Master Class Study Guide

Master Class by Terrence McNally

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Introduction

Terrence McNally's *Master Class* was first produced by the Philadelphia Theatre Company in March 1995; it opened at the Golden Theatre in New York City in November of the same year. The play is based on a series of master classes given by the renowned opera singer Maria Callas at the Juilliard School of Music in New York in 1971 and 1972. Callas (1923-77), was the greatest dramatic soprano of her generation and also a controversial figure. Her restless and tempestuous personality often led her into disputes with opera managements and feuds with rival singers. However, she was adored by her fans and was the subject of constant media attention, including gossip about her jet-set life with the wealthy Greek ship owner Aristotle Onassis.

Although *Master Class* does delve into the triumphs and tragedies of Callas's life, its primary focus is the art of dramatic singing. As McNally's fictional version of Callas teaches her class, she explains to her students, two sopranos and a tenor, just what it takes to invest the music with real feeling, revealing as she does so how demanding the profession of opera singing is. She also reveals her own contradictory personality—proud and egotistical yet also vulnerable and self-pitying. In spite of all the flaws of its main character, however, *Master Class*, written by a man who has been a Callas fan since he was a teenager in high school, is a tribute to the dedication of a great singer and actress to her chosen art.

Author Biography

Terrence McNally was born in Saint Petersburg, Florida, on November 3, 1939, the son of Hubert Arthur and Dorothy Rapp McNally. McNally grew up in Corpus Christi, Texas, where he was introduced to the theater at the age of seven when his parents took him to see *Annie Get Your Gun.* McNally graduated from high school in 1956, after which he attended Columbia University in New York. After graduating Phi Beta Kappa in 1960 with a bachelor's degree in journalism, he went to Mexico on a Henry Evans Traveling Fellowship. In Mexico, he wrote a one-act play, which he sent to the Actors Studio in New York, and in 1961, the Actors Studio offered him a job as stage manager. Later that year, McNally began touring the world as a private tutor for the children of John Steinbeck. When he returned to New York in 1962, he received the Stanley Award for his play *This Side of the Door*. After revisions, this play became *And Things That Go Bump in the Night*, which was produced in New York in 1965.

The play was a failure, and McNally briefly changed careers, becoming assistant editor for *Columbia College Today.* But he soon returned to playwriting, and he won a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1966. Over the next few years, McNally wrote a number of one-act plays, many of which were later produced off-Broadway or on television. The most successful of these was *Next* (1968), a comedy about the indignities suffered by an overweight man at a military induction center. *Where Has Tommy Flowers Gone*? (1971) and *Whiskey* (1973) were less successful. *Bad Habits* (1974), made up of two one-act plays that satirize the treatment of the mentally ill, was a box-office success and won the Hull Warriner Award and an Obie Award. *The Ritz* (1975) was also a box-office hit.

After the failure of *Broadway, Broadway* in 1978, it was six years before McNally returned to the Broadway stage as the creator of the book for the musical *The Rink*. His next play, *The Lisbon Traviata*, about a gay playwright and opera fan who attempts to revive his career and preserve his relationship with his lover, opened off-Broadway in 1985. *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune* (1987), a drama about romance in the age of AIDS, was a critical and commercial success that was later adapted for film, with the screenplay written by McNally.

During the 1990s, McNally continued to write many plays, including *Lips Together, Teeth Apart* (1991), *A Perfect Ganesh* (1993), *Love! Valour! Compassion*! (1993; winner of a Tony Award), *Master Class* (1995; also a Tony Award winner), and *Dusk* (1996). McNally also wrote the books for the musicals *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1993) and *Ragtime* (1996), for both of which he received Tony awards, and the libretto for *Dead Man Walking*, an opera by Jake Heggie that premiered in San Francisco in 2000.

McNally has been a member of the Dramatists Guild Council since 1970 and its vice president since 1981.

Plot Summary

Act 1

As *Master Class* begins, the house lights are still up. An accompanist seats himself at a piano, after which Maria enters, wearing expensive clothes. She announces that there is to be no applause, because everyone is there to work. She makes some remarks about music as a discipline and says that the singer must serve the composer. In the first of many anecdotes about her life, she tells how, during World War II, she used to walk to the conservatory and back every day, even though she had no proper shoes.

She calls for the house lights to be turned off, and addresses some remarks to the accompanist, telling him that all performers must have a distinctive appearance. The accompanist becomes the butt of her somewhat cruel humor, and she pays tribute to her own teacher, Elvira de Hidalgo.

The first student, a young soprano named Sophie de Palma, enters. Maria criticizes her appearance and tells her to get over her nerves. Sophie says she is going to sing an aria from *La Sonnambula* (*The Sleepwalker*), an opera by the Italian composer Bellini. It is a difficult aria in which the heroine, Amina, bemoans her loss of love.

After a bored stagehand brings out the footstool that Maria has requested, the accompanist plays the introduction to the aria, but Sophie only manages to sing the first word before Maria interrupts. She tells Sophie that she is not really listening to the music and shows her how to do it. Sophie tries again, but again Maria interrupts her after the first word. She tells the soprano that she is not feeling the true emotions of the character.

Following another interruption from the stagehand, who brings a cushion for Maria, Sophie sings again. Maria gives instructions as her student sings. Then Maria asks the singer to translate from the Italian, and Maria instructs her on the passion behind the words. She also draws her attention to the stage direction, which calls for the singer to fall on her knees, which Maria demonstrates. Then she talks Sophie through the emotions that are being expressed in the aria and berates Sophie for not having a pencil handy to take notes. Maria recalls that her teacher never had to ask her if she had a pencil and adds that that was during the war, when there were shortages of everything. Having a pencil meant going without an orange. She made notes on everything, so she could continue the tradition built up over centuries of opera. She berates Sophie for not knowing the names of all the great sopranos, such as Giudetta Pasta (1797-1865), Zinka Milanov (1906-89), Rosa Ponselle (1897-1981), and Lotte Lehmann (1888-1976).

Sophie begins to sing, and Maria hears in her mind her own performance as a recording of Maria Callas is played. Her mind goes back to her relationship with the wealthy Greek businessman Aristotle Onassis, whose companion she was for many years. As she

reminisces, she imitates Onassis's voice and his crude way of speaking. She has him say that he bought her with his wealth and that she gave him class, allowing him to acquire the respect that had not formerly been given to him. He tells her how wealthy he is and that she can have everything she wants. He wants her to stop her singing career and sing only for him, and he also asks her to have his child.

The aria ends, and on the recording the audience applauds. Maria thinks back to when she was on the stage at La Scala, the famous opera house in Milan. The last part of the aria, known as a caballeta, plays. It is also the end of the opera. She thinks back to an early disappointment, when another girl was chosen to sing the role of Amina at a student recital. Then she proudly relates how she, who was fat and ugly with bad skin, succeeded. She listens to the musical embellishments that the real Callas is singing on the recording and imagines the way the house lights used to come up while she was still singing. It thrills her to see everyone watching her; her triumph is complete as she listens to the ovation. Then the lights come back up, and the setting is once more the master class. Maria thanks the soprano and leaves the stage.

Act 2

Maria speaks about the sacredness of her art. She notices that there is a bouquet of flowers for her on the piano, but she does not seem to appreciate them. The next student to come out is another young soprano, Sharon Graham, who is to sing one of Lady Macbeth's arias from Verdi's opera *Macbeth.* Maria tells her to go off the stage and re-enter in character. She also mentions that Sharon's gown, although gorgeous, is inappropriate for the occasion. Sharon goes off and does not reappear. Maria realizes that she has hurt the student's feelings but is unrepentant, saying that one cannot be sensitive in a tough business.

A tenor named Anthony Candolino is the next student. Maria asks him some questions, and he says his ambition is to be a great singer, rich and famous. He has chosen to sing an aria from Puccini's opera *Tosca.* He sings the first phrase, and Maria stops him. She is dissatisfied with him, and after a short exchange, she tries to send him home, but he refuses to go. Maria relents and gives him instructions about voice technique and the expression of feeling. Anthony sings, and Maria is enraptured.

The next student is Sharon, who has decided to return, claiming that she has been sick. She starts Lady Macbeth's aria once more, but again Maria is displeased. Maria takes over, entering as Lady Macbeth, reading a letter. She sings the first few lines, but her voice is cracked and terrible. Sharon takes over as Maria coaches and cajoles, urging her to get the feelings right, to sing with passion, and to take her cues from the music. After this, she sends Sharon backstage and then summons her again to repeat the scene. But this time, the audience hears not Sharon but a recording of Maria Callas singing the same piece in a live performance from 1952. Maria adds comments as she listens. Her mind goes back to her debut at La Scala, and she imitates the voice of her husband Battista Meneghini. Battista asks whether she loves him, but the question, which he asks often, only irritates her. After giving expression to her resentments and

her past difficulties, she boasts that she is now beautiful and had thirty-seven curtain calls that night. Then she breaks some bad news to her husband: she will be marrying Onassis. She apologizes. Then she starts speaking to Onassis, saying that all the years she spent perfecting her art were for him, even though he dislikes opera. She tells him she is pregnant with his child. He bullies her into having an abortion. She tells him that she was fired at La Scala but that in the last performance, she was defiant. She kneels and asks him to marry her.

The recording of Callas ends. Maria tells Sharon she should work on some music more appropriate to her limitations. Sharon bursts into tears and lashes out at Maria, telling her she cannot sing anymore and is envious of anyone younger who can. She leaves.

Maria says that if she has been harsh, it is because she has been harsh with herself, but she has tried to communicate something of what she feels about what an artist and musician does. She concludes with advice to the singer: think of the expression of the words, good diction, and your own deep feelings. She gathers her things and leaves.

