Death and the Maiden

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ARIEL DORFMAN

Ariel Dorfman is the son of Fanny Dorfman and Adolf Dorfman, an Argentine professor of economics. The family moved from Argentina to the U.S. before then settling in Chile when Dorfman was around the age of twelve. Dorfman completed his schooling at the University of Santiago. In the early 1970s, Dorfman worked as a cultural adviser to Salvador Allende, Chile's first socialist president. His 1971 book-length essay on American imperialism, *How to Read Donald Duck*, became a bestseller throughout Latin America and, eventually, the world. In 1973 Dorfman was forced to leave Chile for the U.S. when a military coup led by General Pinochet overthrew Allende's government. The new dictator banned *How to Read Donald Duck* and ordered any copies of it burned. Dorfman continued to write while living in the U.S. and became a professor of literature and Latin American studies at Duke University in 1985. His best-known work, *Death and the Maiden*, was completed in 1990 and deals with Chile's pained transition from dictatorship to democracy. More recently, Dorfman and his family have divided their time between Chile and the U.S., a way of living which serves as the subject for the 1998 memoir, *Heading North, Looking South: A Bilingual Journey*. Much of Dorfman's work concerns issues of human rights, tyranny, and power.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Before the play's text begins in earnest, Dorfman specifies that the action takes place in a country that is "probably Chile" and is certainly undergoing a painful transition from military dictatorship to democracy. The play is a response to the overthrow of Salvador Allende's socialist government by General Pinochet's brutal military dictatorship in 1973. The United States, who disproved of Allende's government, is alleged to have supported and even aided Pinochet's actions in the takeover. Not long after that coup, Argentina too underwent similar turmoil—both countries saw widespread civil repression, "disappearances," torture, and murder. *Death and the Maiden* is less about life under an authoritarian dictatorship, however, and more fundamentally concerned with what happens after—that is, how a country both practically and emotionally recovers from pain, what its people need to do to properly move on, and whether a nation can ever truly put the past behind it.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Literary works specifically related to the subject matter of *Death and the Maiden* include Dorfman's own *Widows* and *Reader*. Together, these three works form what Dorfman deems his "Resistance" trilogy. Books by Fernando Alegria and Isabel Allende (whose father was Salvador Allende's first cousin) also deal with Chile's difficult 20th century history. More widely, Dorfman has acknowledged the influence of the English playwright Harold Pinter and has also been compared to Irish author Samuel Beckett and Romanian-French playwright Eugene Ionesco. *Death and the Maiden*, however, is for the most part a more realistic play than much of Beckett or Ionesco's work—that is, until the final act's expressionistic device of lowering a giant mirror in front of the audience. This gesture takes some influence, too, from dramatist Bertolt Brecht's "alienation" effect, wherein theatre seeks to distance the audience from the events on stage and thereby cause deeper reflection on a dramatic work. Looking further back, *Death and the Maiden* also has much in common with Greek tragedy.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Death and the Maiden* (translated from the Spanish: *La muerte y la doncella*)
- **When Written:** 1990
- **Where Written:** Chile
- **When Published:** November, 1990
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Drama
- **Setting:** A beach house in a country undergoing transition from military dictatorship to democracy; "probably Chile"
- **Climax:** Paulina Salas points a gun at Roberto Miranda's head
- **Antagonist:** Roberto Miranda
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Page to stage. *Death and the Maiden* was actually begun in the early 1980s, originally intended to be a novel. Dorfman, however, subsequently realized that he couldn't write the work properly until Pinochet was no longer leader of Chile. It was in 1990 that he decided the subject would work better as play.

Silver screen. *Death and the Maiden* was made into a film by Roman Polanski in 1994, starring Sigourney Weaver.

PLOT SUMMARY

Paulina Salas, a woman around forty years old, and her husband, Gerardo Escobar, a mid-forties lawyer, are staying in their secluded beach house. The country they live in is "probably Chile," and is certainly a newly democratic country trying to leave its military dictatorship past behind.

Paulina is waiting for Gerardo to return home, their dinner going cold on the table. It's already after midnight; the wind is making the curtains billow and the sounds of the **sea** can be heard. Hearing a car pull up, Paulina retrieves a **gun** from the sideboard and listens as Gerardo thanks an unknown individual before coming in. He explains that one of his tires had gone out on the way home and a kind passing motorist had stopped to help. Gerardo blames Paulina for the spare tire in their car being flat and quibbles with her over his missing car jack—which she has loaned to her mother.

Gerardo and Paulina then discuss his new job offer: the country's new president has asked him to head up a new commission to investigate atrocities committed under the previous dictatorship. Gerardo claims he is holding off on taking the job until he has Paulina's approval. Though she is hesitant about the fact the commission will only look into cases in which victims are dead and is equally concerned that the commission will not have powers to prosecute, she tells him to take the position. In particular, she is frustrated that the commission couldn't do anything in a case like hers: she was kidnapped, tortured, and repeatedly raped. Just before they retire to bed, though, it becomes clear that Gerardo had already said yes to the president.

During the night, Gerardo and Paulina are unnerved by a knock at the door. It turns out to be Roberto Miranda, the good Samaritan who had stopped to help Gerardo earlier. Roberto has heard about the commission on the radio and decided to come and offer his congratulations—and to save Gerardo a small inconvenience by bringing back his tire. Paulina, seemingly agitated, listens in as Roberto heaps praise on Gerardo; he tells Gerardo that "the real real truth" is that his honorable work will heal the wounds of the country. As it's getting late, Gerardo insists that Roberto stays the night and shows him to the spare room. Paulina rushes back into bed, pretending to be asleep when Gerardo comes in.

Later in the night, Paulina takes the gun and goes into Roberto's room. After a brief commotion, Paulina drags the unconscious Roberto into the living room and ties him up to a chair. She stuffs her underwear into his mouth, takes his car keys and drives his car somewhere.

A little while later, Roberto wakes up and is shocked to see that he is tied up and gagged. Paulina, holding the gun, plays a cassette of **Schubert's "Death and the Maiden"** that she found in Roberto's car. She talks about the painful associations she now has with that music; it used to be her favorite piece but has since come to make her physically ill. She asks Roberto if this is the very same cassette that he used to play.

Gerardo comes in dozily, astonished by the scene that presents itself. Paulina refuses to put down the gun, explaining that Roberto is "the doctor who played Schubert." Even though she was blindfolded when she was raped and tortured, she claims to unmistakably recognize Roberto's voice. Gerardo moves to untie Roberto, causing Paulina to fire a warning shot, evidently scaring her as much as the other two. Gerardo pleads with Paulina to let Roberto go, telling her that she's "sick." She insists that she won't release him, and that they are going to put Roberto on trial "right here."

Around midday, Roberto is still tied up. Paulina is staring out at sea and talking intimately to Roberto about her life, specifically about the night she was released from captivity. She explains that her torturers had tried to get her to give up the name of whoever was "fucking" her—Gerardo—but that she had successfully resisted. Gerardo enters, having been to deal with a mechanic that Paulina had called out earlier. They remove Roberto's gag. Roberto chastises Gerardo for letting his "extremely ill, almost prototypically schizoid" wife behave this way. He claims, contrary to Paulina's assertions, to have no idea who she is.

Gerardo and Paulina argue about her actions; she insists that if Roberto confesses to raping and torturing her she will set him free (though she admits to fantasizing about doing back to him his own alleged crimes). Furthermore, she wants the confession to be recorded on cassette tape. Gerardo says it's inevitable he will have to resign due to her actions, but she counters that if she has Roberto's confession no one will be able to defend him. If he's innocent, she says, "then he's really screwed."

It's now lunchtime. Gerardo is spoon-feeding soup to Roberto, while Paulina watches on from the terrace. Gerardo explains to Roberto that he thinks the only way for Roberto to free himself is to "indulge" Paulina—he needs to confess, even if he is innocent. Gerardo thinks that a confession, even if it's false, might "liberate" Paulina from her "phantoms." Roberto accuses Gerardo of working with Paulina and questions whether Gerardo is a "real man." If Gerardo thinks he's guilty, says Roberto, why isn't he "cutting his balls off" and killing him. Angered by Roberto's accusation, Gerardo gets up to fetch the gun. Roberto says he was only joking and agrees with Gerardo's earlier to plan. For a false confession to work, he suggests, Gerardo needs to get him a detailed account from Paulina about exactly what happened to her.

As the evening draws in, Paulina and Gerardo sit outside facing the sea. Roberto is inside, still tied up. Gerardo has the cassette recorder on his lap and is asking Paulina to tell him everything about the terrible events she suffered. Paulina brings up something that's always annoyed her: that Gerardo was cheating on her while she was being tortured and raped. In fact,

he was with the other woman on the night she got released and went to find him. Gerardo grows increasingly exasperated as Paulina forces him to tell her how many times he slept with his other lover. She says that all she wants his him making love to her "without ghosts in the bed and I want you on the Commission defending the truth and I want you in the air I breathe and I want you in my Schubert that I can start listening to again." He asks her never to mention that "bitch of a night again"—the night of her release—and pleads with her to give him a full account of her rape and torture. Paulina agrees.

Gerardo puts on the cassette recorder as, at his suggestion, Paulina states her name and begins her story. She outlines how she was kidnapped one afternoon on the street, and that one of the peculiar details she remembers is how one of her kidnappers smelled of garlic. Doctor Miranda, she says, didn't get involved with her until three days later.

At this point Roberto's voice takes over from Paulina's, carrying on her train of thought. The room goes dark and the cassette recorder is lit by moonlight. Roberto outlines how he came to be involved with the military regime. His brother, a member of the secret services, had convinced him that his involvement would be vengeance for what happened to their father, who had suffered a heart attack when peasants attacked his land. At first, outlines Roberto, he had tried to help prisoners by ensuring that the torturers didn't kill them by administering too much electricity; he played Schubert to them to soothe their minds. But the "real real truth" is that over time temptation got the better of him and he gave into his basest desires, enjoying the power that came with raping Paulina. Roberto tells how one of the other torturers, "Stud," would say that the women "like" being raped.

The lights come up and it's nearly dawn. Roberto is writing down the words of his confession as Gerardo plays them back to him from the cassette recorder. The confession ends with a plea for "forgiveness" and a promise of "repentance." Paulina insists that he also write that his confession was made of his own free will. Roberto disagrees, but writes it anyway. Paulina starts listening to the confession from the beginning again. She expresses surprise that, now Roberto has (supposedly) admitted his guilt, Gerardo doesn't want to kill him. She instructs Gerardo to go and fetch Roberto's car.

Now left alone with Roberto, Paulina looks outside and says, "it's going to be a beautiful day." The only thing needed that would make it perfect, she says, is to kill Roberto. She explains that she deliberately planted small errors in her account when she gave it to Gerardo earlier, suspecting him of wanting to help Roberto. Roberto, in his confession, subconsciously corrected those errors: for example, she had changed "Stud" to "Bud," an error that Roberto subsequently fixed. She gives him ten seconds to tell her the truth—or she will shoot him. As she counts past up to nine, she asks what there is to lose from "killing one of them?"

Just at this moment, both characters freeze. Mozart's "Dissonant Quartet" begins to play as a **giant mirror** descends from the theater ceiling. It reflects the image of the audience back at itself, as a spotlight focuses on two or three audience members at a time.

A few months later, the action shifts to a concert hall (with the mirror still in position). Paulina and Gerardo sit in the audience, witnessing the end of a musical performance. As the applause dies down, Gerardo begins to talk to audience members about the success of his commission—how it is finally helping with the "process of healing." Just then, Roberto enters cast in a ghostly, "phantasmagoric" light, staring at Paulina. A bell indicates that the concert is about to recommence. "Death and the Maiden" starts to play; Paulina now looks Roberto for a few moments. As the lights go down, she turns her head and faces the mirror while the music plays on.

CHARACTERS

Paulina Salas – Paulina Salas is a woman of around forty years who is married to Gerardo Escobar. From the beginning of the play it's clear that Paulina is agitated and traumatized by something in her past. When Gerardo returns home late in the first scene, for example, she grabs a **gun** from a drawer and hides behind a curtain, thinking he might be an intruder. Over the course of the play, Paulina reveals more about the terrible suffering she endured under the country's former military dictatorship. Once a promising young medical student, one fateful day she was kidnapped by armed men and made to endure a lengthy period of imprisonment, torture, and rape. Her rapist, a doctor, would play **Schubert** to her during his attacks. Schubert, once her favorite composer, from then on made her feel physical ill whenever she heard it. When Roberto Miranda turns up, seemingly by chance, at the beach house shared by Paulina and Gerardo, Paulina is certain from his voice and mannerisms that Roberto is the same doctor who raped and tortured her (she was blindfolded throughout). She thus decides to put him on trial, tying him at **gunpoint** and forcing him to confess. During the hours that he is tied up, Paulina talks at length about her life. The audience must decide whether Paulina's certainty of Roberto's identity can be trusted, or if she is, as Roberto and Gerardo frequently describe her, "sick." Either way, she sees her actions as a way of taking back a part of herself that was lost long ago. Though she loves Gerardo, she doesn't trust the commission into past atrocities that he has just been appointed to run, believing that it won't investigate a case like hers and won't lead to any prosecutions. Her actions in the play, then, represent an attempt on her part to take control of her situation and find justice.

