The Shadow Box Study Guide

The Shadow Box by Michael Cristofer

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Introduction

Michael Cristofer's *The Shadow Box*, directed by Gordon Davidson, premiered October 30, 1975, at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles. Currently out of print, the play is still a hearty read for a contemporary audience. The work interweaves the lives of three dramatically different terminally ill patients and their loved ones to give a dynamic, well-rounded perspective of death and dying. The richness of the play is exemplified by its unity. The action takes place during the course of one day, on a hospital campus. The source for Cristofer's inspiration was his personal experience with two close friends dying of cancer. Offering varying perspectives of characters, comprising three different plots, gives the work a certain objectivity in its discussion of a sensitive subject.

Thematically, the work touches on the dehumanizing quality death imposes on Cristofer's patients. Other considerations are also explored□characters choose to be remorseful, engage in reminiscence, confront their disease or exist in a state of denial, or lash out in anger. The brilliance of the work and its success at dealing with such tender subject matter is precisely that it draws no moral conclusions, only offers various perspectives for the audience to ponder without compromising the serious nature of terminal illness. Celebrated by critics for its insight, perceptiveness, and humor in dealing with controversial subject matter, it is not surprising that the work earned Cristofer both a Pulitzer Prize and a Tony Award in 1977.

Author Biography

Michael Cristofer was born Michael Procaccino on January 28, 1945, in Trenton, New Jersey. He left Catholic University after three years to begin his acting career. Cristofer performed with the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., ACT in Seattle, and theTheatre of the Living Arts in Philadelphia. In the late 1960s, he found a position with the Beirut Repertory Company in Lebanon and additionally worked to support himself by teaching English. Cristofer produced a street theater production called "Americomedia." He also wrote several plays. His first play, *Mandala*, made its debut at theTheatre of the Living Arts and was met with very little interest or attention from critics. It was not until after his fourth play, *Plot Counter Plot*, that Cristofer would realize great recognition for his work. *The Shadow Box*, based on his own personal experiences with terminal illness, would be his crowning achievement, earning him both a Pulitzer Prize in drama and a Tony Award in 1977.The Mark Taper Forum Theatre, a regional theatre of great repute, was where *The Shadow Box* initially appeared in 1975 before moving on to Broadway in 1977. The success of the playwright was not limited to just this production. Cristofer was frequently honored for his playwriting as well as his acting abilities. He earned major roles in Christopher Campton's *Savages* (1974), Sam Shepard's *The Tooth of Crime* (1974), Maya Angelou's adaptation of Sophocles's *Ajax* (1974), Anton Chekov's *The Three Sisters* (1976), and David Rudkin's *Ashes* (1976). He won additional awards, including a Los Angeles Drama Critics Award in 1973 and a Theatre Award in 1977.

After the success of *The Shadow Box*, Cristofer continued to write plays□among them, *Black Angel*, a drama about a former Nazi officer who, upon being released from prison, must face certain challenges as a result of his involvement in World War II. Cristofer has also written several screenplays of note, including *The Witches of East wick* (1987) and *Bonfire of the Vanities*.

Plot Summary

Act 1

*The Shadow Box*opens with Joe's interview. Joe is a terminally ill patient vacationing on the grounds of a large hospital, a guest in one of three cabins, two of which are otherwise occupied by other patients and their families. He admits that he hasn't seen his family in six months due to excessive hospital bills and the belief that one day he will return home.

Joe shares that he has explained "the whole setup" to his wife, Maggie, and has asked her to relay the information to their young teenage son Steve. He is concerned about his wife's ability to cope with his illness, but for Maggie "it just takes her a little time." Joe explains to the interviewer his own emotional struggles with his condition, admitting his anger and fear.

