

# LISTENING FOR RECONCILIATION: GENDERED TRUTHS ABOUT DEATH AND *MÄDCHEN* FROM DORFMAN AND POLANSKI TO KATHIA ROCK

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**288** *Memento mori* gained popularity in high and late Medieval Europe as populations were ravaged by plagues and pestilence of all kinds. Communicating the Latin admonishment to “remember that you must die,” allegorical motifs such as skulls and skeletons, and genres such as the *Danse Macabre*, emerged to convince Christians that because of the necessity of death, they should prepare themselves to meet their Maker. Both early literary and pictorial examples emphasized that death felled even the most privileged: in Heinrich von Melk’s *Von des Todes gehügende (Memento mori*, written around 1150), for example, the lesson of the *vanitas* of riches is visited upon a king’s son (Haubrichs 65), while in the famous *Danse Macabre* mural cycle painted “in 1424-25 on the walls of one of the charnel houses in the parish cemetery of Les Saints Innocents in Paris, which appears to have been the origin of all later artistic examples of a medieval motif that has proved to be as inspirational as no other from this period” (Freitag xxi), the king is depicted dually “as both a victim of death amidst the ranks of the living and as a worm-eaten corpse” (Oosterwijk 131). There is no question that death served as an inspiration to authors and playwrights in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (Oosterwijk and Knöll 4). The question was rather how it should be portrayed.

In “Dance of Death” plays, death appeared “not as the destroyer, but as the messenger of God summoning men [*sic*] to the world beyond the grave, a conception familiar both to the Holy Bible and to the ancient poets” (Herbermann and Williamson). Given this implicit gendering, it is perhaps not surprising that in the German-speaking realm, the motif that took off tempered the fear of death with eroticism. Sixteenth-century male artists such as Hans Baldung, Hans Burgkmaier, Niklaus Manuel Deutsch, Hans Schwarz, and Barthel Beham seem to have found solace in depicting an erotically charged relationship between two figures, one a skeletal male

and the other a voluptuous young female, whose naked body glistened as white as the paints allowed. These depictions passed into literature with Matthias Claudius's poem "Der Tod und das Mädchen," in which a frightened maiden asks Death to pass her by, to which Death tries to console her:

*Das Mädchen:* Vorüber! Ach vorüber! / Geh wilder Knochenmann! / Ich bin noch jung,  
geh Lieber! / Und rühre mich nicht an.  
*Der Tod:* Gib deine Hand, du schön und zart Gebild! / Bin Freund, und komme nicht, zu  
strafen: / Sei gutes Muts! Ich bin nicht wild, / Sollst sanft in meinen Armen schlafen.  
(Claudius)<sup>1</sup>

Claudius's poem resonated with Franz Schubert, who first set it to music as a *lied* in 1817 and then returned to it as his health was deteriorating seven years later, four years before his premature death at age 31.<sup>2</sup> Schubert's *String Quartet #14 in D minor* has come to be associated with the "Death and the Maiden" motif thanks in no small part to Ariel Dorfman's 1990 play and Roman Polanski's 1994 adaptation of it. In the afterword to the English translation of the play, Dorfman describes it as "a dramatic situation" about "[a] man whose car breaks down on the motorway" and "is given a lift home by a *friendly* stranger," whose voice the man's wife thinks is that of the torturer who some years before raped her, repeatedly, to the strains of Schubert's "Death and the Maiden," and so she "decides to put him on trial" (Dorfman, *Death and the Maiden* 57; emphasis mine).

My focus in this contribution is a pivotal shift that the "Death and the Maiden" motif underwent with the waning of modernity at the turn of this past millennium, and how a subtle but decolonizing shift in representations of the relationship of death and young women can be illuminated through an analysis that puts Dorfman's play and Polanski's adaptation in dialogue with "Terre de nos aïeux," a 2022 music video by Kathia Rock, an Innu singer from Quebec's Côte Nord. The shift that occurs between Dorfman's and Polanski's approaches to *Death and the Maiden* towards the need *not* to withhold judgement on gendered experiences of violence motivated me to see in the searing disappearances and deaths that too many across North America identifying as female, especially Indigenous, have met with over the past decades a decolonized version of the "Death and the Maiden" motif. Trauma theory has long emphasized the importance of listening, something Orit Kamir draws our attention to in her trenchant elaboration of the legal implications of Polanski's adaptation:

Bearing witness to a trauma is, in fact, a process that includes the listener. For the testimonial process to take place, there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an other—in the position of one who hears [...] Testimony is the narrative's address to hearing; for only when the survivor knows he [*sic*] is being heard, will he [*sic*] stop to hear—and listen to—himself [*sic*]. (Felman and Laub 70-71; qtd. in Kamir, *Framed* 192)