Gerardo Escobar – Gerardo is Paulina's husband, a man of around forty-five. He has just been appointed by the country's new president to be the head of an "Investigate Commission"

that will look into human rights atrocities committed under the previous military dictatorship. Astonished at his wife's violent kidnapping of Roberto, Gerardo tries to argue for Roberto's release by appealing to high ideals of justice. Paulina, however, feels that his approach—best described as placing trust in the judiciary and the country's democratic institutions—will not lead to justice. Moreover, a suspicion runs throughout the play that Gerardo is more concerned with his career than with helping Paulina make peace with what has happened to her. He also displays a fairly casual misogyny, laughing about the idiocy of women when talking with Roberto and frequently patronizing Paulina; the audience also learns that, while Paulina was being tortured and raped, Gerardo was having an affair.

Roberto Miranda – Roberto is the enigmatic and mysterious doctor who helps Gerardo on the road when his car breaks down. When he then visits Gerardo and Paulina's beach house to congratulate Gerardo on his appointment to the commission, which he has just heard about on the radio, Roberto is tied up at **gunpoint** by Paulina. The question of Roberto's true identity is the crux of the play: Paulina is convinced that he is the doctor who raped and tortured her, but he insists throughout that he is an innocent man. Certain traits shown by Roberto make Paulina certain of his identity. For example, he uses the phrase "real real truth"—the same as her attacker; in his car is a cassette tape of the same **Schubert quartet** that her rapist would play during the attacks; and when Roberto "falsifies" his confession based on the information Gerardo has gleaned from Paulina about what happened to her, he appears to subconsciously correct a deliberate error that Paulina placed in her account as a test. All in all, though, it can't be said without doubt that Roberto is the same doctor from Paulina's past. Though there is evidence against him, the audience must also consider the reliability of Paulina's state of mind given the immense trauma that she has suffered.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

MEMORY, TRAUMA, AND THE SENSES

Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden* is a harrowing play that centers on Paulina, a woman attempting to come to terms with having been abducted, tortured, and raped under her country's previous dictatorial regime. Having suffered unspeakable horrors at the hands of her abductors, Paulina is forced to confront her trauma when her husband, Gerardo, is visited by Roberto, a man whose voice and habitual phrases seem to match those of the doctor who blindfolded and repeatedly raped her. Dorfman's play argues that memory, trauma, and the senses are inextricably linked. The play specifically shows the difficulties of coming to terms with trauma when its sensory impact is permanently etched into victims' memories, readily reappearing when those same senses later receive similar stimuli; for instance, the sound of **Schubert**, which her rapist played during her torture, continues to make Paulina physically ill.

When confronted by stimuli that reminds her of her torture, Paulina shows a distress which, though she tries to hold it back under a projection of calm, is never far from the surface. Importantly, the emphasis on the senses also makes the experience more visceral for the audience, bringing them painfully closer to Paulina's trauma. When Roberto comes to Gerardo and Paulina's house, on the pretext of wishing to congratulate Gerardo on his new governmental position, Paulina, hidden from view, recognizes the sound of Roberto's voice. She quickly becomes extremely agitated, tying Roberto up at **gunpoint** in order to put him "on trial" as the doctor who systematically abused her. Later in the play she tells Gerardo that she is sure Roberto is her torturer because she also remembers the specific smell of his skin. This detail foregrounds the violent intimacy—the violation of her senses—that Paulina's rape represents to her.

The audience comes to learn that Paulina was blindfolded when she was tortured. While this was obviously intended to make her less likely to be able to identify her attacker, it also heightened her other senses, which explains her intense reaction to Roberto's voice. After tying Roberto up, Paulina puts on Schubert's quartet "Death and the Maiden." This, she explains, is what the doctor would play when raping her and, as she finds the cassette tape in Roberto's car, contributes to her certainty that he is the same doctor. It was once one of her favorite pieces of music but has since come to make her feel "extremely ill" whenever she hears it. The psychological link between the music and her torture has understandably ruined Paulina's enjoyment of Schubert, showing the integrated relationship between the senses, memory, and trauma.

Playing the quartet back to Roberto while she has him tied up and fearing for his life is an attempt by Paulina to reclaim Schubert for herself, targeted at that particular aspect of her trauma. Later Paulina takes this thought further, saying that she might kill Roberto "so I can listen to my Schubert without thinking that you'll also be listening to it, soiling my day and my Schubert and my country and my husband." Dorfman, then, shows that extreme sensory experience constitutes a kind of memory in which traumatic events are stored.

Different strategies for dealing with trauma are presented throughout the play, but none of them seem to match the visceral horror of Paulina's experience of rape and torture.

Dorfman therefore argues that nothing can ever truly erase this kind of experience or, indeed, bring about a truly satisfying justice—the memory and trauma will always be there.

Paulina, sensing in Roberto's chance arrival at her house an opportunity to bring some kind of closure to her trauma, is unsure how best to go about it. She changes her mind throughout the play. At one point, she expressly wants to enact the same kind of sensory terror on Roberto as she herself experienced. She tells Gerado, "when I heard his voice, I thought the only thing I want is to have him raped, have someone fuck him, that's what I thought, that he should know just once what is to…" Later, Paulina seems like she would be satisfied with a remorseful confession from Roberto, before going on to decide that actually it might be best just to kill him. Gerardo presents an alternative strategy for dealing with trauma, imploring Paulina to leave the past behind—in essence, to forget about what happened.

None of these options seem to offer true closure to Paulina because she can never inflict the exact same experience on her torturer. To underscore this point, Dorfman ends the play on an ambiguous note: the audience doesn't actually know whether Paulina kills Roberto or not. In the closing scene, a concert performance of "Death and the Maiden" which takes place a few months after the night of Roberto's "trial," Paulina sees a figure of Roberto that may or may not be real: he enters under *"a light which has a faint phantasmagoric moonlight quality. He could be real or he could be an illusion in PAULINA's head."* This sensory experience shows that, whatever did happen on that fateful night, Paulina's trauma is still a very real presence in her life. Given the play's setting in a country attempting to recover from a brutal dictatorship, this further suggests that a nation's wounds cannot so readily be forgotten.

AUTHORITY, SOCIETY, AND THE PUBLIC

Ariel Dorfman has made no secret of the fact that he wrote *Death and the Maiden* to study what happens when a dictatorship transitions into a democracy, and moreover how the public relates to this shift in authority. As is written at the start of the play, "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." That is, while Dorfman is clear that the play "probably" takes place in Chile, the play's message is more universal. In particular, *Death and the Maiden* holds up to the light the idea of collective responsibility, asking how wrongdoing must be held to account and by whom. As with the other themes in this play, there are no easy answers, making the important point that these issues are difficult, complex, and need input from *all* in society—authority can and does do wrong, and each individual needs to consider their relationship to society as a whole.

The play's final scene holds the key to understanding Dorfman's intentions. Up until this scene, *Death and the Maiden* is realistic in style and abides by traditional dramatic principles such as the unity of place (it all happens in one location). The conversation is natural and the way the play unfolds is believable. This lures the audience into a kind of comfort zone, even if the content of the play is challenging. It's theater, and the audience "consumes" the play as it would any other. But in the play's closing scene, Dorfman completely undermines the realism of what's come before by bringing down a **giant mirror** in front of the audience and having Gerardo and Paulina sit amongst the crowd.

This technique is about breaking the so-called "fourth wall" (the divide between performance and audience), imploring the audience members to truly confront what they have seen instead of absorbing it passively. Dorfman takes inspiration from Bertolt Brecht, who espoused the virtues of "alienating" the audience in order to properly engage them with the theatrical material. The mirror is, of course, an obvious symbol of reflection. In fact, it's a literal object of reflection, projecting the crowd members' faces back upon them. This radical act by Dorfman provokes the audience, asking them to think deeply about how they *themselves* relate to what they've seen in the play. The ending, then, forces a reconsideration of what's come before.

Dorfman clearly views theater as more than mere entertainment. He wants the audience to properly involve themselves in what they've seen, to relate to it. That is, he makes the argument for collective responsibility, suggesting that everyone—not just the characters on stage—is somehow responsible for what has happened and, crucially, what will happen in the future.

With the above scene in mind, then, it becomes clear that the entire play is about collective responsibility. The mirror asks the audience to respond to the attitudes and beliefs of the characters, all three of which show different and not necessarily consistent positions on how individuals relate to society as a whole. The country that the play is set in is in a period of transition and trying to come to terms with the horrors of its past. Systematic torture, rape, and murder are hopefully now consigned to that past, but that doesn't mean that their after-effects have suddenly gone away. Moreover, many of the people involved, both perpetrators and victims, are still around. Dorfman poses this problem to his audience, asking them how a society can best move on from the horrors that came before.

In keeping with this theme, Gerardo notably has just been given a new job as the head of a human rights commission that will look into the crimes of the past. Roberto visits Gerardo and Paulina's house to wish Gerardo well with the new work, but it's also possible that he is checking up on Gerardo, worried that his own (alleged) crimes might be discovered.

However, this commission will only focus on cases that resulted in death and, depressingly, will not prosecute anyone—it exists only in order to establish and maintain a record of what happened. Though this is a valuable cause, this clearly isn't enough for Paulina and doesn't offer any peace to her suffering. Dorfman's mirror thus asks the audience to see things from her perspective and question whether they would be satisfied by Gerardo's bureaucratic inquiry. Furthermore, it pushes the audience members to examine their own role in society. It asks them what they would do under a similar regime as has just fallen in the play. Hanging above the audience, it seems to argue against apathy and imply that citizens who do nothing about wrongdoing in society must also accept a degree of complicity in what happens.

Death and the Maiden poses difficult ethical problems throughout, but certainly one of its main concerns is how members of the public relate to the power structures of their society. Without shirking the complexity of the issue, it suggests that everyone in society must take some degree of responsibility for their world, and it's up to them to use it wisely in order to create and sustain an environment in which they want to live.

FEMALE EMPOWERMENT

Paulina is a strong, intelligent woman who has suffered the double injustice of being raped and knowing that her attacker has in all likelihood escaped any possibility of punishment. And though her husband, Gerardo, appears to be supportive of her, his actions frequently suggest otherwise. The sudden appearance of Roberto, the man who she feels certain is her attacker, gives her an impromptu opportunity to empower herself by taking the issue into her own hands. Whether or not she is right do so, or successful, is another question, and one which ultimately the audience must answer. What is undoubtedly true, though, is that Dorfman shows his audience a temporary reversal of the power structure that facilitated Paulina's attacker—for the duration of the play at least, Paulina has control. This implicitly highlights the gendered dynamics that structure Paulina's world, in which men are presumed authorities and women denied full autonomy and respect.

It's important to understand the way in which Paulina lives in a male-dominated world rife with misogynistic attitudes. Both Gerardo and Roberto speak about Paulina in demeaning terms. Gerardo frequently barks orders at her and Roberto at one point appeals to Gerardo, "man-to-man," to save him: "She isn't the voice of civilization, you are." Paulina also recounts frequent sexually explicit references made about her by her torturers. Roberto often refers to Paulina as a "bitch," and both men characterise her as "mad" or "insane," denying her the right to seek justice. Gerardo, for his part, had an affair with another woman while Paulina was being tortured by the dictatorship.

All of these details, then, accumulate over the course of the play to paint Paulina as an isolated woman in a world dominated by men, making her actions all the more understandable. Gerardo and Roberto's attitude implies that Paulina's suffering is, in part, her own fault—simply for being a woman.

Paulina's specific experiences under the military regime demonstrate the devaluation of women taken to its horrific endpoint: Paulina's rape was the ultimate violation of her identity as a woman. She was disenfranchised of her power and treated as a discardable sexual object by her male abusers. The character of her torture was directly linked to her inferior status as a woman, with her torturers frequently referring to her as a "bitch" and "fresh meat," asking themselves macabre quasi-scientific questions on the effects of their torture on her "sex."

Importantly, part of the reason Paulina was tortured was that her attackers wanted to know the identity of an anti-dictatorship activist that she knew—who, it turns out, was Gerardo. Despite her extreme suffering, Paulina never gave up Gerardo's name, showing her in a small but vital way to be more powerful than her torturers. Accordingly, as the audience gradually learns more about what happened to Paulina, she stakes the claim to be the strongest of the three characters. She has been through far more than either of them and does not display the meekness of Gerardo or the likely immorality of Roberto. This suggests that power is not just about its physical manifestation; Dorfman seems to say that people can have power in different ways, and that Paulina's resistance through mental toughness is a bold example of strength.

As part of her efforts to take control over her situation, Paulina uses characteristically male techniques of intimidation to try to address the injustices she has faced. But by having Paulina use these methods, Dorfman shines fresh light on how violent they are and, more importantly, reminds the audience that when these methods are employed it is usually by men. Paulina knows she doesn't have the physical strength to overpower Roberto or, indeed, Gerardo, who does not approve of her plan to interrogate Roberto. Accordingly, she decides to retrieve a **gun** from a drawer and uses that to exert her dominance over the other two characters. The gun—a phallic symbol—allows Paulina to reverse the usual power dynamic and dictate the course of events. But it also mimics the tactics under which she was kidnapped and by which many people were made to suffer under the dictatorship. She further mimics her torturer by putting on a man's voice and speaking to Roberto in derogatory terms.

Her treatment of Roberto generally echoes the way that she herself was treated (minus the actual torture and rape). He is held captive against his will, as she was. In a particularly important moment, Paulina gags Roberto by taking off her underwear and stuffing it into his mouth. This is a clear gesture of female empowerment, in which Paulina uses an item loaded

with sexual suggestion as a way of enforcing her dominance over her captive. It is clear, then, that Paulina's uses behaviour usually disassociated from her as a woman to take control of her situation.