Joe leaves the interview to meet up with his family back at the cottage. When Maggie arrives, she reacts defiantly, stating "I'm not coming in. You're coming out." In an effort to overcome the awkwardness of their separation and to avoid any discussion of Joe's condition, Maggie engages in small talk but eventually breaks down in Joe's arms. She is unable to accept his condition and insists on silencing Joe when he tries to explain his illness. Brian is now in the interview area, explaining his own feelings as a patient to the interviewer:' people don't want to let go." He expresses his amazement at the denial of others, exclaiming "the trouble is most of us spend our entire lives trying to forget we're going to die . . . it's like pulling the cart without the horse." Further on in his reflection, Brian volunteers that his wife left him, demonstrating that he has come to terms with her departure. Brian's interview is finished, and the action shifts toward the activity in Cottage Two, where Beverly, Brian's ex-wife, and Mark, Brian's gay lover, are meeting for the first time. Beverly is quick to assess a rather awkward scene, "Well, I think we've got that all straight now. He's dying. I'm drunk. And you're pissed off." Mark reports to Beverly that Brian is indeed dying, that his condition is terminal. He then goes into the details of Brian's health as if he were reciting a laundry list, inspiring Beverly's sarcasm, "All the details. You're very graphic." Mark assumes a protective posture with Beverly, causing her to antagonize him even further. The two do not approve of each other, and Mark, in frustration and disgust, is compelled to exit the cabin, leaving Beverly to wait for Brian. The scene again shifts to Cottage One. Maggie is unwilling to enter the cabin, stating "I'll go in when I'm good and ready." As Maggie's irritation increases, Joe begins a lighthearted conversation about buying a farm to try to keep things happy and upbeat. The banter ends in a scuffle when Joe and Steve attempt to pull Maggie toward the cabin. Maggie answers with a hard slap to Steve's face. Steve retreats inside and Joe relents, confused. He discovers that Maggie has not told Steve that he [Joe] is going to die, and angrily turns to Maggie for clarification. Maggie responds "it isn't true" and runs off, leaving a stunned Joe to sit with his head in his hands.

"Piss poor . . . your attitude. It's a piss poor way to treat people," says Felicity to the interviewer. Felicity is also a patient and a resident of Cottage Three, along with her daughter Agnes. She's now in the interview area, but exhibits a decidedly more hostile attitude toward the interviewer than do the other patients. As she expresses:

I'm the corpse. I have one lung, one plastic bag for a stomach, and two springs and a battery where my heart used to be. You cut me up and took everything that wasn't nailed down.

Felicity has confused the reality of the hospital grounds with the belief she is at home. In her lunacy, she states that her daughter Claire is "here," "at the house," but a few minutes later adds that "no, Claire isn't with me anymore . . . Agnes is with menow," and then calls out to Agnes in the darkness. Agnes arrives, and Felicity commands that she' take her back" to the cottage, but not before humiliating Agnes in the presence of the interviewer. When Brian arrives at Cottage Two, his reunion with Beverly is a warm and friendly one. Brian updates Beverly on his life, and all of his recent accomplishments. He has liquidated his assets, put them "in a sock" and "buried" them on Staten Island, taken up painting and writing, even spent time in a Holiday Inn in Passaic, New Jersey. Brian's explanation for this flurry of activity is that he doesn't "want to leave anything unsaid, undone. . . not a word, not even a lonely, obscure, silly, worthless thought." Apart from this moment of elation, Brian tells Beverly "I'm scared to death" when he thinks about dying.

Act 1 ends in Cottage Three, with Felicity and Agnes. In a struggle to reach her mother, Agnes yells out "Mama!!!! Stop it!!" as her mother sings an unfamiliar, disturbing song. As the scene progresses, the voices of the inhabitants of all three cottages form a disjointed, confused dialogue of suffering, beginning with Felicity's childlike cries for help, and ending with Mark's reassuring words, "It'll all be over in a minute. It just seems to take forever."

Act 2

During a small party in Cottage Two, a disgusted Mark again threatens to walk out on Beverly's outrageous, drunken behavior, only to have Beverly carelessly pour a bottle of champagne on him. Brian responds to the conflict, "My God, it's only a jacket. Why are we wasting this time?" After a moving speech, Brian takes Beverly in his arms, "Come on, my beauty, I'll show you a dancer." But the activity is too much for him, and he collapses, then carefully exits to the bedroom.

