

## **Death and the Maiden – Act I**

### **Scene i**

1. Read the opening stage directions. What will the audience assume about Paulina Salas from her behaviour here?
2. Paulina and Gerardo have an argument about the lack of spare tire and jack in the car, but we soon discover the true source of tension between them. What is it?
3. On page 6 Paulina says “Was she pretty at least? Sexy”? What does her assumption/accusation reveal about her relationship with Gerardo?
4. How is the thematic idea of justice introduced in this scene?
5. What is the mood like at the end of the scene? Explain how this mood is created through dialogue.

### **Scene ii**

1. Paulina only hears the visitor – she does not see him. Why is this important for the development of the plot?
2. At this point in the play, does Roberto strike you as sincere or insincere? Write down two quotes as evidence of your answer.
3. What does Roberto predict for the future of the nation? What does Gerardo predict?

### **Scene iii**

1. This scene has no dialogue. Explain how suspense is created through Paulina’s actions

### **Scene iv**

1. What do we learn about Paulina from her monologue on pp 19-22?
2. What is the significance of Schubert’s *Death and the Maiden*? What other significance could the title of this string quartet carry?
3. Who does Gerardo side with when we finds out what Paulina has done? What is your reaction to this?
4. How does the Act end? What do you think Dorfman wants his audience to be thinking at this stage?

## **Act II – Death and the Maiden**

### **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?
3. Paulina wants to “put him [Robert] on trial.” (p. 34). What does she mean by this? (i.e. what does she intend to do?)
4. On pages 36-7, sum up Gerardo’s attempt to reason with Paulina, and her response.
5. On p. 38 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?

### **Scene ii**

1. Gerardo “feeds Roberto as if he were a baby.” (p. 43) How does this action mesh with the central conflict of the play?
2. How does Gerardo persuade Roberto to tape his confession? What will their strategy be?
3. What change of attitude is evident in Gerardo, beginning in the middle of page 47, and what prompts this change?

## **Death and the Maiden – Act III**

### **Scene i**

1. Paulina and Gerardo argue over his past infidelity. He defends himself (My God, I’m only human) and also tries to reason with Paulina, saying this conversation is destructive (Well, you’re going to destroy me. You’re going to end up in a world where I don’t exist, where I won’t be here). But Paulina wants to know the details – how many times he slept with the other woman. Do you think Paulina is being unreasonable? Why can’t she let this past grievance go?

2. On page 58, Paulina's taped version of what happened overlaps with Robert's voice as he tapes his confession, along with the second movement of *Death and the Maiden*. How does this contribute to atmosphere/tension, and how does it also serve to further the plot in an efficient manner?
3. Roberto's confession: Why does he play music for the people he tortures? How did he get involved in torture in the first place? He admits he grew to like it. Do you think this would be the case for most people? Or is it doctor's "curiosity" that leads him to experiment with Paulina (and others)?
4. After hearing the confession, Paulina sends Gerardo off to get Roberto's car. Then she tells Roberto how she set him up by feeding Gerardo some "small lies, small variations". Roberto will not admit guilt, however, and appeals to her to stop the chain of violence (So someone did terrible things to you and now you're doing something terrible to me and tomorrow somebody else is going to – on and on and on.) Paulina responds by saying "why does it always have to be people like me who have to sacrifice?". Look at the rest of Paulina's speech on page 66. Based on what she says here, do you think she does kill him in the end? Why does the playwright choose this ambiguous ending?
5. The mirror descends at the end of the scene so that the audience members must look at themselves. What do you think Dorfman wants us to think, when we see ourselves in the mirror? Are we meant to feel some sort of complicit guilt? Or is our own reflection the answer to Paulina's final question ("What do we lose?")

## Scene ii

1. There is a detail of interest in the opening stage directions. When the audience applauds, she does not. Why?
2. Gerardo tells of the woman who, in the fourteen years she spent looking for her missing husband, was never asked to sit down. Why is this significant?
3. Roberto appears, but "he could be real or he could be an illusion in Paulina's head". Again, Dorfman decides to leave it up to the reader/audience member to choose one or the other. Which would be more satisfying for you – a real Roberto, or a hallucination? Why?
4. Why does Paulina turn slowly and lock eyes with Roberto, just before the play concludes?