Love! Valour! Compassion! Study Guide

Love! Valour! Compassion! by Terrence McNally

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Introduction

Terrence McNally's *Love! Valour! Compassion!* opened Off-Broadway at the Manhattan Theatre Club in 1994 and then transferred to Broadway and won the Tony Award for Best Play in 1995. This was in the middle of the 1990s□a decade in which the playwright garnered an impressive four Tony Awards. The others included Best Book of a Musical for *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1994), Best Play for *Master Class* (1996), and Best Book of a Musical for *Ragtime* (1998). He also scored a theatrical "hat trick" in 1996 when three of his productions ran simultaneously on Broadway: *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *Love! Valour! Compassion!* , and *Master Class*.

Love! Valour! Compassion! was hailed by many critics as McNally at the top of his form. The play centers on eight gay men who vacation together at an upstate New York country home for three summertime holiday weekends. Gregory, the host of the gatherings, is a successful but aging choreographer trying to complete what may be his last major work. Bobby, his blind and much younger live-in boyfriend loves him but is still discovering who he is and what he wants from the world. John is a cynical, mean-spirited, failed English playwright, relegated to working as a rehearsal pianist for Gregory's company. His twin brother, James, a costumer for the National Theatre of Great Britain, is as kind and compassionate as John is angry and alienated. He is also dying of AIDS. Ramon is John's current boyfriend. He is a young, handsome, and talented Puerto Rican dancer just beginning his career. He is also filled with confidence, brimming with sexuality, and very attracted to Bobby. Perry and Arthur are the group's "role models." Although they constantly bicker and feud, the lawyer and accountant have been together for fourteen years and are often the force of stability in an otherwise chaotic world. Finally, there is Buzz, the highly charged and hilarious costumer for Gregory's company who is obsessed with musical theatre, always ready with a sarcastic one-liner, and is usually the life of the party. Like James, he is HIV-positive, and his high jinks often mask his troubled spirit.

Readers of *Love! Valour! Compassion!* will find a formula that has worked well for McNally in some of his other successes: a group of characters gathered together for a weekend of talking, laughing, and exploring the boundaries of their relationships and some of life's more profound and difficult questions. In his introduction to the published play, McNally reveals, "I wanted to write about what it's like to be a gay man at this particular moment in our history. I think I wanted to tell my friends how much they've meant to me. I think I wanted to tell everyone else who we are when they aren't around."

Mostly comic, the play manages to include elements of seriousness and even tragedy. It employs some unconventional theatrical techniques. The stage is mostly bare, the scenery imagined, and each of the characters takes turns narrating the action, alternately speaking directly to the audience and to one another. It is, as the 1997 film version of the play was billed, an outrageous mix of the *The Big Chill* and *The Bird Cage*.

Author Biography

Terrence McNally was born on November 3, 1939, in St. Petersburg, Florida, though he grew up farther west in Corpus Christi, Texas. It was in this setting that McNally was introduced to his life's work: the professional theatre. As a boy, he attended a private school where one of his teachers, an Ursuline nun, brought opera records to play to her class. Twice in McNally's youth, his parents, a wholesale-beverage distributor and a bookkeeper, took him to New York to see stars such as Ethel Merman in *Annie Get Your Gun*. Perhaps most important to McNally was one of his high school English teachers who, McNally told an interviewer for *Biography* magazine, "was truly blessed with that gift of inspiration and of helping young people to realize their potential."

It was this teacher who helped convince McNally to set his sights on an education outside of Texas. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Columbia University in 1960. Only five years later, at the age of twenty-six, McNally had his first Broadway play production, a comedy called *And Things That Go Bump in the Night*. It was not, as McNally describes it, the success he had always dreamed about. "I still think that I win, hands down, the contest for worst first-play reviews," McNally joked in a 1995 interview for *Vogue* magazine. Critics took aim and panned the play. In the *New York Herald Tribune*, Walter Kerr called it "an infertile cross between Sartre's *No Exit*, Edward Albee's *Tiny Alice*, Wagner's *Gotterdammerung*, and the most portentous high school pageant you last saw."

Undeterred, McNally continued to produce a string of one-acts, full-length plays, films, and musicals that have included such notable successes as *The Lisbon Traviata* (1986), *Frankie and Johnny in the Clare de Lune* (1987), *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1990), *Master Class* (1995), *Ragtime* (1997), and *Corpus Christi* (1997). Along the way, McNally has garnered numerous awards and recognitions including two Guggenheim Fellowships, a Rockefeller Grant, the Lucille Lortel Award, the Hull-Warriner Award, a citation from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, an Emmy Award for Best Writing in a Miniseries or Special (for *Andre's Mother*), the Pulitzer Prize (for *Love! Valour! Compassion*!), and four Tony Awards.

McNally is a playwright who faces particularly high expectations for his work, and not just because of his record of success. Along with writers like Larry Kramer, Tony Kushner, Paul Rudnick, and Jonathan Larson, he is credited with exposing largely straight, mainstream audiences to popular gay characters and raising the level of awareness of issues and crises in the gay community, particularly the spread and devastation wrought by the AIDS epidemic. In 1991's *Lips Together, Teeth Apart*, McNally presented two sets of straight couples occupying the Fire Island beach house of one woman's brother who recently died of AIDS. The characters themselves may have been straight, but it was another opportunity to explore gay themes, including homophobia and the mainstream reaction to AIDS. Then in 1994, just prior to *Love! Valour! Compassion*!, McNally won a Tony Award for the book he provided to *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, a musical about two men, a revolutionary political activist, and a homosexual window dresser sharing a prison cell in an unnamed Latin American

country. In his 1997 retelling of the life of Jesus, *Corpus Christi*, McNally even presented a story of Christ's birth, ministry, and death in which both he and his disciples are homosexuals. When the play opened at McNally's longtime theatrical home, the Manhattan Theatre Club, the theatre was surrounded by protesters, angry at what they called an act of blasphemy. Later, when *Corpus Christi* opened in London, a British Muslim group called the Defenders of the Messenger Jesus actually issued a fatwa, or death sentence, on McNally.

As a result of the common content of his plays, both the gay community and mainstream critics expect him to act as a standard-bearer for gay causes, and he is sometimes criticized at both ends when his plays are not political enough. In an interview with the *Advocate*, a national gay and lesbian news magazine, McNally expressed his frustration with this dilemma. "I'm always accused of saying that I'm not a gay playwright," he said. "I'm not saying that at all. I'm a gay man who is a playwright. It's just not about my sexuality."

Rather than appealing to his audiences through epic, in-your-face, politically charged tragedies, McNally tends to write lighter, domestic comedy-dramas celebrating love between ordinary, likeable people facing emotional situations. In this way, he is more like Anton Chekhov or even Neil Simon than Bertolt Brecht. David Kaufman drew this comparison when reviewing *Love! Valour! Compassion!* for the *Nation*. He wrote, "For the ways in which it's told no less than for what it has to say, *Love! Valour! Compassion!* is a remarkably Chekhovian work□which is to say vital and capacious, extremely natural yet poetic and crafted at the same time." And, like Neil Simon, McNally seems committed to his profession for the long term. In a profile of McNally for *American Theatre* magazine, Toby Silverman Zinman wrote, "McNally is not and has never been on theatre's experimental frontier, its cutting edge. . . . He is a solid, prolific writer who has stayed the course, a playwright who knows his Shakespeare, who values technique, who considers the term 'craftsman' a compliment□and his plays have grown steadily over the years in scope as well as depth."

Plot Summary

Act 1

The action of the play begins on Memorial Day weekend at the lakeside vacation home of Gregory Mitchell in upstate New York. Gregory, a successful Broadway choreographer, has invited a group of his friends to visit for the long holiday weekend. We are given a glimpse of most of them right away as they are gathered around Gregory's piano singing "Beautiful Dreamer." There is Bobby Brahms, Gregory's own blind, live-in boyfriend; Buzz Hauser, a comic, sarcastic lover of Broadway musicals who is HIV-positive and afraid of what the future holds for him; Perry Sellars and Arthur Pape, a lawyer and accountant in a long-term, monogamous relationship; John Jeckyll, a mean-spirited English pianist; and his boyfriend, Ramon Fornos, a handsome, young Puerto Rican dancer.

Though each of these men becomes involved with one or more stories, or "plotlines," in the play, *Love! Valour! Compassion!* is more about its characters and the themes they explore than it is about essential elements of plot. The construction of the play has a cinematic quality□short scenes shift fluidly from one into another, often juxtaposing the actions and conversations of the characters to provide additional layers of meaning. Time moves back and forth, while characters take turns interacting in scenes and turning to the audience to narrate portions of the play's events. The early scenes of the play mainly establish the identities of the characters and introduce some of the play's more prominent themes□variations on love and friendship, trust and betrayal, forgiveness and redemption, and the resilience of the human spirit.