Agnes confesses to the interviewer that she is writing letters, posing as her dead sister Claire to humor her mother, stating, "I didn't know what to do, I tried to tell her . . . I tried . . . but she wouldn't listen." Agnes believes that playing along with her mother "makes her [Felicity] happy." The subject turns to Felicity's suffering, and when Agnes pleads, "Why does she want to keep going like this?" she is shocked by the interviewer's answer, "It's what we call 'making a bargain.' She's made up her mind that

she's not going to die until Claire arrives." A troubled Agnes flees the scene but not before promising she will return to speak to the interviewer again.

Mark admits to Beverly that he was at one time a male prostitute until Brian befriended him. He speaks of Brian's illness as if it were his, "It's sick and putrid and soft and rotten and it is killing me." Beverly calls Mark on his bout with self-pity, "from one whore to another," she says, "Brian happens to need you. And if that is not enough for you, then you get yourself out of his life, fast." The struggle ends with Beverly's departure. Before she leaves, she says to Mark, "Don't hurt him with your hope.' Meanwhile, Maggie and Joe have been reminiscing about their life together. The conversation isn't a happy one□Joe expresses his anger because he is dying, and his life is ending without a sense of accomplishment. Maggie breaks down to Joe, stating that he should come home because their relationship isn't "finished," that "it's too fast." The scene between Maggie and Joe ends as they enter the cottage. Upon Maggie's request, Joe says, "I'm going to die, Maggie."

At the play's conclusion, Brian and Mark remain together. Agnes, in what seems like a moment of redemption, says to Felicity, "If I told you the truth now, would it matter?" Recognizing her mother's decline, Agnes forgoes telling the truth and proceeds to read the fictitious letter from Claire to Felicity.

Act 1

Act 1 Summary

The Shadow Box is a two-act play that showcases the lives of three terminally ill people and their families during one day at a special treatment hospital. The socially taboo subject of death and dying is placed in a symbolic shadow box for the audience to view while the human drama is enacted. The author was awarded both a Pulitzer Prize a Tony Award in 1977 for this work.

As the play opens, a man named Joe is seen in a cottage that could be mistaken for a vacation home on a beach. Also on the stage is a small area with a small stool that is suddenly lit up and draws Joe's attention. This area is called the "Interview Area." As Joe sees the light, he steps into this area and looks forward intently as the voice from an unseen person, the interviewer, is heard.

Joe awkwardly adjusts to the unusual situation of talking with a faceless voice but gradually relaxes as the interviewer explains that there is nothing to be frightened of, this is merely the hospital's method of staying in communication with residents of the cottages. Joe is a terminally ill patient who has been released from the hospital temporarily in order to spend time with his family at one of the hospital's specially equipped cottages.

Joe is vigorous and in good humor because his wife, Maggie, and son, Steve, will be arriving shortly. Maggie and Steve have remained on the East Coast during Joe's hospitalization in California and they haven't seen each other for six months. The hospital expenses and the long distance have made regular visits prohibitive. Joe had also discouraged the travel because he had always assumed he would return home. Now that going home is not an option, Maggie and Steve will be coming to see Joe.

Joe has tried to explain the full situation to Maggie but admits to the interviewer that sometimes it just takes Maggie a little while to fully understand things but he hopes that Maggie will love being at the cottage. Joe has also asked his wife to explain the situation to their son, Steve, who is fourteen years old.

As Maggie and Steve approach, Joe shares with the interviewer that adapting to his terminal condition has not been easy and it takes a while to adjust. Joe's first reaction was fear and secondly he was angry. Joe is angry that his illness has made him more of an object than a person and has not been able to vent his feelings. The interviewer assures Joe that any emotion is acceptable and the interviewer is available to listen at any time.

Joe's interview is halted for now as Maggie and Steve have arrived at the cottage. Steve is elated to see his father and hugs him several times and expresses how much he has missed Joe. Maggie lags a bit behind with the luggage and refuses to enter the cottage,

preferring to remain on the porch and show Joe some of the items she has brought from home including food and newspapers. Maggie is adamant about not going into the cottage and engages Joe in conversation about her plane trip. Ultimately Maggie breaks down and cries and she and Joe admit how much they have missed each other. According to Maggie, Joe looks perfectly healthy and does not understand the gravity of his condition. Joe tries to explain but Maggie will not listen. Maggie finally relents and Joe tells her that everything is all right.