Act 1

Act 1 Summary

Master Class is a two-act play based on singing classes given by world-famous opera star Maria Callas. As the play begins, the lights are intentionally still up in the theater as an accompanist takes his seat at a piano. The pianist takes his time adjusting to his seat and acknowledges some friends in the audience. Suddenly Maria Callas is on the stage dressed in not an operatic costume but a custom pantsuit and expensive accessories.

Maria approaches the edge of the stage to address the audience and tells the people that this is not a performance but a classroom. That explains her manner of dress and the fact that the house lights are still up. Maria admonishes the audience that there is to be no applause tonight. This is a classroom, and the students are there to learn, not to perform. Maria comments on the value of projecting, whether singing or speaking, and makes it clear to the listeners that part of the student's lesson is to reach those who have come to the theater.

According to Maria, music is the most important thing in life, especially her life, and she tells a brief anecdote about walking to and from the conservatory during World War II even though she did not have proper shoes and her feet bled. Discipline and courage, she says, are the foundations of a proper operatic career.

Throughout the act, Maria delves in and out of the present by interjecting stories of her past or brief glimpses of her diva behavior. She calls for the house lights to go off because she can't ask any student to come out on the stage under such harsh conditions. Still not satisfied with the stage appointments, Maria asks first for water, then a cushion for her chair and finally a footstool.

Seemingly ready to begin, Maria engages the accompanist and finds out that his name is Manny. Manny has accompanied Maria before, but she does not remember because his appearance, to her, is very nondescript. Every performer must have a distinctive appearance, and Maria relates some of her own attributes and behaviors that have added to her nickname of La Divina.

Maria has nothing but praise for her own singing teacher, Elvira de Hidalgo, who encouraged not only Maria's voice but her stage presence. Maria calls for the evening's first "victim" and jokingly tells Manny that at some point he will understand her sense of humor. When the first student comes out onto the stage, Maria ignores her for a moment while calling out that the theater is too hot and that the footstool still has not arrived. The student, Sophie de Palma, is a young soprano in awe of the great Maria. Unfortunately, the admiration is not returned. Maria tells Sophie to close off her ears, and the diva tells the audience how nondescript the girl is. Again Maria emphasizes the importance of having a distinctive look and a stage presence.

Sophie announces that she will sing an aria from La Sonnambula in which the heroine wails over a lost love. In the middle of Sophie's introduction, a stagehand appears bearing the footstool. Again, the accompanist begins Sophie's introductory music, and the girl manages to sing only one word before Maria interrupts her. To Maria's ears, Sophie is not really feeling the music even though the girl has only sung one note. It is easier for Maria to show Sophie what she means instead of just telling her, and the instructor sings some bars from the aria as an example.

Again the stagehand interrupts, this time bringing a cushion for Maria's chair. Sophie begins to sing once more, and Maria gives verbal direction over the girl's voice. Maria would like Sophie to translate from the Italian verse, but the girl is not able to do so. The diva drops to her knees, arms outstretched, to demonstrate the stage direction as well as the meaning of the words.

According to Maria, Sophie is emotionless and not engaged in the scene. The instructor tells the girl to make notes on the score. When Sophie cannot produce a pencil, Maria shares another story about always having a pencil available for her own lessons as a girl, even though a mere pencil was hard to come by during the war. Maria would have preferred to buy oranges but bought pencils instead because it was absolutely vital to make notes on performances. Not only is Sophie lacking in emotional depth, the girl is not familiar with the great sopranos: Rosa Ponselle, Giudetta Pasta, Lotte Lehmann and Zinka Milanov. Sophie's lack of engagement in her own vocation startles Maria.

Sophie begins the aria again, but Maria's mind is somewhere far away. As a recording of her own singing fills the theater, Maria talks to the audience about her life off stage, specifically her love affair with Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis. Maria speaks as herself and as Aristotle, imitating his vulgar speech and crude attitudes. The basis of their nine-year relationship was that Onassis brought Maria money and she brought him class and respectability.

Throughout the monologue, Maria shares that Onassis wanted her to leave the stage and have a child, but not even all Onassis' wealth could pull Maria away from her first passion, singing. As the aria ends, there is the sound of applause, and the back of the stage is lit to resemble the stage at La Scala, the Milan opera house. This time Maria remembers not a success, but a disappointment when another girl is chosen to play the coveted role of Amina at a student performance.

Maria defiantly tells the story of how she, once a fat and unattractive girl, overcame all odds to become one of the most popular operatic singers of all time. Maria is swept away with the music and describes the feeling of performing at La Scala knowing that many of the world's dignitaries have come just for her performance. Shaken out of her reverie by the end of the music, Maria thanks Sophie, wishes her well and leaves the stage. The accompanist returns the music score to Sophie, and the two leave the stage.

Act 1 Analysis

The art is everything, according to Maria Callas, not only in the appropriate interpretations of operas but in personal presence and relationships. Everything is driven by the creative process, which Maria feels is not only a gift but also a means for a wealthy career. It is hard to find the line between personal and professional with this character because Maria is always performing. A request for a glass of water is just as dramatic as the explanation of the next piece of music.

Maria seems to disregard her colleagues, since she doesn't even consider that her contemporaries can even come close to her stellar career. To Maria, the world is lucky to have found her. In reality, Maria forces the world to notice her and, even now, vies for the spotlight. Some characters are too big to be held or confined, and that is exactly the way Maria likes it. Maria's diva behavior is apparent, even though Maria warns the audience not to indulge her in this classroom setting. Constant demands for stage accessories draw attention to Maria's needs, and it's clear that she expects adoration.

Maria does not seem suited to conducting classes of any sort. The impatience she shows with the lackluster students seems to overshadow any desire to share her talents. Maria competes with her students. No one else can ever measure up to the composer's work, and certainly no one can infuse the work with more passion than she can. Maria has suffered greatly in her life, which made her performances extraordinary, and it is impossible to expect the same level of feeling from younger people with limited life experience.

The class is conducted after Maria's stage career is over, and she focuses on the emotional interpretations instead of the technical aspects of the performances. At this point in her life, Maria is aware that her technical prowess is limited, but she still has passion and drama, which she can hope to infuse into these young people by asking them to explore their own emotional extremes.

Act 2

Act 2 Summary

The stage is as sparse as it was in the first act, but this time there is a bouquet of flowers lying on the piano. The accompanist again enters and takes his seat on the bench. However, he ignores the audience. The house lights are lowered, and there is a considerable wait until Maria enters and moves to the front of the stage. Maria approves of the lowered house lights, mentioning that the performers will not be distracted by the people and can concentrate on the drama of the moment. Maria engages Manny in some light banter and then comments on the flowers on the piano. Manny explains that the bouquet is from an unknown admirer, but Maria is not impressed, at least not visibly, and calls for the next student.

Sharon Graham is the next soprano to enter the classroom, and she announces that she will sing one of Lady Macbeth's arias from Verdi's opera. Maria stops Sharon before she can sing a note and tells the girl to leave the stage and reenter as Lady Macbeth. The role demands the complete demeanor, Maria instructs, not just the correct pronunciation of words. Maria encourages Sharon to astonish the audience and never miss an opportunity to be theatrical.

Before Sharon leaves the stage, Maria criticizes Sharon's choice of clothing. The evening gown Sharon wears is lovely. Maria says, but inappropriate for a classroom setting. As Sharon leaves the stage, Maria explains to the audience that all types of guidance are necessary to make complete performers out of young people.

Apparently Sharon is wounded by Maria's comments. The girl does not return to the stage when called. Maria leaves to find the girl but returns to the stage to say that Sharon is too sensitive for such a tough business. To Maria's way of thinking, art is domination. Every performance is a struggle between the artist and the audience, which Maria considers to be the enemy.

Not skipping a beat, Maria calls for the next student. A tenor named Tony comes on the stage. Maria chastises him for not using his full Italian name and says that any time he sings he will be Anthony Candolino. When Maria asks about his ambitions, Tony answers that he wants to be a world-class singer like Maria. Her only response is to ask for more water.

As with Sophie, Maria asks questions about passion and emotions before Tony is allowed to sing. Maria is not impressed by Tony's attitude and tries to send him home, His refusal to go speaks to Maria, and she is ultimately won over by his voice and style. Maria can add nothing more about Tony's performance and releases him from class.

The next student is Sharon, the soprano who had earlier left the stage wearing an evening gown. Claiming that she had been momentarily sick, Sharon is anxious to

complete her Lady Macbeth aria, but Maria is not at all pleased. Maria leaves the stage to show Sharon how to make the appropriate entrance and sing the part. Unfortunately, Maria's voice cracks and shakes, and Sharon picks up the aria while Maria gives verbal direction.

When Sharon returns to the stage to try the aria one more time, the audience hears Maria's voice, not Sharon's, singing the same aria from a live event many years ago. Just as in the first act, Maria speaks over the music and shares scenes from her own life beginning with her debut at La Scala. Maria's husband at the time, Battista Meneghini, pleads with Maria to declare love for him, but the diva is irritated by the old man and will not give him the satisfaction of the answer he seeks. Battista married Maria when she was younger, heavier and not quite as attractive, and after reaching celebrity status, she is bored with the old man's insistent attentions.

Maria's true passion is the opera. If she loves anything unconditionally that night, it is her performance, marked by thirty-seven curtain calls. Maria can bear Battista's pleadings no longer and admits that she plans to marry Aristotle Onassis. Maria's monologue then switches to Onassis. She addresses him, telling him that her quest for perfection has been for him even though he doesn't understand or like her choice of career. Hoping to save the relationship, Maria admits that she is pregnant, but Onassis casts her away and demands that Maria have an abortion. Maria obeys his command. Onassis is unmoved by the fact that Maria's voice is deteriorating and that she was fired from La Scala. As she explains the defiance she showed in her last performance at the famous opera house, Maria passionately falls to her knees and begs Onassis to marry her.