In addition to directing our attention to two key community-related conditions that Felman and Laub identify for instantiating the healing of trauma—"Restoration of the breach between the traumatized person and community depends, first, upon

public acknowledgment of the traumatic event, and, second, upon some form of community action” (70; qtd. in Kamir, *Framed* 190-91)—Kamir also foregrounds Judith Herman’s insight that psychological trauma can only be understood in a social context. However, what particularly encouraged me to bring Dorfman’s play and Polanski’s film together with Rock’s music video was Kamir’s instructive situating of the questions Polanski’s adaptation raises. Namely, she phrases this line of questioning in terms of reconciliation:

At this critical time of reorganization, when social and cultural paradigms are caught between a traumatic past and an unclear future, how do victims cope with their victimization and recover from painful personal trauma? How can and should the legal system be used to *reconcile* present and past, victims and victimizers, society and individuals, private memories and collective memory? What are the goals and duties of law and the legal system regarding individuals and the collective at such difficult times, and how should they be prioritized? How should a legal system respond when legitimate demands of an individual for law and justice conflict with social needs for stability and *reconciliation*? (Kamir, *Framed* 186-87; emphasis mine)

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In order to see what such action can both look and, more importantly, sound like, I trace in what follows how the shift from evoking one of the more intimate compositions in the tradition of European Romantic art music (Schroeder 2) to a contemporary reversioning of the Canadian national anthem reflects a larger conceptual shift in attitudes towards violence towards those identifying as female, and the importance for overcoming trauma and community-building of listening, especially to them.

The catalyst for Dorfman’s 1990 play was provided by Chile’s pathbreaking Commission on Truth and Reconciliation. As detailed in Robert A. Morace’s informative reception study, that commission was established on 20 April 1990, six years before the better-known South African one, to investigate the abuses of power that had occurred during the seventeen years of Pinochet’s brutal military dictatorship, which had been brought to an end by a plebiscite and parliamentary elections (Morace 135-36). Having spent Pinochet’s reign of terror in American exile, Dorfman returned to Chile as soon as he could and took inspiration from the newly appointed commission “to transform his political as well as aesthetic powerlessness into a powerful and disturbing but not necessarily cathartic drama” (Morace 136). The appointment of a commission that pursued a “prudent but valiant course between those who wanted past terror totally buried and those who wanted it totally revealed” (Dorfman, *Death and the Maiden* 58), and so neither named nor judged the perpetrators, provided Dorfman with a concrete shape for his story: he made the husband a member of such a commission. Dorfman aimed to provide Chileans with a fictional example, the discussion of which could help them begin to answer the huge number of questions they were living with but did not dare pose in public, most prominently:

How to heal a country that has been traumatized by repression if the fear to speak out is still omnipresent everywhere? And how do *you* reach the truth if lying has become a

habit? How do we keep the past alive without becoming its prisoner? How do we forget it without risking its repetition in the future? [...] And what are the consequences of suppressing that past and the truth it is *whispering* or *howling* to us? [...] And how guilty are we all of what happened to those who suffered most? And perhaps the greatest dilemma of them all: how to confront these issues without destroying the national consensus, which creates democratic stability? (Dorfman, *Death and the Maiden* 59; emphasis mine)

Dorfman was hopeful he had found a workable way to “break the silence which was weighing upon so many of my self-censored compatriots, fearful of creating ‘trouble’ for the new democracy” (*Death and the Maiden* 59). Born in Buenos Aires in 1942, Dorfman had been forced to relocate twice as a child as his “Leninist dad” came to the attention of, first, Peronist forces, which the family escaped thanks to a Guggenheim scholarship, and then, after a decade in New York, Senator Joe McCarthy and his House Committee on Un-American Activities, which sent them fleeing to Chile, where Dorfman came of age both personally and politically.<sup>3</sup> In his capacity as Allende’s cultural advisor from 1970 to 1973, Dorfman was responsible for a campaign to make popular culture a progressive force in Chilean society (Lindstrom 215). *Para leer al Pato Donald* (*How to Read Donald Duck*), which he co-authored with Armand Mattelart in 1971, may have gone on to become one of the foundational texts of the Latin American cultural turn (McClennen 173), but post-Pinochet Chileans were less impressed with *Cicatrices en la luna* (*Scars on the Moon*), the play’s original title: “For many, the play seemed to open too many old wounds. Dorfman had difficulty securing financial backing, a theater, even actors to play Gerardo and Miranda (“I think they found it very difficult in a macho culture such as Chile’s to be abused like this on the stage by a woman”)” (Morace 136).