A man named Brian is now spotlighted in the Interview Area and he shares his perspective on death as one where people think life is supposed to last forever. Brian has never been able to understand that belief system when in fact death is the only thing anyone can be sure of. Brian feels that people would be better off if they would admit to the reality of their own death, that way people would live more authentic lives instead of trying methods to prolong the inevitable.

Brian is a writer but feels that his eloquence has been thwarted by the mechanics of dying. Brian's former wife, Beverly, had left him because he wanted to write and discuss everything and not participate and indulge fully in life. According to Beverly, Brian had lost the magic and the zest for real living. Brian rationalizes that every person must live life on his own terms and that Beverly must be happy or she would have returned to him.

Brian's interview concludes with him telling the interviewer that no one should take the process of living and dying so seriously. Each person's dreams are beautiful even though fate is sad but on a day-to-day basis life can be very amusing. The essence, though, is that each person thinks he has all the time he wants and that simply isn't the case.

A light comes up in the living room of the cottage to show a man named Mark, who is Brian's companion. Mark is putting away medications and medical supplies when Beverly walks in. Mark assesses immediately that the woman is Beverly and Beverly recognizes Mark to be Brian's current lover. There is a masked hostility between the two and Beverly uses humor to try to diffuse the situation. Beverly's answer is to have a cocktail but Mark is not interested.

Mark informs Beverly that Brian's condition is terminal and provides her with details of his condition that Beverly finds uncomfortable. Beverly chastises Mark for his cool demeanor and Mark cannot understand why Beverly is even here. Brian has had a particularly trying time lately and Mark wants to protect him, especially from emotional wounds like those inflicted by Beverly. Beverly insists on drinking though and the hostility continues between her and Mark until Mark decides to leave.

Back at the first cottage, Maggie still refuses to go inside and declares that she will enter only when she is ready to do so. Maggie's denial of Joe's illness leaves him at a loss for conversation so Joe diverts the discussion to happier topics such as the family buying a farm and living a rural life. Steve joins in the conversation and chides his mother about her inability to survive in such a situation.

Steve continues to tease his mother and tries to pull her into the cottage and eventually Maggie slaps Steve hard across the face. All three are immediately stunned until Joe comforts Steve who returns to the cottage leaving Maggie and Joe outside. Maggie finally admits that she has not told Steve about Joe's condition because she couldn't bring herself to do it mainly because she cannot believe it herself. Maggie runs away from the cottage and Joe sinks to the cottage steps, his head in his hands.

Now it is Felicity's turn to be interviewed and she is not the least bit affable. Felicity is a woman about sixty or seventy-years-old and she hums to herself to block out the sound of the interviewer. Felicity is staying at the cottage with her daughter, Agnes, who caters to her mother's every whim.

Felicity is incensed about her treatment so far at the hospital although she sometimes believes she is back in her own home and not at the hospital cottage. Felicity is angry that her body has been ravaged by disease and continues to lash out at the interviewer. Suddenly the old woman calls out for someone named Claire whom the interviewer is able to determine is Felicity's daughter.

Felicity says that Claire writes to her regularly and Felicity keeps the letters so they will be at home when she returns. Felicity's conversation drifts in and out of reality as she insists that she is at home and Claire is with her. A few minutes later Felicity tells the interviewer that Claire isn't with her but Agnes is. Felicity then calls out for Agnes who is seen in another room of the cottage. Agnes finishes what she is writing, folds the paper and places it in her pocket and moves to see what her mother needs.

Felicity undermines Agnes by telling the interviewer about how beautiful Claire and her two children are but that Agnes is a bit slower and not as pretty, more like her father than Felicity herself. Felicity demands that Agnes take her back to the cottage now and Agnes confirms with the interviewer that they will keep the appointment for the same time tomorrow. Agnes is a bit surprised when the interviewer asks to talk to Agnes tomorrow too but agrees to the idea.

Brian finally arrives at his cottage where he is reunited with Beverly who has been waiting for him. Clearly delighted to see her, Brian remarks on Beverly's dress and the excessive amount of jewelry she wears. Brian asks if Beverly and Mark have had a chance to meet and Beverly's affirmative answer is less than enthusiastic. Beverly is consumed with Brian and Mark's physical relationship and Brian succinctly tells Beverly that there are more important things to worry about at this point in his life.

