how a retrospective reading of Dorfman's study of Pinter illustrates "how it anticipates both the concerns of his later work on Latin America and the issues that will unite the two writers some twenty years after its publication." Dorfman hardly works in the style of Pinter, a play wnght associated with the Theatre of the Absurd.

Literally meaning "out of harmony," the term absurd was the existentialist Albert Camus's designation for the situation of modern men and women whose lives lack meaning as they drift in an inhuman universe. *Death and the Maiden* explores a political context which could properly be described as absurd, as a military regime prevents individuals from exerting any control over their own destiny. In terms of theatrical technique, however, Dorfman's play remains realistic in form without the stylistic exaggeration of Pinter's work, or that of other playwrights, such as Samuel Beckett *(Waiting for Godot)* and Eugene Ionesco *{The Bald Soprano),* who are usually labeled as absurdists.

While *Death and the Maiden* resists comparison with the work of contemporary playwrights, many have observed that it functions something like Greek tragedy. "More

than one critic," wrote John Butt in the *Times Literary Supplement,* "has commented on this production's formal perfection, the way it unwinds with a remorseless inevitability that recalls the finest classical tragedy." In form, of course, the play differs from tragedy on many levels: it lacks, for example, the downfall and death of a hero or heroine and the "anagnorisis" or self-recognition on the part of that character about the mistake that led to his or her demise. Still, the parallels exist; Mimi Kramer noted in the *New Yorker* that "the play observes classical rules about unity of time and place, and about offstage violence."

Dorfman himself has used the term tragedy to refer to the work, responding to the suggestion that the play functions as political propaganda by saying in *Index on Censorship* that "tragedies are never propaganda, ever." This comment is merely a suggestion of the thematic and dramatic complexity of the work, but Dorfman has explored the idea of tragedy further by examining the concept of catharsis, the social function of classical tragedy by which audiences would purge themselves of certain emotions. "The play," Dorfman stated in the same article, "is not just a denunciation of how bad torture is. It aims to help purge ourselves of pity and terror." In Greek society, the catharsis of tragedy helped to unify people, and Dorfman implies a hope that his play might serve the same role in Chilean society, further enabling the process of reconciliation with that country's past atrocities.

The device of the mirror at the conclusion of the play contributes most strongly to the process of catharsis. In an interview in the London *Times,* Dorfman said, in reference to the audience, that *Death and the Maiden* "is not a play about somebody else, it's a play about them." The mirror coming down is a device which implicates them in the moral dilemma. "People are going to watch themselves and ask: 'what would I do, who am I in the midst of all this'" The mirror is also the element which separates the play from its realistic form ana structure; it leaves the audience with a powerful image at the conclusion of a play whose central conflict remains otherwise unresolved

Historical Context

Ariel Dorfman carefully specifies in his stage directions that *Death and the Maiden* is set in "a country that is probably Chile but could be any country that has given itself a democratic government just after a long period of dictatorship." There is both a specificity and a universality to the play, as many critics have noted, making it extremely topical in the late-twentieth century era of tentative political transformation. Frank Rich of the *New York Times,* for example, called the play a "mousetrap designed to catch the conscience of an international audience at a historic moment when many more nations than Chile are moving from totalitarian terror to fragile freedom." John Butt similarly found the play "timely," saying that it catches the audience "in a neat moral trap" by making them "confront choices that most would presumably leave to the inhabitants of remote and less favoured countries."

Among the many Latin American countries which in recent decades have similarly experienced periods of military rule (Guatemala, Brazil, Bolivia), Argentina and Chile are often compared to one another because of their shared history and close geographical proximity in the "Southern Cone" of South America. Both Chile, following Augusto Pinochet's military coup, and Argentina, in the years of the military's "Dirty War," were characterized by civil repression, extra-judicial abductions and "disappearances," torture, and murder. Familiarity with the modern history of these two countries provides a good basis of understanding for the context *of Death and the Maiden.*

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century in Chile, the political climate swung often between right and left with no government strong enough to effect large scale change. Infrastructure developed slowly and rural poverty became an increasing problem, along with rapid urbanization as desperate populations flooded the city. Some social reforms were achieved in the 1960s, but Chile's politics became increasingly polarized and militant Salvador Allende crept to presidential victory in 1970 with a leftist coalition of socialists, communists, and extremists. Allende's sweeping economic reforms included the state takeover of many private enterprises; the United States was angered by the confiscation of U.S.-controlled copper mines and Chile's openly friendly relationship with Cuba, a country with whom America had ceased diplomatic and economic ties.