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In the Anglophone world, on the other hand, the timing could not have been more propitious. The global political context included “not only what had recently occurred or was still occurring in Argentina, Chile, and much of the rest of Latin America as well as the areas suggested by the other LIFT [London International Festival of Theatre] 91 plays: Eastern Europe, South Africa, the Persian Gulf,” but also events Morace describes as being “closer (politically speaking) to home”: *la Guerra de las Malvinas*, a.k.a. the Falklands War; the Troubles in Northern Ireland; and the recent passage of a war crimes bill, “which raised for Britons the question of whether old men should be tried for crimes committed fifty years ago” (Morace 137). London’s Institute of Contemporary Arts thought highly enough of *Scars* “to expend the program’s entire £2,000 budget on bringing Dorfman to London” (136), and it proved to be a most worthwhile investment. A rehearsed reading on 25 November 1990, which opened with Dame Peggy Ashcroft, in one of her final appearances—she died on 14 June 1991—reading one of Dorfman’s poems and ended with Dorfman discussing the play, led to the play being revised by Michael Hastings (Morace 136). With a new title that drew attention to the thematic significance of Schubert’s music for the play, *Death and the Maiden* premiered at the Royal Court on 4 July 1991.<sup>4</sup> Part of the LIFT “Cross Reference” series, it was an immediate hit:

In 1992 it was staged in some forty countries [...] and by October was being touted as “the most popular play in Europe, showing in more than fifty theatres across the continent, eighteen of them in Germany” [...] By mid-1995 it had become “the most widely seen new drama of our time,” performed in fifty-seven countries, “with sixty-three separate productions in Germany alone.” (Morace 139)

As Dorfman commented, “I wrote this play about Chile, but this subject applies to many places in the world. Each audience inscribes its own history on this play. In Korea they think it is about Korea. In South Africa they think it’s about them. The Germans can read it as an innuendo taking them back to Hitler or Communism” (qtd. in Richardson). A story titled “Crime without Punishment” in Poland’s leading newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, for example, noted that the Eastern European premiere could not have appeared at a better time because “a commission in the country was currently investigating whether martial law was a necessary response to circumstances of the early eighties. If it was not, then its author, General Jaruzelski, and others will face a tribunal” (Morace 139).

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Enter Roman Polanski, whose family relocations were as determinative to his fate as Dorfman’s. Polanski’s Jewish father, “a would-be bohemian,” had emigrated to Paris during the roaring 20s, but ending up “down and out in the European economic depression,” decided in 1936, when his son was three years old, to move the family back to his native Kraków, where the Nazis stormed in three years later (Weschler). Separated from his parents in the ghetto, Polanski somehow managed to survive the war and went on to a storied career as a film director in Hollywood, where he also met with great tragedy and, in 1978, was forced to flee the country to escape charges of having had sexual relations with a minor. Dorfman’s play resonated deeply with Polanski. He first directed a stage production of *La Jeune Fille et la Mort* in Paris and then adapted it for the screen with Hollywood heavyweights Sigourney Weaver and Ben Kingsley as the wife and alleged torturer, and Stuart Wilson, fresh off his success in *The Age of Innocence* (1993, dir. Martin Scorsese), in the role of the husband.

Polanski’s 1994 *Death and the Maiden* solidified the story’s international standing in large part due to the close connection critics and audiences saw between Polanski’s decision to adapt the play and his autobiographical experience. In the *New Yorker*, Anthony Lane suggested that an even more autobiographical approach would have made for a better film (Lane), while Lawrence Weschler deemed *Death and the Maiden* the paradigmatic Polanski film on that account, summarizing that:

The play neatly distributes among its three characters three of the principal guises by which Polanski’s life has come to be so publicly known: Polanski the guilt-ridden husband, who had to come to terms with the savage killing of his own young wife, Sharon Tate, by Charles Manson and his gang in 1969; Polanski the man himself accused, eight years after that, of statutory rape, who, like the doctor, steadfastly continued to maintain his innocence (or, at any rate, to insist that free consent was involved in that fateful interlude with a thirteen-year-old girl, which culminated in his arrest, incarceration, and eventual flight from Hollywood and his continuing exile); and before either of those

events, Polanski, the young Jewish victim of a Fascist regime during the Nazi occupation of his native Poland. (Weschler)

