

# The development of justice in death and the maiden



Composed by Ariel Dorfman, *Death of the Maiden* is regarded as a compelling play where a woman, Paulina, sought justice for actions that happened to her fifteen years ago. She blames a man named Roberto Miranda, a doctor that had visited her and her husband's household at night, because she recognizes his voice and the music that was played. The twist of the play is that the audience does not know if a certain individual, Roberto Miranda, was responsible for the actions. Justice is an important topic to discuss for the actions people inflict on others. It could also be a basis for discussing the oppression of women in society. However, this paper will be discussing Paulina's change of definition of justice in the play while applying the theme of justice. Development of justice applies to the *Death and the Maiden* when Gerardo talks with Paulina, Paulina ties up Roberto at gunpoint, Roberto's confession, and when Paulina describes what happened to her. The literary tools being discussed are the motif of lights, repetition of pauses, motif of the gun, symbol of truth with the cassette player, and the theme of injustice. The development of justice will be investigated through these literary lenses and with the scenes previously mentioned.

To begin with, the development of justice is first shown in the *Death and the Maiden* when Gerardo speaks with Paulina in Act One Scene One:

GERARDO: Paulie? Paulina? (He sees Paulina hidden behind the curtains. He switches on a light. She slowly comes out from the curtains.) GERARDO (cont'd.): Is that...? What're you doing there like that? Sorry I took this long to... I.... (Dürrenmatt 2)

The motif of lights applies to this situation. An example shown is when Gerardo turns on the lamp nearby where Paulina was standing. When the lights turn on, it represented the truth coming out such as Gerardo telling Paulina who Roberto Miranda was and about the promotion he will gain from the president. Paulina sees this as justice, knowing the truth that was told to her. Also, the repetition of pauses seen throughout the scene is significant to the theme of justice. Some pauses that occur when Paulina and Gerardo are speaking shows the strange relationship between the two. Ironically as Gerardo will soon be the 'minister of justice,' he tends to hide the truth from Paulina. These pauses further emphasize the untruthful relationship between the two. When the two talk, the meaning of justice seems to shift.

The development of justice applies to the Death and the Maiden when Paulina ties Roberto up and points a gun at him in Act One Scene Four:

PAULINA (very calm): Good morning, Doctor... Miranda, isn't it? Doctor Miranda. (She shows him the gun and points it playfully in his direction.)  
(Dürrenmatt 16)

The motif of the gun Paulina carries throughout the play to keep Roberto as hostage challenges the Paulina's definition of justice. When Paulina carries the gun, she seems to be in power. We can see that the power of the household shifts to Paulina as she bears the weapon. This change in authority puts Paulina with the right to do what she pleases. She wishes to earn a confession from Roberto proving that he was responsible for raping her fifteen years ago. This is justice that Paulina wanted. But we question if this is the correct way to find justice—by threatening death if the person

didn't do as told. If it was not Roberto who committed the crimes against her, then she would not be delivering justice. Therefore, the definition of justice changes in this part of the play.

Considering Paulina's decision, the meaning of justice changes in the Death and the Maiden when Paulina describes in detail what the secret police did to her. The surprisingly amount of specific details Paulina remembered from the day fifteen years ago shows how keen she was to receive justice since then. She was able to remember the words the men said to her, almost word for word. Her connection with the music from Schubert was used to describe Roberto:

At first, I thought he would save me. He was so soft, so—nice, after what the others had done to me. And then, all of a sudden, I heard a Schubert quartet. There is no way of describing what it means to hear that wonderful music in the darkness, when you haven't eaten in three days, when your body is falling apart, when... (Dürrenmatt 41)

This helps the audience determine if Paulina's actions on Gerardo were justified. Her words have a pathos effect on the audience which can cloud our judgment in deciding so. However, this supports the theme of injustice. These terrible experiences that she witnessed is not just or acceptable. Instead of letting Roberto go, she changes her definition of justice. After earning the confession from Roberto Miranda she begins to believe that he was indeed the person from years ago. But if she killed Roberto (this is not confirmed by the play unfortunately), she thought killing was justice for what

he did to her. Therefore, the change in the meaning of justice is shown when Paulina describes in detail the events from fifteen years.

To end with, the definition of justice alters in the Death and the Maiden when Roberto confesses the events that happened to Paulina fifteen years ago. Ariel Dorfman's use of the cassette player in Act Three Scene Three in order to record Roberto's confession represented the truth:

(Just before evening. Paulina and Gerardo are outside, on the terrace, facing the sea. Roberto inside, still tied up. Gerardo has the cassette recorder on his lap.) (Dürrenmatt 37)

Although the audience still does not know if Roberto was the same person from the past, the symbol remains of as truth. The overlap of his words with Paulina's question if he is indeed telling the truth. Paulina claims that the music was used to falsely reassure the prisoners and Roberto confirms what she said in the next line. These specific actions that Roberto claim is strange for him to admit. The question of whether his words were actually true challenges the theme of justice. The need for Paulina to kill Roberto for his confession soon after changes the meaning of justice. She now sought justice by killing him. She now uses the confession on the cassette player as her justification for wanting to kill him. This confession was now on record, similar to how the court would use this as evidence to deliver justice against crimes. The way Roberto's words coaligned with Paulina's words expresses the change and theme of justice as the truth is finally exposed.

A change in the definition of justice can be traced throughout the entire play.

First when Gerardo speaks with Paulina at the beginning of the play, the <https://assignbuster.com/the-development-of-justice-in-death-and-the-maiden/>

theme and definition of justice was not as significant. Justice to Paulina at this point was knowing the truth from Gerardo. The use of the motif of lights helps reiterate how the truth was being explained to Paulina. When Paulina ties up Roberto Miranda in Act One Scene Three, her definition of justice seems to change. She becomes convinced that the man was the one who raped her fifteen years ago. This contradicts justice since there is no hard evidence that he committed the actions. Therefore, this was illegal and was considered kidnapping or keeping someone as hostage. When Paulina describes the events that occurred, she uses great details to outline the experience. The theme of injustice was plainly represented with the terrible experiences she went through. This was not enough to verify her actions. When Roberto 'confesses' what he has done in the cassette player, the symbol of truth. Although we are not sure if he actually has done these actions to Paulina, it can still be the symbol of truth. In all, Paulina was not justified in her actions against Roberto Miranda even with the supposed confession of her perpetrator. Justice relies on truth, hard evidence, and proper execution of what happens to person who committed the crime. Paulina does not hold the authority to decide this.