The Chilean military, in a coup orchestrated by General Augusto Pinochet, seized power on September 11, 1973, using air force jets to bomb the presidential palace. (U.S. support of the coup through the Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] has been documented.) Allende died, apparently a suicide, and thousands of his supporters were killed. Pinochet, at the head of a four-man ruling junta (a group or council that controls a government), dissolved Chile's congress and repressed—often violently—political opposition. His government maintained power for the next decade and a half, frequently resorting to terror (including the abduction/tortures to which Paulina was subjected) in order to suppress dissent.

A peaceful transfer of presidential power was achieved in 1990 but considerable tension continued between the military and the government concerning the human rights violations of the Pinochet era. Under a constitution written during his regime, Pinochet himself remained army commander until stepping down in March, 1998. Yet after that time he still retained congressional influence with the title of senator for life. Chilean society continues to struggle with the violent legacy of its past, although current president Eduardo Frei has sped the process of reconciliation by accelerating human rights tribunals and inquiries into Chile's "disappeared" (through commissions like the one to which Gerardo has been appointed in *Death and the Maiden).*

Chile's neighbor, Argentina, has likewise seen frequent suppression of democratic processes. The country experienced its first coup in 1930, the government falling toacoalitionof military officers and civilian aristocrats who established a semi-fascist state following the growing trend of fascism in Europe. The military undertook a more forceful coup in 1943, one which set out to restructure Argentine culture totally. The goal this time was not the mere suppression of political radicals but the complete eradication of civilian politics. There were to be five more coups between 1943 and 1976, the year in which the military initiated the brutality known as the Dirty War. During this period, Argentina's most influential ruler was Colonel Juan Peron, first elected to the presidency in 1946.

Peron was different from his military predecessors in that he sought to integrate the urban working class into his party, although his government retained a strong hand on more hard-line radicalism. Peron's partner in everything during the early years of his presidency was his mistress, later his wife, Eva Duarte—known popularly as Evita (composer Andrew Lloyd Weber and lyricist Tim Rice would immortalize her in their 1978 musical *Evita).* She had cunning political instinct, upon which Peron grew to rely. When the military threw Peron over in 1955, many of the social changes he and Evita had initiated remained in place. The legacy of Evita (she died of cancer in 1952), combined with the knowledge that Peron was alive in exile, empowered many to adhere to Peronist ideals, despite the military's attempts to suppress them. Peron was resurrected in 1973 as the economic situation in Argentina continued to worsen, and the public, looking for some positive way out of the military regimes, enthusiastically welcomed his return; he died a mere eight months into his new term as president.

A coup on March 24, 1976, overthrew Peron's widow Isabel, president since his death, and a military junta composed of the three commanders in chief of the armed forces installed itself as the government. In the years between the coup and the resumption of democratic elections in 1983, the military fought a vicious and covert war against the people of Argentina, totally restructuring society to eradicate any political consciousness. A system of clandestine concentration camps, numbering over three hundred at their peak, provided the center of an all-out policy of abduction, torture, murder, and disposal. Estimates of the dead run as high as thirty thousand, and the lives of the survivors were left destroyed in other ways. As in Chile, following a tenuous return to democracy Argentine society at large continues to struggle with the issue of how to rectify the violence of the past. Activists such as Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo (who daringly initiated protests against the military government while it was still in

power) maintain pressure on the current government to investigate human rights abuses, although punishment for many of the perpetrators remains unlikely.

Critical Overview

From the time of its debut, the international reception of *Death and the Maiden* was largely positive, extending Dorfman's reputation as an important writer and intellectual. Reviews of the Broadway production were less enthusiastic, but critics differ on whether the weaknesses were the result of failings in the play, the performances (Glenn Close, Richard Dreyfuss, and Gene Hackman), or the direction of Mike Nichols. English and American audiences lacked the political experience of a recent return to democracy, shared by so many emerging nations in this era, yet the play is easily accessible to them. Matt Wolf wrote in the *Times* of London that the play was an unlikely success given its topic, but "Dorfman argues that its time is now. 'It clearly has touched some sort of nerve, some sort of centre.'" As "a play about the empowerment of women," *Death and the Maiden* grounds the anger of Paulina in concrete historical circumstances, yet universalizes it. "Her rage," Dorfman stated to Wolfe, "comes out of something.. .that can be understood as the product of a system. At the same time, she is clearly speaking for more than torture victims "