The aria ends, and the audience is applauding. Maria comes back to the present and advises Sharon to select musical compositions which won't be as difficult for her limited capabilities. Sharon rages at Maria, saying that jealousy is forcing the diva to be so cruel. The girl leaves the stage.

After a long pause, Maria rationalizes Sharon's behavior by saying that the girl must have thought the expectation was to sing like Maria Callas, but only Maria Callas can do that. Maria admits that the experience has hurt her feelings in spite of the fact that many people don't believe that she has any emotions, and she questions the validity of conducting the classes.

Maria contends that if she has been critical, it is because she has always been critical of herself. Admitting that words aren't her forte, Maria asks for some credit for at least trying to communicate in the best way she knows how. Maria states that although the world will not collapse without artists, people like herself have made it a better place.

To Maria, the life of a singer is a difficult one absorbing the entire life, so anyone entering into this profession must want it wholeheartedly. Maria asks that students concentrate on their expressions, good diction and deep feelings. All Maria asks at the end is that singers sing properly and honestly, and that is her reward. With that, Maria

gathers her belongings and leaves the stage. The accompanist picks up the bouquet and follows Maria offstage while the house lights go up.

Act 2

Act 2 Summary

The recurring theme for the play is the passion for the art of singing. Maria tries to impress on the students that they must see into the music, transcending the obvious and draw on personal experiences to give the most appropriate performances. If talent is conversely related to pain, that explains Maria's life fully. During her wartime childhood, Maria was a plump, unattractive girl. She survived multiple emotional traumas and transformed them into world-class performances.

Maria's passions were not limited to the stage, as evidenced by the monologue in this act when she addresses Aristotle Onassis. Her life played out against the backdrop of his wealth and global status, and Onassis wounded the fragile Maria personally with betrayal and callous indifference.

This act seems to be a mirror of the first in its style and technique, showing Maria chastising and reprimanding cowering music students. The act is punctuated by minor diva episodes, and Maria recalls additional episodes from her life, concentrating on the same subject matter, opera and Onassis. The second act concentrates on the end of Maria's career, in the loss of her voice professionally and Onassis personally. Maria's dominating nature is ultimately sadder and more poignant, as the end of her career is contrasted with the beginning of her students' careers.

Characters

Accompanist

Manny the accompanist rehearses with Maria the day before the master class, but she cannot remember him since he is now wearing a different sweater. She tells him that he does not have a distinctive look and that he must acquire one. Manny is an admirer of Maria and does not react badly to her rather rough treatment of him in act one. In act two, he wins her praise.

Anthony Candolini

See Tenor

Sophie de Palma

See First Soprano

First Soprano

Sophie de Palma is Maria's first student. She tries to sing an aria from Bellini's *La Sonnambula* but does not get past the first word before Maria interrupts her. Maria tells her that she is not listening to the music; she is singing but not really feeling the emotions of the character. Maria's relentless criticism, although meant to be constructive, makes Sophie cry. Maria even tells her that her skirt is too short.

Sharon Graham

See Second Soprano

Maria

Maria is a woman of deep feeling and passion who has had many triumphs and tragedies in her life. Having suffered greatly, she believes this is the key to capturing the tragic emotions of the characters whose roles she sings. She is deeply proud of her achievements because through hard work and persistence she was able to overcome many obstacles. Even as a young woman during World War II, she did not allow hunger and other adversities to interfere with her studies. Her recollection of how a fat and ugly (in her own estimation) adolescent later became a beautiful woman on the stage at La Scala is tinged with pride and pain. There is also a hint of self-pity when she recalls that no one cared about the times she cried herself to sleep at night. It was only her

performance on stage that people cared about. Totally dedicated to her art, Maria views a performance as a struggle for domination. She regards the audience as an enemy that she must conquer; she must win listeners over by convincing them that she is right in her singing and in her interpretation of the role. She believes that her musical art makes a difference in the world if practiced with dedication.

Maria reveals herself as a courageous, restless, tempestuous woman, much as the real-life Maria Callas was. Her anecdotes show that she was always ready to face her enemies, to relish her triumphs, and even to turn her disasters into triumphs. In her conduction of the master class, which she takes as seriously as her own performances, she is totally confident, even arrogant, regarding the rightness of her opinions about acting and singing. She is therefore an intimidating presence for the young students who have come to learn from her. She can be domineering and contemptuous, with an acerbic, mocking sense of humor. She is impatient with interruptions, browbeating the stagehand and using the accompanist as the butt of her humor. She is also ruthless in her appraisal of her students' efforts. Although she is sincere in wanting to pass on her knowledge, she lacks patience, humility, and grace. She tells her students to forget about her presence, while making it impossible for them to do so. She is also always ready to disparage other singers, and she has withering put-downs for some of the great figures of the operatic world, such as Joan Sutherland, Renata Scotto, and Zinka Milanov.

Second Soprano

Sharon Graham is Maria's second student, who comes on in act two. She elects to sing Lady Macbeth's entrance aria, known as the Letter Scene. Maria tells her that her beautiful gown is inappropriate for the occasion and then sends her off to make a more forceful entrance. But Sharon does not return, and Maria assumes that she has hurt her feelings. Later, Sharon does return, with the excuse that she was taken ill. She begins reading the text of the letter and then starts on the aria, as Maria aggressively coaches her. But when Maria tells her that she should attempt something less difficult, Sharon bursts into tears and says that she does not like Maria, adding that Maria can no longer sing and is envious of anyone who is young and can.

Stagehand

The stagehand, dressed in jeans and a tee shirt, brings Maria a footstool and later a cushion. He is clearly uninterested in his work, and he arouses Maria's contempt.

Tenor

Anthony Candolini is the student tenor who has a session with Maria in act two. He has two music degrees and has performed some minor roles. His ambition is to be a great singer and to become rich and famous. He sings an aria from Puccini's *Tosca,* and after some coaching from Maria he wins her enthusiastic approval.

Manny Weinstock

See Accompanist

Themes

Although the play touches on many of the main events of Maria Callas's life, it is not in essence a biographical portrait. Rather, it is an exploration of the nature of artistic creation, as applied to operatic singing and acting. Maria makes clear that art is serious business that cannot be done by half measures; it demands total commitment on the part of the singer/actress. Being an opera singer can never be an easy career; the singer must give everything to the demands of her craft. This means intense discipline over a lifetime.

In addition to total commitment, the singer must be able to call on resources within herself that will enable her to fully inhabit whatever role she is playing. Since the essence of opera is raw emotion, she must be able to fully experience all the emotions felt by the character—joy, sadness, love, hate, jealousy, rage. It is not enough merely to sing the words and get the notes right. "It's not a note we're after here," says Maria to her student Sophie, "It's a stab of pain."

Since Maria emphasizes again and again that her art consists not only of vocal technique but of "Feeling, feeling, feeling," the question arises of how an artist can capture the feeling, say, of a character like Amina in *La Sonnambula,* who has lost the man she loves. Maria makes clear that the singer must have some life experience behind her before she can successfully create the role. She must have experienced the same emotions herself, in her own circumstances. Maria constantly nags the students about whether they really know what they are singing about, and she is not inquiring merely about their knowledge of Italian. She asks Sophie whether she has ever had her heart broken, as Amina has, because no one to whom this experience is foreign could express the passion required in the role.

It is the same when Maria coaches Sharon. Is there anything, Maria quizzes her, she would kill for—a man, perhaps, or a career? She asks because that is exactly what Lady Macbeth is contemplating in the aria that Sharon is about to sing. If Sharon has not felt such desire herself, how can she sing about it? When Sharon replies that she has never really thought about such matters, Maria says that is because she is young. Life will eventually teach her, although in Maria's view, art is even harder to master than life. The point Maria wishes to make is that the singer must reach down into the depths of her psyche to access those times in her life when she felt similar emotions. "You have to listen to something in yourself to sing this difficult music," she tells Sharon. What she is alluding to, whether consciously or not, is a concept developed by acting teacher Lee Strasberg, known as "emotional memory," based on the work of Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938) and his "method" system of acting. The technique of emotional memory focuses on recalling the sensory atmosphere of a past activity in order to recapture the emotion associated with it. That recovered emotion can then be used by the actor as the equivalent of the emotion being experienced by the character in the play. This is one reason why, for example, Maria sets the scene of the tenor's aria in praise of Tosca, telling him that it is ten o'clock on a beautiful spring morning and that he made love all night to Tosca, the most beautiful woman in Rome. When the tenor points out that the

score says nothing about such things, Maria replies, "It should say it in your imagination. Otherwise you have notes, nothing but notes."

At the heart of this is a paradox. By digging deeper into herself, the singer can in fact transcend herself. The artistic imagination transforms the singer into a kind of spiritual medium who can identify absolutely with the fictional character she is portraying. "When I sang Medea I could feel the stones of Epidaurus beneath the wooden floorboards at La Scala," says Maria. She found for herself a "direct line" to the character, as if the woman she was portraying were a real person. It is not a matter of acting, a word that Maria dislikes, but of *being.* (*Medea* is an opera by Italian composer Luigi Cherubini based on a play by the Greek dramatist Euripides. Callas was famous for her performances as Medea.)

Style

Structure

Both acts share the same basic structure. In its essentials, act one consists of Maria's interaction with the first student, the soprano Sophie de Palma, followed by a long monologue in which Maria recalls events from her life. In the original New York production, Zoe Caldwell, who played Maria, stood alone in the light on a darkened stage for this reminiscence, which includes her relationship with Aristotle Onassis, during which he asks her to bear his child, and one of her great triumphs at La Scala. As La Scala is recalled, the interior of the famous opera house is projected on the back of the stage. The entire reminiscence is accompanied by a recording of the historical Maria Callas singing the same aria (Amina's from *La Sonnambula*) that Sophie has been attempting. Act two contains Maria's session with the second young soprano, Sharon Graham, which is split into two sections, before and after her session with the tenor, Anthony Candolino. This act reaches its climax with the same device that was used in act one. It is an even longer monologue this time, as Maria imagines herself in an earlier period of her life, in her first marriage, then again with Onassis, and finally once more at La Scala, although in different circumstances. Continuing the parallelism with act one, she recalls how she became pregnant with Onassis's child (just as he had asked her to in act one). The final parallel is that, as in act one, a recording of Callas plays, and again she is singing the same aria (Lady Macbeth's) that the student had been attempting. The transition is effected through a change in lighting.