However, that does not necessarily mean that the play advocates her decision to do so. The overall point that Dorfman seems to make is that there is no other real strategy available to her—either she has to take back control by mirroring the techniques of her male abusers, or she has to resign herself to never finding justice. The play, then, suggests not that her actions are "right" but that they are, given the circumstances of her life, entirely understandable.

CIVILIZATION AND VIOLENCE

Death and the Maiden seeks to highlight the way in which the threat of, and capacity for, violence lurks beneath the surface of civilization. It asks the viewer to notice the inherent instability of society's culture and civility and provokes them to think about their own capacity for violence. In doing so, the play functions as a kind of warning—a portent of mankind's tragic ability to revert to violence and moral depravity.

Though Paulina, Gerardo, and Roberto live in a world full of culture and civility, the audience is given the impression that these are a thin veneer over the world, masking the violent side of mankind's nature. The country that the characters live in has just transitioned from dictatorship to democracy, a supposedly more civil and just form of society. But it's clear that this newfound stability is precarious, perhaps best evidenced by Gerardo's initial hesitation to answer a knock at the door late at night.

Despite the extremely tense main scenario of the play—Paulina's entrapment of Roberto in order to make him confess to his former crimes—the three characters maintain a nervously poised peace between them. The audience witnesses no real violence, with Paulina's gun only going off one time and that being accidental. But it's made clear over the course of the play just how brutal—and recent—the actions of the previous regime are. By demonstrating the precariousness of the relative peace in which the play takes place, Dorfman shows how society depends upon a difficult, delicate balancing act. To further reinforce this idea Dorfman uses classical music and the play's closing concert hall scene to show that the two worlds—society at its most brutal and society at its most civil—are not as far apart as people think. **Schubert** is considered one of the greatest artists to ever live—but what use is his art, Dorfman asks, if society descends into violence.

Roberto's confession, in which he chronicles his mutation from caring doctor to callous torturer, becomes all the more important in light of the above—whether, in fact, it is real or not. Even in the unlikely event that he *isn't* Paulina's abuser, the testimony that he recounts on tape in front of the audience is the true experience as lived by Paulina (and undoubtedly countless others). Making the audience listen to it, then, is to make them bear witness to its horrors and confront the violent capacity that lurks underneath society's surface of civility. It's worth noting here that Dorfman used real accounts from people who suffered under the Pinochet regime in Chile as inspiration and material for the Paulina's horrific experiences.

Between Paulina's retellings and Roberto's confession, the audience is given an unflinching account of mankind at its violent worst. Most important to this account is the way it details one person's transition from being a civilized member of society to a depraved abuser who gains pleasure from another's suffering. Whoever raped and tortured Paulina was a doctor; doctors are meant to care for people and represent mankind at its most caring and civilized. This is exemplified by a line from the Hippocratic oath, often taken by new doctors at the start of their careers: "I will remember that I remain a member of society, with special obligations to all my fellow human beings." But the doctor in Paulina's case abuses his authority, looking after his "patients" only as far as to make sure the torturers don't accidentally kill them and miss out on any useful information. Roberto's "confession," spoken partly in tandem with Paulina as a way of emphasizing the truth of the account, if not confirming the guilt of Roberto, details the "brutalisation" that the doctor figure underwent as "the mask of virtue" gave way to opportune sexual tyranny: "My curiosity was partly morbid, partly scientific. How much can this woman take? More than the other one? How's her sex? Does her sex dry up when you put the current through her?"

For the audience, any sense of horror at the gruesome details is equaled only by the terrifying fact that, though they are hearing this in the civilized setting of a theatre, the account has the ring of truth to it when considered in the context of mankind's most despairing moments. The descent from civility into cruelty, for example, is a fair way to describe much of what happened to Jewish people at the hands of the Nazis in World War II (among many other examples). Dorfman's play, then, gives a credible account of how civility and community can easily give way to depravity and violence, imploring the audience to consider how that might happen and, moreover, the role individuals have to play in those wider societal shifts.

The shock of *Death and the Maiden* is not in the nature of the violence gestured to within; it's in how plausibly real it all seems. The play's closing scene thus takes on great importance for the overall message: as a **large mirror** descends from the rafters, the audience members are asked to take a good look at themselves and turn the play's question inwardly—to investigate their own capacity for violence.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE SEA

The sea is a background presence in *Death and the Maiden*, overlooked by Paulina and Gerardo's beach house. It functions in subtle and various ways. First of all, it represents unknowability—and, indeed, big questions hang over the play: will the country be able to move on from the atrocities of the past; will Paulina ever truly recover from her trauma; and, crucially, is Roberto the same man that raped and tortured her? Paulina frequently looks out to sea, especially when she is recounting her past. In this light, then, the sea also represents her memory, both in the way her memories function in the depths of her unconscious and in the ultimate irretrievability of the past. The sea as a constant background also gestures towards greater expanses of time, suggesting that though the country's wounds—and Paulina's—may never be healed, they will, over time, come to be forgotten.

SCHUBERT'S "DEATH AND THE MAIDEN"

Classical composer Franz Schubert is mentioned throughout the play. In particular, his quartet "Death and the Maiden" crop up frequently. In general terms, classical music is supposed to be evidence of mankind's refinement and elevation above the cruelty of the animal kingdom. It conjures thoughts of education, skill and sensitivity. This, of course, is markedly contrasted with the horrific violence described in the play. Furthermore, the way in which Paulina's rapist would play this string quartet during the attacks represents a gruesome depravity, in which something that is supposed to bring sensory enjoyment becomes a marker of extreme terror. That's why, since her rape, Schubert's music has made Paulina physically ill—even though he was once her favorite composer. Paulina plays Schubert once she has Roberto tied up, in an attempt to reclaim his music—and, accordingly, a part of herself—from her attacker.

The actual content of the quartet itself also carries specific symbolism. "Death and the Maiden" is recurring motif in Renaissance art, usually depicting a young woman being seized by a personification of death (this can also be traced back to medieval images of the "dance of death"). These images have a subtext of eroticism, and the presence of Schubert's quartet thus gestures to the macabre intimacy of Paulina's rape. Her doctor, then, represents a kind of death figure—though he has not killed her, he has certainly killed *a part* of her character.

THE GUN

Paulina becomes the most powerful figure in the play with the simple fact that she is holding a gun and the other two men are not. The gun allows her to take control of a situation in which she could otherwise be physically overpowered. Gerardo pleads with her to put it down, arguing that only then can a true dialogue begin—but she believes that as soon as she puts down the gun any dialogue will end. A typically male item, the gun is also a phallic symbol, an extension of a (usually) male capacity for violence and desire for sexual dominance. Paulina's use of the gun, then, is a further expression of her desire to assert a sense of control over the life and narrative.

THE MIRROR

Though the play for the most part sticks to strict realist principles, with believable dialogue and a unity of time and place, Dorfmann completely disrupts this stability at the play's conclusion. His stage directions give instructions for a giant mirror to be lowered down from the theater ceiling in order to reflect the audience members' own images back at them. This expressionistic device thus asks them to question how they relate to what they have just seen, provoking them to consider how they would react in the characters' situations. More widely, the mirror gestures towards an idea of collective responsibility—that everyone in society has a part to play in how society takes shape.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *Death and the Maiden* published in 1991.

Act 1, Scene 1 Quotes

❝ GERARDO: If I were to accept, I must know I can count on you, that you don't feel . . . if you were to have a relapse, it could leave me . . .

PAULINA: Vulnerable, yes, it could leave you vulnerable. Stripped. You'd have to take care of me all over again.

GERARDO: That's unfair.

Brief pause.

Are you criticizing me because I take care of you?

PAULINA: And that's what you told the president, that your wife might have problems with . . .

Pause.

GERARDO: He doesn't know. Nobody knows. Not even your mother knows.

Related Characters: Paulina Salas, Gerardo Escobar (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

This is a quote from a discussion between Gerardo and Paulina about whether Gerardo should accept the president's offer to head up a new commission that will investigate human rights abuses under the previous military dictatorship. It's significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, Gerardo shows obvious discomfort in talking about what happened to Paulina under the dictatorship (she was raped and tortured). This recurs throughout the play, showing a weakness on Gerardo's part in facing up to the horrors of what happened to his wife. He is conflicted: part of him is thinking about his career, another about the wellbeing of his wife. Secondly, this quote shows that Paulina has had some kind of breakdown in the past; Gerardo seems as concerned about the embarrassment a "relapse" might cause him as the damage it would do Paulina. The whole conversation takes place under disingenuous circumstances: though Gerardo has framed this discussion as his request for Paulina's permission for him to accept the job, he has already said yes.

PAULINA: Find out what happened. Find out everything. Promise me that you'll find everything that . . .—

GERARDO: Everything. Everything we can. We'll go as far as we . . . *(Pause.)* As we're . . .

PAULINA: Allowed.

GERARDO: Limited, let's say we're limited. But there is so much we can do. . . . We'll publish our conclusions. There will be an official report. What happened will be established objectively, so no one will ever be able to deny it, so that our country will never again live through the excesses that . . .

PAULINA: And then?

GERARDO is silent.

You hear the relatives of the victims, you denounce the crimes, what happens to the criminals?

GERARDO: That depends on the judges. The courts receive a copy of the evidence and the judges proceed from there to—

PAULINA: The judges? The same judges who never intervened to save one life in seventeen years of dictatorship? Who never accepted a single habeas corpus ever? Judge Peralta who told that poor woman who had come to ask for her missing husband that the man had probably grown tired of her and run off with some other woman? That judge? What did you call him? A judge? A judge?

As she speaks, PAULINA begins to laugh softly but with increasing hysteria.

Related Characters: Paulina Salas, Gerardo Escobar (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

This is part of the conversation in which Paulina and Gerardo discuss his possible role as the head of the commission looking into human rights abuse under the military dictatorship. It's a fast-moving debate that demonstrates just how fraught and important the subject is, especially to Paulina. She clearly doubts the ability of the commission to provide justice, given that it will only investigate cases of people who died and, crucially, has no powers of prosecution. Any chance of prosecution depends on the actions of the judges, who have shown themselves to be unwilling to take action. Gerardo is trying to advocate for the commission, arguing that it will still represent a part of the healing process both for Paulina and the country more generally. For Paulina, merely paying witness to the terrible crimes of the previous regime is understandably not enough. The audience, too, must consider whether these

crimes should be punished or if it is pragmatic to record them and try to move on. Paulina's frenzied laughter at the end speaks to her fragile mental state as she wrestles with the trauma of what happened to her and the possibility that she may never find justice.

Act 1, Scene 2 Quotes

GERARDO: Oh, it's you. God, you scared the shit out of me.

ROBERTO: I'm really so sorry for this—intrusion. I thought you'd still be up celebrating.

GERARDO: You must excuse my . . . — do come in.

ROBERTO enters the house.

It's just that we still haven't got used to it.

ROBERTO: Used to it?

GERARDO: To democracy. That someone knocks on your door at midnight and it's a friend and not . . . —

Related Characters: Roberto Miranda, Gerardo Escobar (speaker), Paulina Salas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

This is the moment when Roberto unexpectedly arrives at Paulina and Gerardo's beach house. He has come, he says, to offer his congratulations to Gerardo for his new appointment. Paulina listens to the entire conversation from the terrace, clearly agitated by something (which turns out to be her recognition of Roberto's voice as that of her rapist). This exchange gives a sense of the threat of violence that runs throughout the play which mirrors the wider sense that the country's democracy and peace are fledgling and by no means guaranteed. The implication of Gerardo's comment is that a late-night knock at the door would usually be an ominous occurrence, and probably mean grave danger. It's also worth noting the jovial, ingratiating tone that Roberto tries to strike with Gerardo throughout—if Roberto is indeed Paulina's rapist, this might be an attempt to protect himself future punishment, or an effort to discredit Paulina's testimony against him.

ROBERTO: No, I am telling you, and this is said straight from the heart, this Commission is going to help us close an exceptionally painful chapter in our history, and here I am, alone this weekend, we've all got to help out—it may be a teensy-weensy gesture but—

GERARDO: Tomorrow would have been fine.

ROBERTO: Tomorrow? You manage to get to your car—no spare. Then you have to set out and find me. No, my friend,—and then I thought I might as well offer to go fix it with you tomorrow with my jack—which reminds me— what happened to your jack, did you find out what—

GERARDO: My wife loaned it to her mother.

ROBERTO: To her mother?

GERARDO: You know women. . . .

ROBERTO *(laughing)*: All too well. The last mystery. We are going to explore all the frontiers, my friend, and we will still have that unpredictable female soul. You know what Nietzsche once wrote—at least I think it was Nietzsche? That we can never entirely possess that female soul. Or maybe it wasn't him. Though you can be sure that old Nietzsche would have if he'd found himself on a weekend road without a jack.

Related Characters: Roberto Miranda, Gerardo Escobar (speaker), Paulina Salas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes as Roberto stands at Gerardo and Paulina's door. Roberto is very keen to ingratiate himself with Gerardo and to appear approving of Gerardo's new commission. But the most important aspect of this quote is the way it reflects something that the two men have in common: casual misogyny. They bond over a shared belief of women as stupid; this isn't explicitly stated but is implied by Gerardo's comment about "knowing women." Roberto's reply is especially significant. Firstly, it betrays an attitude that believes women are fundamentally different from men, that they are somehow unknowable and mysterious. His notion that the female soul can't be fully possessed contains the supposition that it is okay to "possess" women—that they belong to men. Most tellingly, Roberto's reference to Nietzsche is part of the evidence that stacks up against him later in the play, when Paulina tells Gerardo that her rapist would often quote Nietzsche.