Brian has taken stock of his life and is tying up loose ends and has begun to write again in the hope of not leaving anything unsaid or undone. Brian's effusiveness is suddenly tempered with reality and he admits to Beverly that the act of dying scares him to death. Convinced that he will be vitally alive until his very last moment is not the part that frightens Brian; it is that fraction of a second when a person makes that leap into the unknown that terrifies him. At that moment a person is absolutely alone and there is no alternative but to give in to it. Beverly does not know how to respond to Brian's statements so she offers champagne and makes characteristic off-hand remarks.

In Cottage Number Three, Felicity chastises Agnes who is singing a hymn. Felicity would prefer a song and launches into a bawdy little tune on her own. Agnes can no longer hide her exasperation and lashes out at Felicity but calms down and indulges Felicity's questions about Claire's imminent arrival.

Voices from the other two cottages now intermingle with Felicity and Agnes's conversation. Brian is wondering why he shakes so much now. Is the constant movement a side-effect of the disease or possibly the medication? Finally Brian comes to the conclusion that he shakes from fear. Joe's voice declares that he has a recurring dream in which everyone he has ever known appears and calls his name but eventually everything goes to white and he can no longer see them.

Act 1 Analysis

The author does a masterful job of incorporating three different stories into one piece with the unifying theme of terminal illness. The role of the interviewer is critical in that the three ill people interact most honestly with the voice. The interactions of the patients with their family members are more guarded and less confrontational in attempts to retain a sense of normalcy.

The use of the interviewer allows the author to introduce another character without adding to the confusion on the set. The anonymity of the interviewer whose voice is heard, but is never seen, has an omnipotent presence as if he is a higher power. Certainly the interviewer is the calm voice of reason amidst the physical and emotional turmoil experienced by the characters.

The author also uses the interviewer to explore each of the characters with whom he has interaction so that the reader learns about the character in more depth without adding more dialogue or scenes to the play.

Joe's attempts to reach Maggie and discuss the situation seem futile while in the next cottage, Beverly and Mark are in conflict about Brian. Probably the most normal scenario of the three is that of Felicity and Agnes as their behavior patterns seem long-rooted and not the cause of Felicity's illness.

Although the three patients are united in the aspect that each is dying, each character has a different view on the situation, which gives the play its contrast and movement. Joe's time is spent trying to make Maggie understand his condition. Maggie's obstinacy is both a help and a hindrance to her husband. Joe would like to believe that he will get well and return home and even indulges in a little fantasy about buying a farm and starting a new life.

Ultimately Joe needs Maggie to focus so that the remaining time is not misspent. It is clear that their marriage has been one in which Joe has shored up Maggie and unfortunately this unexpected illness forces her to focus on a life without her husband. In a sense, Maggie is also dying in that the life she knew will soon cease to exist.

Maggie's only method of rebelling is refusing to discuss Joe's illness with him or with their son, Steve.

Brian seems to be more sophisticated and evolved both intellectually and spiritually and bristles at the nuisance of acting as intermediary between his lover and his ex-wife. Brian has not only begun to tie up the physical aspects of his life but is also prepared to forgive Beverly for her indiscretions and the pain she had caused him. Ironically, by letting go of his life, Brian has seemed to re-gain a new one with a deeper and more authentic perspective.

In contrast, Felicity is contentious and feisty with unconcealed anger about her terminal illness. Felicity's hostility is directed at the interviewer who symbolizes the medical community in general who cannot help the woman at this point in her life. Agnes also suffers Felicity's wrath and cannot make up for her mother's disappointment in her shortcomings.

Felicity's mental acuity is also challenged as evidenced by her slipping in and out of the past in her conversations. It also seems as if the hope of seeing her daughter, Claire, again is the only beacon of hope for the old woman.

In choosing these three characters, the author has selected a cross section of society to address differing points of view on death and dying. Joe is a family man who can't help but worry about his family's welfare after he is gone. Brian is an older, sophisticated man with no family ties and can afford the luxury of ruminating on the philosophical aspects of death. Felicity embodies the senior perspective of someone who has lived a hard life and persevered in spite of all challenges and who refuses to be brought down by some intangible force.

