

# Death and the maiden: a critical overview



## 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.

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 a popularly-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 Author Biography 2 (1980)--which argue that popular literatures promote capitalist and neo-imperial 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 in 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 finds. 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 his 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, 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.

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 bristles, 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 Act 1, Scene 1 9 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 1 10 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 Act 1, Scene 2 11 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 Act 1, Scene 2 12 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 2 13 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 3 14 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 apply 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.

Act 1, Scene 4 15 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. Act 1, Scene 4 16 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 1, Scene 4 17 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. Act 2, Scene 1 18

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. Act 2, Scene 1 19 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 barely 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 Act 2, Scene 1 20 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 1 21 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 Act 2, Scene 2 22 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 2, Scene 2 3 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.



Act 3, Scene 1 24 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.

Act 3, Scene 1 25 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 Act 3, Scene 1 26 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 1 27 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. Act 3, Scene 2 28 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 Characters 29 xperience 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 Doctor Roberto Miranda 30 he 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. Paulina Solas 31 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 pain 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 in D 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). Themes 32 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 pain of her torture and rape, it does grant her freedom from the savagery that afflicted her tormentors.