The Leading Role

Since the play is virtually a one-woman show, with the other characters brought in mostly as foils so that Maria can reveal her artistic personality and her views about singing and acting, the success of the production rests on the ability of the actress who plays Maria to capture the imperious, querulous, and tragic essence of the character. Not only this, she also needs to impersonate convincingly various figures from Maria's life, such as her first husband, her lover Onassis, and her teacher, Elvira de Hidalgo. The actress must also be able to speak the small amount of Italian in the play in a convincing and accurate manner.

Music

Obviously, in a play about a legendary opera diva, music is of central importance. Not only are two Callas recordings played, but the tenor and soprano sing arias on stage (the latter does not complete hers). The centrality of singing, and the tragedy of Callas, whose voice deserted her at a comparatively young age, is forcefully made in the only line of music that Maria herself sings in the entire play. This comes midway through act two, and it is the opening of Lady Macbeth's aria, after she has read the letter. The

stage directions read, "What comes out is a cracked and broken thing. A voice in ruins. It is a terrible moment." The audience is thus given a contrast to the glorious voice on the recordings and so becomes aware of its fragility—as well as the tragic vulnerability of the character on stage to whom the voice belongs.

Historical Context

Maria Callas

Maria Callas was by common consent the greatest dramatic soprano of her generation, excelling in the Italian *bel canto* repertoire. She had a mesmerizing stage presence, and although many regarded her voice as flawed, she could communicate intensity and emotion as no other soprano could. Her personal life was scarcely less dramatic than the operatic roles she played, and there were well publicized incidents involving her legendary fiery temperament, her feuds with opera managements, her rivalries with other singers, and her love affairs.

Callas was born in New York in 1923. She was American by birth and early upbringing, but her parents were Greek, and in 1937 she and her mother left the United States for Greece. Callas was also Italian by virtue of her marriage to Giovanni Battista Meneghini, which lasted from 1949 to 1959.

In Greece, Callas became a pupil of the soprano Elvira de Hidalgo at the Athens Conservatory. She made her operatic debut as Tosca at the Athens Opera in 1941, and she took on other roles over the next three years. In 1945, Callas returned to New York, where she was engaged by Giovanni Zenatello for Ponchielli's opera *La Gioconda* at Verona in 1947. This appearance was in effect the beginning of Callas's career, and in Italy she was soon singing major roles in operas by Wagner, Verdi, and Puccini. Gradually, under the guidance of Italian conductor Tullio Serafin, she began to concentrate on earlier Italian opera. She made a name for herself singing Violetta in *La Traviata,* Gilda in *Rigoletto,* Lucia in *Lucia di Lammermoor,* Amina in *La Sonnambula,* and Norma in Bellini's opera of that name, as well as in *Tosca.* She made her debut at La Scala in *Aida* in 1950; her first appearances in London (1952), Chicago (1954), and New York (1956) were in *Norma.*

By this time, Callas was world famous and had become an extremely controversial figure, known for her great triumphs on the stage but also for her explosive, sometimes quarrelsome personality and her backstage disputes. She was the center of media attention wherever she went, and her rivalry with fellow soprano Renata Tebaldi kept the gossip columnists busy. Callas once said that the difference between her and Tebaldi was the difference between champagne and Coca-Cola. She was known for withdrawing from performances at the last minute, and on many occasions there were factions of the audience that were openly hostile to her. Callas caused one of the greatest scandals in operatic history in January 1958, when she attempted to sing Norma in Rome while suffering from bronchitis. In the audience were the Italian president and other dignitaries. Heckled by the audience, Callas struggled through the first act and then abandoned her performance. The debacle produced an avalanche of negative publicity.

In 1959, Callas left her elderly husband for Aristotle Onassis, but in the mid-1960s Onassis abandoned her for Jacqueline Kennedy, whom he married in 1968.

Troubled by difficulties with her voice, Callas withdrew gradually from the operatic stage. She gave her final performance as Tosca at Covent Garden in 1965. In 1971-72, she gave a series of master classes in New York, and in 1973 and 1974 she emerged from retirement to make a concert tour with her former colleague, Giuseppe di Stefano.

Callas died in Paris in 1977 at the age of fifty-three.

Callas's Master Classes at Juilliard

Callas conducted twenty-three two-hour opera master classes at the Juilliard School of Music in New York from October 1971 to March 1972. She had not sung in public for six years, and her voice was not the great instrument it once had been. Doing the master classes was a way of overcoming her terror of performing by incorporating singing as part of her teaching.

There were twenty-five students in the master class and a paying audience that included some of the great names in opera. Callas did not allow applause from the audience, saying on one occasion (captured in the play), "None of that. We are here to work." Callas scholar John Ardoin writes in "Callas and the Juilliard Master Classes," "And work she did—serious concentrated, dedicated work that placed her, her voice, her personality, and her ideas squarely at the service of her students. . . . This was no ego trip." In the real-life master class, Callas did not offer insulting comments about other singers or indulge in personal reminiscences or displays of ill temper, as she does in McNally's play, although she did on one occasion tell a student that she was inappropriately dressed. However, much of the advice she gave conformed to the sentiments McNally gives her in *Master Class*. Arianna Stassinopoulos, in her biography of the singer, reports that Callas said to a soprano who had just sung one of Gilda's arias from Verdi's *Rigoletto,* "Gilda is a passionate girl, you know; you must convey to the audience all her palpitating emotion before you even begin to sing." Only one of the three arias that figure in *Master Class* was on Callas's syllabus at Juilliard, and that was the tenor aria from *Tosca.* In the play, Maria says she never really listened to that aria, but the master class shows clearly that the real-life Callas knew it extremely well.

Callas was always well prepared for her class, having sung earlier in the day, with her accompanist, all the arias that were to be covered in the session. Sometimes she would sing during the class. On some days, the voice was only a shadow of what it had been, but (unlike the dramatic moment in the play when Maria's voice fails her), Callas would simply say, as Ardoin reports, "I'm not in voice today" and move on without fuss. At other times, her voice would attain its characteristic splendor.

At her last class, Callas said good-bye in almost exactly the words that McNally gives her in the final paragraph of her last speech in *Master Class*. In his early version of the

script in 1994, the entire farewell speech was virtually word for word what Callas had said, but McNally altered the speech in his revisions.

Critical Overview

Master Class was a resounding commercial success. It ran from November 1995 to June 1997 on Broadway, recording over six hundred performances. By 1997, there also had been about forty productions abroad, including those in Argentina, Estonia, Germany, Israel, Italy, Hungary, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, and Turkey.

Zoe Caldwell received high praise for her performance as Callas, whom she played from opening night until June 28, 1996, and for which she won a Tony Award. Brad Leithauser, in *Time,* wrote that "you don't doubt that if [Caldwell] could only transfer what's inside her to her pupils, they would sing like angels." However, Caldwell's strong performance tended to obscure, according to Leithauser, the shortcomings of the play. He questioned the division of the play into two acts, since "the second act doesn't deepen, it merely extends." He also declared that McNally's attempt to "drive [the play] toward an old-fashioned theatrical climax (one of the students ultimately mutinies against Callas' bullying) feels contrived." These alleged shortcomings, however, did not stop the play from winning the number six slot in *Time's* end of year list of the best plays of 1995.

Nancy Franklin in the *New Yorker* also remarked on Caldwell's outstanding performance ("Caldwell plays Callas with . . . steely force and conviction") but felt that the play did not serve the historical Callas well. She argued that the recordings available of Callas's master classes make it clear that "as a teacher Callas was a consummate professional . . . . she was unfailingly attentive to her students, and didn't use the audience as a foil for her egomania," unlike the Callas in the play. Franklin's conclusion was that because of McNally's desire to present Callas as an "artistic personality"—complete with haughty, sardonic manner—and to discover what it was in Callas that so moved her audiences, the play "says more about its author than about its subject . . . . *Master Class* doesn't get us any closer to Callas."

When Patti Lupone took over from Caldwell on Broadway in the summer of 1996, Vincent Canby, reviewing the production for the *New York Times,* commented that the play was more "complex and difficult than it first seemed." He was referring to the way *Master Class* goes back and forth between Callas's memories and her interactions with her students. Canby described the Callas of the play as "a spectacular pousse-café of gallantry, [b——]iness, dedication and impatience with the second-rate." Lupone, who played the original title role in the musical *Evita,* did not quite convince Canby with her performance, which he described as possessing "more power than control":

Under Leonard Foglia's direction, she makes all the right moves, but she doesn't execute them with the innate grace of the woman who was possibly the twentieth century's most dazzling opera star. There's something slightly crude about this Callas when she should be cleanly, imperially demanding.