Although Dorfman only began to discuss his Jewishness in his 1998 autobiography *Heading South, Looking North: A Bilingual Journey* (Lindstrom 216), one could speculate that it was that at the time underrecognized aspect of Dorfman's public persona that particularly resonated with Polanski. The parallels in their oeuvres are in any case unmistakable: "the thematic concerns of human rights, authoritarianism, and the critique of popular culture and its ideological content" in Dorfman's (Lindstrom 216) find their equivalent in the "[v]iolence, brutality, violations of human rights and dignity, insanity, victimization, and the complex relations and boundaries between victim and aggressor" in Polanski's (Kamir, "Cinematic Judgment and Jurisprudence" 69). If one did not know that Mieke Bal's comment that "ethical unsettlement is the thrust of his work" (Bal 44) was about Dorfman's *Picasso's Closet*, one could mistake it for being about something of Polanski's. However, had Bal been writing about Polanski, it is likely that the ethical unsettlement she noted would have been attributed to something personal; writing about *Picasso's Closet*, Bal only engages with Picasso's, and not Dorfman's, biography and the aspect of it most interesting to Dorfman—Picasso's "cowardice and complicity" in not saving friends from the Nazis (Bal 44). In contrast, Olivia Harsan's reading of Polanski's 1971 *Macbeth* takes as its focus the similarity in the brutal deaths of, first, Polanski's mother and then, his wife (Harsan 125). Harsan is suspicious of Polanski's denial in Laurent Bouzereau's 2011 documentary *Roman Polanski: A Film Memoir* that his Shakespeare adaptation had anything to do with "the horrible events" he had experienced (Harsan 125). At the same time, she notes, he relates in the documentary

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the hardship of living in the Kraków Ghetto and the heartache of watching his friends thrown into trucks destined for the concentration camps. When his pregnant mother, Bula, was deported and sent directly to Auschwitz, his father took ten-year-old Roman to a secluded part of the fence enclosing the ghetto and told him to run and never turn back. (Harsan 125)

Drawing attention to the fact that Tate was also heavily pregnant when savagely murdered by Manson and that *Macbeth* was Polanski's first project following that tragedy, "released a mere two years after" (Harsan 125), Harsan questions how these events could *not* have impacted Polanski.

In both Polanski's personal life and in his art, then, the relationship between death and young women was even less friendly than in Dorfman's. While Polanski faithfully included Schubert's string quartet in his adaptation, thus situating his film in the European tradition of the "Death and the Maiden" motif, he made a key change that Kamir attributes to his autobiographical experience:

the film replaces the play's open-ended last scene with a clear-cut resolution, thus actively preventing the viewer from dwelling philosophically on the unreachable nature of truth, a confounding endeavor, as well as the convenient evasion of judgment [...] The film's

ending leaves little doubt: Roberto *did* torture and rape Paulina; Paulina *did* recognize him correctly; her narrative *was* truthful, his denial deceitful. Together with Gerardo, with whom the viewer has strongly identified throughout the film, the viewer is overwhelmed by shame. (Kamir, *Framed* 207; emphasis in original)

This change is not insignificant as it was the play's ambiguous, difficult ending—confronting audiences with a giant mirror—that had been singled out for special praise from London reviewers (Morace 142-43).<sup>5</sup> The play's ending leaves open the possibility that Paulina has in fact carried out her threat and shot Miranda: "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" (Dorfman, *Death and the Maiden* 55). Audiences only know that there has been "no repentance from Roberto and no death blow from Paulina" (Schroeder 8), the possibility of which undermines Paulina's character. The Polish actress who played her in Warsaw "didn't want Paulina to be right because I wouldn't want to live in a country where Paulina's approach wins" (Richardson). In making clear that Paulina was right in her recognition of Miranda, Polanski's version ups the ante. In both play and film she is a fury, collapsing the gap between the death and maiden of the title in good postmodern fashion, but the film makes unequivocal the gender biases of institutional systems that Dorfman only gestures towards in portraying the husband as a chauvinist<sup>6</sup> and having him and Miranda gaslight Paulina when she seizes control, calling her "ill" and "mad" (Dorfman, *Death and the Maiden* 20, 36).

A scant half year after the London premiere of *Death and the Maiden*, the first Women's Memorial March took place in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside on 14 February 1992. Two years later, when Polanski's adaptation came out, Bill Clinton signed into law the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), "a landmark piece of legislation designed to support and protect survivors of domestic violence, stalking, and sexual assault" (Willis), which was reauthorized in 2013, for the first time giving tribes jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute felony domestic violence offences on reservations. In Canada, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission spent six years listening to the stories of residential school survivors and then in 2015 issued 94 calls for action, including one for a national public inquiry into the disproportionate victimization of Indigenous women and girls. That inquiry's *Final Report* was presented to the public on 3 June 2019, just as H.R. 1585 (*Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act* of 2019), which had been passed by the US House of Representatives, stalled in the US Senate; it was again reauthorized in March 2022. The slow and inadequate nature of these measures is announced in Polanski's 1994 film, the ending of which is a stinging condemnation of "the legalistic vision of law as objective, neutral, and therefore impartial and just" (Kamir, *Framed* 209). Rather, as Kamir convincingly demonstrates, this vision is revealed to be "a smoke screen, disguising personal, completely subjective fears, human deficiencies, and self-promoting interests" (*Framed* 209). What tempered Dorfman's depiction was an awareness of the delicacy of confronting these issues "without destroying the national consensus, which creates democratic

stability” (“Afterword from *Death and the Maiden*” 352). The nebulous, increasingly perilous status of democracy leads me to reformulate that statement as a need to first *create* a national consensus that incorporates individuals’ “legitimate demands” for not only law but also for justice; for conflicts to be dealt with adequately, reconciliation has to be considered alongside stability (Kamir, *Framed* 187).