Also inspired by the excellence of the London production, Andrew Graham-Yooll commented in *Index on Censorship,* "The conflict between the three characters, the suspect's denial, the woman's search for revenge, and the husband's need for justice, create gapping, thrilling and intense theatre." The *Times Literary Supplement's* Butt, meanwhile, called the play "harrowing." He observed that *Death and the Maiden* might draw some criticism for failing to provide any solutions to the moral dilemma it presents, any "easy answers to the question of how the new democracies should deal with the criminals in their midst." The critic, however, found this dramatic choice to be more true to experience and a real strength of the play: "In fact, the play's depressing message is that none of the three characters can offer a solution because all are still re-living the past."

In citing negative aspects of the Broadway production, Frank Rich of the *New York Times* nevertheless praised the strength of Dorfman's play. What makes it "ingenious," he wrote, is the playwright's "ability to raise such complex issues within a thriller that is full of action and nearly devoid of preaching." Rich found that despite the heavy star power of the Broadway production, its light tone diminished the inherent strengths of Dorfman's complex play. Rich wrote that "it is no small feat that the director Mike Nichols has managed to transform 'Death and the Maiden' into a fey domestic comedy. But what kind of feat, exactly?" Rich found the direction and characterizations flat and one-dimensional, producing an ironic and "tedious trivialization of Ariel Dorfman's work." Nichols took a similar approach in his film version of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* noted Rich but there produced a "funnier though still valid alternative" to the play. "But what exactly," wondered Rich about the current production, "is the point of his jokey take on a play whose use of the word death in the title is anything but ironic?"

Mimi Kramer in the *New Yorker* similarly criticized the Broadway production in comparison to the London one but found the inadequacies to be a product of Dorfman's "obvious" and "flaccid" play. "The questions raised by 'Death and the Maiden' have been

oft before but ne' er so ploddingly explored," she wrote. The play takes too long to set up its central conflict, Kramer felt, dwells too long on the irony of Paulina contemplating doing just what her tormentors did to her, and "never gets much beyond that idea." Thomas M. Disch of the *Nation* also found that the weaknesses of the play and of the production reflected one another. "The plot is all too simple," he wrote, the characters "generic and hollow," and Dorfman "neither engages one's emotions nor thinks through the situation with any rigor." The director cannot be blamed for the result, Disch concluded, "nor yet can the cast, who do no more and no less than Hollywood stars usually do—play themselves, for lack of any better-defined roles."

In concert with Kramer, John Simon identified weaknesses in Dorfman's play. He wrote in *New York* magazine of the "unconvincing" devices which establish the dramatic situation in the play, and other flaws of technique. "Yet these are small matters," he continues, "compared to the basic insufficiency of reducing a national and individual tragedy to a mere whodunit." For Simon, the play fails because of this trivialization. And whereas Butt found the lack of resolution in the play to be a strength, Simon argued that because the play "avoids coming satisfactorily to grips with the one question it raises," it cannot succeed as a whodunit, either.

Jack Kroll of *Newsweek* also argued that Dorfman lessened the impact of his play by turning it into a "whodunnit." One effect of his choice was that it allowed the director, quoted as saying "God preserve us all from a true political play," to turn the production into a "domestic imbroglio." Kroll's assessment falls somewhere in between Simon, who found the play a failure, and Rich, who argued its strength despite the nature of the Broadway production. *Death and the Maiden* remains "a fiercely political play," Kroll commented, and if Dorfman had only forced his character Miranda to face his own guilt, this one change could have produced the "masterwork" that many critics have called the play, and enabled the star actors "to reach an emotional focus that they only glancingly hit m this production."

Apart from reviews of the premiere productions and interviews with Dorfman, there exists yet little criticism of *Death and the Maiden.* Most articles and other extended works on Dorfman focus on his novels, poetry, or his experience as a critic and artist in exile. One exception is Stephen Gregory's lengthy article for *Comparative Drama,* which explores parallels between Dorfman and British playwright Harold Pinter.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Death and the Maiden is a play fundamentally concerned with memory, exploring the relationship (and occasional conflict) between personal and institutional memories. In this essay, Busiel examines these and other issues.