Act 1, Scene 3 Quotes

❝ *We see her dragging something in, which resembles a body but we can't be sure. As the scene continues, it can be seen that it is a body. She moves a chair and hoists the body onto it, ties it to the chair. She goes into the spare room, returns with what seems to be Roberto's jacket, takes a set of car keys*

from it. She starts to leave the house. Stops. Turns back to look at the body which is now clearly that of Roberto. She takes off her panties, stuffs it into Roberto's mouth.

Related Characters: Roberto Miranda, Paulina Salas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

These are stage directions in a short scene that takes place after Gerardo has insisted that Roberto stay the night. They show Paulina taking violent control of her situation. She has just knocked Roberto unconscious and now ties him up, hostage-style, to a chair. Her choice of action mirrors the violence of extra-judicial vengeance and is comparable to her own abduction. She acts this way because she does not believe that Gerardo's commission will offer her any semblance of justice; furthermore, she is certain that Roberto is the doctor who raped and tortured her. Using her own underwear as a gag is a symbol of her empowerment, specifically using an object associated with sex—and therefore, her rape—as a means of imposing control. It's up to the audience to decide if her actions are justified.

Act 1, Scene 4 Quotes

❝ PAULINA: But here I am chatting away when I'm supposed to make breakfast, aren't I, a nice breakfast? Now you like—let's see, ham sandwiches, wasn't it? Ham sandwiches with mayonnaise. We haven't got mayonnaise, but we do have ham. Gerardo also likes ham. I'll get to know your other tastes. Sorry about the mayonnaise. I hope you don't mind that this must remain, for the moment, a monologue. You'll have your say, Doctor, you can be sure of that. I just don't want to remove this— gag, you call it, don't you?—at least not till Gerardo wakes up.

Related Characters: Paulina Salas (speaker), Roberto Miranda, Gerardo Escobar

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 20-21

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of this scene, Roberto regains consciousness to find himself tied up and gagged. Paulina is in mid-flow, talking about her life, suggesting that holding Roberto hostage is offering her, if not catharsis, an opportunity to speak about things she normally holds deep within. Her discussion about sandwiches is a play on the idea of women as domestic servants whose role is to provide for the superior men. There is a sense that she is enjoying her newfound, fleeting power, drawing satisfaction that she has reversed the situation that caused her such trauma. Her mention of a "nice breakfast" is a direct quote from the words Gerardo said as he got into bed after inviting Roberto in to stay.

❝ PAULINA: D'you know how long it's been since I last listened to this quartet? If it's on the radio, I turn it off, I even try not to go out much, though Gerardo has all these social events he's got to attend and if they ever name him minister we're going to live running around shaking hands and smiling at perfect strangers, but I always pray they won't put on Schubert. One night we were dining with— they were extremely important people, and our hostess happened to put Schubert on, a piano sonata, and I thought, do I switch it off or do I leave, but my body decided for me, I felt extremely ill right then and there and Gerardo had to take me home, so we left them there listening to Schubert and nobody knew what had made me ill, so I pray they won't play that anywhere I go, any Schubert at all, strange isn't it, when he used to be, and I would say, yes I really would say, he's still my favorite composer, such a sad, noble sense of life. But I always promised myself a time would come to recover him, bring him back from the grave so to speak, and just sitting here listening to him with you I know that I was right, that I'm—so many things that are going to change from now on, right? To think I was on the verge of throwing my whole Schubert collection out, crazy!

(raising her voice, to Gerardo)

Isn't this quartet marvellous, my love?

[…]

The real real truth is that you look slightly bored.

Related Characters: Paulina Salas (speaker), Roberto Miranda, Gerardo Escobar

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes just before Gerardo wakes up to find Roberto tied up in the living and Paulina holding the gun. It represents the first mention of Schubert in the play—apart from the title itself—and gives a sense of the strange ways that trauma can affect an individual. Though the audience doesn't yet have full details of what happened to Paulina, she is talking about the way her rapist would play this particular Schubert quartet during his attacks. This clearly had a profound impact on her that created a devastating link between the memory, the trauma, and her senses. Since her attacks, hearing any Schubert at all—once her favorite composer—makes the trauma nauseously present.

PAULINA: It's his voice. I recognized it as soon as he came in here last night. The way he laughs. Certain phrases he uses.

GERARDO: But that's not . . .

PAULINA: It may be a teensy-weensy thing, but it's enough for me. During all these years not an hour has passed that I haven't heard it, that same voice, next to me, next to my ear, that voice mixed with saliva, you think I'd forget a voice like his?

(Imitating the voice of Roberto, then of a man)

"Give her a bit more. This bitch can take a bit more. Give it to her."

"You sure, Doctor? What if the cunt dies on us?"

"She's not even near fainting. Give it to her, up another notch."

Related Characters: Paulina Salas, Gerardo Escobar (speaker), Roberto Miranda

Related Themes:

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

Gerardo finds it difficult to believe that Roberto is the man Paulina thinks he is. Here, Paulina gives her reasoning for why she is so sure that Roberto is the man that raped and tortured her. She was blindfolded throughout her terrible experience, and states that this gave her a heightened awareness of her other senses. Accordingly, the voice of the doctor is burnt into her psyche, making it instantly recognizable. The main phrase that Paulina is referring to is Roberto's use of "real real truth," which occurs throughout the play. Her quotation and impersonation of her attacker gives a sense of the way in which she was brutally objectified, considered to be nothing more than a "bitch" and a "cunt"—not an equal human being. Her attacker's words show mankind's capacity for acts of depravity, which depend on a mental distancing from the people being made to suffer—something which is all the more harrowing for its plausibility.

Also worth noting is the way the usually dignified and honorable role of a doctor is inverted here, his medical expertise being used not to maximize health, but suffering.

GERARDO: Paulina, I'm asking you to please give me that gun.

PAULINA: No.

GERARDO: While you point it at me, there is no possible dialogue.

PAULINA: On the contrary, as soon as I stop pointing it at you, all dialogue will automatically terminate. If I put it down you'll use your strength to win the argument.

[...]

GERARDO: You can't do this.

PAULINA: When are you going to stop telling me what I can and can't do. "You can't do this, you can do that, you can't do this." I did it.

Related Characters: Paulina Salas, Gerardo Escobar (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

Paulina's decision to put Roberto on trial is entirely dependent on the unlikely opportunity of him ending up at her house by chance. Here, Gerado pleads with her to put down the gun; but she recognizes that it is the sole source

of the power that gives her control over the situation. Contrary to Gerardo's assertion, the violent threat paradoxically enables her ability to confront both her attack and her (alleged) attacker. She knows that Gerardo will overpower her if she puts the gun down and therefore refuses his pleas. More generally, it gives her a chance to make him listen to her, a way of resisting the way in which he usually orders her around. The gun itself is a characteristically phallic symbol, meaning Paulina has to use a form of violent threat more typically male than female in order to exert her control.

GERARDO: Please, Paulina, could we start being reasonable, start acting as if—

PAULINA: You be reasonable. They never did anything to you.

GERARDO: They did things, of course they did things—but we're not competing for some horror prize here, damn it— let's try and be reasonable. Even if this man was the doctor of those terrible events—he isn't, there's no reason why he should be, but let's say he was—even in that case, what right do you have to bind him like this, baby, look at what you're doing, Paulina, think of the consequences of—

Related Characters: Paulina Salas, Gerardo Escobar (speaker), Roberto Miranda

Related Themes:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

As Gerardo tries to convince Paulina that she is acting irrationally, this conversation reveals telling aspects to both of their characters. Gerardo frequently characterizes Paulina as unreasonable, meant less in the sense of being "unfair" and more closely tied to concept of insanity. Roberto, too, taints Paulina with this accusation throughout the play. These moments point to the undercurrent of misogyny in this world. Whether Paulina is insane or not, in either case her actions are understandable: either she is taking advantage of a rare opportunity for justice or she is acting under the pressures of severe trauma. Gerardo's experiences can't compare with what Paulina has been through, as he realizes mid-sentence.

Act 2, Scene 1 Quotes

PAULINA: You don't know anything about Gerardo, do you?—I mean you never knew a thing. I never breathed his name. Your—your colleagues, they'd ask me, of course. "With that twat, little lady, don't tell you haven't got someone to fuck you, huh? Come on, just tell us who's been fucking you, little lady." But I never gave them Gerardo's name. Strange how things turn out. If I had mentioned Gerardo, he wouldn't have been named to any Investigating Commission, but would have been one of the names that some other lawyer was investigating. And I would be in front of that Commission to tell them how I met Gerardo—in fact I met him just after the military coup, helping people seek asylum in embassies—saving lives with Gerardo, smuggling people out of the country so they wouldn't be killed. I was wild and fearless, willing to do anything, I can't believe that I didn't have an ounce of fear in my whole body at that time.

Related Characters: Paulina Salas (speaker), Roberto Miranda, Gerardo Escobar

Related Themes:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote Paulina continues her monologue, speaking to the restrained Roberto. Here, Dorfman contrasts two very different types of power: physical and mental. Paulina couldn't do anything physical to stop her torture and rape, but she had the strength of mind to resist her abusers attempts to make her give up useful information. In a sense, then, this represents a victory for her and contributes to an overall impression in the play that she is the strongest of the three characters. This also provides more backstory to Paulina and Gerardo, telling the reader that Gerardo was once brave too. Though he doesn't act like it, Gerardo owes his life to Paulina's mental fortitude.

ROBERTO: *(coughs, then in a rough, hoarse voice):* Water.

GERARDO: What?

PAULINA: He wants water, Gerardo.

Gerardo rushes to fill a glass with water and brings it to Roberto, giving it to him to drink. Roberto drinks it down noisily.

PAULINA: Nothing like good fresh water, eh, Doctor? Beats drinking your own piss.

ROBERTO: Escobar. This is inexcusable. I will never forgive you as long as I live.

Related Characters: Paulina Salas, Roberto Miranda, Gerardo Escobar (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

In this excerpt, Roberto's gag is removed for the first time since Paulina tied him up. Her comment about "piss" strongly implies that this was something she was made to do during her imprisonment, adding further detail to the suffering she had to undergo. Roberto is momentarily reduced to his basic human needs and stripped of his cultured manner. The most important aspect of this quote is to notice Roberto's instinctual behavior on being given back his capacity to speak. Though Paulina is clearly his captor, his first thought is to try and reason with Gerardo—the man, not the woman. This another subtle example of how Roberto and Gerardo generally demonstrate a misogynistic attitude and don't give importance to Paulina's thoughts or actions.

GERARDO: But then, what are you going to do to him? With him? You're going to—what? What are you going to—and all this because fifteen years ago someone . . .

PAULINA: Someone what? . . . what did they do to me, Gerardo. Say it.

Brief pause.

You never wanted to say it. Say it now. They . . .

GERARDO: If you didn't say it, how was I going to?

PAULINA: Say it now.

GERARDO: I only know what you told me that first night, when . . .

PAULINA: They . . .

GERARDO: They . . .

PAULINA: Tell me, tell me.

GERARDO: They— tortured you. Now you say it.

PAULINA: They tortured me. And what else? What else did they do to me, Gerardo?

Gerardo goes to her, takes her in his arms.

GERARDO *(whispering to her):* They raped you.

PAULINA: How many times?

GERARDO: More than once.

PAULINA: How many times?

GERARDO: You never said. I didn't count, you said.

PAULINA: It's not true.

GERARDO: What's not true?

PAULINA: That I didn't count. I always kept count. I know how many times.

Related Characters: Gerardo Escobar, Paulina Salas (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 34-35

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes as Gerardo tries once more to "reason" with Paulina and make her free Roberto (his instinct is to trust Roberto's innocence over Paulina's certainty). It shows that Paulina's rape was fifteen years ago, emphasizing the severity of her trauma; no matter what time goes by, her suffering remains present in her everyday life. Gerardo, for his part, thinks that fifteen years should be ample time for someone to get over the tremendous suffering of rape and torture. The quote also makes it clear that Gerardo has difficulty in facing up to the stark facts of what happened to

Paulina. He can barely bring himself to say the word "rape," an action which is important to Paulina because it reduces his ability to mentally distance himself from its terror. The discussion about how many times she was raped is evidence of the way in which her mind was utterly and painfully alert to what was happening to her, contributing to the idea of her suffering as an extreme violence brought to bear upon her senses.

PAULINA: Oh, my little man, you do fall for every trick in the book, don't you? Gerardo, you have my promise, as solemn as it can be, that this private trial will not affect you or the Commission. Do you really think I'd do anything to trouble the Commission, stop you from finding out where the bodies of the missing prisoners are, how people were executed, where they're buried. But the members of the Commission only deal with the dead, with those who can't speak. And I can speak—it's been years since I murmured even a word, I haven't opened my mouth to even whisper a breath of what I'm thinking, years living in terror of my own . . . but I'm not dead, I thought I was but I'm not and I can speak, damn it—so for God's sake let me have my say and you go ahead with your Commission and believe me when I tell you that none of this is going to be made public.

GERARDO: Even in that case—I have to resign no matter what, and the sooner, the better.

