Death and the Maiden

By Ariel Dorfman

ANNOTATIONS:

1. Make 5 **connections** to the story. Put these in the margins or at the bottom. Label them with a C
2. Ask 5 **questions**. Put these in the margin or at the bottom and label them with a ?
3. Highlight 3 sentences that reveal **characterization**. Label these with a ☺ and tell what they show.

**Act II, Scene 1**

*Midday. Roberto is still in the same position. Paulina with her back to him, looking outward to the window and the sea, rocking herself gently as she speaks to him.*

PAULINA: And when they let me go—d’you know where I went? I couldn’t go home to my parents—they were so pro-military that at that time I had broken off all diplomatic relations with them. I’d see mother only once in a long while… Isn’t this bizarre, that I should be telling you all this as if you were my confessor, when there are many things I’ve never told Gerardo, or my sister, certainly not my mother. She’d die if she knew what I’ve really got in my head. Whereas I can tell you exactly what I feel, what I felt when they let me go. That night…well, you don’t need me to describe what state I was in, you gave me a quite thorough inspection before I was released, didn’t you? We’re rather cozy here, aren’t we, like this? Like two old pensioners sitting on a bench in the sun. (*Roberto makes a gesture, as if he wanted to speak or untie himself.*) Hungry? Things aren’t that bad. You’ll just have to be patient until Gerardo comes. (*imitating 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.” (*Her own voice*.) 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 the 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. But I am really getting off target. That night they let me go, well, I went to Gerardo’s house, I knocked on the door, over and over, just like you did last night, and when Gerardo finally answered, he looked agitated, his hair was disheveled— (*The sound of a car outside. Then a car door opening and closing. Paulina goes to the table and takes the gun in her hand. Gerardo enters*.) How did it go? Was the flat easy to fix?

GERARDO: Paulina, you are going to listen to me,

PAULINA: Of course I’m going to listen to you. Haven’t I always listened to you?

GERARDO: I want you to sit down and I want you to really listen to me. (*Paulina sits down.*) You know that I have spent a good part of my life defending the lay. If there was one thing that revolted me in the past regime—

PAULINA: You can call them ***fascists***…  
GERARDO: Don’t interrupt. If something revolted me about them it was that they accused so many men and women, that they forged evidence and ignored evidence and did not give the accused any chance of defending themselves, so even if this man committed ***genocide*** on a daily basis, he has the right to defend himself.

PAULINA: But I have no intention of denying him that right, Gerardo. I’ll give you all the time you need to speak to your client, in private. I was just waiting for you to come back, that’s all, so we could begin this in an orderly official fashion. (*She gestures to Gerardo, who takes the gag off Roberto. Then she indicates the cassette recorder.)* You should know, Doctor, that everything you say will be recorded here.

GERARDO: My God, Paulina, shut up! Let him say what he… *Brief pause. Paulina switches on the recorder.*

ROBERTO (*Caughs, 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.

PAULINA: Hold on, hold on. Stop right there, Doctor. Let’s see if this thing is working. She presses some buttons and then we hear Roberto’s voice.

ROBERTO’s VOICE: Escobar. This is inexcusable. I will never forgive you for as long as I live.

PAULINA’s VOICE: Hold on, hold on. Stop right there, Doctor. Let’s see if this thing is working.

Paulina stops the recorder.

PAULINA: Ready. It’s recording everything marvelously. We already have a statement about forgiveness. It is Doctor Miranda’s opinion that it is inexcusable—that he could never forgive as long as he lives—tying someone up for a few hours, holding that person without the right to speak for a few hours. Agreed. More?

*She presses another button.*  
ROBERTO: I do not know you, madam. I have never seen you before in my life. But I can tell you this: you are extremely ill, almost prototypically schizoid. But you, Escobar, you, sir, are not ill. You’re a lawyer, a defender of human rights, a man who has been persecuted by the former military government, as I was myself, and your case is different, you are responsible for what you do and what you must do is untie me immediately. And I want you to know that every minute that passes makes you more and more of an accomplice to this abuse and that you will therefore have to pay the consequences of—

PAULINA: (*Puts the gun to his temple*.) Who are you threatening?

