

Conventions: Theatrical Realism & Postmodernism

“We inhabit a time of fear and mistrust: nothing could be more urgent than asking ourselves how we should react when we have been overwhelmed by a monstrous offence; nothing could be more imperative than the need to understand how easy it is to go from victim to accuser, from accuser to invader, from violator to victim.

In the austerity of that room, the man and woman I dreamt up embark on the quest for guidance and deliverance. Stripped of all defences and masks, they go at each other with all the hope they can muster. They wonder, as I do, if we will be able to find a way out of the endless cycle of hatred and retribution in which our species seems to be trapped.”

Dorfman, A. (2008). ‘A Vicious Cycle’. <http://www.theguardian.com>. retrieved 20 November 2015.



Theatrical Realism Conventions: A heightened form of realism (Stanislavsky)

Task: Choose THREE conventions and fill in examples from the text. Afterwards, answer the “effects” question below.

Convention	Examples: <i>Death and the Maiden</i>
Stage-time equals real time	Act I Scene I to Act II Scene II (Scene III occurs “some months later” after Scene II)
The action of the play takes place in a single location over a condensed time frame	Act I: starts after midnight, towards end of act I it’s becoming dawn Act 3 scene I “just before evening” (implying night 2) Act 3 Scene 2: “a concert hall a few months later” (this is after Act 3 Scene I - and the 4th wall coming down at the end. Roberto is moving and floating about in the area.
Settings are often banal (deliberately ordinary) but offer a ‘slice of life’	Act I Scene I: The Escobars’ beach house is described in the stage directions as having, “a terrace and an ample living/dining room where dinner is laid out on a table with two chairs.” → nothing out of the ordinary.

The 'box set' is normally used for realistic dramas on stage, consisting of three walls and an invisible 'fourth wall' facing the audience	
Characters are shaped by their circumstances, particularly their social or economic environment	Paulina → Victim of Pinochet regime's torture. Saving people and helping them escape. Gerardo → cautious with Paulina, but bound to New Commission and its values,
Speech is everyday rather than heightened for effect	<p>Act I Scene 1: Paulina and Gerardo bicker and fight like an ordinary couple using everyday language. "Beyond repair. Irreparable, huh?"</p> <p>Act I Scene 2: Gerardo's use of expletives portray casual and normal conversations. "Oh, it's you. God, you scared the shit out of me"</p> <p>Act I Scene 2: Roberto uses informal language when talking to Gerardo. "No thanks, I... Well, a teensy-weensy bit."</p> <p>The use of ellipsis throughout the play mimics real life conversations (not ending sentences, pausing to speak, trailing off, etc).</p>
Explore 'sordid' subjects previously considered taboo on the stage	<p>Trialling previous torturers to bring out the truth and achieve justice. → letting victims be heard, tell their stories</p> <p>The whole Pinochet regime (no one wanted to talk about it).</p>

<http://www.thedramateacher.com/realism-and-naturalism-theatre-conventions/>

Effects - What is the **effect** of this type of theatrical convention? How does it help the playwright achieve his intended purpose or communicate a thematic element to the audience? Write in complete sentences below.

- It's difficult for the audience to interpret a play that is unrealistic
- having a realistic piece reaches more audience members- being grounded in real-life can help heighten the social critique and make audience members understand the implications of the issues

- Heightens the responsibility and understanding of the audience and their place in society - the audience can picture their own part in this situation.
- The characters in one setting can help the audience understand the restriction of freedom for characters. Paulina is repressed in some way, so the restricted setting helps to visualize that idea in a symbolic way
- Using colloquial language brings the audience into the story and the audience can focus on what is being said.

Postmodern Ending “tools for authentic introspection, questioning, and representation of human experience” (Postmodern Theater)

Task: Choose Using all three conventions, fill in examples at the end of *Death and the Maiden*. Focus primarily on Act 3. Afterwards, answer the “effects” question below.

Convention	Example - <i>Death and the Maiden</i>
Breaking of the fourth wall	<p>“A giant mirror which descends, forcing the members of the audience to look at themselves [...] Selected slowly moving spots flicker over the audience, picking out two or three at a time, up and down rows.”</p> <p>- The mirror which “forces the audience to look at themselves” questions the audience’s responsibility in society → Are they a victim of abuse? Are they torturers? By breaking the fourth wall, <i>Death and the Maiden</i> highlights the issue regarding transparency of the truth in society. → Can people trust one another? What do people hide from each other?</p> <p>The mirror and the spotlights flickering over the audience → It encourages various interpretations as to what extent individuals have responsibility for distributing truth and justice to society.</p> <p><i>“Then she turns her head and faces the stage and the mirror.”</i></p> <p>- While the mirror is still in front, the audience can see Paulina and Gerardo’s expressions while still being able to see all other real audience members, breaking the fourth wall. (but also blending the two worlds together)</p>
Blending the reality of the real world with the reality of the theatrical world / audience is integral to the	<p><i>“They sit down facing the mirror, their backs to the spectators, perhaps in two chairs or in two of the seats in the audience”</i></p> <p><i>Gerardo begins to talk to members of the audience, as if they were at the concert.”</i></p> <p>→ Gerardo and Paulina are both in the audience seats, and are talking</p>

<p>shared meaning making of the performance</p>	<p><i>“Under the music we can hear typical sounds of the audience during a concert: throats clearing, an occasional cough, the ruffling of program notes, even some heavy breathing.”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the sounds remind the audience of sitting in a theatre, might think people around them making the noise. Also blends the real world and ‘Paulina and Gerardo’s’ world. <p><i>“A bell goes off to indicate that the concert is about to recommence.”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - alarming sound that bring audiences attention out of the imaginative world back to reality <p><i>“Gerardo and Paulina sit in their seats. Roberto goes to another seat, always looking at Paulina. Applause is heard when the imaginary musicians come on. The instruments are tested and tuned.”</i></p> <p>> Gerardo and Paulina are both part of the audience, clapping their hands and applauding.</p>
<p>The narrative need not be complete or linear, but can be broken and imagistic.</p>	<p>“Roberto enters, under a light which has a faint phantasmagoric moonlight quality. He could be real or he could be an illusion in Paulina’s head.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The ambiguity of Roberto’s presence and whether he exists or not questions the reality of the theatrical world. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Has Chile really reconciled? Have proper reparations been made to the victims? Can the victims ever overcome the crimes of society? <p>“After a few instants, she turns slowly and looks at Roberto. Their eyes interlock for a moment. Then she turns her head and faces the stage and the mirror. The lights go down while the music plays and plays”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The eerie atmosphere of the ending, and Roberto and Paulina’s eyes “interlock(ing) for a moment” establishes the trauma that victims continue to feel even after ‘justice’ is served. ● She attempts to “face the stage and the mirror”, however a mirror would reflect Roberto in the background, haunting Paulina after attempting to move on. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Unable to disassociate the music that she loved from the music of her torture → “while the music plays and plays”.

Effects - What is the **effect** of these theatrical conventions in this play? Why have they been used at the end of the play? How does it help the playwright achieve his intended purpose or communicate a thematic element to the audience?

The mirror and the lights shine a light on the prospect of who in the audience might be a victim or a torture. It illuminates the audience member’s involvement, even if it was just prejudice or turning a blind a eye during the regime.

Showing that everyone shares a responsibility in what happened in Chile - the mirror demonstrates that we can’t escape from what happened. We have to face it and see ourselves reflected in it.

Dorfman wants the audience to question their role in distributing their truth in society and moving forward/reconciling with the past. There is no right and wrong answer, so the postmodern techniques encourage everyone to dig into themselves and think about how justice can be achieved in society.