Related Characters: Paulina Salas, Gerardo Escobar (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Paulina outlines the reasons why she feels Gerardo's commission will not provide her with a sufficient sense of justice about what happened to her. The first reason is that, by virtue of being alive, she is automatically discounted from having her case investigated (even if that was something she was willing to. go through, which is not certain). The commission, then, is more about creating a public record than administering justice. While this kind of public service is an important one, especially given the way that people are made to "disappear" under authoritarian dictatorships, it offers no retribution or sense of closure for victims. In essence, it's an attempt to take a pragmatic approach to providing a way for a country to move forward past its trauma—but as Paulina's attitude demonstrates, it's very hard to make the case that, where crimes have been committed, those who have committed the crimes shouldn't be held to account in order to serve some greater good. The other important element to this quote is that it gives a good insight to Gerardo's priorities: he is fixated on what Paulina's actions mean, not for her, but for him and his career.

PAULINA:I would imagine pushing their head into a bucket of their own shit, or electricity, or when we would be making love and I could feel the possibility of an orgasm building, the very idea of currents going through my body would remind me and then—and then I had to fake it, fake it so you wouldn't know what I was thinking, so you wouldn't feel that it was your failure—oh Gerardo.

GERARDO: Oh, my love, my love.

PAULINA: So when I heard his voice, I thought the only thing 1want is to have him raped, have someone fuck him, that's what I thought, that he should know just once what it is to . . . And as I can't rape—I thought that it was a sentence that you would have to carry out.

GERARDO: Don't go on, Paulina.

Related Characters: Paulina Salas, Gerardo Escobar (speaker), Roberto Miranda

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

Here Paulina gives Gerardo an unflinching account of how her trauma has affected her. She admits to wanting to inflict the same suffering on her attackers that they did on her, with particular focus on the specific sensations caused by her torture and rape. Her wish for closure manifests as a desire to make her enemies experience her *exact* pain. The quote also demonstrates the way that rape as a sexual act has denied her the ability to enjoy consensual sex, providing further evidence of the many ways that such a catastrophic experience can continue to make an individual suffer. Gerardo finds this honesty very difficult to bear because it makes Paulina's suffering much more visceral.

Act 2, Scene 2 Quotes

GERARDO: Roberto, I want to be honest with you. There is only one way to save your life . . .

Brief pause.

I think we have to—indulge her.

ROBERTO: Indulge her?

GERARDO: Humor her, placate her, so she feels that we—that you, are willing to cooperate . . .

Related Characters: Roberto Miranda, Gerardo Escobar (speaker), Paulina Salas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

This takes place while Gerardo is spoon-feeding soup to Roberto as Paulina watches on from the terrace. It shows that, despite Paulina's conviction that Roberto is her rapist, and the reasoning for this that she has given to Gerardo, Gerardo still goes with his instinctual belief that Roberto is innocent. In fact, they have a certain kind of male camaraderie going on. Gerardo's attitude towards Paulina is inherently dismissive and is at odds with his earlier expressions of sympathy towards her. Finally, it's telling that he uses the word "indulge," implying that to give her a sense of justice would be "enjoyable" to her, rather than urgent and necessary. Moreover, his priority in doing so is to free Roberto—not to ascertain whether Roberto is Paulina's rapist or not.

ROBERTO: Playing roles, she's bad, you're good, to see if you can get me to confess that way. And once I've confessed, you're the one, not her, you're the one who's going to kill me, it's what any man would do, any real man, if they'd raped his wife, it's what I would do if somebody had raped my wife. Cut your balls off. So tell me: you think I'm that fucking doctor, don't you?

Pause. Gerardo stands up.

Where are you going?

GERARDO: I'm going to get the gun and blow your fucking brains out. (*Brief pause. Angrier and angrier)* But first you sonuvabitch I'm going to follow your advice and cut off your balls, you fascist. That's what a real man does, doesn't he. Real macho men blow people's brains out and fuck women when they're tied up on cots. Not like me. I'm a stupid, yellow, soft faggot because I defend the son of a bitch who screwed my wife and destroyed her life. How many times did you screw her? How many times, you bastard?

Related Characters: Roberto Miranda, Gerardo Escobar (speaker), Paulina Salas

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes just after Gerardo's suggestion that he and Roberto should "collaborate" on falsifying Roberto's confession in order to secure his release (and, presumably, to help Gerardo keep his new post on the commission). Roberto hits Gerardo where it hurts, attacking his sense of masculinity and suggesting that Paulina is dominant over him. This then brings about the one true display of anger in Gerardo—notably absent in his discussions with Paulina—and leads him to momentarily desire killing Gerardo. It's not convincing, however, and is quickly deflated when Roberto insists that he was only "joking." The quote speaks to a specific idea of masculinity that is grounded in violence and the protection of status.

Act 3, Scene 1 Quotes

GERARDO: People can die from an excessive dose of the truth, you know.

Related Characters: Gerardo Escobar (speaker), Paulina

Salas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes as Paulina probes Gerardo on the affair that he had whilst she was being raped and tortured. Just as she wants what happened to her to be out in the open, with the view to hopefully assisting her desire for justice, so too does she want to put Gerardo's wrongdoings out in the open in order to make him take responsibility for his actions. Gerardo's response suggests that too much truth is damaging, a notion that is fundamentally at odds with the express purpose of his commission—to expose the brutal truth of what happened under the military dictatorship. Accordingly, this becomes further evidence of Gerardo's meekness and the suspicion that his appeals to justice are not as principled as he would make them out to be.

ROBERTO: A kind of—brutalization took over my life, I began to really truly like what I was doing. It became a game. My curiosity was partly morbid, partly scientific. How much can this woman take? More than the other one? How's her sex? Does her sex dry up when you put the current through her? Can she have an orgasm under those circumstances? She is entirely in your power, you can carry out all your fantasies, you can do what you want with her.

Related Characters: Roberto Miranda (speaker), Paulina Salas

Page Number: 59

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is part of Roberto's confession, which the audience never knows for sure is genuine. In fact, the last word Roberto has on the matter is to deny that what he says here is true. Even if it's not, this quote demonstrates the way in which an individual can descend from civility into violence: the process of "brutalization." Roberto describes how his empathy was eroded and replaced by the opportune temptation to fulfil otherwise unfulfillable sexual desires. His brutalization thus grotesquely morphed his medical sensibilities, twisting them from a desire to help to a desire to experiment. This is a grim but all-too-real assessment of mankind's latent capacity for violence.

Act 3, Scene 2 Quotes

Gerardo and Paulina sit in their seats. Roberto goes to another seat, always looking at Paulina. Applause is heard when the imaginary musicians come on. The instruments are tested and tuned. Then Death and the Maiden *begins. Gerardo looks at Paulina, who looks forward. He takes her hand and then also begins to look forward. After a few instants, she turns slowly and looks at Roberto. Their eyes interlock for a moment. Then she turns her head and faces tire stage and the mirror. The lights go down while the music plays and plays and plays.*

Related Characters: Roberto Miranda, Paulina Salas, Gerardo Escobar

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

This stage direction closes the play. By this stage, a giant mirror has been lowered down in front of the stage and reflects the audience's image back on itself, thus implying them to consider how individuals function within collective responsibility. As Gerardo and Paulina sit down for a concert of classical music, Roberto's appearance is ambiguous—Roberto might be real, or, given the "phantasmagoric" light upon him, could be a figment of Paulina's imagination and thus a manifestation of her ongoing trauma. The change of scene from the beach house to the concert hall foregrounds the delicate balance of civility in society that holds back a capacity for extreme violence. Dorfman's intentions, then, are to force the audience to think deeply about the play, and acknowledge that the events contain within are less "theatrical" then their environment might suggest.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1, SCENE 1

The play is set in the "present" in a country that is "probably Chile" but could be any nation that has recently transitioned from dictatorship to democracy.

This sets up the play as being both local to Chile and universal, implying that its themes apply to other countries going through similar changes.

Paulina Salas, a woman who is about forty. years old, sits on the terrace of her secluded coastal home, which she shares with her husband, lawyer Gerardo Escobar. On the dining table, dinner is laid out for two and going cold. A strong wind makes the curtains billow and there are sounds of the **sea**.

There is an eerie disquiet at the start of the play. The sea acts as a symbol of time—or more specifically, the great expanse of time that has witnessed mankind's entire history and what came before. Paulina was clearly expecting Gerardo to return earlier.

Paulina hears a car approach the house and seems agitated. She takes a **gun** out of a drawer, hides behind the curtain, and listens, hearing Gerardo expressing thanks to an unknown individual. She hides the gun as he comes in, surprised to find her hidden.

Paulina is clearly worried, perhaps having convinced herself that something bad must have happened to Gerardo to cause his lateness. This emphasizes the fragile calm in a country very new to democracy. The gun, of course, introduces an early threat of violence.

Gerardo explains to Paulina he was talking to the "great guy" who stopped to help him when his car broke down. He shows her the nail which busted one of his tires and complains that Paulina had failed to fix the spare in the trunk of their car. They bicker about the spare and the car jack, which Paulina has loaned to her mother.

The act of kindness shown to Gerardo by a passing stranger suggests that this is a society becoming more civil, its individuals showing empathy to one another. But the nail on the road, in a more subtle way than the gun, also gestures towards potential violence. The nail could also be read as a phallic symbol, violating the tire in a way suggestive of what happened to Paulina.

Gerardo informs Paulina that he has invited "Doctor Miranda"—the good Samaritan who helped him on the road—over for dinner on Sunday. The topic of conversation moves to Gerardo's news that the president has asked him to head up a commission looking into abuses under the previous dictatorship. He tells Paulina that he wanted to ask her permission before accepting the offer.

Gerardo's new job would make him a prominent member of the new government and would represent a significant career progression. As the audience soon finds out, his request for Paulina's permission is perhaps not as sincere as it seems.

Gerardo says he's worried about what would happen if Paulina were to have a "relapse" while he was running the commission. She seems annoyed, asking if that's what Gerardo told the president—he says that "nobody knows."

The use of the word "relapse" implies that Paulina has had some kind of breakdown previously. Throughout the play Paulina resents the idea put forward by both Gerardo and Roberto that she is mentally ill.

Paulina asks if the commission will only investigate the "most serious cases"—meaning the ones that ended in death. Gerardo says yes, adding that he doesn't like to talk about "it." But, he continues, if he's heading the commission they'll have to talk frequently about what happened under the dictatorship. He embraces Paulina, telling her that he loves her and that "it" still hurts him. She passionately gives her "yes" for him to take the job and implores him find out "everything."

Paulina is understandably frustrated by the idea that the commission will only introduce cases involving dead individuals. This means that atrocities involving rape and torture that did not result in death will be pushed aside. The way they talk around "it"—Paulina's ordeal—is indicative of Gerardo's attempts to avoid hearing the details about what happened to her.

Gerardo tries to reassure Paulina about the commission, saying it will do as much as it can to shine a light on the horrors of the previous regime. He says what happens after that depends on the judges. Paulina dismisses the judges' integrity, seeming increasingly hysterical. Gerado calms her down: "Silly. Silly girl, my baby."

The audience must here consider whether "shining a light" is a sufficient response to the human rights abuses that the characters refer to throughout the play. Evidently, the idea of justice is important to Paulina and she does not feel that it will be fully realized. Gerardo's way of calming down Paulina is patronizing.

Paulina asks if Gerardo has already said yes to the president. He says he didn't want to hurt her, but that yes, he took the job already.

Gerardo's request for Paulina's permission was entirely disingenuous. It was, then, a skewed and failed attempt to protect her state of mind by pretending to give her power of the situation.

ACT 1, SCENE 2

An hour later, a car approaches Paulina and Gerardo's beach house once more. Hearing a knock at the door, Gerardo goes to answer in his pajamas. He reassures Paulina, still in the bedroom, that he will "be careful."

Because the house they are staying in is so secluded, any car approaching instils fear in Gerardo and Paulina. It's also suggestive of the way terrible crimes under the old regime were often committed in secret. Many people in Chile under General Pinochet were "disappeared"—made to vanish without a trace.

Gerardo opens the door to find Roberto Miranda standing there. Roberto apologizes profusely for waking them up—he thought they'd be up celebrating. Gerardo apologizes for his attire and says they haven't gotten used to democracy yet, "that someone knocks on your door at midnight and it's a friend and not…" Paulina edges out to the terrace to hear the conversation, taking care not to be seen.

Gerardo and Roberto's exchange is civil and friendly. Paulina, however, once again shows her intense distrust of newcomers. Gerardo's comment again points towards the fragility of newfound peace under the fledgling democracy.

Roberto explains that he had been driving back to his beach house after helping Gerardo, listening to the news. Upon hearing the name of the lawyer chosen to head up the Investigating Commission, he had realized it was Gerardo and decided to come and offer his congratulations.

It's up to the audience if Roberto's story seems credible—arguably he could have waited until the morning to visit the house. If he is guilty of the crimes Paulina alleges, perhaps this early attempt to befriend Gerardo is a way of ensuring he is not punished in the future.

Roberto asks Gerardo if he would like to hear the "real real truth" about why he's come to visit. Roberto says he thought about how noble and important Gerardo's upcoming work will be, how it's going to "shut the door on the divisions and hatreds of the past" and "help us close an exceptionally painful chapter in our history." With this in mind, Roberto says he thought the least he could do was return Gerardo's spare tire to save him that inconvenience.

The phrase "real real truth" is an important part of the play. Paulina, listening in to the two men, recognizes the phrase as one used by her attacker. It's also a strange phrase—the two "reals" imply that there is a level of truth that is less real. This gestures toward an atmosphere of disinformation and propaganda under the previous dictatorship. Roberto's comments put forward the idea that a country has a kind of collective trauma when it goes through terrible times.