Later actresses who have taken on the role of Callas include Faye Dunaway, who plays Callas in the film version of the play. Dunaway appeared in a touring production of *Master Class* at the Shubert Performing Arts Center in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1997. Alvin Klein, reviewing the production for the *New York Times,* found some weak spots in her interpretation of the role and argued that she did not own it as completely as Caldwell and Lupone had. He pointed in particular to her veiling of her emotions in the crucial section when the tenor moves Callas deeply with his rendition of an aria from Puccini's *Tosca:* "Ms. Dunaway's reaction to his splendid performance is guarded. She masks her tears, turning away from the audience, after he leaves." Although Klein acknowledged that there may be some merits to the choice Dunaway made, he adds, "yet Ms. Dunaway's reserve narrows the performance and works against much of the role as Mr. McNally crafted it." Since Klein regarded the play as "little more than a sketch for an actress of largesse to fill in with heartbreak and transcendence," he claimed that a less than perfect performance in the leading role merely exposed the relative weakness of the script.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English and has published many articles on twentieth-century literature. In this essay, Aubrey discusses some outstanding moments in Maria Callas's singing that have been captured on audio and videotape and how these reflect the themes of Master Class. *He also discusses the changes Callas brought to opera singing.*

Playwright McNally is a lifelong fan of Maria Callas. He first heard her when he was a fifteen-year-old high school student in Texas in 1953. The recording was of Callas singing in Donizetti's opera *Lucia di Lammermoor,* and McNally felt that she was singing just for him. He later wrote, "Listening to Callas is not a passive experience. It is a conversation with her and finally, ourselves.... She tells us her secrets—her pains, her joys—and we tell her ours right back" (quoted by John Ardoin, author of "Callas and the Juilliard Master Classes," in *Terrence McNally: A Casebook*).

McNally was fortunate enough to have heard Callas sing live twenty-five to thirty times, something that few other people in the United States can match. Callas's career was short, and not many people younger than fifty are likely to have heard her live on the operatic stage, since her last performance, as Tosca at London's Covent Garden, was in July 1965. (Many determined operagoers waited in line for five nights to get tickets.) Her last performance in the United States was at New York's Metropolitan Opera a few months earlier. At the Met, the audience gave Callas a tumultuous reception, and the long bouts of applause at her entrance and during the acts extended the performance an hour longer than scheduled. "The stage presence shown by Callas in her performance would have raised the hackles on a deaf man" was only one among the torrent of accolades that the critics bestowed on her in the morning newspapers the following day (quoted by Arianna Stassinopoulos in her *Maria Callas: The Woman Behind the Legend*).

However, despite the legendary status Callas attained in her lifetime, for today's reader or playgoer who has little knowledge of opera, the name Maria Callas may be scarcely more than a name from the distant past. Perhaps for the non-opera fan, the most vivid moments that capture what Callas meant and still means to many people occur in the 1993 film *Philadelphia,* for which Tom Hanks won an Oscar. Hanks plays Andrew Beckett, a gay lawyer who has AIDS and who is illegally fired from his job because of it. He fights back against the law firm as he also battles the deadly disease. In a key scene Andy listens at home, with his lawyer Joe Miller (Denzel Washington), to a 1954 recording of Callas singing Maddalena's aria, "La Mamma Morta," from Umberto Giordano's opera *Andrea Chenier.* Andy, whose favorite aria this is, is transported in ecstasy and pain as Callas sings the story of Maddalena's tragic life. Translating the words over her voice as he listens, he asks Joe, "Can you hear the heartache in her voice? Can you feel it, Joe?" Joe, who knows nothing of opera and is stunned by what is going on, nods his head earnestly. The aria reaches its climax when Maddalena tells how Love came to her and urged her, in spite of her despair, to live: "Sorridi espera! Io son l'amore!. . . Io son divino" ("Smile and hope! I am Love! . . . I am divine"). As

Callas's top notes ring out in affirmation and triumph—an ecstasy emerging from bitterest pain—Andy feels the same inspiration, ready heroically to affirm life even as he faces a cruel death. It is Callas's disembodied voice that creates the intense drama of this scene, which is so pivotal to the movie. It perfectly illustrates McNally's comment quoted above, to which he added an imaginary snatch of dialogue between diva and devotee: "'I have felt such despair and happiness,' Callas confesses. 'So have I, so have I,' we answer." McNally suggests that what we see and hear in the characters that Callas brings to such vivid life is a reflection of ourselves, of our own hopes and disappointments, sorrows and joys, just as the aria from *Andrea Chenier* mirrors the deepest emotions of Andy in *Philadelphia.*

It is fortunate that all the great roles Callas sung have been preserved on audio recordings so that present and future generations will be able to enjoy and learn from her. However, many people who heard her sing in person say that audio recordings do not convey everything that Callas brought to the roles. In addition to her expressive voice, with its distinctive dark timbre, she was also a dramatic actress of astonishing gifts. She had an electrifying stage presence, as this comment by London critic Bernard Levin (quoted in Nigel Douglas's book, *More Legendary Voices*) makes clear: "We all tingled when she entered as though we had touched a live wire."

Although Callas's career ended before the age of video had fully arrived, several of her performances have been preserved on videotape in black and white. Although they cannot convey the full force of what it must have been like to hear and see her in the flesh, they do preserve something of Callas's magnetic presence, the passion and emotional power she brought to her singing, and the adoration she evoked from her fans. Two of the videos are concert performances given in Hamburg, one in 1959, in which she sings the letter-reading aria from Verdi's *Macbeth* that is featured in *Master Class*, and the other in 1962. Two of the arias in that 1962 video recording (which is still commercially available) perfectly illustrate the themes of *Master Class* that Maria labors to instill in her students: they must fully inhabit the roles they are singing, they must summon up from somewhere within themselves the emotions that are required, they must *become* the characters they are representing.

In the videotape from Hamburg on that long-ago night in 1962, Callas makes her entrance with dignity and basks in the applause, smiling radiantly and offering a regal wave of the hand. Not for nothing does Maria in *Master Class* instruct Sharon Graham to make a *real* entrance, not just come out on stage: "You're on a stage. Use it. Own it. This is opera, not a voice recital. Anyone can stand there and sing. An artist enters and *is.*" In the Hamburg recording, Callas then accepts a rose from a middle-aged admirer, breaks off the stem, and with a spontaneous flourish inserts the flower into her cleavage. ("Never miss an opportunity to theatricalize," says Maria in *Master Class*.) Callas is now fully the diva, lapping up the adoration of her fans. But then it is time for business. As the orchestra begins the introduction to "Pleurez, mes yieux," Chimène's aria from act 3 of Jules Massenet's opera *Le Cid,* Callas closes her eyes, and a contemplative look appears on her face. It is as if we are watching the moment of metamorphosis, in which the diva turns into the character Chimène (a transition that is never seen in the opera house, since the singer is in character all the time she is on

stage). Callas then opens her eyes and glances upwards. Now she *is* her character, and is ready to expresses the conflict in Chimène's mind and heart: the man she is in love with is also the man who killed her father, and she knows that whatever happens in the future, there will be great sorrow for her. Callas closes her eyes again, tilting her head to the left as an expression of anguish crosses her face. She has taken her cue from the agitation that appears in the music. It is just as Maria in *Master Class* urges her students: listen to the music, because the music tells the singer all she needs to know. And as Callas begins to sing the aria, one senses that nothing in that concert hall exists for her at that moment other than the music and the emotions that it summons forth in her. "Very few people can weep in song," Maria says to her student Sophie, and this aria reminds us that Callas was one of them.

It is a similar story for the final aria on this recording, "O don fatale," from Verdi's *Don Carlos.* (The aria is mentioned in passing in *Master Class*.) Callas's singing here is so dramatic that it is likely to give anyone goosebumps. There is little buildup—a moment of inner contemplation, a sudden glance upward like a stab of pain or a moment of shock, and then Callas tears into the aria, with all its twists and turns of deeply felt emotion, holding nothing back. It is a testament to her fictional counterpart in *Master Class*, who says over and over that the singer must *feel* the music she is singing: her art is all about "Feeling, feeling, feeling."

It is also, of course, about technique. All the passionate intensity in the world is of no use unless it can be channeled through the confines of the art form in which it is expressed. As Callas herself said in one of her real-life master classes, advising a student to study a difficult aria meticulously and slowly, "Do not try to add exterior passion until you are confident with the aria's internal demands. In opera, passion without intellect is no good; you will be a wild animal and not an artist" (quoted in John Ardoin's *Callas at Juilliard: The Master Classes*). No one who studies the transcripts of Callas's master classes could fail to appreciate her deep knowledge of the minutiae of the vocal music, even in arias for voices other than soprano.

It was this combination of technical mastery, emotional expressiveness, and dramatic skill that made Callas the preeminent artist she was. Although vocal technique was something that Callas, throughout her life a perfectionist, labored hard to perfect—her voice had flaws that she never succeeded in eradicating—the dramatic, expressive power that could so electrify an audience seemed to be a natural ability. As Ardoin puts it in *The Callas Legacy,* "Callas seemed incapable of being inexpressive; even a simple scale sung by her implied a dramatic attitude or feeling. This capacity to communicate was something she was born with."

So great was Callas's impact that scholars routinely refer to the "Callas revolution" when they discuss the changes that she brought to opera singing. No longer was the Italian *bel canto* (literally "beautiful singing") repertoire, such as Bellini's *Norma* or Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor,* merely an opportunity for a beautiful vocal performance, with dramatic considerations secondary. Callas interpreted the roles with such feeling and dramatic intensity that the heroines of these operas became believable characters. Since her career, which spanned the 1950s and early 1960s, came at a time when the

increasing popularity of film and television was beginning to condition audiences to expect greater realism from operatic performances, Callas played a vital role in maintaining opera as a viable form of entertainment.

There is no doubt also that Callas paid a price for her gifts. The underlying suggestion in *Master Class* is that the artist, as a consequence of being able to feel deeply, must also suffer deeply. She must know not only the heights of human experience but also its depths, the extremes of anger, grief, despair, and isolation. Callas in her personal life knew all these emotions intimately. It is to her lasting credit that she was able to harness her pain and send it out in the service of great art.