Ariel Dorfman observed in an interview with Carlos Reyes on the Amnesty International website, "Memory is a constant obsession for me. I deal often with people who are fighting against those who would obliterate others, who would forget them, ignore them, neglect them, erase them from the earth." Memory becomes an obsession in the context of a society confronting the legacy of a repressive regime, where painful individual memories of past injustices are often eradicated by a government which wants to forget the past or even deny that such violence ever occurred.

In Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden,* it is years after Paulina's abduction and torment, yet her memory of the experience remains crystal clear. She concludes without a doubt in her own mind that Roberto Miranda is the doctor who tortured and raped her, drawing on particular details such as the Schubert quartet, Miranda's quoting of Nietzsche, his smell, his voice, and the feel of his skin. Gerardo questions the value of Paulina's evidence and Miranda calls her memories "fantasies of a diseased mind," but Paulina remains resolute. While a few details of her experience had initially appeared fuzzy, Paulina reveals in the course of the play that she obscured information in order to protect her loved ones from pain or possible danger. Gerardo, for example, has always believed (hat Paulina does not remember how many times she was raped in captivity "I didn't count, you said." But Paulina confronts him with the fact that she always knew exactly—she merely hid the fact from Gerardo because he was so obviously uncomfortable with the details of her experience.

Death and the Maiden unfolds simultaneously forward and in reverse; in fact there is very little forward movement of plot in comparison to the unfolding of the past which occurs in the course of the play. Dorfman's primary theme of the past affecting the present is also a central stylistic device built into his play's technique. The two threads are intricately bound: just as a country cannot move forward by forgetting its history, the play's present tense narrative depends utterly on the events of the past. There is the painful legacy of Paulina's abduction and the question regarding Miranda's role in her rape and torture; Gerardo's affair with another woman while Paulina was in captivity is another painful memory that is revealed as the play's narrative progresses. Paulina's perception of the past is clear, but she struggles with the issue of just how she should remedy these injustices. Indeed. John Butt observed in the *Times Literary Supplement* that "the play's depressing message is that none of the three characters can offer a solution because all are still re-living the past." Like the society of which they are a part (probably, but not exclusively, Chilean), all three must find a productive way to move forward.

In a play contrasting the ideal and the practical, Paulina and Gerardo differ in their respective concepts of justice under the present circumstances. Consequently, they

also differ in their notions of how both individuals and society at large can address their painful memories of the past and what, exactly, can be done with this knowledge. Gerardo believes in the efficacy of the commission (and the country'snew "democratic" government) to which he has been appointed, feeling that justice will be served by faithfully investigating human rights abuses and then turning the findings over to the country's courts. He sees Paulina as emotionally trapped by memories that she must somehow put behind her. "You're still a prisoner," Gerardo tells Paulina, "you stayed behind with them, locked in that basement." Gerardo encourages her to "free yourself from them" in order to put her mind at rest.

While the play is not largely sympathetic to Gerardo or his point of view, Dorfman explained in the Amnesty International interview that he can understand the political value of Gerardo's perspective: "In a transition to a democracy as in Chile, Bolivia, South Africa, there are different reasons why people do not want to remember. They say, Look, if we keep on stirring up the past it's going to destroy us.' This includes many who were themselves repressed, hurt or part of the resistance." Seeking to turn the page and move into a productive future, individuals like Gerardo hope that their society can reach a consensus and doing so often requires "excluding those who continue to remember"

Paulina is insulted by Gerardo's implication that her only option is to forget her pain; in her mind, justice cannot possibly be served through the channels which presently exist, so she takes the law into her own hands. To Gerardo, Paulina's actions "open all the wounds," but Paulina's wounds have been festering for years, and her action is the beginning of a process of healing. She mocks Gerardo's suggestion that she merely let Miranda go, so that years from now "we see him at the Tavelli and we smile at him, he introduces his lovely wife to us and we smile and we all shake hands and we comment on how warm it is this time of the year." Gerardo, meanwhile, perceives himself as realistic and does not mean to trivialize Paulma' s pam and anger when he states:"basically, yes, that is what we have to do" in order for *society* to begin its process of healing.

