

Peter goldsworthy`s maestro: steamy hothouse of darwin

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Peter Goldsworthy's *Maestro* demonstrates the importance of setting in understanding characters such as the protagonists Paul Crabbe and Eduard Keller. Written in a retrospective narrative from Paul Crabbe's point of view and how the settings of 'steamy' Darwin, 'suburban' Adelaide and 'hypocritical' Vienna affected him. Upon moving from Adelaide to Darwin, Paul immediately falls in love with the 'city of booze, blow and blasphemy'. Darwin is the backdrop to the sensual addiction Paul develops and feeds his heightened sense as a 'steamy and lush hothouse'.

Totally different from Adelaide, Paul thrives in the new setting, as his character develops. Paul meets Keller, the 'Maestro' in Darwin and is fascinated by the first impression Keller leaves upon him. The formal white suit Keller wears contrasts with the Swan, the dark and casual hotel he inhabits, symbolising Keller's alienation in Darwin. Described by Paul as a 'type of monastery... a place for atonement', Darwin and the Swan provide an insight into the Maestro's character.

To Keller, Darwin symbolises the social and cultural isolation he craves as atonement for the crimes he believed he had committed. Keller's history affects him so deeply he was changed by it, and to Paul he is merely a 'Nazi'. 'Upon reflecting, Paul found it strange to realise how much he 'came to love the man, depend on him' from his first impressions. As a teacher Keller taught Paul incomplete lessons of music and life that Paul comes to regret not appreciating. On Paul's final night in Darwin he goes to the Swan with the intention of saying goodbye to Keller and then meeting with his girlfriend Rosie.

Keller's acceptance of Paul as an important part of his life is symbolised through the new chair and table he has purchased for Paul, finally ready to share his mysterious history. However, Paul doesn't realise the confessional for what it was and with 'the aroused sexual present' overwhelming the past he leaves behind his broken teacher. Keller's past and transition in nature from a 'romantic virtuosos' to strict teacher is shown through music and his descriptions of Vienna. After the Nazis rose to power, Keller describes the ballroom of Vienna being turned into 'the experimental laboratory for the end of the world' demonstrating that Keller's own world ended along with his love of Vienna. Keller's love for his wife Mathilde gave him rubato, and 'that extra littleness' that Paul could never achieve. However, it buoyed his arrogance and belief of his own invulnerability which prevented him from realising the danger his Jewish family were in, in Vienna. To Paul, Vienna represents a European city of culture and music but to Keller it is a reminder of his lost family and regretted choices.

Vienna is also the cause of Keller's mistrust and suspicion of beauty, as he says 'never trust the beautiful' is something Paul, as a young and naive man, can't understand. Keller describes Vienna as a veneer, 'hiding the hypocrisy within' in an attempt to teach Paul the lessons he had to learn through awful experiences. Paul and Keller's natures are contrasted by Goldsworthy in *Maestro* and their similarity is what causes Keller to endeavour to teach Paul.

The confessional that Paul snubbed, a privilege that he failed to realise through selfishness and sensual addiction, was Keller's explanation and he

told Paul this as he called out ' I tell you this, not for me, but for you. ' Paul's rejection of the deep connection he shared with Keller is something he would come to regret as he strove to defy the limits of perfection Keller had shown him. When Paul leaves the setting of Darwin to attend school, he takes an arrogance that let him believe Keller ' had taught all that was in his power to teach. In comparison to ' lush' Darwin, Melbourne and Adelaide are mundane and suburban and perhaps symbolise the direction Paul's future will take, as he rejected Keller and the incomplete lessons he strove to teach. Paul realises he can't bridge the tragic gulf between talent and genius in his travels of Europe as he ignored Keller's advice of ' a little hurt now, to save a wasted life'. Vienna is a city of culture and music to Paul and the setting is important in understanding how he differs from his mentor, the Maestro.

The settings of Goldsworthy's Maestro are important in understanding the history and context of each character and their actions. The settings are significant in the novel as they contrast the characters to their surroundings and develop meaning such as Keller's chosen isolation in Darwin. Each place in the novel symbolises differences and similarities and Goldsworthy positions the reader to observe the way the character understands and interacts with their surroundings, be it Darwin, Adelaide, the Swan or Vienna.