Source: Bryan Aubrey, Critical Essay on *Master Class,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Mazer examines how the character of Maria Callas in Master Class *evinces the paradoxical nature of the diva as performer and self. Master Class* begins with a double untruth. Maria Callas (or, more accurately, the actress playing Maria Callas) strides on stage, almost certainly to the accompaniment of the audience's applause, looks directly at the audience, and announces, "No applause. We're here to work. You're not in a theatre. This is a classroom."

The first untruth is the statement that we are not in a theatre, since we in fact are in a theatre, both outside of and within the fictional world of the play. In *Master Class*, the stage of the theatre represents the stage of a theatre—the recital hall at the Juilliard School, where Maria Callas gave a series of master classes in 1971 and 1972 before a full house of students and spectators. In the theatre, when *Master Class* is performed, it is, of course, not really 1971 but the present; it is not Juilliard but (for the play's Broadway run) the Golden Theatre; and the audience is comprised of paying theatregoers, not advanced voice students. But the audience is *there,* as an audience, in both the reality of the theatrical event and the fiction of the play. The actor may be (in the original production) Zoe Caldwell and not the "real" Maria Callas, but the response of the audience to Caldwell—applause—is the same response that the 1971 Juilliard audience (the fictional audience that the real audience pretends to be) has for Callas. For Caldwell/Callas to tell us that we are not in a theatre flies in the face of what we know to be true, both in life and in the fiction of the play.

The other untruth is that Maria Callas does not want applause. Maria Callas, we soon see, lives for applause, and thrives on having an audience, alternately revealing and concealing herself from it, pandering for its affection and sympathy and holding it in contempt. Later in the play she will even deny that she had asked the audience not to applaud. Maria's attitude and her philosophical pronouncements are filled with such contradictions: that we cannot know what she suffered in Greece during the war and that we have to know it; that one can only create art if one has suffered and that one must not bring one's private suffering to one's art; that singers sing for the sheer joy of it and that singers must never give away their talent except for sufficient pay, etc., etc. The paradox of the audience's simultaneous presence and absence, of the fiction's theatricality and non-theatricality, is mirrored by Maria Callas's opinions—at best paradoxical and at worst contradictory and mutually exclusive—about life, art, performance, and their relationship. And at the heart of these paradoxes is the real subject of the play, what one might call "the Paradox of the Diva."

Terrence McNally has dramatized the phenomenology of the diva before, most notably in what might be considered the ultimate play about "opera queens," *The Lisbon Traviata*. But there the focus is not on the diva but on her fans, the homosexual protagonists who project onto the diva their own identity, desires, and suffering. In *The Lisbon Traviata* the opera queen's identification is both with the singer and with the operatic role she plays: both with Maria Callas, the self-consuming performer who makes her private suffering transcendently public through her performances, and with

Violetta, the consumptive courtesan in *La Traviata*, who sacrifices her happiness and her health for love.

McNally is not interested in the phenomenon of the opera queen in *Master Class* (though in one of the flashback sequences, Maria ventriloquizes the voice of her lover Aristotle Onassis, who observes "The fags just want to be you." Instead he shifts his focus to the object of the opera queen's emulation, the diva herself. But the way he views the diva is clearly in line with the paradoxes and contradictions in the way opera queens admire and emulate the diva, a phenomenon most recently articulated in Wayne Koestenbaum's autobiographical polemic, *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire.* The opera queen, Koestenbaum argues, admires both the diva's persona—her arrogance, grandeur, and self-fashioned hauteur and sublime bitchiness—and the roles that the diva plays. Indeed, the opera queen's identification with the roles the diva plays magnifies the opera queen's emulation of the diva, for the diva, the opera queen believes, identifies with the character even more closely than the opera queen ever can and so becomes the opera queen's emotionally expressive, sacrificial surrogate. As Stephen, one of the two opera queens in *The Lisbon Traviata*, explains, "Opera is about us, our life-and-death passions—we all love, we're all going to die. Maria understood that. That's where the voice came from, the heart, the soul, I'm tempted to say from some even more intimate place." At the end of the play, Stephen, having failed to enact Don Jose to his departing lover's Carmen, throws his head back in a silent scream of heartbreak while Callas's Violetta plays on the stereo, the diva's voice expressing a pain that is simultaneously the singer's, the character's, and the listener's.

The diva, the subject of the opera queen's emulation, is simultaneously present and absent, playing a distilled and self-fashioned version of herself in every role she plays and dissolving herself into the music and the dramatic situation of the character she acts and sings, rendering herself transparent to the character and the composer (and librettist) behind the character. The difference between the actor and the character she is playing is erased in the eyes of the opera queen: the diva is both transcendently herself and transubstantially the character; indeed, that is to a great extent the source of her glory.

But the relation of an actor to the character he or she is playing is, in the theatre as well as in opera, much more complicated and more paradoxical than the opera queen imagines. And this complicated relationship of actor to role—the paradoxical complementarity of the consummately self-effacing actor and the transcendently-herself diva—is the real subject of *Master Class*, a play in which the opera-singer-as-lecturer is not "in character" ("You're not in a theatre. This is a classroom") and yet is never, strictly speaking, "out" of character, in which theatrical performances draw upon the performer's true "self" and yet the "self" is itself always performative.

The salient biographical facts about Maria Callas's life are all made reference to in *Master Class*, her American and Greek upbringing, her training, the patronage of Battista Meneghini, her debut, her radical physical transformation and weight loss, her affair with Onassis, her conflicts with tenors, managers, directors, and rival sopranos,

the hirings and firings, and the precipitate decay of her voice. But the play is less a biography of the artist than it is a play about the nature of artistry, the relation of a particular artist's life to her art. The paradoxes of this relationship are both the play's subject and dictate the play's form, and these paradoxes ultimately lead to a shift in the play's focus that muddies the play's focus and, as we shall see, finally undoes the play's otherwise pristine structure.

The play's action, such as it is, consists of three consecutive coaching sessions in real time: Sophie de Palma, a soprano, who sings Adina's "Ah, non credea mirarti" from Bellini's *La Somnambula;* Anthony Candolino, a tenor, who sings "Ricondita armonia" from Puccini's *Tosca;* (and soprano Sharon Graham, who is driven from the stage by Callas's brow-beating but returns to be coached in Lady Macbeth's entrance aria, "Vieni! t'afretta" from Verdi's *Macbeth.* In each of these sessions, Callas is rude, condescending, dismissive, and egocentric. And in all three sessions she is a brilliant teacher. And there emerges from her teaching, however obnoxious, a coherent, if complex, philosophical position about the relationship of the singing actor to the operatic role.

Callas interrupts the first note that Sophie de Palma sings in the Bellini aria: "I want to talk to you about your 'Oh!'" The student answers, "I sang it, didn't I?" Callas explains:

That's just it. You sang it. You didn't feel it. It's not a note we're after here. It's a sob of pain. The pain of loss. Surely you understand loss. If not of another person, then maybe a pet. A puppy. A goldfish.

Mixed with Callas's patronizing examples ("a puppy. A goldfish") is a stereotypical "Stanislavski Method" acting exercise—Lee Strasberg's "emotional memory"—in which the actor substitutes an experience from his or her own life to generate an emotional response equivalent to the emotions of the character that are called for in the dramatic situation of the script. Callas repeatedly rejects "just singing" ("You were *just* singing," she tells the tenor, "which equals nothing"). Instead she calls for acting, in the twentieth-century Stanislavskian tradition: feeling "real" emotions based on the "given circumstances" of the script and embellished or translated in the imagination of the actor (when the tenor complains that "It doesn't say anything about ten A.M. or spring or Tosca's body in the score," Callas responds, "It should say it in your imagination. Otherwise you have notes, nothing but notes."

The emotions that Callas calls for are not "realistic"; they are channeled through the artifice of the operatic medium ("Anyone can walk in their sleep," she tells Sophie, singing a somnambulist's aria; "Very few people can weep in song"). Each successive level of expression in opera is more artificial: speech is more active and demands more actively channeled emotional energy and a more intense revelation of one's own more intense emotions than silence; recitative calls for more energy and emotion than speech ("When you can no longer bear to speak, when the words aren't enough, that's when he

[Bellini] asks you to sing"; aria more than recitative; and a cabaletta more than its preceding aria.

"This is not a film studio," she explains, "where anyone can get up there and act. I hate that word. 'Act.' No! Feel. Be. That's what we're doing here." And she later tells Sharon, helping her "make an entrance" for her Lady Macbeth entrance aria, "This is opera, not a voice recital. Anyone can stand there and sing. An artist enters and *is.*" What Callas means by "be" and "is" is clearly something more than passive existence or inexpressive emotion and is rather a grand, artificial, projected distillation of

one's identity and emotional truth: as she tells Sophie, "This is the theatre, darling. We wear our hearts on our sleeves here." When she tells Sophie "I'm not getting any juice from you, Sophie. I want juice. I want passion. I want you", she clearly means that the "you" that an opera singer needs to "be," the being that breathes and feels and sings on stage, is something grand, extreme, distilled, and directed. Callas doubts whether Sophie has that magnitude of experience or the magnitude of expressiveness: "He's broken her heart. Have you ever had your heart broken?" she asks. When Sophie answers, "Yes," Callas adds, snidely, "You could have fooled me"; and Sophie herself concludes, ruefully, "I'm not that sort of singer. . . . I'm not that sort of person either."