The question of whether Miranda is the doctor who tortured and raped Paulina is the central dramatic confiict in *Death and the Maiden,* but the play contains the larger thematic issue of how a society should confront a violent and repressive past, specifically reconciling conflicting memories of what occurred in this era. Establishing a history of the victims will be a valuable step towards national reconciliation, and the tape recording Paulina makes for Gerardo is an important trial run for his work on the commission. It is an interview much like the ones he will conduct in a professional capacity, but the process also has strong implications for the couple putting their own personal demons to rest. "That's the way," Gerardo states, "that's how we'll get out of this mess—without hiding a thing from each other, together." Dorfman himself believes in the importance of truth commissions such as the one to which Gerardo has been appointed, for even if they have little or no power to punish the guilty, they do establish a social or institutional memory. "The previous regime," Dorfman told Reyes, "lived by telling this falsity: This never happened to you." The commissions can be crucial, therefore, because they "are able to establish certain truths in a public way, to become

part of official history." Just how satisfying such a process can be to Paulma and others like her, however, lingers as one of the more difficult issues presented in the play.

When the mirror is lowered near the conclusion of *Death and the Maiden,* a powerful image is introduced which implicates the audience in the play's central social conflict. "The point about the play is that it works in the grey zone of ambiguity," Dorfman related to Andrew Graham-Yooll in *Index on Censorship.* "It allows each person in the audience, or each reader, to ask themselves who they are in relation to each character " To assess one's own investment is part of the process of rectifying different memories, conflicting narratives of what occurred in the past. "In Chile, everybody has lived that situation How do you make the truth, how do you pervert one truth to bring out another?" Certainly, the image of the mirror functions somewhat ambiguously, as indeed does the conclusion of the play itself. Dorfman's characters are forced to move forward, putting the past at rest without necessarily resolving it. What is a personal issue for them is reflected in the social quandary faced by countries like Chile or Argentina, *m* which the process of investigation goes on despite the promise of a clear resolution any time in the near future.

Dorfman commented to Matt Wolf in the London *Times* that the impact of *Death and the Maiden* stems largely from the fact that "there are few plays about the real difficulties of the transition to democracy and few plays about violence and memory that work in this way." Indeed, it is a tribute to the strength of the play, and to Dorfman's experience as a novelist as well, that the playwright was able to explore the implications of the past so fully while still meeting the theatre's requirements for an exciting and dramatically viable plot. The play's intriguing treatment of memory is thus at the center of both its current political topicality and its lingering literary value.

Source: Christopher G Busiel, for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 1998

Critical Essay #2

In this unfavorable review, Simon feels that Dorfman fumbles an opportunity to expound upon the subjects of dictatorships and human rights violations. Death and the Maiden, he feels, is nothing more than a contrived mystery.

Ariel Dorfman, the Chilean writer, brings us his *Death and the Maiden,* a drama set in a country that, the program coyly tells us, "is probably Chile." A long era of dictatorship has yielded to a new democracy, and Gerardo Escobar, a lawyer, has been appointed to the presidential commission investigating political crimes. Driving back to his beach house, he blows a tire and, having neither a spare nor a jack (much is made of these two unconvincing circumstances), gets a stranger, Dr. Miranda, to give him a lift home. By an even less persuasive device, Miranda drops in after midnight, and Gerardo's wife, Paulina, recognizes him (or so she thinks) as the man who, fifteen years ago, participated in torturing her and repeatedly raped her. But she keeps mum.

Miranda accepts Gerardo's invitation to spend the night (more stretching of credibility), and while he sleeps, Paulina knocks him out, drags him into the living room, ties him to a chair, and gags him. In the morning, she is seated beside him with a gun. She tells her flabbergasted husband that they will hold a trial; Gerardo is to be the defense, Paulina the witness, prosecutor, and judge. Miranda, when he does get a chance to speak, flatly denies being *that* doctor. Paulina, we gather, has been mentally unbalanced since those terrible events: Is she capable of determining what's what? And how will she deal with Miranda if he is found guilty?

But we do not get enough of the Escobars' home life to infer just how crazy Paulina is. Or enough about this society to deduce whether Miranda's loving Schubert's famous quartet and quoting (or misquoting) Nietzsche constitute enough grounds for identifying a person. We don't even know what to make of the fact that former evildoers are to be ferreted out but granted amnesty. Yet these are small matters compared to the basic insufficiency of reducing a national and individual tragedy to a mere whodunit. For despite the little grace (or disgrace) notes of humorous squabbles and troubled personal relationships, the play is really all is-he-or-isn't-he, did-he-or-didn't-he: too trivial for the amount of suffering on which it is predicated. Can you imagine *Hamlet* if its only real concern were whether Claudius did or did not poison his brother?