Such an approach to reconciliation has been a prominent aim of bodies such as Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission and National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and supplementing these political efforts has been an expanding list of artworks. The REDress Project Jamie Black started in 2010 has been particularly generative, as one sees in the World Press Photo winning image Amber Bracken took of a memorial of red dresses hanging on crosses on Tk’emlups te Secwepemc land just outside Kamloops, BC, just as the sun was setting on 19 June 2021, following the discovery of unmarked graves at the residential school there (Lederman). My interest here in Kathia Rock’s 2022 “Terre de nos aïeux” is in how it situates itself in the trajectory of REDress projects while at the same time taking on the Canadian national anthem and re-signifying the “Death and the Maiden” motif along the same lines Polanski’s adaptation does—insisting on the crimes perpetuated against those identifying as female and then seeking the strength to maintain the resoluteness necessary to work through the complexities of survival in the aftermath of that acknowledgement.

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Unlike Dorfman’s Paulina, both Polanski’s Paulina and Rock are shown as able to draw strength from their surroundings. Polanski’s female protagonist symbolically breaks out of the bourgeois beach house in which she remains imprisoned in Dorfman’s play and forces a blindfolded, handcuffed Miranda at gunpoint to a cliff’s edge, where he offers a more genuine confession than he had in the house and is left by Paulina and her husband to stare out over the whirling waters below. Similarly, Rock appears not just in her village but also on rocks, a sandy beach and a forest clearing. However, this landscape is not lacking in threats. Pairs of girls’ shoes, summer dresses, and stuffed animals wrapped in patterned pink fleece pajamas hang from the horizontal railing piece of an unpainted grey wooden fence, i.e. the piece to which the pickets have been nailed, which is to say, the piece without which the fence will fall apart. These tangible symbols of missing and murdered women, girls, and residential school victims work as an updated form of *memento mori*, an admonishment to remember not the inevitability of human mortality but the preventability of violent crimes against vulnerable populations.

The importance of symbolism in the video is reinforced by the vulnerability of the outfit Rock is wearing: a stunning red ballgown specially made for the video.<sup>7</sup> The gown features a sumptuous train and a gauzy corset-like bodice decorated in appliqué that matches her full-length gauzy arm-coverings and leaves her shoulders bare. We catch sight of her long, feathery red earrings amidst her dark hair, and of her matching red leather cowboy boots as she strides along the rocks and dances as she leads a group of community members, who are clad in Indigenous items such as moc-

casins and embroidered skirts and shawls, along a house-lined street in the village she is from: Uashat mak Mani-utenam (Picard), just outside Sept-Îles—an eight-hour drive up the Côte Nord of the St. Lawrence from Quebec City and some four hours from the end of Highway 138.<sup>8</sup>

The name Mani-utenam, which means Mary’s Village (*Mani-Utenam | Portrait of a Nation | Culture | Nametau Innu*), is featured early on in the video (the 26-second mark) in large black letters on a corrugated, A-frame church whose façade is simply decorated with the name and a figure of the Virgin Mary flanking a large cross above a door with a red corrugated canopy. In front of the church, a group of mostly female community members of all ages gathers. The female elder that Rock embraces, who is wearing dangling beaded earrings, the red background colour of which brings out the red of her shawl, is likely her mother or one of her aunts.<sup>9</sup> The embrace is accompanied by the lyrics: “Nos femmes assassinées, enlevées, violées” (our women assassinated, taken away, violated), a message underscored in the next lines of the first verse, “Oh Canada, terre de nos aïeux / Nos femmes disparues, déshonorées, souillées” (Oh Canada, land of our elders / Our women disappeared, defiled, dirtied), which we hear while staring out with Rock from the sand beach into a grey, foggy expanse. After a quick cut to Rock on the cliffs accompanied by a grey-haired guitarist clad in an embroidered and fringed brown leather vest, we return to the church. As Rock sings the final line of the first verse, “Nos enfants se délestent de la vie” (our children’s lives are thrown away), a young girl with braided pigtailed and her back to us, who is alone on the concrete expanse in front of the church, looks up to see that the group is gone and springs up to catch up to them. During the ensuing chorus, the group walks along, and as Rock reaches the lines “Coyote aux abois, dis-moi / Où sont nos filles, où sont nos joies” (Coyote at bay, tell me / where are our girls/daughters, where are our joys), the camera searches out the young girl, walking hand-in-hand with a trusted female relative, while the next line, which repeats the previous lines in Innu-aimun, “Coyote aux abois, dis-moi / Tshin e petemen tshin e uatemen uitemu,” is accompanied by a close-up of the girl looking directly into the camera. This staging, like the giant mirror that descends at the climax of Dorfman’s play, confronts audiences with a demand to reflect on past crimes, but here the forthright gaze of a potential victim of violence, one surrounded with a strong, determined community, shifts the focus from past to future, from recrimination to reconciliation through preventative action.