What "sort of person" does it take to be an opera singer? Here again there are both paradoxes and contradictions in what Callas teaches. On the one hand, she claims on her first entrance, the diva must practice complete self-effacement: "If you want to have a career, as I did—and I'm not boasting now, I am not one to boast—you must be willing to subjugate yourself—is that a word?—subjugate yourself to music." But, paradoxically, the singer both erases herself and is completely herself. For subjugation involves sacrifice, and what is being sacrificed is the singer's own self. The diva must be a supreme egotist in order to make the supreme sacrifice of her ego to her audiences. And, she argues, you must be well paid for your pains. "Never give anything away. There's no more where it came from. We give the audience everything and when it's gone, *c'est ca, c'est tout. Basta, finito.* We're the ones who end up empty." She invokes Medea's line to Jason in Cherubini's *Medea*—"I gave everything for you. Everything"—to explain this: "That's what we artists do for people. Where would you be without us? Eh? Think about that. Just think about it while you're counting your millions or leading your boring lives with your boring wives." The sacrifice of the self is too great to be wasted on psychotherapy: "Feelings like Sharon's"—who has run off stage to vomit and has not yet returned—"We use them. We don't give them away on some voodoo witch doctor's couch." Instead, they should be saved for the stage, where they are distilled and delivered, at great personal pain, to the audience.

Callas's relation to her audience—both the audience of her operatic past and the current audience in the classroom/recital hall—is fraught with contradictions. "The audience is the enemy," she says, quoting Medea's line to Jason; "Dominate them. . . . Art is domination. It's making people think for that precise moment in time there is only one way, one voice. Yours. Eh.?" At times (including the flashback sequences, in which Callas recalls singing only for Meneghini or only for Onassis), the audience is worthy of the singer's self-immolation and sacrifice. At other times the audience is passive,

unappreciative, and unworthy: she talks scornfully of an acquaintance whose favorite part of the operas are the intervals; and we see her hold in contempt the stagehand in the recital hall, who neither knows nor cares about the art being created on the stage within earshot.

McNally best dramatizes the capacity of an audience to be moved by the artificially distilled expressive powers of the singer's voice and emotions channeled through the composer's music when Callas herself listens to Tony Candolino sing "Ricondita armonia." To the tenor's disappointment, after he has finished singing, she says only "That was beautiful. I have nothing more to say. That was beautiful." Being an audience member, being the recipient of the imagined emotions of Cavaradossi for Tosca as channeled through the voice and soul of the tenor as she never was when she played Tosca herself ("I was always backstage preparing for my entrance"), Callas is, for one of the rare moments in the play, left speechless. And she stumbles awkwardly from that moment—a moment that demonstrates why, from an audience's point of view, the singer's art is worthwhile—to the unexpected admission that "It's a terrible career, actually. I don't know why I bothered."

Through her pedagogical encounters with Sophie and Tony, Callas teaches both the students and the audience what it takes to become an effective singing actor. One must have suffered sufficiently to provide the emotional raw material for embodying the character's emotion. One must be willing to re-experience the most difficult times of one's life over and over again, with all of the focused and distilled intensity of the first experience. One must be willing to display one's most private feelings and experiences in public, both to an uncaring and ungrateful audience (personified, in *Master Class*, by the stage-hand) and to an attentive and appreciative public that demands that each performance be yet another self-consuming and self-consumed display of re-experienced emotional agonies. And, finally, becoming a singing actor requires the singer to turn him or herself into an artificial being, in part because the medium of musical and theatrical expression is so highly conventionalized and artificial and in part because of the cutthroat world of the operatic profession. One must, in short, play the part of the diva to be a diva; one must become a monster of egotism, selfishness, competitiveness, and vindictiveness, capable of cutting a swathe for oneself in the world of managers, conductors, directors, claques, and other divas, in order to get the opportunity to practice one's art. And, by practicing one's art, by dredging up every life experience and emotion in the service of the drama, and the dramatic character, and the music, one self-destructs, consuming irreversibly the raw material of the art in the very act of making the art. Becoming the diva leaves little more than dry tinder; singing sets the tinder alight, burning with a brilliant flame before the audience, until all that is left are ashes, thorns, and nails.

And so we see Maria Callas through the play: a brilliant actress still, still wearing her all-too-public life's pain on her sleeve, still grabbing the spotlight, indulging her ego, destroying with a glance or a quip everyone around her. And when she finally sings, the stage directions record, "What comes out is a cracked and broken thing."

By the middle of the second act, after Callas has coached two singers and driven a third from the stage, we have learned about the paradoxes of acting contained within the diva's craft, and we have come to some understanding of how this craft calls upon the singer to create a particular performative persona and to put that persona to the service of the self-consuming art of singing. Callas, in her roundabout and often contradictory way, explains these principles to us as she coaches Sophie and Tony, and she demonstrates, in her abominably egotistical behavior, what she has become in service of this art. But it not until the final third of the play, when she coaches Sharon Graham, that we see the means by which a younger singer can put these principles into practice, that we see a singer who can become, potentially at least, another Callas and, in this instance, chooses not to.

Sharon has returned to the recital stage after vomiting in fear and humiliation, determined now to prove herself. Callas humiliates her and browbeats her into acting and not just singing the aria, as she did with Sophie and Tony. But here, as we watch, the Stanislavskian exercises and the Strasbergian emotional memory substitutions begin to work. Callas insists that everything be concrete, specific: the letter from Macbeth that Lady Macbeth reads, in unsung speech before the recitative, must be real, and not imagined ("I don't want pretending. You're not good enough. I want truth; the news of Duncan's imminent arrival comes not from 'someone' but from 'a servant'." When Sharon hesitates between the recitative and the aria, Callas, swept up in the flow of the drama and encouraging Sharon to be swept up too, insists "don't even think of stopping! You are Lady Macbeth!." After the aria, with the news of Duncan's arrival, the emotional identification of Sharon with Lady Macbeth is, with Callas's coaching, nearly complete:

Maria: How does that make her feel?
Soprano: Happy?
Maria: Don't keep looking at me for answers, Sharon.
Tell me, show me. Vite, vite!
Soprano: Really happy.
Maria: Love happy? Christmas morning happy?
Soprano: Murder happy!
Maria: Ah! And what is she going to do about it?
Soprano: She's going to sing a cabaletta!
Maria: She's going to kill the king! Do you know what
that means?
Soprano: Yes, it's terrible.
Maria: Not to her! Do you believe women can have
balls, Sharon?
Soprano: Some women. Yes, I do!
Maria: Verdi is daring you to show us yours, Sharon.
Will you do it?
Soprano: Yes!

The stakes of the scene, the stakes of the act of performing itself, have become, for Sharon, nearly like those for Callas. "This isn't just an opera. This is your life," Callas

insists. "Is there anything you would kill for, Sharon," she asks her, suggesting "A man, a career?" "You have to listen to something in yourself to sing this difficult music," she insists, suggesting that the characters she has sung, and the characters of the classical tragedies of her native Greece—Medea, Electra, Klytemnestra—were real people, to whom she has a real connection:

Maria: These people really existed. Medea, Lady Macbeth. Or don't you believe that? Eh? This is all make-believe to you?
Soprano: I've never really thought about it.
Maria: That's because you're young. You will. In time. Know how much suffering there can be in store for a woman.

As Sharon sings, she feels in her soul, her body, and her voice the connection that Callas insists is the

true art of the diva. And she is told, and undoubtedly understands, the life, emotions, and experience to which the singing actor's art must be connected: one in which she is capable of feeling that she *could* kill for a man or a career, where in time she will know how much suffering is in store for her, where she can not only believe in Medea or Lady Macbeth but can feel so strong a kinship with them that she can *become* them, emotionally and viscerally. Sharon, unlike Sophie and Tony, is capable of learning the lessons that Callas has to teach.

After Sharon finishes singing the complete aria and cabaletta, Callas, coming out of her reverie/ flashback sequence, dismisses Sharon's professional prospects, damning her with the faint praise:

I think you should work on something more appropriate for your limitations. Mimi or Micaela maybe. But Lady Macbeth, Norma, I don't think so. These roles require something else. Something. How shall I say this? Something special. Something that can't be taught or passed on or copied or even talked about. Genius. Inspiration. A gift of god. Some recompense for everything else.

Sharon, in tears, responds:

I wish I'd never done this. I don't like you. You can't sing anymore and you're envious of anyone younger who can. You just want us to sing like you, recklessly, and lose our voices in ten years like you did. Well, I won't do it. I don't want to. I don't want to sing like you. I hate people like you. You want to make

the world dangerous for everyone just because it was for you.

Sharon clearly wants to get back at Callas for her condescension. But there is more to her response than this. Sharon sees in Callas's cruelty the more important truth of the diva's art: that this type of art exacts too high a price, that one would not wish upon oneself the experiences and suffering that could generate such art, and that creating art from such personal and emotional raw materials is self-consuming, and ultimately destroys the medium of the art—the singer's voice. Sharon leaves the stage; Callas brushes off the confrontation, withdraws into the shell of her professional persona, utters a few platitudes about art and, saying "well, that's that", brings both the master class and *Master Class* to a close.

Throughout the play, McNally has been putting forth as his hypothesis the myth of Callas the diva: she so channels her own life and emotions into her singing and acting; she so fully becomes a conduit for her own sorrows and the object of projection for the fantasies and emotions of her audiences that she has ruined her voice and withered into a cruel and egotistical if magnificent monster, a *monstre sacre.* Sharon's defection at the end only confirms the hypothesis and elevates the diva to an even-greater level: a figure of sublime loneliness, shunned as a pariah, so monstrous that she can be watched in awe but is too horrifying to be emulated.

The dramaturgical mastery of *Master Class* lies in its twin strategies for representing Callas as a dramatic character. For, in watching her teach, we see the monster she has become; and in learning *what* she teaches—the practices of personal, emotional-based acting that she teaches unsuccessfully to Sophie and Tony and successfully if Pyrrhically to Sharon—we learn how she has become that person. We see less the genuine person and more the persona that Callas has created for herself and that has been created for her: the diva. From the moment that Callas singles out a member of the audience to demonstrate how "It's important to have a look", we see the theatricality, the performativity of the diva's persona. "This isn't a freak show. I'm not a performing seal," she tells Sophie, explaining that her fabled fieriness is not a performance but an ingrained part of her identity: "My fire comes from here, Sophie. It's mine. It's not for sale. It's not for me to give away. Even if I could, I wouldn't. It's who I am. Find out who you are. That's what this is all about. Eh?" And yet Callas *is* a freak, a performing seal. Within Callas's talents as a self-creator, within the persona that she has forged from her status as diva ("Never miss an opportunity to theatricalize," she tells Sharon), everything is a performance. Acting, even when acting means surrendering to a character and effectively becoming that character, never entails the loss of self; indeed, it is where the performative self is created and articulated. As the stage director Visconti tells her (in the first-act flashback sequence), "You are not a village girl. You are Maria Callas playing a village girl." Callas's "performance" as teacher of a master class *is* Callas. The diva uses herself to perform; consequently she only *is* when she performs.