Yet even as a whodunit, *Death and the Maiden* fails because it avoids coming satisfactorily to grips with the one question it raises. Would Agatha Christie leave a murder unresolved and then pride herself on her ambiguity? And it isn't as if the wit, pathos, or language here were good enough to carry the play or even a half-pound paperweight. Mike Nichols's direction does not seem to achieve more than anyone else's would, and the acting does rather less. Gene Hackman is a believable Miranda, perhaps because he is spared the excesses of Dorfman's fancy writing. But Richard Dreyfuss's lawyer is only Richard Dreyfuss, take it or leave it. As for Glenn Close, she is not exactly bad but seems, as usual, miscast. For Miss Close is almost always a bit too much this or not enough that; with rare exceptions, her performances leave you

undernourished or overstuffed. Personally, I would have loved to see Mary Beth Hurt or Laila Robins in the part, or indeed Lizbeth Mackay, Miss Close's talented standby.

Curiously, Tony Walton, perhaps having shot his wad on *Baboons,* has under—or misdesigned— the scenery, which is sparse and a bit bewildering. And Jules Fisher's lighting (no doubt at Nichols's behest) turns illicitly stylized for a naturalistic play. But Ann Roth's costumes are suitably understated Last time, I reviewed a terrible play by Richard Caliban. Here, despite an Ariel and a Miranda, things are not appreciably better.

Source: John Simon, "The Guary Apes," in *New York,* March 30,1992, pp 87-88

Critical Essay #3

Weales offers a mixed appraisal of the 1992 New York production of Dorfman'splay, finding the play's ambiguous ending frustrating. The critic did note, however, that the work deals with important issues and makes for adequate entertainment.

Somewhere beneath the slick and enervating surface of Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden,* there are serious themes struggling to get out. The play is set in "a country that is probably Chile," one that has recently emerged from a dictatorship and has become, tentatively, a democracy. The question—one that is asked every day in Eastern Europe, in South and Central America, in Africa—is whether the new nearly democratic health of a country depends on the recognition and punishment of the oppressors from the past or whether the present is better served—as Mussolini's sexpot granddaughter was saying on television recently—by dismissing all that ugliness as history. In Dorfman's play there are advocates of recognition and of punishment, although not necessarily of both. Gerardo Escobar (Richard Dreyfuss) is a lawyer who has been named to a commission, with minimal power, that will investigate charges of wrongdoing—very wrongdoing—in the past. His wife, Paulina Salas (Glenn Close), who was raped and tortured in an attempt to extract information from her, is understandably obsessed by what happened to her and aches to punish the villains. Circumstances provide an occasion. Roberto Miranda (Gene Hackman), who has earlier rescued Escobar, stranded on the road by a plot device, drops by in the middle of the night to congratulate Escobar or perhaps to soften him up in case his name should come up in the hearings. Paulina recognizes (or thinks she does) Miranda as the Schubert-loving doctor who led her torturers; she ties him up, demands a mock trial, threatens to be judge and executioner.

Escobar is potentially the most interesting character. Miranda either is or is not the torture doctor; Paulina either will or will not kill him. Escobar finally sides with Miranda and feeds him information, which he may not need, for the confession Paulina demands. Escobar's motivation is nicely unclear. His distress at Paulina's homemade vengeance may result from his belief in proper legal proceedings, even though he knows that the judiciary is still shot through with appointees of the old regime; after all, *we* do not want to be like *them.* He may be afraid that Paulina's irrational behavior will wreck his career, stain his growing importance within the new government It may be a bit of male bonding; we learn that while Paulina was under arrest, risking her life to protect Escobar's name, he was having an affair.

In the next to last scene, Escobar having been sent offstage, Paulina listens to Miranda's confession and decides to kill him anyway. After an impassioned speech about the way victims are expected to act in a civilized way ("And why does it always have to be people like me who have to sacrifice"), she holds a gun to his head and.. .blackout. In the published play, Dorfman asks for a mirror to descend so that the audience can see itself while a spotlight picks out one playgoer after another. This effect would presumably generalize the theme, take the play away from Paulina, who may or may not be mad, and prepare for the final scene. There, the three principals, formally

dressed, arrive at a conceit to hear a little Schubert. Dorfman may intend a final ambiguity to an ambiguous play—a testimony to Paulina's unwillingness to act as her torturers did, an indication that the past is to be smoothed over by social ritual, or, given the look exchanged between Paulina and Miranda, a confession that the questions the play presumably faces are questions still.