Gerardo thanks Roberto, and the two men laugh about how Paulina gave Gerardo's car jack to her mother. Gerardo says, "you know women." At this, Roberto quotes what he thinks is Nietzsche: "We can never entirely possess that female soul."

Gerardo and Roberto's comments belie the attitude that men are rational and women are not. Roberto's Nietzsche quote, while also raising the questionable prospect of possessing female souls, has important repercussions later in the play.

Roberto says there's no need for Gerardo to thank him. As a doctor, Roberto explains, he likes to help people. He says the "real real truth" is that Gerardo is "exactly what this country needs." They discuss the upcoming Commission. Roberto hopes that it uncovers the names of those who committed atrocities, but Gerardo says the names are to be kept secret.

Like the Nietzsche comment, Roberto's "real real truth" is one of the utterances that convinces Paulina of Roberto's identity. If Roberto is indeed the man who raped and tortured Paulina, it's possible that in this conversation he is trying to glean as much information as possible about the commission in order to best protect himself.

Roberto expresses the view that he's for "killing the whole bunch of them." Gerardo respectfully disagrees, saying that the death penalty never solved anything. Roberto insists that "there are people who simply don't deserve to be alive."

If Roberto is guilty of atrocities under the military dictatorship, the views he expresses here make it less likely for Gerardo to suspect him. His comment speaks to the complicated ethics of administering justice.

Gerardo explains to Roberto that one of the many problems the Commission will face is that the Army will try to stand in its way. They say, explains Gerardo, that the investigation is "an insult" and will open "old wounds." Both men agree that perhaps the shadowy figures who committed atrocities under the previous regime will form some kind of "mafia" or "secret brotherhood" that will keep themselves protected.

One of the great difficulties in a country trying to come to terms with horrors in its past is that many of the perpetrators are likely to still be living within its borders. Different views are expressed throughout the play as to how to deal with this morally difficult situation.

Gerardo tells Roberto "in confidence" that the president believes that there are "people who are ready to make statements, so long as their confidentiality is guaranteed." Gerardo believes that eventually "the names will pour out like **water**." Roberto says he wishes that were true.

Gerardo shouldn't really be telling these things to Roberto, a man he's only just met. The water imagery relates to the coastal setting.

Realizing the late hour, Roberto prepares to leave. Gerardo insists that he stay the night with them, refusing to take no for an answer. He says Paulina will cook them breakfast, which convinces Roberto to stay. Besides, says Roberto, the "real real truth" is that he is very tired. Paulina hurriedly returns to the bedroom.

Roberto once more uses his "catchphrase," further convincing Paulina of his identity. It's also notable that Gerardo simply expects Paulina to play the role of housewife and cook the two men breakfast in the morning.

Gerardo shows Roberto his room, apologizing that he can't offer him a toothbrush. Roberto dismisses him, saying a toothbrush is one of "two things you never share." They go to their respective bedrooms. As Gerardo explains to Paulina that they have a guest, she pretends to be half-asleep. "Tomorrow," Gerardo tells Paulina, "you can make us a nice breakfast."

Roberto's is another example of casual misogyny in the play, implying that women are objects that may or may not be shared at the whim of men. Gerardo's comment to Paulina is also misogynistic, falsely framing breakfast as something he is giving her permission to make.

ACT 1, SCENE 3

During the night, Paulina comes into the living room. She retrieves the **gun** again, as well as what appear to be "stockings." She stands by Roberto's bedroom, listening for a few moments.

Paulina's behavior is quite mystifying for the audience at this point. They know something is up with her but as yet don't know what it is.

Paulina enters Roberto's bedroom, and there is a "confusing muffled sound, followed by a sort of cry." She drags Roberto into the living room and ties him to a chair.

The sudden appearance of violence in the play is made shocking by the drawn-out and superficially civil conversation that has previously taken place between Gerardo and Roberto.

Paulina retrieves Roberto's car keys from the spare room. Before leaving the house, she takes off her underwear and stuffs it into Roberto's mouth. She goes outside and drives his car away. As the headlights momentarily fill the living room, Roberto is shown to be "totally unconscious."

Paulina's use of her underwear as a gag is partly because it's the closest thing she has to hand. But there is a deeper meaning: by gagging Roberto with her underwear, she reframes an object related to sexual desire as a way of exerting her own newfound control.

ACT 1, SCENE 4

Still before dawn, Roberto regains consciousness. Realizing he is tied up, he struggles desperately—and unsuccessfully—to free himself. Paulina sits in front of him with the **gun**. With a calm demeanor, she says: "Good morning, Doctor… Miranda, isn't it? Doctor Miranda."

The gun gives Paulina control over the situation and prevents her from being overpowered physically by either Roberto or Gerardo throughout the play. Her greeting suggests a certain familiarity between the two, which, at this point, Roberto does not—or pretends not to—share.

Paulina talks about a female friend she had at medical school who was also a "Miranda." She was a brilliant mind, Paulina explains, but there's no telling what became of her. Paulina mentions her own studies, saying she never qualified and that Roberto can probably guess why.

Though the audience doesn't know exactly what happened to Paulina yet, it's already clear that it was something of a horrific nature. This discussion —or monologue, more accurately—underlines the way Paulina's life has been disrupted by what happened to her.

Paulina explains that she was fortunate that she had Gerardo to turn to after she left university. She's heard that, now that the military isn't in charge, the university might be allowing people who were kicked out to reapply; she says she's considering doing so. She then apologizes to Roberto for "chatting away" when she's supposed to be making a "nice breakfast."

Dorfman contrasts the violent tension of the situation with the casual air that Paulina affects during her talking at—not with—Roberto. This "chatting away" serves to underscore who is in charge in this situation. Gerardo, for his part, is still asleep. Paulina's comment about breakfast recalls the earlier casual sexism of Roberto and Gerardo.

Paulina also apologizes to Roberto that "this must remain, for the moment, a monologue." She says he can have his say in good time, once Gerardo wakes up. Opening up her bedroom door, she tells Roberto that the "real real truth" is that he looks "slightly bored."

Paulina repeats Roberto's catchphrase back at him, attempting to make him realize that she knows who he really *is.*

Paulina takes out a cassette of **Schubert**'s string quartet "Death and the Maiden," which she found in Roberto's car. She puts it on. She hasn't listened to it for a while, she explains, because whenever she hears any Schubert it makes her feel "extremely ill." Schubert was her favorite composer and, Paulina goes on, she had always promised to herself that she would one day "recover him, bring him back from the grave so to speak."

Paulina's trauma has had a visceral, long-lasting effect on her. The sensory experiences during her suffering have greatly affected the function of her memory, causing her reaction to Schubert to be one of nausea rather than pleasure. This reversal mirrors the way rape takes an action that is meant to be enjoyable and transforms it into a sensory and psychological terror.

Paulina calls out to Gerardo, "Isn't this quartet marvelous, my love?" She says to Roberto that now she'll be able to listen to **Schubert** again, perhaps even attend a concert. She asks if he knows that Schubert was a homosexual, before noting that of course he does—he was the one who "kept repeating it over and over again" while playing the tape. She asks if the one she found in Roberto's car is the same tape, or whether he buys a new one each year to keep the sound pure.

Paulina's shout to Gerardo is mocking in tone, aping the way that people consume culture and perform their refinement. Evidently, by playing Schubert in the given situation, Paulina feels she is reclaiming a piece of herself.

Gerardo comes in, dozy from sleep. It takes him a moment to notice the scene in front of him. Astonished, he asks Paulina, "what the hell is going on" referring to the scene as a "kind of madness." He moves to help Roberto, but she threatens him with the **gun**. Paulina tells Gerardo that "it's him"—"the doctor who played **Schubert**." She recognizes his voice, she says. Gerardo says that she's "sick," reminding her that she was blindfolded during "those weeks" so couldn't possibly recognize Roberto.

Gerardo is understandably surprised by what he finds in the living room. Paulina uses the gun to make it very clear that she means business. As a phallic symbol, the gun also signals the reversal in power roles. The audience gets more information about what happened to Paulina; the fact that she was blindfolded explains why she has a heightened attention to other sensory input.

Paulina says she may be "sick" but she can still recognize a voice. She asks Roberto to confirm whether "when we lose one of our faculties, the others compensate." It's not just the voice she recognizes, continues Paulina, but his laugh and "certain phrases he uses." She tells Gerardo that not an hour has gone by when she hasn't heard that voice: "that same voice, next to me, next to my ear, that voice mixed with saliva."

Gerardo and Roberto frequently characterize Paulina as "sick" or "mad." Paulina expresses the disturbing intimacy involved in rape and demonstrates how heightened her other senses were when her sight was denied. The audience must judge the evidence stacking up against Roberto and ask whether it is sufficient to prove that Paulina is correct.

Paulina imitates Roberto's voice in conversation with another man, saying, "'Give her a bit more. This bitch can take a bit more.' 'You sure Doctor? What if the cunt dies on us?' 'She's not even near fainting. Give it to her, up another notch.'"

Paulina imitates the voice and phrases of those who abused her, demonstrating their entrenched sexism. Going "up another notch" is a reference to the amount of voltage her torturers were administering to her.

Gerardo pleads with Paulina to put down the **gun**, saying there is "no possible dialogue" while she points it at him. She says, "on the contrary, as soon as I stop pointing it at you, all dialogue will automatically terminate." He warns her of "serious consequences" and asks Roberto to forgive Paulina's behavior. She tells Gerardo not to "dare ask forgiveness from that piece of shit."

Paulina's control of the situation depends on her possession of the gun and, accordingly, her monopoly over any potential violence.

Gerardo asks Paulina to untie Roberto. When she insists that she won't, he moves towards Roberto. At this, Paulina fires the **gun**, surprised at the recoil. Roberto looks desperate. Gerardo tells Paulina to give him the gun, saying, "you can't do this." She replies: "When are you going to stop telling me what I can and can't do."

Here, Roberto genuinely fears for his life. Paulina has evidently not used a gun before, such is her surprise at the strength of the recoil. Paulina indicates that she is not going to let Gerardo tell her what to do, reversing their usual power dynamic.

Paulina suddenly remembers that that she has phoned a mechanic and tells Gerardo to get dressed to greet him. Gerardo pleads with her to "start being reasonable." She tells him to be reasonable: "they never did anything to you." Gerardo tries to argue that they did, before interrupting himself to say, "we're not competing for some horror prize here, damn it." Even if she's right about Roberto's identity, he continues, what "Right" does she have to treat him like this.

Again, Gerardo tries to paint Paulina as "unreasonable"— a mad woman. His comment about the "horror prize" is telling, as it becomes apparent through the play that Paulina's suffering under the dictatorship was much greater than his own. His question about "Right" is an attempt to appeal to higher ideals of justice, but this seems extremely remote to Paulina because the country does not have a judicial system she feels she can put her trust in.

The mechanics truck pulls up outside, prompting Paulina to close the curtains. Gerardo asks her if she's considered that he could call the police. She doubts he would do that and says that if he does she'll shoot Roberto before turning the **gun** on herself. He says she's "unrecognizable." Paulina tells Roberto to explain what he did to her to make her this "crazy," and says to Gerardo that she intends to put Roberto on trial "right here. Today." Or, she asks, "is your famous Investigating Commission going to do it?"

Paulina, essentially, intends to do what Gerardo's commission can't: put Roberto on trial. Having already fired the gun once, her threat of violence and suicide appears credible. Making Gerardo go with the mechanic to fetch his car also allows Paulina to have time alone with Roberto in the following scene.

ACT 2, SCENE 1

It's now midday. Roberto is still tied up. Paulina is talking to him, looking out at the **sea**, rocking gently in her chair. She is evidently part way through the story of what happened to her, speaking now of what happened when she was released from capture. She says she couldn't go back to her parents as they were so pro-military.

The sea (and the ocean) are often associated with the depths of the human psyche and here is no exception. The sea facilitates Paulina's recollections, and Roberto is forced to bear witness to her testimony. This allows Paulina to make him know what her suffering was truly like and is an attempt to break down the emotional detachment he must have felt if, as is alleged, he did rape and torture her.

Paulina breaks off to say how "bizarre" it is that she is telling Roberto these things as if he is her "confessor." There are things she's never told Gerardo, let alone her mother, she says. Roberto gestures to her. If she's hungry, says Paulina, he'll have to wait till Gerardo is back. She again impersonates a man's voice: "You hungry? You wanna eat? I'll give you something to eat, sweet cunt, I'll give you something big and filling so you can forget you're hungry."

Paulina frequently tries on the voices of her torturers. If Roberto is who she thinks he is, this mimicry is another way in which she demonstrates her temporary power over his life. Another interpretation of her impersonations is that they show the fragility of her mental state and/or the intense hold her traumatic memories have over her. The specific quotes are illustrative of the cruelty she suffered.

Paulina continues, talking about Gerardo. Roberto's colleagues, she says, wanted to know who was "fucking" her. She never gave up Gerardo's name; if she had, she points out, Gerardo would not be on the commission but would be one of the people they'd be trying to find out what happened to. She explains that during the dictatorship she and Gerardo smuggled people out of the country to safety.

Despite her terrible suffering, Paulina showed incredible mental resilience which represents a kind of psychological victory over her abusers. Her and Gerardo's previous work to help people escape shows the bravery that she and her husband once shared.

Gerardo arrives back at the house, prompting Paulina to pick up the **gun** again. She asks him whether the flat tire was easy to fix. He tells her to sit down and "really listen" to him. He says that if she forges and ignores evidence without giving Roberto a chance to defend himself she will be just as bad as the previous regime. Paulina counters that she intends to give Roberto that right, and that Gerardo will be able to act as his lawyer.