The “Terre de nos aïeux” video finishes with a similarly poignant depiction. As we listen to the opening lines of the fourth verse, “La violence est inculte, elle rend stérile est déserte / La peur est une insulte, une semence inerte” (Violence is uneducated, renders sterile, is a desert / Fear is an insult, an inert seed), we are transported from the train of Rock’s red gown gliding across a footprint in the sand to a muddy logging area. Rock stands solemnly in the foreground holding a black and white feather and is approached by a young adult male whose light grey sweatshirt and jeans are offset by long red ribbons tied to his forearms. He is the only young man in the video. The

sequence is interrupted by the next lines, “Nous irons planter sur la terre de nos aïeux le germe de l’amour patient / Et nous récolterons les fleurons glorieux un beau matin de printemps” (we will plant in the land of our elders the seed of patient love / And one beautiful spring morning we will harvest the glorious flowers), during which we see Rock look first directly into the camera from her dancing perch on the rocks, just as the young girl in the first verse had, and then out over a forested expanse to the water, while she makes what are clearly significant hand gestures. During the final chorus, which begins with a shot of a fluffy, dark brown dog barking (“Coyote aux abois, dis-moi”—coyote at bay, tell me), the various threads of the video are montaged: Rock with downturned eyes in the clearing as the young man approaches much closer; Rock in the front row of villagers in the street together with the young girl with the braided pigtailed, the elder she hugged, and another female elder; Rock on the rocky cliff holding up the train of her gown so that it billows like a sail and making another significant hand gesture; Rock looking at the young man as she hands him the feather she has been holding; the two of them shot from below with logs and branches beneath their feet, their outstretched arms linked by the feather and his long red ribbons fluttering in the breeze; and finally, Rock standing alone on one of the rocks in a bay surrounded by coniferous forest and rushing water. Unlike the bourgeois concert audience that surrounds Paulina at the end of *Death and the Maiden*, these natural surroundings radiate the same sense of strength and security that the community surrounding the little girl in the first verse of the video does.

They also confront audiences with a different type of identificatory challenge than the powerful ending of Dorfman’s story, in which “The audience metonymically stands for the citizens of Chile, who will need to decide how to deal with their past” (Vieira 80). While audience members may not all reach the same decision, as Patricia Vieira underscores, “the presence of Gerardo and Paulina in a concert hall signals that, despite political differences, they will have no alternative but to share a common public space with their former adversaries” (80-81). “Terre de nos aïeux”’s intervention is more complicated because of the tripartite nature of the national consensus it is working towards. Canada, Quebec, and the Innu are all nations, and all have a stake in the video’s thematics of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and residential school violence against children. Taking its title from the second line of the French version of the Canadian national anthem, which in English is “our home and native land,”<sup>10</sup> each of the four verses in Rock’s song engages the anthem. In its first two verses, lines from the anthem are repeated three times: “Oh Canada, terre de nos aïeux” and “Notre histoire est une épopée” (our history is a saga). In the third verse, the phrase that repeats three times, “Et nos valeurs combien de fois trompées” (and our values, how many times cheated), reverts the anthem’s “Et ta valeur, de foi trempée” (And your valour, of tempered faith), which leads to the variation in the fourth verse that we’ve already encountered: the flowers in “Ton front est ceint de fleurons glorieux!” (Your brow is adorned with glorious garlands!), which are to be understood as the spoils of battle (“Car ton bras sait porter l’épée”—Because

your arm knows how to wield a sword), are transformed into a harvest of the seed of patient love: “Nous irons planter sur la terre de nos aïeux le germe de l’amour patient / Et nous récolterons les fleurons glorieux un beau matin de printemps” (we will plant in the land of our elders the seed of patient love / And one beautiful spring morning we will harvest the glorious flowers). These modifications to the French version of the Canadian national anthem draw attention to the fact that it, the original version of the anthem,<sup>11</sup> uses a different form of second-person address than the English version: in English “you” refers to the country more generally (“We stand on guard for thee”), whereas in French the anthem addresses individual Canadians (ton front, ton bras, ton histoire, ta valeur), raising the question in the last line of whose homes and rights these will protect (“Protégera nos foyers et nos droits”) and in the first line of who “nos” aïeux are.