Following the opening scene around the piano, the action shifts to late at night. Most of the men are in their bedrooms sleeping, but Bobby has gone down to the kitchen for a late snack when he encounters Ramon. They have a brief, passionate, and physical sexual encounter in the kitchen that ends with a bottle of milk crashing to the floor and breaking, waking Arthur who comes down to investigate. Ramon disappears, back to the bedroom he shares with John, but it is obvious to Arthur what has happened. He helps Bobby clean up, and they discuss Bobby's act of unfaithfulness to Gregory. Arthur admits that he once cheated on Perry and recommends that Bobby keep it to himself, forget about it, and move on. "I told him," he warns Bobby, "and it's never been the same. It's terrific, but it's not the same."

Bobby goes back to bed with Gregory, and Arthur rejoins Perry while the scene changes to the previous day when everyone arrived. Their reappearances now, one at a time, are an opportunity to get to know them in revealing "snapshots" of their personalities. John is downstairs spying in Gregory's journal when Buzz appears. Far from feeling guilty at being caught in the act, John reads aloud from the journal and encourages Buzz to join him. They discuss the status of their relationships. John has been seeing Ramon for three weeks, and Buzz recently broke up with yet another boyfriend who found him too "intense." True to his description, Buzz turns to the audience with a

campy rave about his love for musicals, his hatred of AIDS, and his longing for a man to call his own.

They are joined by Gregory and Ramon who have been swimming in Gregory's lake. Ramon is Puerto Rican, young, handsome, virile, less experienced than the other men but clearly capable of holding his own. He is an odd match for John, who is older, more cynical, and far less humorous. Their differences are obvious in the constant disagreements they have with each other. Ramon expresses his admiration for Gregory ("Mr. Mitchell" he calls him) and his phenomenal career, and the men compliment him on the success of his own small dance company, which has recently gained critical acclaim and moved from a small space in the East Village to the Opera House at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Next to arrive are Perry, Arthur, and Bobby, who come in from the city together by car. While driving, they discuss Bobby's blindness, which he has had since birth and does not let deter him or define who he is or how he interacts with people, apart from getting to know them by touching their facial features rather than simply shaking hands. They also reflect on the relationship Perry and Arthur share. After fourteen years together, they act as "role models" for the other couples, though they too have had their share of bumpy roads. Now they are the sort of couple who finish each other's sentences and know each other's likes, dislikes, and responses intimately.

As the men all unpack, settle in, have dinner, and gather together around Gregory's house, some of the play's other complications are revealed. John has a twin brother, James, who is suffering from advanced symptoms of AIDS and who wants to come for a visit. A phone call from James upsets him terribly and causes him to be anxious and angry for the rest of the evening. Perry and John were once lovers. They now detest one another and can hardly be in the same room together without quarrelling. Gregory has committed all of them to dance in an all-male drag rendition of *Swan Lake* as an AIDS benefit at Carnegie Hall. (No one wants to participate.) Perry, it turns out, has a mean, bigoted streak in him, which surfaces at dinner, angering Arthur.

Separately, these complications seem like commonplace events in the lives of ordinary men; but together in Gregory's house at the beginning of this Memorial Day weekend, they paint a thematic picture of a group of men bound together by their art, their sexuality, their lifestyles, their struggles, and their dreams. The first act ends with a mixture of relief and sadness. Arthur forgives Perry for his angry outburst; Ramon forgives John for his arrogance and insults. Buzz, acting as narrator, reveals that after the first day, it rained all weekend. We also learn that during the rain Buzz cried while watching old movies, Gregory sat for six hours listening to a piece of music and waiting for inspiration that never came, and Ramon seduced Bobby in the kitchen in the middle of the night.

Act 2

At the beginning of the second act, all of the men are gathered together again at Gregory's house, this time for the Fourth of July holiday weekend. As before, the act progresses in a series of short scenes, which the characters take turns narrating. Gregory, Buzz, Perry, and Arthur play tennis outside, while John once again pages through Gregory's journal and sits moodily playing the piano indoors. His brother, James, has arrived from England, causing the houseful of men to contemplate the differences between the identical twin brothers. (Perry has dubbed them "James the Fair and John the Foul.")

Between Memorial Day weekend and the Fourth of July, Bobby reveals, Ramon has tried to call him a number of times. When Gregory has answered the phone, he has simply kept silent or hung up. He has again returned to the house with John, though this time even John acknowledges that Ramon is "eligible." Bobby knows the real reason he has returned is for him.

The newest developing relationship is between Buzz and James. Even though he initially tells John jokingly that James "looks too much like you and acts too much like me," it becomes quickly obvious that Buzz is fond of the newcomer. After the tennis match (which Buzz and Gregory handily win), he and James sit beneath a tree sipping iced teas and martinis and discussing their careers and the progress of the disease they have in common. Each has been told by his doctor that he should have died months before, though they both seem in reasonable health right now. James is the only one of the two to have developed one of the telltale visual signs of AIDS: a dark lesion on his chest. When he pulls up his shirt to show it to him, Buzz surprises James by gently kissing it. It is an unexpected sign of spontaneous affection that launches the two men toward a romantic relationship neither had anticipated.

Amid the highs and lows of the weekend's holiday games and interpersonal struggles, a new crisis suddenly arises: Bobby receives a call from India, where his older sister has been visiting. She was killed in a freak accident on an amusement park ride. The news devastates Bobby and casts a shadow over the guests and their celebration. They offer to leave, but Bobby and Gregory both insist they stay. Then Bobby, in his anguish and emotional confusion, confesses to Gregory the affair he had with Ramon on Memorial Day weekend. Shocked, hurt, and angry, Gregory insists that Bobby leave the house that day and fly down to Texas to be with his family and await the arrival of his sister's body from overseas.

While Bobby packs and makes his arrangements, the other men carry on with their weekend. Arthur swims naked out into the lake, where he finds Ramon sunbathing on a wooden raft. Ramon taunts him into diving underwater with him and then unexpectedly kisses him on the mouth and swims away. Later, Perry and Buzz hide out in John's closet to spy on him (a taste of his own medicine) and end up seeing a sexual encounter between John and Ramon in which Ramon pretends to be a prisoner tied to a chair while John interrogates him. During the interrogation John confesses his first

homosexual experience as a teenager in England with a boy named Padraic Boyle and bitterly refers to Ramon's infatuation with Bobby, which has become evident to all of them. After the scene, when John discovers the two men in the closet, he spits in Perry's face and curses him, telling him he hopes he contracts AIDS and dies of it like his brother James.

Finally, as in the previous act, the action moves toward a relieved but unsettled conclusion. Bobby tells Ramon it is over between them. Gregory finds Bobby outside waiting for a cab ride, forgives him, and asks him to hurry back. James measures the guests (except for Perry, who still refuses to participate) for tutus for their upcoming drag performance of *Swan Lake*. Perry and Arthur celebrate their fourteenth anniversary together with a cake and singing. The two of them dance together and then are joined by Buzz and James, while Gregory and Ramon sit at the side, watching.

Act 3

The final act occurs over Labor Day weekend, still at Gregory's house in the country. The passage of time over the summer has made its mark, and in some cases taken its toll, on the eight friends. Gregory's attempts to complete his new dance, made even more difficult by his frustration with Bobby and his infidelity, have gone nowhere. He has spent the summer alone in the studio listening to music he cannot seem to dance to. James, though still fighting, is slipping further into the deadly symptoms of his disease. John, in his way, longs for Ramon, who still accompanies him to the house but clearly remains infatuated with Bobby. They all seem destined for a difficult final weekend of summer together, until an incident occurs in the kitchen that turns everything around.

Ramon is preparing coffee for everyone when Gregory enters after a fruitless morning in his studio. He listens to Ramon ramble on about his favorite singers and his earliest days as a dancer, until suddenly he snaps. He grabs Ramon's arm and twists it behind his back and then demands that he thrust his other arm down the sink into the garbage disposal. Perry and Buzz arrive on the scene and are horrified by what they find, but their presence gives Gregory the chance to wrench a confession out of Ramon. He insists that Ramon tell everyone why he is being attacked. When he finally admits that it is because of Bobby, Gregory releases him and carries on as if nothing had happened.

Ramon's confession is a cathartic moment for Gregory. The frustration, anger, and betrayal he has been feeling are soothed by getting the guilt out in the open, and he returns to his studio with new purpose and vigor. Meanwhile, his friends pass the weekend in leisurely, personal pursuits. While it rains, they stay in bed and eat, drink, and read. The next day, when the sun is out, Perry, Arthur, Buzz, and James go canoeing on the lake.