Gerardo tries to reason with Paulina by appealing to her sense of fairness and justice. She has already thought of that and, at this moment, has every intention of giving Roberto a fair trial, facilitated by Gerardo as his lawyer. Gerardo's point, sincere or not, is that she risks behaving in the same morally reprehensible way as the previous authorities.

Paulina removes the gag from Roberto and switches on a cassette recorder, telling him that everything he says will be on tape. Roberto coughs and begs for water. Gerardo gives him some which he gulps down thirstily. "Beats drinking your own piss," says Paulina.

Paulina wishes to record everything; this is a marked contrast to the way things were under the previous regime, during which people could be made to disappear with a trace. Her comment about drinking "piss" implies that this was something she was forced to do during her captivity.

Roberto addresses Gerardo, saying, "this is inexcusable. I will never forgive you as long as I live." Paulina checks the tape recorder is working and plays back Roberto's words. Roberto protests his innocence, saying he doesn't know Paulina and that she is "extremely ill, almost prototypically schizoid." He says that Gerardo, as a "defender of human rights," must untie him immediately.

Roberto's first thought on having his gag removed is to address who he feels is the true authority in the room: the man, Gerardo. As Gerardo has done previously, Roberto "diagnoses" Paulina as mentally ill.

Paulina points the **gun** at Roberto's head, asking, "who are you threatening?" She tells him that "in here, for now," she is in command. Roberto says he needs to go to the bathroom. She makes Gerardo untie Roberto's legs and insists that she, not Gerardo, will accompany him to the bathroom: "It's not as if it's the first time he's going to take his—instrument out in front of me."

Paulina reminds Roberto who is in control of the situation. There is something demeaning about Roberto needing permission to go to the bathroom, which Paulina enjoys. The use of the word "instrument" nods to the fact her rapist was a doctor.

Paulina escorts Roberto to the toilet at **gunpoint**. When they return, she makes Gerardo tie up Roberto again. Gerardo pleads with Paulina to let him to talk to her privately, and they go out to the terrace.

Gerardo thinks he can reason with Paulina, if he can just speak to her one-to-one.

Gerardo questions Paulina's intentions with these "insane acts." She says it's not "vengeance," as she is going to give Roberto the "guarantees he never gave me." Gerardo warns that if Paulina wants to kill Roberto she'll have to kill him first, but Paulina denies she has any desire to murder.

Here is another mention of Paulina's "insanity." Paulina insists that she wants to give Roberto a fair trial—that is, she wants to uphold higher ethical and moral standards than the previous military regime.

Gerardo, exasperated, asks what Paulina is going to do Roberto, "all this because fifteen years ago someone…" Paulina implores Gerardo to say what exactly it was that "someone" did to her. He hesitates, before saying, "they tortured you." "And what else?" she asks. Taking her in his arms, Gerardo whispers, "They raped you." Paulina tells him she was raped fourteen times; she lied to him about not keeping count.

Gerardo implies that, because what happened to Paulina was fifteen years ago, she ought to move on. What he doesn't realize is how visceral Paulina's suffering was then and still is now. He evidently finds it difficult to say the word "rape," as if not saying it somehow makes it less true. Paulina's recollection of how many times she is raped is meant to increase the reliability of her testimony as well as underscore the horror of her torture.

Paulina returns to the topic of the night she was released. She remembers Gerardo saying they would put "these bastards on trial." She asks him who she's supposed to go to now. Gerardo complains that there won't even be a Commission now because of her actions. Furthermore, he says, he'll have to resign. He asks her if she "wants the time back when these people decided our life and death," begging her to free Roberto. He thinks Roberto is a "man we can trust."

If Roberto is Paulina's abuser, his attempt to ingratiate himself with Gerardo appear to have worked; Gerardo seems to side with Roberto more than Paulina at this point. He also seems more concerned with his career than with the process of healing that Paulina's trauma requires.

Paulina tells Gerardo that he's being naïve. She says the Commission can't help her, as it only deals with cases of those who have died. But she has a voice, she expresses, and she is using it for the first time in years. Gerardo reiterates that he will have to resign; Paulina asks if the "real real truth" is that he will resign "because of your mad wife, who was mad because she stayed silent and is now mad because she can speak?"

Paulina expressly spells out that her actions represent her empowerment. She also uses phrases from both men against Gerardo: "real real truth" and "mad." This again underscores her control of the situation. Furthermore, her point that she will be viewed as mad whether she is silent or whether she takes action highlights the difficult situation victims of such crimes find themselves in.

Paulina asks Gerardo to "wait just a sec." She goes back into the living room and sees Roberto about to free himself. She ties him up again more firmly. Once again putting on a man's voice, she asks "Hey, don't you like our hospitality? Want to leave so soon, bitch?" She passes her hands up and down his body, "almost as if she were caressing it."

This is an almost comic moment in a dramatically tense play. Roberto is on the brink of freeing himself, but Paulina arrives just in time. Her comments again mimic her torturers, and her momentary caresses of Roberto show that she wants to mock her rapist's actions as part of her overall empowerment.

Paulina returns to the terrace and tells Gerardo that it's not just Roberto's voice she recognizes—it's also his skin and his smell. Gerardo says that if Roberto's guilty it's even more reason to set him free. If everyone acted like Paulina, he says, "the whole return to democracy can go screw itself." He says she's still "a prisoner … locked in that basement …" He implores her to free herself "from them." Paulina asks if he expects her to smile at Roberto in a few years time when they inevitably meet in public.

Paulina highlights the link between her memory, her trauma, and her senses. Gerardo piles psychological pressure on her and accuses her of being a prisoner of her own mentality. He forgets—or ignores—that this is because she feels she can't let her attackers get away with what they've done—their freedom denies Paulina hers.

Paulina suggests that she and Gerardo "reach a compromise … Isn't that what this transition is all about … The Commission can investigate the crimes but nobody is punished for them?" Gerardo asks Paulina to tell him what she wants.

The Commission seems to have a paradoxical purpose. In a democracy, crime is meant to be punished, but the mere discovery of crimes appears to be the Commission's intention. The audience has to decide whether that is useful in and of itself or just an important stage in an overall project for justice.

When she first heard Roberto's voice last night, Paulina explains, her initial thought had been to do to him exactly what was done to her, "minute by minute, instrument by instrument." She says Roberto was the worst of her torturers; the other were "so vulgar" but the doctor "would play **Schubert**, he would talk about science" and quote Nietzsche. Gerardo is evidently shocked to hear that the doctor who tortured her would quote Nietzsche, as Roberto did earlier.

Here Paulina espouses the biblical formula for justice, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." That is, by exactly replicating her suffering she can somehow even it out or make it equal. The obvious difficulty is that she might then have to consider herself as bad as her attackers. Paulina doesn't know that Roberto earlier quoted Nietzsche to Gerardo, but it's another piece of evidence in her favor. Gerardo interestingly keeps that revelation private.

Paulina goes on, explaining that the only thing that got her through life after what happened was to imagine "pushing their head into a bucket of their own shit, or electricity." She explains that she had to fake her orgasms with Gerardo, because any "idea of currents" going through her would remind her of her torture. When she'd heard Roberto's voice, she goes on, she thought she would like "to have him raped," even toying with the idea that Gerardo would have to do it on her behalf. She'd also considered using a broomstick.

This gives a sense of the horrific sensory violation that Paulina's attackers forced upon her. Her admittance to Gerardo that her orgasms are faked is both an intimate show of honesty and a potentially upsetting fact for him, threatening his sense of masculinity. The gruesome details of her proposed rape of Roberto highlight the physical terror of her own suffering.

Paulina explains that after those fantasies of revenge she'd decided that what she actually wants from Roberto is his confession. She wants to have a signed record of everything he did, and of all of his victims. If he does that, she says, she will let him go. Paulina instructs Gerardo to convince Roberto to confess: "I'd say it's a lot more pleasant than having to fuck him." Gerardo asks, "what if he has nothing to confess?" If Roberto is innocent, replies Pauline, "then he's really screwed."

Paulina puts forward a different idea of justice, suggesting that the recording of Roberto's crimes for posterity is as important as punishment. In exposing the truth, she feels she would be closer to moving on. She also shows that she isn't just thinking of herself, but sees her actions as an attempt to get some kind of justice for many other victims too. Her last words of the scene remind the reader that it isn't 100 percent certain that Roberto is the man she thinks he is.

ACT 2, SCENE 2

It's lunchtime. Gerardo spoon-feeds Roberto soup at the table. Roberto's hands are now tied in front of him, rather than behind his back. Gerardo insists on addressing Roberto as "Doctor Miranda"—as if he were a client. Paulina watches from the terrace. Roberto says Paulina is "mad" and needs some sort of "psychiatric treatment." Gerardo says that, "to put it brutally, you are her therapy, Doctor."

There is a strange intimacy between Gerardo and Roberto at this moment, Gerardo effectively having to care for the infantilized Roberto while simultaneously insisting on the formal address of the lawyer-client relationship. Paulina maintains control from afar.

Gerardo tells Roberto that he needs to confess, otherwise Paulina will kill him. Roberto protests that he has nothing to confess, though he is aware that some doctors were used by the secret police as "consultants in torture sessions." Gerardo says he must confess, unless he has a way of denying it. Roberto complains that he'd have to change his voice, skin and smell to deny Paulina's charge against him.

Roberto tries to discredit Paulina's ability to verify whether he is who she says he is based on the supposed unreliability of her evidence. It's interesting that Gerardo's motivation here isn't to establish or refute Roberto's guilt, but to try and help him free himself.

Roberto continues to profess his innocence, describing himself as "a quiet man." He says the only mistake he's made is stopping to help Gerardo. Gerardo tells Roberto that he thinks the best idea is for them to "indulge" Paulina. He suggests that Roberto pretend to confess in order to free himself. Roberto angrily tells Gerardo that "instead of proposing dishonorable solutions" he should be "convincing that madwoman of yours to cease this criminal behavior before she ruins your career and ends up in jail or in an insane asylum." Roberto asks if Gerardo is incapable of imposing "a little order in your own house?"

Gerardo conspires with Roberto to figure out how best to free him, while Roberto continues to protest his innocence. There is something oddly sensuous about his use of the word "indulge," as if by giving Paulina (false) confirmation of her suspicions they are somehow satisfying a desire within her. Roberto insinuates that Gerardo is not a "real" man—or "real real," perhaps—implying that he ought to have control over his woman and evidencing yet more misogyny.

Paulina comes back in. Gerardo asks if she can leave so that he can finish his conversation with Roberto. She agrees, saying, "I'll leave you men to fix the world." She returns to the terrace.

Paulina's comment is steeped in irony, gesturing toward the way in which the men in her world believe that they are more intelligent and practical than she is. But her brief return to the house also reiterates the quiet threat of violence.

Gerardo again suggests that Roberto falsify a confession in order to "indulge" Paulina and be freed. He thinks that might "liberate her from her phantoms." Roberto accuses Gerardo of conspiring with Paulina; he thinks Gerardo will kill him as soon as he's finished his confession: "it's what any man would do, any real man, if they'd raped his wife, it's what I would do if somebody had raped my wife. Cut your balls off."

The notion of Paulina's trauma as consisting of "phantoms" has important resonance at the end of the play. Roberto continues to appeal to the sense that Paulina, in her actions, has emasculated Gerardo. He also points out that he is in a double bind, as he believes any genuine confession would result in his death anyway.

Roberto's comments anger Gerardo and he gets up to fetch the **gun**. He pauses and says that, actually, first he will follow Roberto's advice and cut his balls off. He calls Roberto a "fascist," taking offence at Roberto's suggestion that he is not a "real man." When Roberto tries to reason with him, Gerado says that "Gerardo is gone" and that now he's going to apply the philosophy of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."

Gerardo takes Roberto's bait and briefly plays at being a "macho" man. Though it's an unconvincing performance, it does gesture towards the way violence proliferates in cycles, revenge acts prompting further revenge acts ad infinitum. This second reference towards biblical justice only highlights that the characters will have to make up their own minds about what is the right course of action—no god is going to intervene.

Roberto tells Gerardo that he was only "joking." Gerardo says that he is going to fetch Paulina and let her have the pleasure of killing Roberto. Gerardo says he's tired of being in the middle. Roberto admits that he's scared. After a brief pause, Gerardo's tone changes and he admits that he, too, is scared.

Both men admit to being afraid, emphasizing Paulina's control over the situation. Gerardo, despite his accusations of irrationality levelled at Paulina, is arguably the character with the least clear perspective on the situation, showing himself highly susceptible to mirroring Roberto's state of mind.

Roberto agrees that he will forge a confession, but asks Gerardo to acquire all the details he's going to need in order to make it credible. Gerardo asks if Roberto is suggesting he deceive his wife; Roberto counters that he is asking him to "save the life of an innocent man." He asks if Gerardo believes in his innocence, saying he cares what Gerardo thinks (but not Paulina): "She isn't the voice of a civilization, you are. She isn't a member of the president's Commission, you are." Gerardo leaves to tell Paulina that Roberto needs "a piss."

Roberto now appeals to Gerardo's ego, speaking in grandiose terms of Gerardo's role on the commission. Again, if Roberto is guilty, this could be a cunning strategy on his part to protect himself against future prosecution. The unlikely possibility remains, of course, that he is entirely innocent and sincere in the things that he says.