The author also brings up the theme of the clinical nature of death in American society. Best expressed by the use of the interviewer, the patients are reduced to being cases who are questioned by some unidentifiable source. The interviewer's anonymity does not allow for emotional contact giving the perception that death should be viewed as a scientific process and that efficiency is most important due to the brevity of time allotted to each case. This treatment dehumanizes the characters and reduces them to the status of being merely a medical case.

Act 2

Act 2 Summary

It is now evening of the same day and Brian watches Beverly dance while Mark is in the kitchen. At Cottage Number One, Joe brings some coffee to Maggie and leaves her for a few minutes to get a sweater for her.

Brian is enjoying Beverly's performance but Mark is disgusted at her behavior. Beverly tells Mark the reason for all the jewelry she wears. Each piece of jewelry signifies one of Beverly's lovers who are now out of her life. As she names each man, Beverly removes the appropriate piece of jewelry and continues to drink. When Beverly finishes her performance, she opens champagne and accidentally spills some on Mark's jacket and the two of them get into a heated argument over the accident.

Brian has reached his tolerance level for this behavior and angrily takes Mark's soiled jacket and throws it on a chair amazed that his lover and his ex-wife can be arguing about something so trivial when there are more important issues to discuss. Brian attempts to dance with Beverly but is too weak and collapses. Both Beverly and Mark rush to Brian's aid but Brian wants to be left alone and goes to his bedroom. Beverly follows Brian out of the room and Mark sits and drinks directly from the champagne bottle.

Agnes is now being interviewed and is surprised and pleased that the interviewer is interested in her feelings through the process of Felicity's death. Agnes suffers from psychosomatic headaches constantly and is always tense and tired.

The interviewer abruptly changes the subject and wants to know about Claire. Agnes tells the story of how close she and Claire used to be, especially after the death of their father. Felicity had been a strong woman and managed the dairy farm in spite of many hardships. Claire was very pretty but very high-spirited and always argued with Felicity until one day Claire left.

After a year had passed, Felicity received a letter from a man in Louisiana telling her that Claire had been killed in an accident. After the news of Claire's death, Felicity began to decline and just gave up her will to live. Agnes did not know how to revive her mother who so grieved the loss of the favorite daughter. Felicity refused to acknowledge Claire's death.

It was then that Agnes decided to write the letters and pretend that they had come from Claire. Somehow, the anticipation of the letters and the idea that Claire will return are the only things that have kept Felicity alive for the past two years. In Agnes' mind, people need something to hope for and she has provided that hope for Felicity.

Agnes cannot see that she is doing anything wrong as Felicity's thinking is impaired and there is no harm in giving hope to a dying woman. The interviewer asks Agnes to

consider the possibility that the false hope is keeping Claire alive but for the wrong reasons. Felicity is enduring much physical and mental anguish yet she will not allow herself to die because she is waiting for Claire's return. The interviewer explains that in the death business, it is called "making a bargain."

Agnes is appalled by the thought of this concept and turns her anger on the interviewer who says that Felicity is deteriorating and may need to be moved back into the hospital. Agnes flatly refuses the idea and the prospect of any more invasive procedures on her mother's exhausted body. Agnes does relent briefly though and agrees to speak to the interviewer again as Felicity's voice is heard calling out for Claire.

In the first cottage, Joe and Maggie reminisce about their life, the jobs, the vacations and the house they built. Joe had imagined grandchildren surrounding him in his old age and he is angry that, that will not happen. Joe has a sense of futility about his life and the fact that Maggie will not discuss this with him.

Maggie's fear turns into anger and she wants to have all those good and bad moments of their life back because their relationship is not finished. Their life went by much too fast. Finally Maggie acknowledges Joe's imminent death and agrees to enter the cottage with him for the first time.

In Brian's cottage, Beverly and Mark talk about the man they have both loved. Brian is a more highly evolved spiritual person than either one of them and they have both struggled to understand him at times. Mark reveals that Brian took him in off the street where Mark was a male prostitute.