In the evening, John slips into the room where his brother James is wrapped in towels and a robe, sweating with fever. He confesses his jealousy for his brother who, he claims, "got the good soul." Everyone, from their parents to the men who occupy the house that weekend have naturally been drawn to love James unconditionally, whereas

John has always been the one on the margin, disliked by most. He longs to know the secret of this unconditional love. Without saying a word, James takes his brother's hand in his and kisses it over and over again. He does this while John pours out all the wrong things he has ever said or done to his brother. They cry together, and James silently offers his brother forgiveness.

All this time, Gregory is working at a feverish pace on his dance, watched through the windows by Perry, Arthur, and Ramon. They are in awe of what they see. Though he is aging and his body aches with the effort, Gregory's skill amazes them. He knows, though, that the dance he has created is one that he can never perform to its fullest. In an act of generosity, nobility, and admirable forgiveness, he calls Ramon in and asks him to dance the part in its world premiere. The gesture is at once the passing of the torch from the aging artist to his youthful apprentice and a supreme act of love for Bobby.

The final scene of the play is, appropriately, a highly theatrical one. All of the men except for Perry are dressed in tights and tutus to rehearse their drag scene from *Swan Lake* for the AIDS benefit. As the music plays, they link arms and begin measuring out the steps. They also take turns addressing the audience, sharing some final, poignant information about what the future holds for them.

Perry begins by revealing that he will die in "twenty-seven years, eight months, six days, three hours, thirty-one minutes, and eleven seconds." His death comes in front of the television with his beloved Arthur in the next room. Arthur relates that he follows his lifelong companion three years later. Buzz does not provide such a specific time frame but says his end comes "soon. Sooner than I thought, even," though as a consolation it was not long after meeting a well-known actress whose work in musical theatre he adored.

Somewhat surprisingly, James confesses that he "wasn't brave" and apologizes to Buzz for returning home to England to take pills for his illness. Although Ramon claims he is immortal, he admits that he was eventually killed in a plane crash enroute to a concert in Massachusetts. Bobby does not share details of his death, but Gregory interjects that they were no longer together when it happened. Bobby had found another man, as Gregory continued to age. For his part, Gregory says, "I . . . Bury every one of you," though it got lonely at his isolated country house.

When the lights suddenly go out on the rehearsal, they abandon their dancing and gather together for a last look at the moon rising over the lake. Perry, Ramon, Arthur, Buzz, and Gregory sit on the shore singing "Harvest Moon" while Bobby and James go skinny-dipping in the water. Eventually, all of the men take their clothes off and join them for the last splashing celebration of their eventful summer holiday weekends together.

Characters

Bobby Brahms

Bobby is Gregory's live-in boyfriend of four years. He is in his early twenties, much younger than Gregory, but they share gentle demeanors, a passion for music, and a love for the natural surroundings at Gregory's house in the country. Blind since birth, Bobby does not let his handicap deter him, and he resists letting it define him. He tells Arthur, "People think blindness is the most awful thing that can happen to a person. Hey, I've got news for everybody: it's not."

Bobby expresses his love for Gregory openly and in many ways, large and small. He rides to their country home from New York City with Perry and Arthur after running some shopping and business errands for him. The two of them have a ritual for his arrival: they meet, embrace, and exchange loving greetings. Then Bobby goes to walk untended around the grounds outside the house, breathing the fresh country air and offering thanks to God for the blessings of the home, the friends around them, and his relationship with Gregory.

Still, Bobby is young, and, despite his efforts to lead a normal life, his handicap has limited his experience in the world. When Ramon begins to seduce him, Bobby seems drawn toward him as much for the adventure and new experience as for Ramon's youth and physical attractiveness. After the affair, he is instantly guilt-ridden, and following the unexpected death of his sister, he emotionally confesses his unfaithfulness to Gregory. He and Gregory make amends, and they end the play together, but as they reveal in the play's final, future-looking scene, the gulf between them one day becomes too wide, and Bobby leaves Gregory for someone his own age.

Ramon Fornos

Ramon is the "outsider" in the group of men gathered at Gregory's house. He arrives the first weekend as John's date (they have been seeing each other for only three weeks) but is clearly not committed to a serious relationship with him. Ramon is young, handsome, virile, and clever, though less experienced as an artist and new to the higher social circles that Gregory and his friends occupy. A Puerto Rican dancer whose modern company has recently found success, Ramon has found himself catapulted from a small performance space in the East Village to a major production in the Opera House at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. That is where his performance caught the attention of John and some of the other men.

In contrast to John, Ramon is extremely self-confident and overtly sexual. He easily describes those things he likes about himself. "I love myself," he proclaims at dinner. "I love myself when I'm dancing. . . . I love myself when I'm making love with a really hot man. I love myself when I'm eating really good food. I love myself when I'm swimming

naked." He flirts with other men and seduces carelessly, almost randomly. Within minutes of Bobby's arrival at the house, Ramon tracks him down outside to learn more about him. That very night, he finds Bobby alone in the kitchen, and they share a brief, passionate, and physical sexual encounter.

Ramon's interest in Bobby seems to be more than just physical. He tries to call him between visits, and he returns to the house for the Fourth of July weekend with John, even though he is plainly more interested in Bobby. Yet he still pursues other men. While sunbathing on a raft in the lake, he lures Arthur out for a swim and unexpectedly kisses him on the mouth.

Ultimately, Ramon comes to represent two important milestones in the lives of Gregory and Bobby. At the moment that Gregory offers Ramon the opportunity to be the solo dancer in the world premiere of his new work, Ramon becomes a symbol for Gregory and Bobby's repaired relationship and of a passing of the artistic torch from the older generation to the younger one.

Buzz Hauser

Buzz provides the play with some of its most humorous and touching moments. Alternately comic, sarcastic, and poignantly tragic, Buzz is actually a somewhat stereotypical New York homosexual. He works making costumes for Gregory's companies and volunteers time at a local AIDS clinic, and he is a great lover of Broadway musicals. He is constantly singing them, quoting from them, and comparing people and situations in his life to them. In a humorous allusion to great musical composers and librettists, he proclaims, "I'm just a Gershwin with a Romberg rising in the house of Kern." He is also HIV-positive and, at heart, terribly frightened of what the future holds. Even he admits that much of his laughter and joking are obvious attempts to forget the sadness and destruction that AIDS has wrought all around him and the thoughts of what it will eventually do to him as well. For the weekends he is spending with his friends at Gregory's house, he has even devised a game in which anyone who mentions AIDS pays a five-dollar fine.

Although he jokes about his ill luck with relationships and claims to be through with trying to build significant, long-lasting ones because of his own condition, he eventually falls in love with John's brother, James, who also suffers from AIDS and is in a more advanced stage of the disease. James provides Buzz with something he desperately did not want but unwillingly craved: someone to take care of and to care for him in return. In their few months together that summer, they spend their days canoeing on Gregory's lake and sipping cocktails in his garden and their evenings battling the horrible fevers, coughing, and physical exhaustion that come with James's condition. As with Bobby and Gregory, Buzz and James end the play together, though it is revealed in the final scene that after that summer James returned to England to be treated and Buzz succumbed to his own illness shortly afterward.

James Jeckyll

James is John Jeckyll's identical twin brother. Raised together, they have lived apart for many years. James remained in England, working as a costumer for the National Theatre when John immigrated to the United States. He is witty, generous, and self-deprecating and seems to care deeply about everyone he meets. When he joins the men at Gregory's house over the Fourth of July weekend, his kindness and gentle personality, in contrast to John's seething anger and general loathing, lead the others to dub the brothers "James the Fair and John the Foul."

James seems to serve two purposes in the play: He functions as a foil to John and Buzz, reflecting and magnifying some of their important characteristics, and he brings the deadly, physical presence of AIDS into the midst of all the men. For John, he provides an opportunity for redemption. His brother has spent years hating James for the way he naturally enchants those around him, drawing their "unconditional love," while he, John claims, was left with the "bad soul." In a moving scene near the end of the play, James sits in a chair, half-asleep and shivering with fever, while John expresses to him all the pent-up rage and jealousy he has felt over the years. Silently, James reaches out his hand to touch his brother and tearfully forgives him.

For Buzz, James provides a final chance at a meaningful relationship, even though it is one that they both know will soon end tragically. In the brief time they have together, James manages to give Buzz a new lease on life. Whereas early in the play Buzz, true to his name, "buzzed" around the house frantically, humming the tunes to old musicals and tossing sarcastic and often dark comments into casual conversations, with James he finds the inner peace to settle into more relaxed behavior. They boat together, read to one another, and, of course, Buzz tends to James's many physical needs as his condition deteriorates.

In many ways, James seems to represent the "Valour!" of the play's title, but, interestingly, he confesses in the final scene that his bravery eventually wore out. "I wasn't brave," he tells the audience. "I took pills. I went back home to Battersea and took pills."