298 The question of “we” is central to anthems and the establishment and maintenance of a national consensus. While Dorfman’s and Polanski’s “we”s are fluid but, as we have seen, point to the sexism of institutional power, Rock’s predominate and leave little room for ambiguity. Initially her “nous” is an object of historical suffering: “L’histoire avec une grande hache qui nous retranche et qui / Nous trache / Nous mâches et nous recrache” (it is history with a capital H that has subtracted us / Has cut us / Chewed us up and spit us out). However, this “nous” then shifts to a subject form that draws attention to its attachment to place: “nous avons perdu notre place” (we have lost our place). The importance of belonging resonates in Rock’s song in its use of the possessive form (nos femmes, nos filles, nos enfants, nos aïeux), as though that were her response to the informal you address in the French original (ton front, ton bras, ton histoire, ta valeur). The informal “you” her “nous” interacts with, the familiar coyote of the chorus (dis-moi / Toi qui entends et toi qui voit), is contrasted with a shift in the second verse to a formal, plural vous: “Aux yeux de vos juges, aux yeux de vos clergés” (In the eyes of your judges, in the eyes of your clergy), which makes clear that her “nous” understands itself as interpolated by judicial and religious institutions, as well as harmed for reasons the next lines shed light on: “Étions nous insoumises, à ce point mauvaises / [...] Étions nous trop belles, étions nous trop femmes / [...] Pour justifier vos gestes infâmes” (Were we insubordinate, so bad / Were we too beautiful, were we too female / [...] To justify your vile actions). Yet despite all the harms done, “Pourtant encore nos voix montent vers la lune” (Yet still our voices rise to the moon) because this “nous” recognizes how stultifying violence and fear can be. Rather they are “Prête à reprendre la manière de nos vaillantes mères et de nos aimantes grands-mères” (Ready to take up the way of our valiant mothers and loving grandmothers). That readiness, this French-Innu anthem makes clear, is the way forward.<sup>12</sup>

To sum up, the shift the “Death and the Maiden” motif underwent towards the end of the twentieth century was toward survival, something it is clear the young woman in Claudius’s eighteenth-century poem had no hope of—Death there had the last word. In Dorfman’s play, the ironically titled *Dr. Death*, Miranda, defends tor-

turing as a way of preventing people from being killed: “I told myself that it was a way of saving people’s lives, and I did, because many times I told them—without it being true, simply to help the person who was being tortured—I ordered them to stop or the prisoner would die” (*Death and the Maiden* 47). This postmodern approach aimed to interrogate the circumstances and implications of past mass deaths committed by the apparatus of, and therefore in the name of, a nation by depicting a potential one in as much ambiguity as possible. Polanski’s autobiographically inflected adaptation then shifted the motif away from death, and towards the maiden, by removing the ambiguity and making it clear that, given the opportunity, Paulina would choose not to kill her torturer. Rock’s music video completes the shift, with its depiction of the possessions of murdered and missing women and children as *memento mori*, an admonishment to nations to oversee the survival of all of their citizens. One sees how sophisticated the understandings of the damage wrought by institutional forces and how developed the personal and cultural tools for healing trauma have become in the intervening three decades. May this missive also be heard.

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## NOTES

1. “*Girl*: Keep going, just keep going! / Go away, scary skeleton! / I’m still young, please keep going! / And don’t touch me.  
*Death*: Give me your hand, you beautiful, delicate creature! / I am a friend and have not come to punish you. / Be cheerful. I’m not scary, / Come sleep softly in my arms.” (Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.)
2. Given that Goethe’s penchant for young women only increased as he aged, it is perhaps not surprising that it was the *Totentanz* motif he chose to poeticize and not the *Tod und das Mädchen* (see Stegemeier).
3. In his 1998 autobiography, Dorfman underscores the irony of his family’s relocation to the US in 1943, a year after his birth. When the Argentinian military seized power in a “pro-Axis coup” masterminded by “the enigmatic figure of then Colonel Juan Domingo Perón” in June of that year, his Russian émigré father “resigned indignantly” from his position at the Universidad de la Plata, incurring the new regime’s wrath (Dorfman, *Heading South, Looking North* 23-24). As Dorfman narrates it, “[b]efore he could be jailed, my father skipped the country on an already granted Guggenheim Fellowship. My anti-imperialist father fled in December of 1943, to the United States, the most powerful country in the world, protected by a foundation built with money that had come out of one of the world’s largest consortiums. Money that had come from tin mines in Bolivia and nitrate in Chile and rubber plantations in the Congo and diamonds in Africa saved my Leninist dad” (*Heading South, Looking North* 24).
4. See Schroeder for a good account of the musicological implications of Dorfman’s adoption of Schubert.
5. The Broadway version, on the other hand, enjoyed far less success due to director Mike Nichols’s decision to “eviscerate the play politically” (Morace 145) and “concentrate on the play’s sexual theme” (Morace 146), something Morace attributes to its having to cater to “an American audience like the one that the speaker of Dorfman’s poem ‘Something Must Be Happening to My Antennas’ fears he is beginning to resemble, an audience indifferent to and insulated from real suffering and oppression yet moved to tears by *General Hospital*” (Morace 147).
5. Dorfman has Geraldo bond with Miranda in such exchanges as: “*Gerald*: You know how women are...