And so it is—or should be—with McNally's drama: We see what she has become and we learn the process by which she became this way. But this is, of course, not the entire play, nor is the master class, despite the play's title, the only narrative and dramaturgical

means by which the playwright shows us Callas's character. McNally has demonstrated for us what she has become and taught us the process of acting that has made her this way—one that demands that she wear her emotions on her sleeve and transmit her own life and suffering into her performances through her body and voice on stage. What we do not know—and what opera queens cannot know about a diva, except through gossip columns and the fanciful projections of their own imaginations—is the life lived, the nature of the actual sufferings that the singer transmutes into her performances.

The genius of *Master Class* is that, once we have seen what Callas has become and learned how she used (and used up) her life to get this way, we don't actually *need* to know the life that she lived. But this is precisely what McNally gives us, in the most theatrically stunning sequences of the play: the flashback fantasy sequences, to the accompaniment of Callas's live recordings of the arias that the student singers are singing. These sequences—brilliant as they are in performance, affording an opportunity for the actor to jump back and forth between Callas's student years and her triumphant debuts and between her public and private lives—belong to two other genres of play entirely. One genre is the autobiographical one-hander (such as the Lillian Hellman vehicle that Zoe Caldwell played a few years before she created the role of Callas in *Master Class*), in which the historical figure, through some theatrical pretense (Emily Dickinson inviting us in as neighbors to share her recipes, Truman Capote speaking into a tape recorder for the benefit of a journalist) retells and relives formative events from his or her life.

The other genre to which the flashback sequences of *Master Class* belongs is, arguably, the largest segment of American twentieth-century dramatic writing, what might best be called the "psychotherapeutic whodunit." In such plays, a protagonist's tragic agony or a family's crippling dysfunction can be traced, as in the Freudian psychoanalytical model, to a single, traumatic event, real or imagined, that is concealed from several of the characters and the audience until late in the play: Biff sees Willy with a prostitute in a cheap hotel in Boston; Mary Tyrone regresses to a point in her life before she discovered her husband to be an alcoholic and, more significantly, before the infant Eugene died of the infection given to him by his older brother Jamie; George and Martha "kill off" the child which the audience and Nick discover to have been invented by them; Dodge and Bradley narrate the story of the child buried in the backyard.

The flashback sequences in *Master Class* satisfy the whodunit energies generated by the theories of acting taught and practiced by Callas in the real-time framework of the play. If Callas is indeed transforming her real-life suffering, to which she casually alludes repeatedly in her teaching, then the audience naturally desires to learn more about these traumatic experiences: Callas proving herself to her teacher, Callas's La Scala debut, her final performances at La Scala in defiance of the general manager who was firing her, the patronage of Battista Meneghini, and her abusive relationship with Onassis. Moreover, the flashback sequences confirm the ways that Callas's personal emotions—shame, desire, vindictiveness, revenge—are channeled into her singing. Just as Lady Macbeth invites the unholy spirit to enter her body, Callas invites the voices of her own life to enter her, through Verdi's "infernal music," to "Come, fill me with your malevolence". As the house lights in La Scala come up as Callas finishes her *La*

Somnambula aria on the stage of La Scala, she is able to reverse the audience's vampiric gaze, to see the eyes of the viewers devouring her performance, and can declare, "My revenge, my triumph are complete."

The logic of the standard American dramaturgical master narrative demands that the audience know the biographical causes of characterological effects. For an audience, to understand the formative traumas is to know the character; for a character, to face the cause is to begin to heal; and, for character and audience alike, theatrically reliving these traumas is both a form of purgation and a fulfillment of the play's dramaturgical logic. In *Master Class*, the traumatic event to which the whodunit logic of the play points turns out to be a familiar one in American drama: Callas, having been told by Onassis that the greatest gift she can give him is a child, announces that she is pregnant and is now told by him that she must get rid of the child. As in *Long Day's Journey into Night, Desire Under the Elms, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf, The American Dream, Buried Child, Talley's Folly,* and countless lesser American plays, the central hidden trauma of the play turns out to be female fertility; the missing center of the play and its character turns out to be, as it is in so many plays, the missing, dead, murdered, unconceived, or aborted baby. Underneath a fascinating metatheatrical drama about art lies a far more conventional American "dead baby" drama. We discover that Callas, the object of the opera queen's emulation and envy, is herself consumed with envy; and the object of her envy is something common both to American drama and to the mythology of male homosexuality: the womb.

In exploring the phenomenon of the diva, the play's own logic asks us to resist such easy answers. Callas was willing to create art from the material of her life at great cost. We learn how she did so, and we see the cost. If *Master Class* is indeed about art and its making out of life, then, ironically, we need to see the life *only* through the art. But in the flashback sequences and in their reversion to the traditional dead-baby trope, the playwright gives us too much. The sequences are arguably more than just a violation of the playwright's own metatheatrical fiction and more than just a deviation from his chosen dramaturgical structure in favor of a return to the more traditional structural conventions of the psychotherapeutic whodunit: they are a violation of the theories of art explored in the play. The flash-backs effectively turn the playwright, and the audience, into opera queens: they not only allow us, like the opera queen, to imagine that the person's real pain can be heard in the diva's voice; they materially confirm that the pain and its origins is everything we imagine it to be. In narrating and reenacting her life to sounds of her own voice singing Adina or Lady Macbeth on a recording, Callas is effectively lip-synching her own life, just as Stephen lip-synchs to Callas's Violetta at the end of *The Lisbon Traviata* Callas not only fulfills the opera queen's myth of the diva; in *Master Class* the queen of opera demonstrably becomes an opera queen herself.

Source: Cary M. Mazer, "*Master Class* and the Paradox of the Diva," in *Terrence McNally: A Casebook,* edited by Toby Silverman Zinman, Garland Publishing, 1997, pp. 165-80.

Topics for Further Study

Near the end of the play, Sharon says to Maria, "I don't like you." What is your reaction to Maria? Do you like her or dislike her? Is she a good teacher or is her manner too harsh?

Describe a moment in theater, opera, musical, or film in which you have been emotionally moved by the performance of a particular actor or singer. Who was the performer, and how did he or she create the effect that moved you?

Music has power to touch the emotions in ways that the spoken word cannot. Why should this be so? Analyze some music that you know well, either instrumental or vocal, and try to account for why it has the effects it does. Describe some of the many effects music can have on people. Why for many centuries did soldiers march into battle to the sound of music?

Maria Callas's life was full of emotional turmoil. Is there a link between suffering and creativity? If not, why have people often thought that there is? In what ways is the artist different from other men and women? What are the essential qualities that a creative artist, whether musician, singer, painter, or writer, must have?

What Do I Read Next?

McNally's play *Love! Valour! Compassion*! (1994) arose from McNally's desire to write about what it was like to be a gay man in America in the 1990s. The play received laudatory reviews and won several awards, including a Tony Award for best play.

Greek Fire: The Story of Maria Callas and Aristotle Onassis (2001), by Nicholas Gage, sympathetically documents the tempestuous nine-year affair between Callas and the Greek shipping tycoon. Relevant for students of *Master Class* is Gage's claim that Callas gave birth to Onassis's son in 1960 and that the baby died within hours.

Maria Callas: An Intimate Biography (2001), by Anne Edwards, is the latest of more than thirty biographies of Callas. Edwards is at pains to search for the facts behind all the myths about Callas, and she produces evidence to refute Gage's assertion in *Greek Fire* that Callas had a son by Onassis. In addition to the riveting tale of Callas's ultimately tragic life, Edwards also provides many descriptions of opera plots, costumes, and sceneries.

Diva: Great Sopranos and Mezzos Discuss Their Art (1991), by Helena Matheopoulos, covers twenty-six leading female opera singers, who discuss topics such as their vocal development, the roles for which they are best known, and their personal lives. Many offer advice to young singers.

Further Study

Brustein, Robert, "*Master Class,*" in the *New Republic,* February 5, 1996, pp. 27-28.

Brustein's review was one of the few negative reviews of the play. Brustein regards it as capably written, but forgettable, although it does have some value as a tribute to Callas.

Christianssen, Rupert, *Prima Donna,* Pimlico, 1995, pp. 266-98.

Calling Callas a "naïve genius," Christianssen analyzes the Callas revolution in terms of the singing tradition she inherited, the changes she wrought, and her influence on sopranos who followed.

Kroll, Jack, "*Master Class,*" in *Newsweek,* November 13, 1995, p. 85.

Kroll's review is a laudatory review that describes the play as a profile in courage, with Zoe Caldwell, as Callas, putting on a virtuoso performance to remember.

Torrens, James S., "*Master Class,*" in *America,* February 17, 1996, p. 30.

Another review that is full of praise for what Torrens calls the most exciting play of the Broadway season. McNally's love of opera finds its perfect vehicle.

Zinman, Toby Silverman, ed., *Terrence McNally: A Case-book,* Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997.

This text contains interviews with Zoe Caldwell and McNally, as well as Cary M. Mazer's article, "Master Class and the Paradox of the Diva," in which he discusses what he sees as paradoxes and contradictions in what Maria teaches her students.

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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:

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