John Jeckyll

John Jeckyll is as cynical, mean-spirited, and closed off as his twin brother is compassionate, generous, and open to those around him. Tellingly, the first time John speaks to the audience, it is over his shoulder while urinating in the bathroom. At one point, he mockingly asks Buzz, referring to Gregory and Bobby's relationship, "What kind of statement about his work do you think a choreographer is making by living with a blind person?"

Now working as Gregory's rehearsal pianist, John is also a failed, frustrated playwright. He wrote a musical once that was produced both in England and America and panned by critics in both places. Now he earns his living playing piano while constantly working

on some new writing project or another. Among John's despicable characteristics is his habit of spying on people and reading their private thoughts. "I am obsessed with who people really are," he tells the audience. "They don't tell us, so I must know their secrets." He overhears Arthur's confession to Bobby about his infidelity to Perry, and he brazenly reads Gregory's private journal in front of Buzz.

For all his detestable qualities, though, John seeks to be understood and even liked by those around him; he has just never found the way. Near the end of the play, when he finally confronts his brother, James, and confesses to him all the anger and jealousy he has felt over the years at his brother's effortless ability to attract and enchant people, his final plea is that "I just wanted to be the one they loved." When it comes time for John, like the others, to deliver the news of his future, though, he admits, "I didn't change. And I tried. . . . I just couldn't. No one mourned me. Not one tear was shed."

Gregory Mitchell

At forty-three, Gregory Mitchell is a celebrated Broadway dancer and choreographer with many successes behind him, but he has an aging body that is not responding the way it once did, and he is struggling with creativity for his last master work. Gregory is the host for the three summertime holiday weekends the men spend together in the play. They all come to his century-old country home, two hours north of New York City, for relaxation, recreation, and companionship.

Gregory is a disciplined man of particular tastes. He has restored the home and planned its furnishings and decorations carefully. It is a source of great pride and passion for him, particularly when he can entertain there. "I love my. Um. House," he says in the play's opening lines. "Everybody does. I like to fill it with my friends. Um. And walk around the grounds at night and watch them." Gregory's stuttering speech is the one glaring flaw in what otherwise seems to be a remarkably composed and purposeful man. As the playwright himself notes in a stage direction, Gregory is entirely different when he moves: free, spontaneous, and "as physically fluent as he is verbally inhibited."

Gregory's main struggles in the play are his love for Bobby, Bobby's betrayal, and his attempt to complete a major piece of choreography for a world premiere in New York that December. Both of these complications come together and are resolved in two scenes with Ramon. In the first, on their Labor Day weekend retreat, Gregory finally confronts Ramon about his affair with Bobby. They are in the kitchen together after Gregory has spent a particularly frustrating morning in his studio. Ramon is preparing coffee and rambling about his favorite singers when Gregory snaps and attacks Ramon. He forces him to thrust his hand down the sink into the garbage disposal and confess his actions with Bobby in front of Perry and Buzz. The assault is over quickly, and no one is seriously hurt, but it has the effect of relieving Gregory of his anxiety and inhibition. Suddenly, he is able to create again, and he finishes his dance.

Then, in a generous, noble, and admirable act of forgiveness, he asks Ramon to dance the part in its world premiere. The gesture represents both the passing of the torch from

the aging artist to his youthful apprentice and a supreme act of love for Bobby. In the final scene, when the fates of all the other men are revealed, all that is told about Gregory is that Bobby eventually left him for a younger man and that he outlived everyone else, getting "awfully lonely" in his secluded country home.

Arthur Pape

In many ways, Arthur is one of the most subtle and least defined characters. It is not until late in the play that we discover he is an accountant. His work life has little to do, apparently, with his leisure time or his relationships. Although Perry, his partner of fourteen years, has the more forceful personality (when introduced to Ramon for the first time, Perry interjects, "He's Arthur, I'm Perry. He's nice, I'm not."), Arthur is perfectly capable of holding his own during their many quarrels. And even though they joke that they are a "role model" couple for the time they have spent together, they do have many quarrels in the play.

In his review of *Love! Valour! Compassion!* in the *New Leader*, Stefan Kanfer determined "[Perry and Arthur] would rather fight than switch; arguments and jealousies cement their relationship." In the car on the way to Gregory's country house, they argue over Perry's use of vulgar language when a woman cuts him off in traffic and over Perry's depiction of John Jeckyll as "Satan." At dinner Arthur is infuriated with Perry when he refers to an African child in a photograph Buzz describes as a "nigger." Each time they fight, though, whether it is a disagreement over bath towels or the way to behave in polite company, they always make amends.

Somewhere in their collective past, Arthur cheated on Perry. He confesses this to Bobby the night he finds him downstairs after making love with Ramon. This long-ago act of unfaithfulness in an otherwise dedicated relationship may have actually strengthened the bond between them. They each have given the other something to dislike and many things, including forgiveness, to love. Arthur's end comes, he tells us in the play's final moments, three years after Perry's. "On the bus," he says. "Very quietly. Just like my life. Without him, I won't much mind."

Perry Sellars

Perry is a lawyer who, in addition to his practice, helps with some of Gregory's company's business and provides pro bono work for AIDS organizations. He is in a long-term relationship with Arthur. Over the July Fourth holiday weekend they celebrate fourteen years together. He is in many ways the "straightest" of the play's gay men. He dresses conservatively and half-playfully/half-seriously mocks Buzz for his obsession with musical theatre and calls him a "big fruit." He objects when Buzz appears on the lawn naked except for an apron, does not skinny-dip in the lake with the rest of the men, and refuses to join them in donning a tutu and tights for Gregory's drag rendition of *Swan Lake*.

He is also the play's most constant narrative voice. Although each of the men takes a turn with a monologue or narration to the audience, Perry is the one heard most often, and he seems to provide the most "objective" views of the other characters and their behavior.

At the same time, his conservatism often presents him as the uptight, occasionally angry, counterpoint to Arthur's gentle humanity. While driving to Gregory's country home with Arthur and Bobby, Perry angrily curses a woman who cuts him off in traffic, using the most vulgar language he can think of. Later at dinner, while discussing a photograph of a starving African child Buzz keeps above his desk at work, Perry angrily fumes, "Feed him, brush him off, and in ten years he's just another nigger to scare the [sh□□] out of us."

Perry's outbursts are a source of occasional strife between Arthur and him, but he always finds a way to apologize and gain Arthur's forgiveness again. Near the end of the play, it is Perry who starts telling the audience what the future holds for them. Predictably, he is exacting with his calculations. "I have twenty-seven years, eight months, six days, three hours, thirty-one minutes, and eleven seconds left," he says. He reveals that he dies in front of the television watching *Gone with the Wind* while Arthur argues with his brother on the phone in the next room. At the time of his death, then, he spent nearly forty-two years with his lifelong companion.

Themes

Love

Although they are more complicated and many-layered than the simple words might suggest, McNally declares his important themes in the very title of his play: *Love! Valour! Compassion!* Through the dialogue and action of the play, he explores the way these abstract ideas have very real impacts on the lives of his eight characters, and he suggests how they may impact all of us.

The first words of the play introduce one of its most important themes. "Um. I love my. Um. House," Gregory stutters in the opening narration. He continues, explaining that he loves not only the house itself (the antique furniture and wallpaper, the lighted windows, and so forth) but also the happy memories it contains and the joyful times he continues to have there with his friends all around. Gregory's house is a refuge of sorts from the rest of the world, a place where he and his friends can gather to relax and be themselves.

Within that house, over the course of the summer in which the play takes place, a number of variations on the theme of love occur. Other than his house, Gregory's love in life is Bobby, his live-in boyfriend of four years. Bobby is blind and twenty years younger than Gregory. He adores Gregory and admires his commitment to dancing, though he has never been able to fully experience it for himself. Bobby's youth and inexperience, however, are significant in their relationship. He is more easily led astray, and his affair with Ramon causes a deep rift between them. Even though Gregory eventually forgives him, Bobby reveals in the play's epilogue that he eventually leaves Gregory for a younger man.

Perry and Arthur represent a different kind of love. Whereas Gregory and Bobby are still early in their relationship, still discovering who they are, Perry and Arthur are celebrating their fourteenth anniversary together. "We're role models," Perry says of their relationship. "It's very stressful." They bicker and feud like many couples who have been together for so long, but they are also completely committed to each other. Their fate, they reveal in the final scene of the play, is to grow old together and die within a few years of each other.

Yet a third kind of love presented in the play is that shared between Buzz and James. Their love has the excitement and romance of young, new love, as well as the patience and commitment of a more mature relationship. It also possesses an urgency, spurred by James's failing health as a result of his struggle with AIDS that explains why their bond together develops so quickly over the summer. At the beginning of the play, Buzz vows that he has all but given up on pursuing new relationships seriously, partly out of frustration at driving away so many potential mates ("I'm too intense for them," he admits) and partly out of fear at what his own HIV-positive condition has in store for him. Nonetheless, his passion for James shows that love is wild, emotional, and not

something that can be easily controlled. Despite his best intentions to remain single, he ends the play intensely loving James and caring for him in the advanced stages of his illness.