ROBERTO: I wasn’t—

PAULINA: Threatening, yes you were. Let’s get this clear, Doctor. Threat time is over. Out there you bastards may still give the orders, but in here, for now, I’m in command.

Now is that clear?

ROBERTO: I’ve got to go to the bathroom.

PAULINA: Piss or shit?

GERARDO: My God, Paulina! Doctor Miranda, she has never spoken like this in her life.

PAULINA: The Doctor’s used to this sort of language…Come on, Doctor. Front or rear?

ROBERTO: Standing up.

PAULINA: Untie his legs, Gerardo. I’ll take him.

GERARDO: Of course not. I’ll take him.

PAULINA: I’ll do it. Don’t look at me like that. It’s not as if it’s the first time he’s going to take his—instrument out in front of me, Gerardo. Come on, Doctor. Stand up. I don’t want you pissing all over my rug.

*Gerardo unties the legs. Slowly, painfully, Roberto limps toward the bathroom, with Paulina sticking the gun in his back. Gerardo turns off the cassette recorder. Pulina goes out with Roberto. After a few instants, we can hear the sounds of urination and then flushing. Meanwhile, Gerardo has been pacing nervously. Paulina returns with Roberto.*

PAULINA: Tie him up again. (*Gerardo begins to tie up Roberto’s legs*.) Tighter, Gerardo!

GERARDO: Paulina, this is intolerable. I must talk with you.  
PAULINA: And who’s stopping you? GERARDO: Alone.

PAULINA: Why? The doctor used to discuss everything in my presence, they—

GERARDO: Dear, dear Paulie, please, don’t be so difficult. I want to talk to you where we have some privacy.

*Gerardo and Paulina go out onto the terrace. During their conversation, Roberto slowly manages to loosen his leg bonds.*

GERARDO: What are you trying to do? What are you trying to do, woman, with these insane acts?

PAULINA: I already told you—put him on trial.

GERARDO: Put him on trial, what does that mean, put him on trial? We can’t use their methods. We’re different. To seek vengeance in this fashion is not—

PAULINA: This is not vengeance. I’m giving him all the guarantees he never gave me. Not one, him and his—collegues.

GERARDO: And his—collegues—are you going to kidnap them and bring them here and tie them up and…

PAULINA: I’d have to know their names for that, wouldn’t I?

GERARDO: —and then you’re going to…

PAULINA: Kill them? Kill him? As he didn’t kill me, I think it wouldn’t be fair to—

GERARDO: It’s good to know that, Paulina, because you would have to kill me too. I’m warning you that if you intend to kill him, you’re going to have to kill me first.

PAULINA: Would you mind calming down? I haven’t the slightest intention of killing him. And certainly not you… But as usual, you don’t believe me.

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 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: 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. (*Brief pause*.) And that night, Gerardo, when I came to you, when I told you, when I started to tell you, what did you swear you’d do to them when you found them? “Some day, my love, we’re going to put these bastards on trial. Your eyes will be able to rove”—I remember the exact phrase, because it seemed, poetic—“your eyes will be able to rove over each one of their faces while they listen to your story. We’ll do it, you’ll see that we will.” So now, darling, tell me who do I go to now?

GERARDO: That was 15 years ago.

PAULINA: Tel me who’s supposed to listen to my accusations against this doctor, who, Gerardo? Your Commission?

GERARDO: My Commission? What Commission? Thanks to you, we may not even be able to investigate all the other crimes that—And I am going to have to resign.

PAULINA: Always so ***melodramatic***. Your brow gets all furrowed up with wrinkles that make you look ten years older. And then people will see your photograph in the newspaper and won’t believe that you’re the youngest member of the Commission.

