
The Death and the Maiden Journal

Since dramas often lack the time to fully develop characters, playwrights rely on indirect characterization to avoid under developing their characters. Audience members and readers must personify the individuals through other means such as dialogue or actions. In order to characterize each of the three characters in Death and the Maiden, Ariel Dorfman manipulates various elements of dialogue and language. Through frequent usage of ellipsis, dashes, and diction, Gerardo's character establishes himself as a subordinate individual. The personality of his wife, Paulina, distinguishes itself through the questions and long monologues of her dialogue, portraying her distrustful nature and strong spirit. Conversely, formal diction seems to not be the only element of dialogue that characterizes Roberto. His class, education, and emotions present themselves through the usage of punctuation, specifically dashes or ellipsis.

Throughout the play, Death and the Maiden, Gerardo expresses the characteristic of subservience towards those around him, especially to his wife Paulina. In order to capture this perception, Dorfman employs two distinct techniques. During his arguments, both Paulina and Roberto appear to interrupt or overshadow Gerardo due to the insertions of ellipses and dashes. For instance, early on in the play, Paulina dismisses Gerardo when he says:

GERARDO: You mean Roberto Miranda? I hardly know the man. Besides, I haven't decided yet if I should...

PAULINA: You've decided.

GERARDO: I said I'd answer tomorrow, that I felt extremely honored but that I needed ...

PAULINA: The president? You said that to the president? (Dorfman 7-8)

During the entire conversation, Paulina denies Gerardo the ability to finish his thoughts; indicating her lack of consideration for what he has to say. In addition to punctuation, Gerardo's word choice contributes to his portrayal of submissiveness. He always appears to have an apologetic and pleading tone as he talks; most notably during his conversations with Paulina as she explains the fake trial Gerardo tries to reason with his wife before she does anything crazy "Dear, dear Paulie, please, don't be so difficult. I want to talk to you where we have some privacy (33). By emphasizing the words, "please", "Paulina", "Paulie", and "love" Gerardo attempts to appeal to his wife, making her come to her sense before she does anything rash. In this example, Gerardo begs Paulina to refrain from shooting Roberto and free him without undergoing the trial she has prepared. His expression of calmness and reason attribute to a

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

GET HELP

sense of docility. Instead of angrily demanding that she discontinue her charade, Gerardo nicely tries to persuade her, appearing as if he was afraid of her. Unquestionably, Dorfman's emphasis the punctuation and diction of Gerardo's character pronounces his subservience.

Compared to her husband Gerardo, Paulina appears to embody the antithetic personality. Paulina's exceptionally dark and troubling past haunts her throughout the play. During the time of Pinochet's rule, thousands of individuals were kidnapped and tortured for political reasons, including Paulina. Her experiences of rape and torture attribute to her distrust of those around her. Paulina's wariness demonstrates itself through Dorfman's utilization of punctuation in her speech. Nearly all of Paulina's dialogue ends in a question mark. Whether she talks to her husband or Dr. Miranda, question marks seem to exhibit Paulina's character. For example, when Paulina explains her intentions with Roberto to her husband, the questions contribute to the idea that Paulina begins to doubt Gerardo and his faith in her:

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 fill 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 (34).

Paulina loses faith in her husband because he appears to distrust her. She fears the idea of the one person she thought she could trust, Gerardo, suddenly not trusting her. In addition the frequent inclusion of question marks, Paulina's speech exhibits extensive monologues. These lengthy lines of speech portray her desire to be the center of attention and take charge of the situation. Her nearly interminable monologue at the beginning of Act One Scene 4 displays to the audience Paulina's dramatic nature. She explains to Dr. Miranda parts of her troubled past and her feelings on Schubert (19-21). By extensively talking for just over three pages, Paulina appears as the focus of the conversation, just the way she likes it. Undoubtedly, as the play progresses, Paulina's distrust of people and her love of attention make themselves known to the audience through the presence of question marks and monologues.

Conversely, Dr. Roberto Miranda's use of language distinguishes his differences from the other two characters of the play. Formality characterizes his speech, reflecting his class and education. Roberto's proper elocution develops more than the speech of Paulina or Gerardo, which assert a more casual tone. Even when Paulina forcefully ties him up, Roberto's speech still embodies the highest level of formality:

ROBERTO: I do not know you madam. I have never seen you before in my life. But I can tell

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

GET HELP

you this: you are extremely ill, almost prototypically schizoid. But you, Escobar, you sir, are not ill... (32).

Despite being the prisoners of two strangers, Roberto still remains polite and proper when addressing Paulina and Gerardo. However, Dorfman changes the punctuation of Dr. Miranda's dialogue, especially within the scenes where he remains the captive of the Escobars. Compared to before, the most notable difference occurs with a frequent inclusion of ellipses and dashes. These punctuation marks reflect the nervousness and fear that Roberto feels during these situations; like when Gerardo begs him to indulge Paulina by playing along with her fantasy:

Roberto appears hesitant at the thought of lying to Paulina and rightly so, considering the dangerous situation. If he provides Paulina with one wrong answer, it could cost Roberto his life. The ellipses in this excerpt persuade the audience of the doubt Roberto feels since it appears uncharacteristic of his demeanor. If Dorfman would have utilized Roberto's previous speech patterns, his sentences would terminate with a more definitive answer rather than an open-ended one. However, his hesitancy reveals his awareness of the situation; if this plan goes wrong, he risks his own life. On the whole, Roberto's higher status asserts itself through his formal diction. Yet the addition of ellipses and dashes portrays a nervous feeling that may overshadow his formality.

All in all, playwrights manipulate an assortment of techniques to typify the characters in their plays. Ariel Dorfman employs indirect characterization, specifically through dialogue, in order to distinguish the three characters of his play *Death and the Maiden*. Gerardo's frequent inclusion of dashes and ellipses within his dialogue, in addition to an apologetic diction, contributes to the perception of his meekness and passivity towards others. The complete antithesis describes the personality of his wife Paulina. Her speech includes long monologues, informing readers of her desire for attention. Furthermore, recurrent question marks make Paulina's dialogue, contributing to her distrustful character. Lastly, Roberto's language appears exceptionally polite and formal in comparison with other characters. However, at times, his speech includes specific punctuation that displays to readers the nervousness he feels in certain situations.

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

[GET HELP](#)