Valour

In his play's title, McNally chose the British spelling for "valour," perhaps because of his two English characters, twin brothers John and James Jeckyll. To be valorous means to be brave or courageous, to boldly face difficult odds (whether or not one overcomes them). This quality describes a number of characters in the play. Buzz, who is HIV-positive, uses his sarcasm and humor to present a valorous front to the world. Gregory, who has had a long and successful career as a dancer and choreographer is now, at the age of forty-three, bravely assembling what will be his final masterwork, which he passes on to the younger Ramon. Then there is Bobby. Blind since birth, Bobby makes necessary accommodations for his handicap but struggles not to let it define him. When he is introduced to Ramon for the first time, he tells him simply, "I get around fine. It'll surprise you." True to his word, it is one of the few references to Bobby's condition that is made in the play, and he is as active a participant in their weekend gatherings (canoeing, skinny-dipping, strolling through the wooded grounds) as any of the other men.

Finally, one of the most valorous characters in the play is James. He arrives as a newcomer to the group over the July Fourth holiday weekend and quickly gains their affection and admiration. For all his suffering (he is in the advanced stages of AIDS and suffers from chronic fatigue, incontinence, and other symptoms related to his illness), he is remarkably at ease and good-natured. He even deflects attempts by others to highlight his condition. In a poignant moment of the play, Buzz tries repeatedly to get James to reveal how he is really feeling, to which James finally responds, quoting Shakespeare, "We defy augury." It is his semi-humorous attempt to valiantly resist the urge he must have to completely break down, which would bring down those around him, particularly Buzz. Interestingly, though, James's own assessment of himself is that he was not valorous. In the play's epilogue, he shares, "I wasn't brave. I took pills. I went back home to Battersea and took pills. I'm sorry, Buzz."

Compassion

To be compassionate means to share the suffering of someone else and to want to aid and support that person. Compassion, in many ways, is the feeling that bonds Gregory and his friends together. Gregory has compassion for Bobby's blindness, helping when needed and giving him his space and freedom the rest of the time. When Bobby's sister is killed, Gregory is prepared to drop everything to be at Bobby's side with his family in Texas. Everyone has compassion for Buzz, whose HIV-positive condition is stable but precarious. Though he might drive them all mad from time to time with his constant barrage of show tunes and biting sarcasm, they sympathize with his condition and even encourage his antic behavior. They even accept John into their midst, despite the fact

that he is overly critical, darkly humored, and willing to pry into their private diaries to learn about their secrets and thoughts.

For almost all of the men, however, the greatest acts of compassion in the play center on acts of forgiveness. When he finds Bobby downstairs after his brief sexual encounter with Ramon, Arthur admits that he too once cheated on Perry. It was difficult, he relates, but Perry did eventually forgive him, an act of compassion that led to more than forty years of togetherness for them. Gregory must finally do the same for Bobby when Bobby admits his indiscretion with Ramon. Gregory's gesture of compassion is a particularly moving one. After threatening and physically attacking Ramon in the kitchen, forcing him to confess his love for Bobby, Gregory is emotionally liberated. His new freedom allows him to complete the dance number he has been laboring over and ultimately give it to Ramon to dance in its world premiere.

A similarly moving act of compassion is James's forgiveness of his brother, John. While James sits in a chair, wrapped in a bathrobe and slumped in a feverish state, John harshly relates to him all of the jealousy and anger he has felt toward his brother for many years. He accuses him of having the "good soul" and tells him he resents the way their parents and everyone else they have known have given James their unconditional love. In the end, weak as he is, James offers his brother some release from his torment. He holds John's hand, cries with him, and forgives him for all his spiteful remarks and hatred. James's compassion actually leads John to want to be a better person.

Style

Juxtaposition

One of the unique and clever aspects of *Love! Valour! Compassion!* is its use of space and time. Although the play is set in a single location, Gregory's country house in upstate New York, the action occurs in every room of the house and all over the grounds, and frequently the audience is presented with multiple scenes happening at the same time. By presenting the action of the play in this fashion, McNally is relying on a literary device known as *juxtaposition* to cleverly compare and contrast characters, dialogue, and themes. Juxtaposition occurs when two things are placed side by side, or over one another, and their important qualities are compared and contrasted.

In *Love! Valour! Compassion!* this occurs frequently. In the very first scene of the play, following Gregory's narrated introduction, the men are all asleep in their beds while Bobby and Ramon have a sexual encounter in the kitchen. Visually, the audience sees Bobby and Ramon kissing and holding one another in the kitchen; Gregory, John, and Buzz alone in their beds; and Perry and Arthur together in theirs. Perry's narration, which runs underneath and throughout the scene, describes the events from the vantage of the future, as they happened in the past. This simultaneous presentation of characters and their thoughts throughout the house quickly establishes who these men are and how the audience should feel about them. Bobby and Ramon's act of physical passion is quick and fleeting. Afterward, as Bobby cleans up the broken milk bottle with Arthur, he is instantly guilt-ridden. Seeing Bobby and Ramon together while Gregory sleeps alone and unaware just upstairs in his own home makes Bobby seem untrustworthy and dislikable. But hearing him relate the events a moment later to the kind-hearted and more mature Arthur, makes him seem human, vulnerable, and sympathetic.

This scene also illustrates dramatic irony; one of the greatest advantages and cleverest effects of juxtaposition in *Love! Valour! Compassion!* Dramatic irony is a literary device that occurs when the audience knows something that the characters do not. In this instance, the audience knows from this juxtaposed flashback at the beginning of the play that Bobby cheated on Gregory sometime during the Memorial Day weekend holiday. Later, when time is reversed and the characters begin to arrive at Gregory's for the start of the weekend, this knowledge affects how they are all viewed, particularly Bobby, Gregory, and Ramon. Although they hold each other, say kind things, and seem to be a committed loving couple, the audience knows that very soon Bobby will betray Gregory. And though he presents himself as John's boyfriend and the young newcomer to the bunch, the audience knows Ramon will soon be the one to tempt Bobby away.

Soliloquy

In dramatic literature, a soliloquy is a monologue, a speech in which a character talks to himself or reveals his thoughts alone or with only the audience to hear. Perhaps one of the most famous is Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" soliloquy, in which he questions whether he should commit suicide out of grief and desperation at the death of his father, the king.

In *Love! Valour! Compassion!* , McNally uses character soliloquies to provide exposition, to move the action of the play along, to reveal the secret, inner thoughts of characters, and to look into the future. One of the first soliloquies of the play belongs to John who, while spying on the other men in their beds and reading through Gregory's diary, mockingly tells the audience, "I am that merry wanderer of the night," driven, he claims, by curiosity to know who his friends really are. John's brutally honest soliloquy directly reveals many things about him that he might not have shared openly in dialogue with other characters. He has a cold, hard personality. He does not seem to have the same compassion for the suffering of his friends that the other men possess. He is dishonest and not trustworthy.

At the beginning of the second act, Bobby delivers a soliloquy that provides exposition, explaining to the audience what has happened since their Memorial Day weekend together. Through Bobby's soliloquy, the audience learns that Ramon has been calling him since that weekend. He reveals that the last time he made love with Gregory, he was thinking of Ramon. And he reveals that Ramon has arranged to meet him on Gregory's raft in the middle of the lake that day.

One of the most challenging and unique soliloquies in the play belongs to John, midway through the third act. In performance, the parts of John and James, the twin Jeckyll brothers, have been played by the same actor. The script does not call for the two of them to be onstage at the same time□except for the moment of John's soliloquy, which he is supposed to be partly narrating to the audience and partly addressing to his brother, James, who is slumped in a chair, semiconscious with fever. As he speaks to the empty chair, John conveys all the anger and jealousy he has felt toward his brother (himself) and accuses him of having the "good soul," while he was left with the bad soul and no ability to make people love him unconditionally, the way they love James. In a difficult moment for the performer playing this part, John then describes to the audience how James took his hand and pressed it against his face, cried on it, kissed it, and told him that he forgave him for all his hatred. In the end, John himself settles into the chair and becomes James. This clever twist on the use of a soliloquy accomplishes a number of things: It adds even greater depth to John's character; it resolves one of the plot's central complications; and it reinforces the "theatricality" of McNally's play.

Historical Context

The characters in *Love! Valour! Compassion!* may not be representative of "mainstream" America in the 1990s, but they face all of the same cultural and political events the rest of the country experienced in that decade, as well as some challenges and crises unique to the gay community. The 1990s in America were years dominated by the Bill Clinton presidency; a soaring economy; an amazing boom in electronics, computers, Internet communications, and commerce; a growing healthcare crisis; increasing acts of terrorism involving United States citizens and the military around the world; and high-profile acts of violence here at home, covered by television news that began to operate twenty-four hours a day.