GERARDO: Are you deaf? I just told you I’m going to have to resign.

PAULINA: I don’t see why.

GERARDO: You don’t see why, but all the rest of the country will see why, especially those who dont want any kind of investigation of the past will see why. A member of the president’s Commission, who should be showing exemplary signs of the moderation and equanimity—

PAULINA: We’re going to suffocate from so much ***equanimity***!

GERARDO: —and objectivity, that this very person has allowed an innocent human being to be bound and tormented in his house—do you know how the newspapers that served the dictatorship, do you know how they’ll use this episode to undermine and perhaps even destroy the Commission? (*Brief pause*.) Do you want these people back in power? You want to scare them so they come back to make sure we don’t harm them?

You want the times back when these people decided our life and our death? Because if that’s what you want, that’s what you’re going to get. Free the man, Paulina. Apologize for the mistake and free him. I’ve spoken to him, politically he seems to be a man we can trust or so it—

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 were 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 the 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.

PAULINA: You’d have to resign even if no one knew about this? GERARDO: Yes.

PAULINA: Because of your mad wife, who was mad because she stayed silent and is now mad because she can speak?

GERARDO: Among other reasons, yes, that’s so, if the truth still matters to you.

PAULINA: The real real truth, huh? (*Brief Pause*.) Could you wait just a sec. (*She goes into the other room and discovers Roberto about to free himself. When he sees her, he stops immediately. Paulina ties him up again wile her voice assumes male tones*.) “Hey, don’t you like our hospitality? Want to leave so soon, bitch? You’re not going to have such a good time outside as you’re having with me, sweetie. Tell me you’ll miss me. At least tell me that.” (*Paulina begins to slowly pass her hands up and down Roberto’s body, almost as if she were caressing it. Then she goes back to the terrace*.) It’s not only the voice I recognize, Gerardo. I also recognize the skin. And the smell.

Gerardo. I recognize his skin. (*Brief pause*.) Suppose I was able to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that this doctor of yours is guilty? Would you want me to set him free anyway?

GERARDO: Yes. If he’s guilty, more reason to set him free. Don’t look at me like that. Imagine what would happen if everyone acted like you did. You satisfy your own personal passion, you punish on your own, while the other people in this country with scores of other problems who finally have a chance to solve some of them, those people can just go screw themselves—the whole return to democracy can go screw itself—

PAULINA: Nobody’s going to get screwed! Nobody’s even going to know!

GERARDO: The only way to be absolutely sure about that is to kill him and in that case you’re the one who’s going to get screwed and I’m going to get screwed along with you. Let him go, Paulina. For the good of the country, for our own good.

PAULINA: And me? What I need? Look at me, look at me!

GERARDO: Yes, look at you, love. You’re still a prisoner, you stayed there behind with them, locked in that basement. For fifteen years you’ve done nothing with your life. Not a thing. Look at you, just when we’ve got the chance to start all over again and you

begin to open all the wounds… Isn’t it time we—? PAULINA: Forgot? You’re asking me to forget.

GERARDO: Free yourself from them, Paulina, that’s what I’m asking. PAULINA: And let him loose so he can come back in a few years’ time? GERARDO: Let him loose, so he won’t come back ever again.

PAULINA: And we see him at the Tavelli and we smile at him, he introduces his lovely wife to us and we smile and we all shake hands and we comment on how warm it is this time of the year and—?

GERARDO: No need to smile at him but basically yes, that is what we have to do. And start to live, yes. *Brief Pause.*

PAULINA: Look, Gerardo, I suggest we reach a compromise.

GERARDO: I don’t know what you’re talking about.

PAULINA: Compromise, an agreement, a negotiation. Everything in this country is done by consensus, isn’t it? Isn’t that what this transition is all about? They let us have democracy, but they keep control of the economy and of the armed forces? The commission can investigate the crimes but nobody is punished for them? There’s freedom to say anything you want as long as you don’t say everything you want? So you can see that I’m not irresponsible or emotional or…sick, I propose that we reach an agreement. You want this man freed without bodily harm and I want—would you like to know what I want?