If this sounds like an interesting—even an important—play, it certainly did not seem so in the theater. Part of the problem lies with Dorfman. Although moral problems can certainly be carried by a thriller or a mystery, here the emphasis is on the is-he-or-isn't-he of Miranda and the possibility that Paulina may have been driven mad by her experience. More of the blame lies with director Mike Nichols. That blackout on the gun-wielding Paulina is a case in point. It comes across not as her hesitation, but as a directorial tease, an attempt to pump suspense into a flaccid melodrama. The three stars, all of whom have done admirable work elsewhere, seem simply to be going through the motions of performance. Everything is as elegant and sterile as Tony Walton's set. I found I did not believe in any of the characters nor care about their dilemmas which meant that it was also difficult to dig for the half-buried serious themes.

Source: Gerald Weales, "Go Ahead, Shoot," m *Commonweal,* Volume CXTX, no. 9, May 8,1992 , p. 21

Adaptations

Death and the Maiden was adapted as a film in 1994, directed by Roman Polanski, and starring Sigourney Weaver as Paulina, Ben Kingsley as Miranda, and Stuart Wilson as Gerardo. Novelist Rafael Yglesias *(Fearless)* and Dorfman wrote the screenplay based on the original play

Topics for Further Study

Summarize the evidence presented that Roberto Miranda is the doctor who raped and tortured Paulina. Does the play offer convincing evidence for his guilt or innocence?

Compare director Roman Polansla's film adaptation to Dorfman's original text. Screenwriters Dorfman and Rafael Yglesias altered the play's ending, providing further evidence that Miranda is guilty. Do you think this detracts from the play's original vision?

How do the life roles or careers of each of the characters seem to be reflected in their actions and beliefs'

Analyze the different ways the characters view the idea of revenge in the play. In what ways is it presented as satisfying or dissatisfying?

Research the recent work of human rights tribunals in countries like Chile or Argentina. How do accounts of this process suggest that the individuals involved balance the ethical issues presented in this play?

Analyze the theatrical device of the mirror which is lowered near the conclusion of the play. What effect(s) does this image achieve?

Compare and Contrast

1992: Augusto Pinochet, who handed over the Chilean presidency in 1990 to democratically-elected Patrick) Aylwin Azocar, remains commander in chief of the army.

Today: Pinochet has stepped down as army commander but in March, 1998, was bestowed the title of senator for life, despite widespread protest.

1992: With Pinochet still their commander in chief, the Chilean armed forces continue to wield a good deal of autonomous power in Chilean society.

Today: There is still considerable tension between the government and the military concerning the human rights violations of the Pinochet era. Although current president Eduardo Frei has accelerated human rights tribunals and inquiries into Chile's "disappeared," punishment of the perpetrators remains extremely difficult.

1992: The era of Apartheid is gradually drawing to a close in South Africa, with whites voting two to one in a referendum to give President F. W. de Klerk a mandate to end white-minority rule. A June massacre in a black township, however, and charges of police involvement in the case, suggest the pressing need for more rapid transformation.

Today: While many political, social, and economic difficulties remain for South Africa, the peaceful transfer of power to President Nelson Mandela makes the country an excellent example of how a society can make the difficult transition to democracy.

1992: Peru's President Alberto Fujimori suspends the Constitution April 5, and assumes dictatorial powers in the fight against corruption and Maoist guerrilla group Sendera Luminosa ("Shining Path"). The United States suspends aid to Peru.

Today: On April 22, 1997, President Fujimori orders a military attack against a group of leftist guerrillas who have held hostages for several months in the Japanese embassy in the capital of Lima. All fourteen of the guerrillas are killed, along with two soldiers, and one of the hostages; many others are wounded. Fujimori's actions are celebrated internationally, but nagging issues remain, including damaged relations with Japan (who had pushed for a peaceful negotiation to end the standoff), and accusations that Fujimori has used government intelligence forces to investigate political opponents. Throughout Latin America, the continued existence of guerrilla activity combined with hard-line government policies suggest the continued fragility of many of the region's democracies.