For homosexuals in America, it was also a decade of important gains, controversial setbacks, and tremendous losses. For much of the 1980s, the AIDS epidemic was largely ignored by the federal government. First named "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome" (AIDS) in 1982 at a time when 1,614 cases were diagnosed in the United States and 619 people died from the disease, it was not until 1987 that President Ronald Reagan publicly commented on AIDS and significant attention was focused on its prevention and treatment. By that time, 71,176 people in the United States had been diagnosed with AIDS, and 41,027 were dead.

By the early 1990s, several popular and high-profile figures, including Rock Hudson, Liberace, and Arthur Ashe, had died from AIDS-related complications. In 1990, a teenage hemophiliac named Ryan White received national attention when he announced that he had contracted AIDS from a blood transfusion, and the following year professional basketball player Magic Johnson announced to the world that he was HIV-positive and had likely contracted AIDS from casual, unprotected, heterosexual sex. Suddenly, the AIDS epidemic was not just a cause for concern among homosexuals; it was a cause for concern for everyone. While the disease continued to spread around the country and around the world, more and more resources were provided for AIDS research and prevention campaigns, and the tide began to turn. The estimated annual number of AIDS-related deaths in the United States fell approximately 14 percent from 1998 to 2002, from 19,005 deaths in 1998 to 16,371 deaths in 2002.

In addition to the threat of AIDS, homosexuals in America in the 1990s faced other prominent social and cultural issues. In 1993, the United States military, in an effort to maintain an official ban on gays and lesbians serving in the armed forces while still protecting the civil rights of homosexual soldiers, introduced a "don't ask, don't tell" policy that allowed homosexuals to serve their country, provided they kept their sexual orientation a secret. In September 1993, Congress passed a law supporting the controversial military policy.

In a similarly mixed act of legislation, President Clinton signed the "Defense of Marriage Act" in 1996. The act denied federal recognition of same-sex marriages and gave states the right to refuse to recognize same-sex marriages that were licensed in other states. The act did not prohibit states from deciding for themselves whether to legalize gay

marriages, but it did make it more difficult for gay couples in long-term relationships to receive the same recognition and rights as heterosexual married couples. That same year, Hawaii became the first state to legalize same-sex marriage.

On the employment scene, in a separate action taken at the same time as the Defense of Marriage Act was passed, the Senate voted against a bill called the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) that would have banned employers from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation. In 2001, ENDA was reintroduced, but by 2003 it had still not passed the Senate, even though some of the nation's largest and best-known employers, such as Walmart and Disney, had begun to forbid discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in their own corporate policy statements.

Critical Overview

When McNally's *Love! Valour! Compassion!* opened Off-Broadway at the Manhattan Theatre Club in 1994, it was greeted warmly by its reviewers, who predicted it would quickly transfer to Broadway and be the splash of the following season. It did, and it was, earning McNally the Tony Award for Best Play in 1995 (one of four Tony Awards he netted between 1990 and 1997). Those who praised the play applauded its profound, evocative themes, its masterful dialogue, and its depiction of gay characters as ordinary people facing both ordinary and extraordinary problems.

In the *Nation*, David Kaufman observed:

What's difficult to convey in any discussion of *Love! Valour! Compassion!* is the grace with which the characters become real people as their stories unfold. It's not only that they're vividly rendered, but that they're revealed gradually, in a layered and richly textured fashion.

In *Backstage*, reviewer David Sheward noted that through the characters' struggles in the play "we see the adverse and the everyday." But, he added, "McNally's deep characterizations, sharp eye for details, and terribly funny and terribly natural dialogue are anything but everyday." In *Time* magazine, Richard Corliss urged his readers, "In concert with director Joe Mantello and a faultless ensemble, McNally has created a celebration□of manhood, friendship, making do, soldiering on. If you're looking to celebrate the vibrant life of off-Broadway, start right here."

Still, some critics, even those who otherwise praised the play, felt compelled to warn their audiences about its liberal use of male full-frontal nudity, something Broadway has seen its share of in productions like *Hair* and *Oh, Calcutta!* but has not yet come to accept as ordinary and tasteful. "One caveat about this theatrical masterwork," cautioned Sheward, "it has more nudity than anything since *Oh, Calcutta!* So if you plan to audition for the replacement company, head for the gym." Reviewing the 1997 film version for *Variety*, Emanuel Levy commented, "This screen version contains some improvements over the play. There is less emphasis on frontal nudity, which was excessive onstage."

For all its awards and general popular acclaim, however, there were those reviewers who disliked the play. Robert Brustein's review of the Broadway production in the *New Republic* took McNally to task for being overly predictable, formulaic, and, above all, non-theatrical. "*Love! Valour! Compassion!* is simply another example of . . . Yuppie Realism," Brustein complained, "a genre that focuses on upwardly mobile middle-class professionals, usually on vacation, in the act of exchanging witticisms while examining faulty relationships and compromised principles." Furthermore, the critic fumed, it is "less a play than a treatment for a T.V. series . . . the play has no real subject other than sexual relationships□who is sleeping with whom, and how the who and the whom can be rearranged."

Although he found some positive qualities in the play, Stefan Kanfer, writing for the *New Leader*, ultimately expressed some of the same concerns as Brustein. "Even at his infrequent best," Kanfer suggested, "McNally shows little originality or audacity. For all its psychological candor and physical nudity, *Love! Valour! Compassion!* is actually nothing more than *The Big Chill* seen from the other side of the bed, complete with nostalgic angst and b□□y asides."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Glenn is a college dean and professor specializing in theatre history and literature. In this essay, Glenn applies the principles of gay/lesbian studies and "queer theory" to Mart Crowley's 1968 drama The Boys in the Band *and to McNally's play, and explores how the depiction of gay characters and gay identity has changed in the last three decades.*

Playwright Terrence McNally has been faced with the same persistent question about his work throughout his career: "What does this play mean for the gay community?" Perhaps it should not be surprising, considering that in more than three decades of playwriting, McNally has contributed such well-known, gay-themed creations as the homosexual bathhouse farce *The Ritz* (1975), the gay breakup drama *The Lisbon Traviata* (1985), and *Corpus Christi* (1997), his retelling of the life of Jesus in which Christ and his disciples are all homosexuals. Still, McNally resists being categorized. "I'm always accused of saying that I'm not a gay playwright," he lamented in a 1997 interview with the *Advocate*, a national gay and lesbian news magazine. "I'm not saying that at all. I'm a gay man who is a playwright. It's not just about my sexuality."

The fields of gay/lesbian studies and queer theory are relatively new ones, developing in the 1980s and 1990s respectively. They both grew out of feminist theory, which only had its start in the mid-1970s. Feminist scholars were among the first academics to challenge the assumption that one mainstream, universal identity□the white male citizen□should serve as the foundation for all literary criticism, social studies, and political thought and action. Feminist theory considered gender (designations of "male" or "female") to be not one set of natural, inborn characteristics common among everyone sharing the same physical traits, but instead a group of ideas, concepts, signs, and signifiers that society assigns to "male roles" or "female roles" that defined, and sometimes limited, the way those roles functioned and interacted in the world. For feminists, there was no single universal "truth" that defined the way bodies, minds, and personalities, whether male or female, functioned as a result of biology. Rather, bodies, minds, and personalities were formed through a combination of biology and societal beliefs and expectations about them that were based on gender.

Essentially, feminist scholars asserted that differences among people matter. A number of factors, including race, class, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality all interact, producing an endless variety of identities that cannot be rigidly defined ("white, middle-aged male" or "young, black female") and, indeed, can actually change over time. This also suggested that gender is not "essential" to an individual's "identity" but is only a component of a much larger system of identity crafting.

Gay/lesbian studies incorporate many of the same scholarly techniques as feminist theory to consider social structures and social ideas about sexual identity. It considers especially how homosexuality and heterosexuality have been historically defined and how societal views of what is "normal" and what is "abnormal" influence what is depicted in art, literature, and popular culture. Analyses of characters in works of

literature by gay/lesbian studies scholars often tend to push characters toward broader categories of definition. A bisexual character, for example, may be considered a homosexual character who has not yet found his "true" identity.

Like gay/lesbian studies, queer theory examines and critiques both "normal" and "abnormal," or "deviant," behavior, particularly sexual behavior, and insists that all such behaviors that contribute to forming categories of identity (for example, "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual," "transvestite," "fetishist") are social constructions, not just natural or biological states of being. Because of this, there are nearly as many variations on being "queer" (different from the "norm") as there are people who identify with one or more of these categories. As a result, queer theory tends to allow for a larger number of identity categories, without passing judgment on whether one or another is more "authentic" and acceptable.