Mark's pain spirals down into a monologue of gritty details about the ugly side of the dying process and Beverly is outraged that Mark can perceive Brian in this way. Mark tells Beverly that it is easy for her to have such an elevated position on the topic but Mark is the one who lives with Brian and his dying every day.

Mark cannot bear the thought of Brian leaving and Beverly observes that Mark's life is just based on false hope. Beverly finally concedes and decides to leave but not before warning Mark not to hurt Brian by giving the dying man too much hope.

In Cottage Number Three, Agnes reads the fake letter from Claire to Felicity who interrupts her to ask for tea and if Agnes would please read Claire's letter. Agnes stares at Felicity recognizing the moment of her mother's decline into senility.

Joe and Brian are now in spotlights and face forward as if talking directly to the interviewer. Brian tells the interviewer that people just don't want to let go. Everyone thinks that their own time will last forever because no one expects death to happen to them. Joe says that nothing will stop death no matter what you try to do to stop it.

Now the other characters are heard interspersed with Joe and Brian and they comment that life goes by so fast, that it feels like only a minute and you try to remember what it was you believed in. The dying process adds anger to this mix of emotions and it would be helpful if someone warned you of this when you were young. Everything that ever

matters has an end. The characters each add something that is of value to them; these hands, this face, this air, this smile, this pain.

Brian says that people can tell you that you're dying but if you are dying, then you must still be alive and you still have the things that matter, at least for awhile. All the characters answer "yes" in their turn and the lights fade.

Act 2 Analysis

The reality of terminal illness forces people to face death as a fact of life. After that stage is realized, the process of acceptance starts, beginning with denial, which is shown in various degrees by all the characters at some point. Brian is logical about the fact of his imminent demise and tries to incorporate the process with the overriding spiritual aspects of it. Beverly seems to understand this about her ex-husband and supplies the humor and drama which Brian enjoys, however it is Mark who is faithful and stays with Brian at the end.

Not surprisingly, the other two patients, Joe and Felicity, are further along in the acceptance phase than their families. Agnes is more open to the idea of her mother's death, partly because of Felicity's age but also her mother's declining mental status. Maggie is the stalwart one who remains fixed in her denial until it occurs to her that Joe's death is no longer about her own feelings.

Fortunately Maggie realizes in time that Joe is in need of her support now and she is able to rally and provide what he needs. Maggie's symbolic entry into the cottage at last signifies her acceptance of the situation and her resolve to love her husband in the way he needs at this point in his life.

Part of the dying process is a life review and each of the patients does this within character to relate to untroubled times when anything is possible. It is the fact of limitations that seems to bother the patients the most so floating back in time provides a little bit of mental balm if only for a short while. Felicity's mental state keeps her in a perpetual state of memory which may or may not be her method of survival.

The author shows the important theme of regret as a result of the reminiscing the characters do. There is contrast between the concept of regret and the actions taken by the patients, particularly Brian and Joe. Brian challenges any remorse and resolves to do everything he never did or think everything he never thought.

The author masterfully provides Brian, Joe and Felicity with flashbacks and memories which provide more depth to their stories without adding dialogue which keeps the play razor sharp in its plot enactment.

Brian battles the process while Joe is more resigned to the end of an unfulfilling life. Somehow Joe seems to be a sadder case because in his own eyes he had not begun to live and now his chances are being removed. At least Brian has had the opportunity to experience a fuller life although that is poignant in its own sadness.

Clearly there are different stages of grief and each person experiences them in his own way but the author ends the play with the most important theme of all, to really live while you're alive. Even though each person has reached acceptance at the end of the play, there is a unanimous feeling that each character will continue to experience life as fully as possible because while there is still life, there is still hope.

Characters

Agnes

Agnes is described as a "middle-aged woman, very neat, very tense, very tired." According to the author, Agnes is someone who has "tried all her life to do the right thing, and the attempt has made her unsure of herself." She is Felicity's oldest daughter and her only surviving child. She shares with the interviewer that she suffers from psychosomatic headaches. They are so much a part of her that she has trouble recognizing them unless they have "gone away." Living in the shadow of her deceased sister, Claire, it appears that Agnes is consumed with pleasing her mother, with caring for her adequately during her illness, despite ongoing abuse from her mother, and the disruption Felicity's illness creates in her life. When asked about her sister or her mother, Agnes has little difficulty in relaying all of the details of their lives. But when asked what she will do when her mother dies, she looks at the interviewer in silence. Agnes also admits that after one of her mother's hospital stays, she wrote a letter in response to her mother's own letter, posing as Claire. She has continually written such letters, claiming that it gives her mother hope, that "it makes her happy." But when the interviewer asks Agnes what "makes her happy," she is startled and immediately redirects the focus back to her mother's condition.