What Do I Read Next?

Widows, a 1981 novel by Dorfman, later adapted into a play of the same name. *Widows* focuses on a group of thirty-seven women who suspect that their missing husbands have been abducted and killed by authorities of their government. Dorfman set the novel in occupied Greece in the 1940s to avoid censorship but changed the setting to Chile when he created the stage adaptation. Depicting the experience of people seeking justice under a repressive regime, *Widows* provides an interesting counterpoint to *Death and the Maiden.*

How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic, an early work of criticism by Dorfman, which illustrates his argument that forms of popular literature such as comic books have historically been used to promote capitalist ideology and encourage passivity, specifically for the benefit of American business interests in Latin America.

La casa de los espiritus (1982), the first novel by Isabel Allende, now one of the world's most widely read Hispanic writers, whose father was first cousin to Chilean President Salvador Allende (the novel was translated by Magda Bogin as *The House of the Spirits* and published by Knopf, 1985). Allende, like Paulina in *Death and the Maiden* helped transport people to avoid military repression after Pinochet's coup. The events she witnessed, "the dead, the tortured, the widows and orphans, left an unforgettable impression on my memory," and were incorporated into this work.

Allende: A Novel, by Fernando Alegria, is a biography of Salvador Allende cast in a novel form, illustrating "how fiction and history occasionally "collide, then merge, enriching and refining each other."

Chilean Writers in Exile: Eight Short Novels, edited by Fernando Alegria (Crossing Press, 1981) presents "an expression of a group of writers who, in spite of all the hardships of life in exile, are producing vigorous statements on behalf of the Chilean people." The collection, which contains Dorfman's *Putamadre,* offers the opportunity to compare different perspectives on Chilean politics and life in exile, as expressed in fiction.

Extremities, by William Mastrosimone, a contemporary American play about a woman victimized by a rapist in her own home, who manages to turn the tables and trap her attacker. The play (which was made into a film in 1986 starring Farah Fawcett) makes an interesting contrast to *Death and the Maiden* because of the revenge theme and the different ways in which it is played out.

Further Study

Contemporary Literary Criticism, Gale- Vol. 48,1988, Vol.77,1993.

This resource compiles selections of criticism; it is an excellent starting point for a research paper on Dorfman.

The selections in these two volumes span Dorfman's career up to 1993 (criticism of *Death and the Maiden* is found in Volume 77). Dorfman is also covered in *Hispanic Writers, Hispanic Literary Criticism,* and Volume 130 of *Contemporary Authors.*

Graham-Yooll, Andrew. "Dorfman: A Case of Conscience" in *Index on Censorship,* Vol. 20, no. 6,1991, pp 3-4. An interview with Dorfman in which the playwnght discusses Chile's transition to democracy and his own plays *Reader* and *Death and Maiden.*

Gregory, Stephen. "Ariel Dorfman and Harold Pinter. Politics of the Periphery and Theater of the Metropolis" in *Comparative Drama,* Vol. 30, no. 3,1996, pp. 325-45 An article that fleshes out the "string of contingencies" between these two writers Gregory's article presents "a summary of the writers' respective political involvements and commitments," continues with an analysis of several plays (including *Death and the Maiden),* and concludes "with a retrospective political reading of Dorfman* s' study of Pinter to show how it anticipates both the concerns of his later work on Latin America and the issues that will unite the two writers some twenty years after its publication."

Guzman, Patncio *The Battle of Chile* (re-release), First Run Icarus Films, 1998

A documentary, produced in the years 1973-1976, which is still banned in Chile to this day. The film presents a leftist perspective on Salvador Allende's presidency, the coup of Pinochet, and the first "years of terror" following the installation of the dictatorship. Guzman's more recent work also includes the film *Chile: The Persistent Memory*
Skidmore, Thomas E. and Peter H. Smith *Modern Latin America,* fourth edition, Oxford University Press (New York), 1997.

A comprehensive, general resource on the interrelated political histories of this vast region. It is particularly useful in understanding the context of Dorfman's play, applicable to Chile as well as to a number of other Latin American countries who have experienced periods of military repression. Students interested specifically in the history of modern Chile may investigate some of the many books on the topic, such as Mark Falcoff s *Modern Chile, 1970-1989: A Critical History* (published by Transaction, 1989).

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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