When Mart Crowley's *The Boys in the Band* first premiered onstage in New York in 1968 and then on movie screens across the country two years later in 1970, it immediately challenged some of the concepts of "normal" and "abnormal" sexual identity believed to be held by "mainstream" America. Although gay/lesbian studies and queer theory had not yet been described as formal means of criticism, the popular press still recognized the significance of Crowley's work. The play was hailed as a watershed event, a turning point in the history and culture of homosexuals in America. Although previous plays and films had included homosexual characters and themes, they were typically minor and marginalized or depicted as "deviants" to be scorned and punished. *The Boys in the Band*, though, presented for the first time on a mainstream stage a group of men discussing their sex lives, dancing together, and even kissing and having simulated sex on stage. "Mart Crowley's work was so assertively gay and so deliberately outrageous," John Rickard recalls in a retrospective article in the *Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide*, "that it was bound to shock the largely non-gay audiences that flocked to see the play and, far greater numbers, the movie."

The play's setting is a birthday party that thirty-year-old Michael is giving for his friend, Harold. The guests include the slightly younger Donald, a lover of Michael's from years before and now a good friend who sees the same analyst; Emory, a campy interior decorator; Bernard, a black bookstore clerk somewhat insensitively dubbed "the African Queen"; and Hank and Larry, the only "couple" at the event (though Larry still pursues other men while Hank, divorced school teacher and the father of three children, seeks a monogamous relationship). Two outsiders join this group of long-time friends: an attractive but dumb hustler named "Cowboy," who is presented by Emory as a birthday present for Harold, and Alan, Michael's heterosexual friend from college who stops by for the evening after a fight with his wife.

The play is alternately hilarious, melodramatic, and tragically serious. Sometimes it has the feel of high farce like McNally's *The Ritz*; and at other times it follows a roller-coaster ride of barbed dialogue and warped relationships similar to Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. After getting off to a mostly comic beginning, the play turns toward trouble when Michael, a struggling alcoholic who has been on the wagon for five weeks, downs a glass of gin. As the alcohol pours, the men settle in for sharp

exchanges, some of which now seem dated and stereotypical at best and horribly offensive at worst. At one point, Emory, who shares a special relationship with Bernard, tells his black friend, "Why don't you have a piece of watermelon and shut up."

The height of the play's emotional ride climaxes in a game of truth called "Affairs of the Heart" that Michael coerces the group into playing. In the game, each man must phone the one person that he has truly loved, scoring points based on whether he makes the call, speaks to the person, identifies himself, and confess his love. Bernard and Emory share stories of loves they lost when they were young. Hank ends up calling the answering service he shares with Larry and leaving a message that he loves him. Alan, who does not want to play the game, is finally pushed into making a call by Michael, who is sure Alan is going to call a mutual college friend named Justin and confess his love and deep-seated gay identity to him. Alan does make the call and leaves the message, but when Michael takes the phone from him, he discovers that Alan has been speaking to his wife, Fran, attempting to reconcile their differences.

In many ways, the success of *The Boys in the Band* in 1968, and again on screen in 1970, represented progress for those with some kind of gay identity in America. It proved that homosexual characters could be accepted by mainstream audiences for who and what they were. Still, the question was raised whether the gay characters themselves actually accepted their identities, when so much of what they did and said to each other in the play seemed filled with conflicting emotions, animosity, and self-doubt. Much of that anguish is summed up in one of the play's more famous lines, when Michael challenges his friends, "You show me a happy homosexual, and I'll show you a gay corpse."

This kind of grim humor is heard throughout the play. Sometimes it is voiced as a soul-searching sigh of resignation from a gay man constantly battling a straight world, as when Michael sadly laments, "If we could just learn not to hate ourselves quite so much," or when Harold arrives late to his own birthday party and exclaims, "What I am, Michael, is a 32-year-old, ugly, pock-marked Jew fairy□and if it takes me a while to pull myself together and if I smoke a little grass before I can get up the nerve to show this face to the world, it's nobody's [g□□d□□] business but my own." At other times, it is delivered as an indictment, a condemnation, as when Harold brutally confronts Michael after Alan's phone call to his wife and tells him, "You are a sad and pathetic man. You're a homosexual and you don't want to be. But there is nothing you can do to change it. Not all your prayers to your God, not all the analysis you can buy in all the years you've got left to live. You may very well one day be able to know a heterosexual life if you want it desperately enough□if you pursue it with the fervor with which you annihilate□but you will always be homosexual as well. Always, Michael. Always. Until the day you die."

While mainstream audiences flocked to theatres and cinemas around the country to see Crowley's work, many gay viewers were less enthusiastic. Gay activists protested both the play and the movie. Some critics, too, complained that the characters were too stereotypical or too self-loathing. Even years later, in a 1995 essay for the *Journal of*

Popular Film and Television, Joe Carrithers criticized the movie version of Crawley's work, saying:

Such a film negatively depicts those gay lives that do not follow heterosexual paradigms, reinforcing long-held stereotypes of gays as sad, troubled, and unhappy people. Gay viewers, hoping to see themselves and their lives reflected on the screen, find instead two equally distasteful options: either they must behave like straight men if they want to succeed, or they must accept a definition of their identity imposed by straight men.

Still, the author himself insists that the characters in *The Boys in the Band* were drawn from real life and that the story is a product of its time, of an age when homosexuality was a crime in most states and was listed as a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association (a designation that would not change until 1973). In a 1995 documentary called *The Celluloid Closet*, Crowley said, "I knew a lot of people like those people. The self-deprecating humor was born out of a low self-esteem, from a sense of what the times told you about yourself."

Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* (1985) was an all-out assault on the American government and healthcare industry that allowed AIDS (for a time called the "gay plague") to ravage the homosexual population in the country for years before the disease began to significantly affect heterosexuals and government resources responded to the need. Harvey Fierstein won the 1993 Tony Award for Best Play with *Torch Song Trilogy*, three short plays about a flamboyant drag queen, a semi-closeted bisexual schoolteacher, and their lovers and friends. And perhaps most famously, Tony Kushner won the Tony Award for Best Play and the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 1991—1992 for his epic, two-part play *Angels in America*, which depicts the struggle against AIDS in both the gay and straight communities, set against the backdrop of the conservative decade of the 1980s.

For all their appeal to both gay and straight audiences and for all their critical acclaim, each of these plays, like *The Boys in the Band*, also presents one or more characters that are marginalized, conflicted, ambivalent, or even filled with self-loathing because of their sexual orientation and confused identity. In some ways, they seem to persist in the notion that there is such a thing as a "gay identity," even though, as Timothy Scheie argues in "Acting Gay in the Age of Queer," an essay for *Modern Drama*, such an identity no longer exists. "The idea of 'gay' as a self-evident category of identity and an easily definable community has lost considerable currency in the age of the queer," Scheie asserts. "From a queer perspective, the articulation of sexuality that presupposes a stable 'gayness' assumes a naïve, uncritical and even dangerous position."

One of McNally's accomplishments, then, in terms of queer theory applied to his play, is that to a man all eight characters seem comfortable with who and what they are. No one is closeted, withdrawn, or remotely ambivalent about his sexuality. While sexuality does not completely define the men, it joins many other unique and individual characteristics to inform who they are and influences much of what they say and do in the play. There

is no uniform "gay identity" that all of the characters fit or struggle against. They are all gay, but they are also each unique and wear their "gay identities" differently.

The middle-aged, mature, and stable Gregory is a successful dancer and choreographer who may share in some of the stereotypical, societal expectations of gay men. (He collects antiques in his meticulously restored hundred-year-old country home and choreographs an all-male drag dance number from *Swan Lake* for an AIDS benefit.) But ultimately Gregory is defined more by his commitment to his blind lover, Bobby, and his passion for his art than by these less important surface qualities.

Arthur and Perry are successful professionals (an accountant and a lawyer) in a fourteen-year relationship that will last them the rest of their lives. It is not idyllic: They bicker, fight, separate, and reunite as most committed couples do. Arthur once cheated on Perry, an act that damaged but did not destroy their union. Perry does not manage his anger well and often curses in a vulgar fashion and reveals his bigotry toward racial and ethnic minorities. Of all the men, he may also be the most reserved in his outward expressions of his sexuality and homosexuality. He expresses shock at the more extroverted Buzz when he appears on the lawn naked except for an apron and high heels, does not join the other men when they go skinny-dipping in the lake, and refuses to dress in drag to dance in Gregory's *Swan Lake*. Still, as Scheie notes, these are simply individual preferences related to sexual identity. "Making visible differences . . . is a double-edged sword," Scheie writes. "One person's Gay Pride march is someone else's idea of a freak show, or yet another's sell-out to the myth of a tolerant inclusive pluralism." Perry's reactions do not mean he is conflicted or withdrawn, but merely that he has selected to craft his identity in different ways.