GERARDO: I’d love to know what you want.

PAULINA: When I heard his voice last night, the first thought that rushed through my head, what I’ve been thinking all these years, when you would catch me with a look that you said was—abstract, fleeting, right?—you know what I was thinking of? Doing to them, systematically, minute by minute, instrument by instrument, what they did to me. Specifically to him, to the doctor… Because the others were so vulgar, so… but he would play Schubert, he would talk about science, he even quoted Nietzsche to me once.

GERARDO: Nietzsche.

PAULINA: I was horrified at myself. That I should have so much hatred inside—but it was the only way to fall asleep at night, the only way of going out with you to cocktail parties in spite of the fact that I couldn’t help asking myself if one of the people there wasn’t—perhaps not the exact same man, but one of those people might be… and so as not to go completely off my rocker and be able to deliver that Tavelli smile you say I’m going to have to continue to deliver—well, I would imagine pushing there 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 I want 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.

PAULINA: But then I told myself it would be difficult for you to collaborate in that scheme, after all you do need to have a certain degree of enthusiasm to—

GERARDO: Stop, Paulina.

PAULINA: So I asked myself if we couldn’t use a broom. Yes, a broom. Gerardo, you know, a broomstick. But I began to realize that wasn’t what I really wanted—something that physical. And you know what conclusion I came to, the only thing I really want? (*Brief pause*.) I want him to confess. I want him to sit in front of that cassette recorder and tell me what he did—not just to me, everything to everybody—and then have him write it out in his own handwriting and sign it and I would keep a copy forever—with all the information, the names and data, and all the details. That’s what I want.

GERARDO: He confesses and you let him go. PAULINA: I let him go.

GERARDO: And you need nothing more from him?

PAULINA: Not a thing. With Miranda’s confession in my hand, you’d be safe, you could still be on the Commission and he wouldn’t dare send his thugs to harm us because he’d know that if harm came to me or to you, his confession would be all over the newspapers the next day.

GERARDO: And you expect me to believe you that you’re going to let him go after he’s confessed? You expect him to believe that you won’t blow his head off as soon as he’s confessed?

PAULINA: I don’t see that either of you have an alternative. Look, Gerardo, you need to make this sort of scum afraid. Tell him I hid the car because I’m getting ready to kill him. That the only way to dissuade me is for him to confess. Tell him that nobody knows he came last night, that nobody can ever find him. For his sake, I hope you can convince him.

GERARDO: I have to convince him?

PAULINA: I’d say it’s a lot more pleasant than having to fuck him.

GERARDO: There’s a problem, of course, you may have thought of, Paulina. What if he has nothing to confess?

PAULINA: Tell him that if he doesn’t confess, I’ll kill him.

GERARDO: but what if he’s not guilty.

PAULINA: I’m in no hurry. Tell him I can wait months for him to confess.

GERARDO: Paulina, you’re not listening to me. What can he confess if he’s innocent?

PAULINA: If he’s innocent? Then he’s really screwed. *Lights go down.*

**Scene i**

1. In the opening stage directions, the sea is again mentioned. Go through all of Act I and find the number of references to the sea/sound of the sea (look mainly in the stage directions). Why do you think Dorfman uses the sea/sound of the sea as a motif in the play?
2. In scene i, we see Paulina becoming increasingly crude in her language. Find three examples of downright shocking words/phrases she utters:

a.

b.

c.

What is signified by her excessively crude language?

1. Paulina wants to “put him [Robert] on trial.” What does she mean by this? (i.e. what does she intend to do?)
2. Sum up Gerardo’s attempt to reason with Paulina, and her response.
3. Paulina once again uses the words of her former torturer – “Hey, don’t you like our hospitality” etc. She has done this several times before. What is the effect of this mimicry?