*Roberto (laughing)*: I know only too well. It's the female soul. You know what Nietzsche once wrote? The female soul is never entirely *ours*, we can never entirely possess it" (*Death and the Maiden* 12; emphasis mine) and "*Gerald*: "I wonder if there's anything else you might...? A toothbrush is really the only thing I think I can't offer you... *Roberto*: One never shares one's toothbrush, my friend. Or one's woman. *Gerardo*: No..." (*Death and the Maiden* 15).

7. The symbolic significance of the colour red was on prominent display during Pope Francis's historic "penitential pilgrimage" to Canada in the summer of 2022 (Ka'nhehsí:io Deer [@Kanhehsii]). Paraded past the Pope was a 50-metre-long ceremonial cloth with "2,800 names, written in stark white on the blood-red fabric, the product of years of research into what happened to Indigenous children who were stolen from their parents, placed in these schools, and never seen again" ("National Student Memorial Register"). The scroll was originally presented at the Canadian Museum of History in Gatineau on Orange Shirt Day in 2019 in response to the TRC's call 72 to develop and maintain the National Residential School Student Death Register. The TRC's report is available online at [www.documentcloud.org/documents/2091412-trc-calls-to-action.html](http://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2091412-trc-calls-to-action.html).
8. According to the bilingual (English-French) Nametau Innu website, Mani-utenam was "acquired by the federal government in 1948, and designated as an Indian Reserve the following year. When it was founded, it was made up primarily of families associated with the Moisie River, or 'Mishta shipu.' Other families who were settled in Uashat, moved there in the 1950s" (*Mani-Utenam | Portrait of a Nation | Culture | Nametau Innu*).
9. I base this presumption on Rock's relating in an interview on the radio show *Bonjour la Côte* that "Je voulais voir ma mère, mes tantes, ma famille, qui ont toujours été là pour moi, qui m'ont toujours encouragée, soutenue et écoutée. Ils m'ont vraiment aidée à passer à travers les étapes de création de mon album au cours des quatre dernières années" (I wanted to see my mother, my aunts, my family, who have always been there for me, who have always encouraged, supported and listened to me. They really helped me get through the stages of creating my album over the past four years) (Picard).
10. It is remarkable that this phrase survived the 2016 updating that changed "in all thy sons command" to "all of us command" (Giese). As Giese informs us, "the history of the anthem is a history of change. The phrase 'thy sons command' wasn't even in the original version—it was added in 1913. (The previous wording was the gender-neutral 'thou dost in us command.')
- It's been suggested that the revision was a piece of pre-WWI propaganda as well as a slam at the increasingly powerful women's suffrage movement. Singling out 'thy sons' was an attempt to both whip up military support and to slow the progress of women's rights" (Giese).
11. "Chant national" was written by Sir Adolphe-Basile Routhier to the music of composer Calixa Laval-lée, and first performed in Quebec City on 24 June 1880 (Kallmann and Potvin).
12. A similar indication of the gap between Indigenous and official positions on reconciliation can be seen in the impromptu rendition of an ancient Cree ballad to the tune of the Canadian national anthem that Si Pih Ko, also known as Trina Francois, launched into to protest the presentation to Pope Francis of a ceremonial headdress in Maskwacis, Alberta, during his 2022 "penitential pilgrimage." Just as he had addressed those present in his native Spanish, she also spoke to the Pope in her native Cree, "You are hereby served spoken law. *We*, the daughters of the Great Spirit and *our* tribal sovereign members cannot be coerced into any law, any treaty that is not the Great Law" (Pauls; emphasis mine). As one sees in this translation, which she provided to CBC News, her "we" resembles Rock's in being in the first instance Indigenous, female, and very firm in acknowledging the historical harms, rather than the authority, of the Canadian nation-state. As a member from Si Pih Ko's home community of Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, 800 kilometres north of Winnipeg, commented, "She spoke from her perspective as a woman. She includes herself in the language when she speaks and she's saying that we are like a part of a sovereign group and we are the women of the group [...] The message itself was a rebuke to the Pope, the Catholic Church, and the colonizing countries of Britain and France" (Pauls).

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