At times, McNally even seems to be poking fun at the idea of a single, homogenous, dominant identity against which all other "queer" variations must be compared. At one point, the flamboyant and musical-loving Buzz is insisting to his friends that what they all really need is more "gay music" written by gay composers. Perry points out that there is no such thing as "gay music," to which Buzz retorts:

Well, maybe there should be. I'm sick of straight people. Tell the truth, aren't you? There's too [g□□d□□] many of them. I was in the bank yesterday. They were everywhere. Writing checks, making deposits. Two of them were applying for a mortgage. It was disgusting. They're taking over.

Buzz's mock reverse bigotry is meant for humorous effect, but it also instantly raises in the mind of the heterosexual reader or audience member the objection that there is no such thing as a conspiracy of "straight people," with all the similarities and single-mindedness that category suggests, all intent on "taking over" the world. "Straight people," like "gay men," may share some basic traits, but they are defined more by their differences than their similarities.

One of the play's most revealing exchanges of dialogue about the role of sexual identity occurs between John, the middle-aged English rehearsal pianist and failed playwright, and his twenty-something boyfriend Ramon, the handsome Puerto Rican dancer and

"outsider" in the group of men. In an after-dinner conversation that turned heated over the question of what they truly care about in the world and how they should help their fellow man, Perry asks for feedback from the "younger generation" (Bobby and Ramon). Ramon begins to respond, "As a gay man, I think□" He is cut off by John who rebukes him, "No one cares what you think as a gay man, duck. That wasn't the question. What do you think as a member of the human race?"

It would be hard to imagine any of the characters in *The Boys in the Band* leaping into the debate with such an observation. For them, in 1968, all questions seemed to point toward "what you think as a gay man." Thirty years later, while the struggle among homosexuals and heterosexuals in America for universal acceptance continues, the way in which many people, artists and critics included, define their identities and present themselves to the world has significantly changed.

Source: Lane A. Glenn, Critical Essay on *Love! Valour! Compassion!*, in *Drama for Students*, Gale, 2004.

Adaptations

Love! Valour! Compassion! was adapted as a film in 1997 by Terrence McNally. The film version stars most of the original Broadway cast, including John Glover, Stephen Spinella, Stephen Bogardus, John Benjamin Hickey, Justin Kirk, and Randy Becker. Jason Alexander plays the role of Buzz, originated on Broadway by Nathan Lane. The film was produced by Fine Line Features and directed by Joe Mantello. It was made available on video by New Line Home Features in 1997.

Topics for Further Study

Critics have compared some of McNally's plays, particularly those like *Love! Valour! Compassion!* and *Lips Together, Teeth Apart* that develop through conversational dialogue rather than significant action, to those by the Russian playwright Anton Chekhov. Read one of Chekhov's major plays, perhaps *The Cherry Orchard* or *The Seagull*, and compare and contrast Chekhov's style of contemporary realism with McNally's. Consider such things as narrative voice, plot structure, development of characters, and how each author treats important themes in his work.

A prominent subject in *Love! Valour! Compassion!* is AIDS, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Buzz is HIV-positive and struggling to contain his symptoms. James shows the telltale lesions that appear in the advanced stages of the disease. Both men die not long after the play ends, and all who live on are touched again and again by the emotion and destruction the disease presents. The play was first produced in 1994, only a few years after America had begun to respond in significant ways to this public health crisis. Research the discovery of AIDS in the early 1980s and see what you can learn about its spread across America and around the world. How was the disease first identified? What are its symptoms? How is it transmitted? What can be done to protect oneself and others? What is currently being done to eliminate AIDS or to help people affected with the disease live longer?

In the play, Gregory is a celebrated dancer and choreographer who has committed his life, and his body, to his art. By the end of the play, Gregory is forced to face his own physical limitations: Although his mind is still capable of devising masterful dances, his forty-three-year-old body is no longer able to dance them, and he must begin sharing his art with the next generation. Literature and history are filled with stories of artists who sacrificed for their art, paying with their bodies, their minds, and their loved ones. Find a story about such an artist and write an essay about him or her. What did the artist sacrifice? What did he or she hope to create or gain? How did those around him/her respond? In your opinion, is great art worth paying such a tremendous price for?

Most of the characters in the play are involved in one way or another with the theatre scene in New York. Gregory is a choreographer and has his own company. Ramon is a dancer. Buzz and James are costumers. John is a pianist and an aspiring playwright. Even Perry, the lawyer, provides legal advice to Gregory and his company. What careers are available in the performing arts, both on the stage and behind the scenes? What kind of education and training is required for these jobs? How much do they pay? Where are they located?

What Do I Read Next?

Terrence McNally has written more than two-dozen plays over the past three decades, some with characters and themes and construction similar to *Love! Valour! Compassion!* In *Lips Together, Teeth Apart* (1991), two straight, married couples meet for a Fourth of July weekend at the Fire Island home recently left to one of the women by her brother who died of AIDS. The setting causes them to face many troubling issues including their homophobia, failing marriages, and fear of death.

McNally received a Tony Award for Best Play the year after *Love! Valour! Compassion!* with his biographical play *Master Class* (1996) about the legendary opera diva Maria Callas. On the surface, *Master Class* seems to present a series of voice classes Callas offered at Julliard toward the end of her career. Underneath, though, the play explores the relationship between art and artist and the price artists sometimes pay for a lifetime of discipline and creative outpouring.

Tony Kushner's epic, two-part drama *Angels in America* (1991) is set in the mid-1980s during the discovery and spread of AIDS. It has been lauded as being among the best dramas of the twentieth century and was turned into a movie for television in 2003.

Another contemporary play that deals directly with the impact of AIDS in this country is Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* (1986), a play about the earliest days of the AIDS crisis and America's lack of response to the needs of the gay community. It has been lauded as being among the best dramas of the twentieth century and was turned into a movie for television in 2003.

Growing Up Gay in America: Informative and Practical Advice for Teen Guys Questioning Their Sexuality and Growing Up Gay (2002), by Jason Rich, provides a sensitive, thoughtful, and wide-ranging exploration of many topics important to male teens who are gay or questioning whether they may be gay and want information about self-acceptance and fitting in. Rich provides specific information about relationships, sex, the gay social scene, gay-friendly organizations, advice lines, schools, churches, and web sites.

Revelations: The Autobiography of Alvin Ailey (2000) takes its title from one of Alvin Ailey's most famous ballets. This book was completed years after Ailey's death in 1989 by his chosen coauthor, Peter A. Bailey. It includes interviews with dancers, colleagues, and friends who remembered Ailey and his contribution to the world of dance, as well as Ailey's own reflections on his professional hurdles, personal life, and relationships with family and friends. He chronicles his life from his early childhood, living in poverty in Texas, to politics and racism and their effect on his dancing and the eventual founding of the popular and successful Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

Further Study

Christie-Dever, Barbara, *AIDS: Answers to Questions Kids Ask*, Learning Works, 1996.

This informative question-and-answer style approach to AIDS awareness and education for teenagers includes biographical sketches of Ryan White, Magic Johnson, and others.

Guernsey, Otis L., Jr., ed., *Broadway Song and Story: Playwrights/Lyricists/Composers Discuss Their Hits*, Dodd Mead, 1986.

This collection contains reflections about writing and producing plays for Broadway by some of its most successful playwrights, lyricists, and composers, including Edward Albee, Hal Prince, Marsha Norman, Stephen Sondheim, Lanford Wilson, Elia Kazan, and Terrence McNally.

Osborn, M. Elizabeth, ed., *The Way We Live Now: American Plays and the AIDS Crisis*, Theatre Communications Group, 1990.

The American theatre experienced many losses in the early years of the AIDS epidemic. This collection of essays and plays confronts the disease and the emotions it has stirred in the theatre and in public life.

Stine, Gerald J., *Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome: Biological, Medical, Social and Legal Issues*, 3d ed., Prentice Hall, 1998.

This book provides an informative look at the history and current state of the AIDS/HIV pandemic, including statistics, social reactions, economic costs, recent medical findings, and references.

Zinman, Toby Silverman, ed., *Terrence McNally: A Casebook*, Garland Publishing, 1997.

This collection of essays and interviews examines McNally's thirty-year career to date, focusing particularly on the two plays for which McNally won Tony Awards: Best Play of 1995 for *Love! Valour! Compassion!* and Best Play of 1996 for *Master Class*.

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Rickard, John, "*The Boys in the Band*, 30 Years Later," in *Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide*, Vol. 8, Issue 1, March 2001, p. 9.

Scheie, Timothy, "Acting Gay in the Age of Queer: Pondering the Revival of *The Boys in the Band*," in *Modern Drama*, Vol. 42, Issue 1, Spring 1999, p. 1.

Sheward, David, Review of *Love! Valour! Compassion!*, in *Backstage*, November 11, 1994, p. 30.

Zinman, Toby Silverman, "The Terrence McNally," in *American Theatre*, March 1995, pp. 12—18.

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Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

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Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Drama for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535