ACT 3, SCENE 1

Just before evening, Paulina and Gerardo sit on the terrace facing the **sea**. Gerardo has the cassette recorder on his lap. He asks Paulina to tell him what exactly what happened to her, because he needs to hear it from her lips.

The audience here knows that Gerardo's real intention, rather than offering Paulina the catharsis of opening up about her suffering, is to get details that he can then pass on to Roberto.

Paulina says she's already told Gerardo about what happened. He replies that she had started to, fifteen years ago (in reference to the night they were reunited after her release). Annoyed, Paulina says that he can't have expected her to go on talking when, on the night that she was released, he was sleeping with another woman. He protests that she "already forgave" him for that.

A small but significant part of Paulina's trauma is that Gerardo had an affair while she was in captivity. This fact further paints Gerardo as weak and self-serving.

Gerardo says, "we'll die from so much past, so much pain and resentment," and wants them to finish "that conversation from years ago." Paulina makes him tell her how many times he slept with the other woman. He admits it was on more than one occasion, telling her that "people can die from an excessive dose of the truth."

Gerardo's quote about truth is in direct contradiction with the proposed purpose of his commission. His role will be to facilitate the drawing out of the truth—and, following that logically, the more truth uncovered the better. His statement to Paulina, though, contradicts this, suggesting that his values shift depending on whether he is thinking about his career or his wife.

Gerardo, increasingly exasperated, say to Paulina that he is her hands: "like a baby, I've got no defenses, I'm naked in front of you like the day I was born." Paulina says she wants him: "I want you inside me, alive. I want you making love to me without ghosts in bed and I want you on the Commission defending the truth and I want you in the air I breathe and I want you in my **Schubert** that I can start listening to again."

Both characters show an outpouring of emotion here. Gerardo's reference to himself as "a baby" mirrors the earlier infantilization of Roberto (when Gerardo had to spoon-feed him). Both instances suggest a loss of "masculine" dominance. Paulina's outburst is about her longing to be free from the suffocating memory of her trauma. Her mention of ghosts ties in with Gerardo's earlier mention of her "phantoms" and also hints at the play's ending.


Gerardo asks Paulina never to mention "that bitch of a night again." If they keep talking about it, he says, it will kill him. Paulina agrees to tell Gerardo "everything" about what happened to her. He turns on the cassette recorder and asks her to speak "just as if you were sitting in front of the Commission."

Both Gerardo and Roberto use "bitch" as a derogatory term even when not referring to a woman, again suggesting an entrenched misogyny.

On Gerardo's instruction, Paulina states her name and the date of her kidnapping. She explains how, on that day, three men got out of a car and forced her to come with them at gunpoint. She remembers the "smell of garlic" on the breath of one of her kidnappers. She is annoyed at herself for being to "obedient" and not screaming for help.

Paulina begins her account in an official manner, similar to the way witnesses to the proposed commission will begin their statements. The reference to the "smell of garlic" highlights once more the link between the senses, memory, and trauma.

The lights go down as Paulina explains how, when she first met "Doctor Miranda" three days later she thought "he would save me." At first, he was "soft" and "nice." She recounts how he put on **Schubert's quartet** and what effect that had in the darkness after "three days" without food.

Ironically, Paulina's starvation would probably, for a moment or two, have heightened her experience of Schubert. She is in the darkness because she is blindfolded.

Roberto's voice takes over from Paulina, continuing with her discussion. The second movement from **Schubert's "Death and the Maiden"** plays. Roberto explains that he would put on music to make the prisoners think he was a "good guy" and thought it would be a way of 'alleviating their suffering." The Schubert fades away; as the lights come up, Roberto continues his speech, talking into the cassette recorder.

This shift from Paulina to Roberto's voice is on the one hand a time-saving device, allowing what's being said to shift from victim's account to perpetrators confession without the audience having to hear the same speech twice. But it also links Paulina and Roberto together, reminding the audience of the gruesome intimacy they have allegedly shared. On the other hand, it also foregrounds the possibility that Roberto is fabricating his testimony directly from Paulina's.

Roberto explains that he was brought in by the regime to help prevent the regime's torturers from accidentally killing the prisoners. His brother was in the military secret service and told Roberto that he could help "pay the communists back for what they did to Dad" (who had a heart attack when peasants attacked his land). He says the "real real truth" is that he accepted his role for "humanitarian reasons," believing that even his enemies deserved medical attention.

Roberto's speech tells an all-too-familiar tale of one person's gradual passage into violence and depravity. It may have been true that he accepted his role for "humanitarian reasons," but that empathetic impulse was quickly eroded by peer pressure and sexual temptation. It also speaks to a cycle of violence, one which only a collective responsibility can successfully disrupt.

Roberto continues that his responsibility was to oversee the amount of electric current administered to prisoners to ensure they did not die. But over time "the mask of virtue" fell away and he began to feel "excitement." Paulina Salas, he says, came to him when it was already too late.

Virtue is a "mask," not a deeply held set of ideals. The idea of virtue as a mask adds a ceremonial aspect to it that aligns with the symbolism involved in the artistic trope of "death and the maiden," which is a figure of death seizing a young woman.

Roberto says a "brutalization" came over his life. His "curiosity was partly morbid, partly scientific. How much can this woman take? [...] Does her sex dry up when you put the current through her? Can she have an orgasm under those circumstances?" His power allowed him to carry out his fantasies, he adds.

"Brutalization" is an accurate diagnosis by Roberto, emphasizing the detachment required to inflict this kind of suffering on another human being. His questions show a twisted mindset in which he allows himself to think previously unthinkable scientific questions. His power corrupted his ethics. His questions also show an intense objectification of the female sex.

A beam of moonlight shines on the cassette recorder. Roberto continues, talking about how the other torturers tempted him not to "refuse free meat." One of them was called "Stud," he says, and Stud would say "all these bitches like it and if you put on that sweet little **music** of yours, they'll get even cosier." Finally, says Roberto, he gave into temptation—but he adds that "not one ever died on me."

The beam of moonlight focuses the audience's attention on the confession. The contrast between women as "free meat" and the "sweet little music" of Schubert is harrowing and deeply uncomfortable for the audience, yoking together mankind's most civilized side with its least. Roberto's comment that no one ever died on his watch shows how far his ethical standards have (allegedly) slipped. "Stud" is an important part of Paulina's evidence against Roberto that allows her to self-convict him.

Dawn arrives. Roberto is now untied, transcribing his words from the cassette record onto a sheet of paper. In front of him lie more sheets with his writing on them. Roberto's recorded voice says that he took part in the "interrogation of ninety-four prisoners, including Paulina Salas"—all he asks for now is "forgiveness." Gerardo pauses the cassette so Roberto can copy out the words. The tape concludes with Roberto's hope that his confession will prove his "real repentance" and help the country to find peace. It claims that "there can be no worse punishment than that which is imposed upon me by the voice of my conscience."

The amount of time that has passed and the number of pages the confession has taken indicate that Roberto's speech has gone into many details that they audience are not privy to. Roberto slyly links forgiveness for him to the country's ability to move on, making one seem dependent on the other. His comment that the worst punishment is his own conscience is conveniently suggestive that Paulina ought to free him. Of course, if he is innocent this would be an understandable line of thought.

With the confession finished, Roberto asks Paulina if he wants him to sign it. She tells him first to write down that he has made it of his own free will, without "any sort of pressure." He says that's not true, but writes it down anyway, showing it Gerardo. Gerardo nods.

Paulina wishes to differentiate Roberto's confession from the kind made under the dictatorship by officially stamping it as Roberto's free will. Of course, this is inherently contradictory considering she's been holding a gun the entire time. Roberto can pretend it's true—though it's not the "real real truth," further contributing to the slipperiness of truth throughout the play.

Paulina picks up the paper before putting the confession on again from the beginning. Gerardo tells Paulina "it's over." She looks out to **sea** and sighs deeply. She suddenly turns to Gerardo, and says she'd thought, once Roberto had confessed, she'd have to stop Gerardo shooting him. He says he wouldn't "stain my soul with someone like him."

Looking out to sea gives Paulina perspective and reconnects her with her trauma. In holding up the paper, she is subconsciously comparing Roberto's account to her lived experience—and is evidently dissatisfied. Her dig at Gerardo is similar to Roberto's—though not framed as an accusation that Gerardo is not a "real man," that's probably how it is heard.

Paulina throws Roberto's car keys to Gerardo and tells him to get his car. Gerardo goes out. Roberto asks to go the bathroom unsupervised, but Paulina says there is one more "matter" to take care of. She looks outside and predicts a "beautiful day." The only thing missing, she says to Roberto, is to kill him.

This is a sudden twist for the audience. All along Paulina has professed that she will free Roberto if he confesses to his crimes.

Paulina points the gun at Roberto, telling him he has a minute to pray. He stands up, once more claiming to be innocent and that his confession was false.

This has the atmosphere of an extra-judicial killing, the kind prevalent under the military dictatorship. Roberto is genuinely surprised that he isn't being released.

Roberto claims not to understand why Paulina now wants to kill him: after all, she gave Gerardo her word that she would let him go if he confessed. She explains that, whereas earlier she still had a slight doubt if he was the same doctor who abused her, she figured out a way to check. She planted small errors in the story of her rape and torture when she told it to Gerardo earlier, and Roberto has accidentally corrected those errors in his confession.

Paulina, then, knew all along that Gerardo would try to help Roberto. She has put him on trial through testing his confession, without either man being aware. This is another example of the way in which she maintains authority throughout the play.

Paulina tells Roberto that, when she had told everything to Gerardo earlier, she deliberately switched the name of one of Roberto's fellow torturers from "Stud" to "Bud." Roberto said "Stud" in his confession, proving to Paulina that she has the right man. She says she isn't going to kill Roberto because he's guilty, but because he hasn't repented at all.

The way that Dorfman flattened the sense of time between Paulina's "victim's account" and Roberto's "confession" means that the audience doesn't get to see how Gerardo presented Paulina's details to Roberto. Ultimately, this leaves open the possibility that Gerardo himself said "Stud." The likelihood, though, is that Roberto is the man Paulina thinks he is, and he subconsciously corrected her deliberated errors in his story. The audience has to confront the question of whether this evidence is substantial enough to prove that Roberto is Paulina's rapist and torturer.

Roberto pleads with Paulina: "What more do you want?" She insists she wants the truth; if he gives her that she'll let him go. She starts counting to ten. Roberto stands up, defiant. He says even if he confesses she'll kill him, and he won't let "any sick woman treat me like this." She'll be killing an innocent man, he says. He mentions his three children.

What was once a trial now resembles an execution. Roberto's comment is odd—rather than plead his innocence more desperately, he protests the pointlessness of him making a genuine confession. He returns to the idea of Paulina as "sick," adding further evidence of his misogyny for good measure.

Paulina asks why it is always people like her "who have to sacrifice, why are we always the ones who have to make concessions?" She says she always has to "bite her tongue"—but not this time. This time, she says, she will "do justice" in one case, at least. "What do we lose by killing one of them?" she asks.

By "people like her," Paulina means victims on the one hand, but is also implying "women" more generally. She is asking why she has no say in the way justice is administered, questioning why she is expected to accept the status quo. Her question at the end is one of the central ethical dilemmas of the play—whether it's legitimate to kill someone who has committed terrible acts, or if that erodes society's moral standards yet further.

Roberto and Paulina freeze as music by Mozart drifts in. Here, the stage directions give instructions for a **giant mirror** to descend from the ceiling of the theatre, forcing the "members of the audience to look at themselves." Spotlights pick out individual members of the audience as the music plays on.

This is a highly disruptive moment in which the audience's experience of the play is completely changed. The giant mirror is an expressionistic device with deliberately obvious connotations—Dorfman wants the literal reflection to force audience members to personally reflect on what they've seen and, more importantly, where they stand on the problems posed in the play. It also leaves the play itself on a cliff-hanger, making it unclear whether Paulina shoots Roberto or not.

ACT 3, SCENE 2

It's some months later. Paulina and Gerardo are at a concert, elegantly dressed. They sit in the crowd (perhaps in the theater audience itself, suggests the stage direction). The music stops. After the sound of applause, Gerardo begins talking to members of the audience as if they were at a concert. He talks about "the Final Report of the Commission," explaining that it was difficult but worthwhile work. He says it has helped in the "process of healing."

Gerardo's commission has been doing its work and is now the subject of Gerardo's small talk, suggesting that the commission is a talking point among the general public. The public, of course, is the theater audience. This scene also represents a seeming return to reality and civilization, the characters back in the cultured environs of a concert hall (just as the play's audience sits in the theater).

Paulina, meanwhile, has bought some candy. Roberto enters, under a ghostly moonlight of a "phantasmagoric" quality. A bell goes off, indicating that the concert is about to recommence. Gerardo and Paulina sit down. Roberto takes another seat, eyes fixated on Paulina. As **Schubert's "Death and the Maiden"** plays, she turns to look at Roberto. Soon after, she swiftly turns to face the stage and the **mirror.** The lights go down.

The play ends on an enigmatic note. There is the clear suggestion that Roberto is a "phantom," tying in with earlier moments in the play in which Paulina is described as haunted. But it's a deliberately ambiguous moment: one possibility is that Roberto is a figment of Paulina's imagination and represents the impossibility that she can ever truly let go of her trauma. The other possibility is that she didn't kill Roberto and this figure is genuinely him in the flesh, foregrounding the painful fact that, under the new government, victims will have to live side by side with their abusers. Both can't be true. Paulina's look into the mirror insists that the final interpretation—and, in fact, the responsibility—belongs to the audience itself.

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