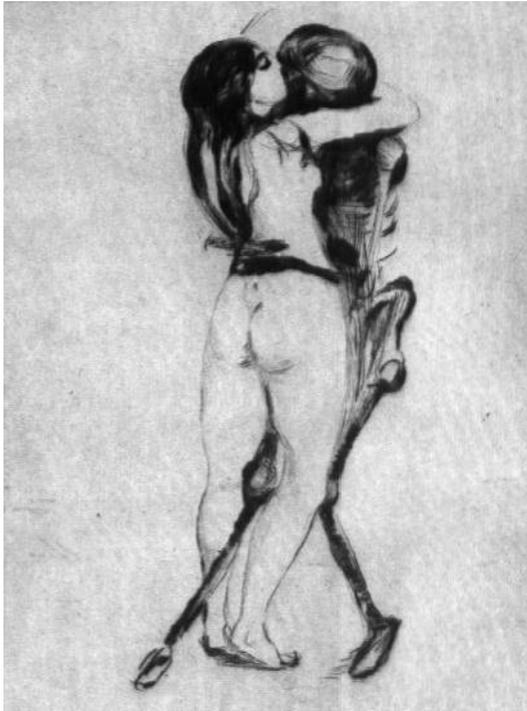


Death and the Maiden



Edvard Munch, *Death and the Maiden*

by Ariel Dorfman

"Life pardoned me. History pardoned me. Violence passed me by. Death decided not to take me. I should have been at La Moneda Palace with Allende."

– *A Playgoer's Companion* –

Ariel Dorfman:



Ariel Dorfman was born in Buenos Aires on May 6, 1942, and shortly after his birth moved to the United States and then, in 1954, to Chile. He attended and later worked as a professor at the University of Chile, marrying Angelica Malinarich in 1966 and becoming a Chilean citizen in 1967. From 1968 to 1969, he attended graduate school at the University of California, Berkeley and then returned to Chile. In an interview in *Bomb Magazine*, Dorfman said, "I'm constantly trying to figure out how you can be true to an

experience which in fact very few people in the world would understand, such as having most of your friends disappear or be tortured, and at the same time finding a way of telling that story so other people in other places can read their own lives into that." His most famous play, *Death and the Maiden*, describes the encounter of a former torture victim with the man she believed tortured her; it was made into a film in 1994. Dorfman's works have been translated into more than 40 languages and performed in over 100 countries. He has won various international awards, including two Kennedy Center Theatre Awards. Dorfman also writes regularly for such publications as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Guardian* (where he has a featured blog), *Le Monde* and *L'Unita*. [adapted from Wikipedia]

Some Background:

Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden* is a moral thriller about a woman, Paulina, who believes that a stranger who comes to her home is the doctor who, under a military dictatorship, tortured and raped her many years before. The play's title is taken from a piece of music by Franz Schubert; Paulina loved the piece but grew to revile it when it was played repeatedly during her torture sessions. Dorfman began writing the play in the mid-1980s, when he was in exile from Chile, a country under the rule of the military dictator General Augusto Pinochet. It was not until Chile's return to democracy in 1990 that Dorfman returned to the play and "understood . . . how the story had to be told." A

workshop production of *Death and the Maiden* was staged in Santiago, Chile, opening in March, 1991, and in July of that year the play had its world premiere at London's Royal Court Upstairs. In November the production, which received the London Time Out Award for best play of 1991, moved to the Royal Court Main stage. Reception of the play was positive, critics finding it both dramatically engaging as well as historically timely (given the number of societies around the world facing painful legacies of repressive regimes). The play had its Broadway premiere on March 17, 1992.

Some History:

General Augusto José Ramón Pinochet Ugarte (born November 25, 1915) was head of the military dictatorship that ruled Chile from 1973 to 1990. He came to power in a coup that deposed Salvador Allende, a Marxist physician who had become the first Socialist to be elected President of Chile. On September 11, 1973, the military, led by Pinochet, stormed the presidential palace and seized power from President Allende, who was found dead soon after. A junta headed by Pinochet was established, which immediately suspended the constitution, dissolved Congress, imposed strict censorship, proscribed the leftist parties that had constituted Allende's Popular Unity coalition, and halted all political activity. Many were exiled and received abroad, in particular in Argentina, as political refugees; but they were followed in their exile by the DINA secret police. In 1980, a new constitution was approved, which prescribed a single-candidate presidential plebiscite in 1988 and a return to civilian rule in 1990. Pinochet lost the 1988 plebiscite, which triggered multi-candidate presidential elections in 1989 to choose his replacement. Pinochet transferred power to Patricio Aylwin, the new democratically elected president. While it was originally denied by his supporters, it is now generally accepted that Pinochet's government was responsible for torturing and killing thousands of people perceived to be opponents.



"Culture doesn't know boundaries. Art is the one thing that crosses every boundary, every border, back and forth." – Ariel Dorfman

Summary:

When the play opens, "The time is the present and the place, a country that is probably Chile but could be any country that has given itself a democratic government just after a long period of dictatorship." At the Escobars' secluded beach house it is late at night and an uneaten dinner lies out on the table. Paulina sits on the terrace, startled by the sound of an unfamiliar car motor. She takes a gun from the sideboard, and stands listening as her husband, Gerardo, speaks to the driver of the car and then enters the house. Paulina is disturbed by the unusual occurrence, and Gerardo explains that he had a flat tire on the way home and accepted a ride from a passing motorist. He blames Paulina for the spare tire being flat and for the jack being gone (Paulina lent it to her mother). The couple argue about these details and then discuss Gerardo's meeting with the country's president, from which he has just returned. Gerardo has been named to a commission examining human rights abuses under the country's previous government, a military dictatorship. (It is revealed through dialogue that Paulina was arrested and tortured while attending medical school during this dictatorship.) Paulina has mixed feelings; she is suspicious of the commission, which is only to investigate cases of abuse that ended in death.

The Title:

The theme of "Death and the Maiden" is a common motif in Renaissance and later art, especially in painting, and music. The motif was picked up again by the Romantics, a prominent example being Franz Schubert's lied *Der Tod und das Mädchen*. Edvard Munch's engraving, on the cover, is a late 19th century example.

This document was researched by

The *Death and the Maiden* Task Force

Jeff Amos, Diana Myers, and Katelyn Penney

and edited and assembled by

Maggie Banks, Holly Lanteigne, and Russ Hunt

English 2223: The Page and the Stage

St. Thomas University

visit our Web site, at

<http://people.stu.ca/~hunt/22231112>