

### **Comparative Commentary:**

*Examine the use made by writers of innocence and/or ignorance, comparing the presentation of such elements and their effects on the individual works you have studied.*

Ignorance has impeded human progress, impeded human prosperity. This very characteristic has tainted the world with injustice and allowed ignorant ones to abdicate responsibilities. Within the Greek tragedy 'Oedipus Rex,' and the modern tragedy 'Death and the Maiden,' Sophocles and Dorfman have focused upon this universal trait to depict a microcosm of the world with the political and social issues stemming from ignorance. The central theme of the pursuit of knowledge has been highlighted through employing ignorance as the fundamental trait of the protagonists within both plays.

A hierarchical society is portrayed within both plays and male protagonists dominate the peak. They have the ultimate power and power provides soil for ignorance. The male protagonists are ignorant to accept the truth. In the exposition of Oedipus Rex, Oedipus declares 'You know me, the world knows my fame, I am Oedipus.' The protagonist fully displays his power and ignorance has rooted upon his attitude. The notion of male superiority is also embedded within 'Death and the Maiden.' Gerardo has the ultimate power in the household. In fact, he abdicates domestic responsibilities within the household. 'This is the son of a bitch that gave me a flat...If his wife happened to remember to fix the spare, right?'

Ignorance has been presented to readers at the exposition of the Greek tragedy 'Oedipus Rex.' It has also provided the play with the central conflict. Oedipus murdered Lias at the intersection where 'three roads meet.' The setting is highly symbolic as the father and son may have taken an alternative path. Yet, due to ignorance, they neglected this prospect and the quarrel was resolved by death of the father. Oedipus encrusted his soul with his father's blood allowing the prophecy to partially unveil. Furthermore, Lias' only surviving servant reported that they were attacked by a 'gang of thieves,' ignorant to divulge the truth that Oedipus murdered the entire crew individually. This very lie caused Oedipus to blindly suspect others and ironically curse the murder. 'You said *thieves*...I cannot be the killer. One can't equal many.' Purely ignorance has formed the basis of the central conflict within Oedipus Rex.

Ignorance is also presented as a foremost quality within Oedipus. Through the climax of the play, Oedipus evolves from an impetuous, ignorant tyrant to a man of denial, a man enclosed by darkness, a tragic hero. The potent truth has elicited self-realization within the protagonist. Gradual revelation of truth has caused a gradual eradication of ignorance within Oedipus. He learns to accept his destiny. Ignorance is eliminated at the resolution of the play and the town of Thebes is redeemed from sin.

Within 'Death and the Maiden,' ignorance is also presented through the portrayal of male power. However, ignorance revolves around both female and male protagonists. It serves as a motif within this play and enhances the central theme of the pursuit of truth. There is a continuous implicit power struggle amongst the couple and Paulina is neglected until

she gains power from the gun possession. Even then, Gerardo is reluctant to acknowledge the truth. 'We'll die from excessive doses of truth.'

Differ to 'Oedipus Rex,' ignorance has a less significant role into forming the basis of the central conflict. In fact, Gerardo and Paulina do not step out of their ignorant character in the end. The handling of Roberto is also left ambiguous despite Paulina's promise to free Roberto. Perhaps this is the effect of the embedded trust-betrayal relationship between her and her husband as he had an affair while Paulina was tortured by Dr. Miranda. The trust-betrayal relationship allowed Paulina to neglect her promise and the destiny of Roberto is left unanswered at the resolution. Roberto too is ignorant. At the climax of the play, Paulina says 'But I'm not going to kill you because you're guilty, Doctor, but because you haven't repented at all.' Dr. Miranda's ignorance has triggered the cycle of sin. His ignorance forbid him to repent. Therefore he could not be redeemed or forgiven. His consequences are left unrequited and Dorfman depicts a rhetorical resolution. A parallel is drawn to the consequences of the country when oppressors do not repent. Through employing ignorance within the characters, Dorfman underscores the central theme of pursuit of truth.

Within the two plays, 'Oedipus Rex' and 'Death and the Maiden,' the writers use ignorance as a powerful characteristic within the characters. The ways in which this trait is presented, however, is different. Oedipus grows and accepts fate while Roberto refuses sin. Sophocles and Dorfman have depicted a microcosm of reality comprising the social and political problems. Through ignorance, the writers have conveyed to readers that this trait has implanted sin within the society. Physical and spiritual wounds must be healed for human prosperity.