Beverly

Beverly is a surprise guest at Cottage Two, and much to Mark's dismay, she is his lover Brian's colorful ex-wife. Beverly is a world traveler, an adventurer, and a bit of a drunk. She enters the cottage in an expensive, though soiled and torn, evening dress decorated with "bits of jewelry" and hidden by a "yellow slicker raincoat and rubber boots." Despite her physical attractiveness, she has a rather bawdy sense of humor and throughout the play can be observed swigging from a gin bottle strategically placed in her purse. What makes Beverly an endearing character is her ability to be brutally honest or frank, yet at the same time interject humor into an otherwise grave situation. She is able to illuminate the reality of Brian's disease both to the patient and to his lover, appeasing or comforting one while alienating the other. Her ability to see Mark's true character is also apparent. She reminds Mark that Brian needs him.

Brian

Brian is the second terminally ill patient, introduced in the work as "a graceful man . . . simple, direct, straightforward," who "possesses an agile mind and a childlike joy about life." Of all of the characters, Brian seems to have taken considerably more time to

ponder his life for the sake of productivity□his past relationships, his accomplishments, his hopes and dreams unfulfilled, as well as what it means to be dying. During a conversation with his ex-wife, when asked about his newfound interest in writing, Brian says, "I realized that there was a lot to do that I hadn't done yet. So I figured I better . . . start working." For Brian, "working" means liquidating or selling off all of his personal assets and burying the money in a sock on Staten Island, visiting Passaic, New Jersey, just to go, or writing an endless stream of literature. Besides being a dreamer of sorts, Brian is the philosophical voice of the work. He is resolved to forgive and forget the fact that his ex-wife walked out on him.

Brian has come to terms with his past, and in doing so, his universe has opened up.

Felicity

Described as being sixty or seventy and wheelchair bound, Felicity is surprisingly feisty, if not somewhat senile, and openly hostile to both the interviewer and her daughter Agnes. She refers to the interviewer as "you and your people" who've' all come to look at the dead people." Felicity's assessment of her daughter is not encouraging either, telling the interviewer, "She's a little slow. It's not her fault. Not too pretty and not too bright," and warns the interviewer "you have to be careful of Agnes. She's jealous." Felicity also appears to be suffering from dementia, speaking to the interviewer of life on her dairy farm as if she were still there, and of her deceased daughter Claire as if still alive. She holds onto these memories, according to her daughter, to keep herself going, to maintain a sense of hope. According to the interviewer, however, these memories may be the only thing keeping her alive.

Interviewer

The mysterious interviewer never reveals him or herself to the audience. This character de.nitelyworks for the hospital and appears to be a clinician.Whether he or she is a psychiatrist is unclear. It is also clear to the interviewer's subjects that meetings with the interviewer are research driven. More importantly, however, it is through the probing questions of the interviewer that the audience becomes privileged to information others do not have.

Joe

Act 1 opens with Joe, a terminally ill patient and resident of Cottage One, speaking to the interviewer. He is described as being a "strong, thick-set man, a little bit clumsy with moving and talking, but full of energy." It has been six months since Joe has seen his wife and son, and after a long hospital stay, he is a bit anxious about a family reunion. Although Joe reveals to the interviewer his fears about dying, he is quick to point out that it is his wife's mental state that troubles him deeply. When the interviewer tells Joe that he "seems" to be "fine," Joe responds half-heartedly, distracted by the momentary

arrival of his family, saying, "Oh, me. Yeah sure, but Maggie." Joe does express his own personal feelings concerning his illness to Maggie, despite her continued resistance to discuss such matters. Heist a realist and faces his disease and feelings head-on. Joe talks about his dreams and his anger at lost opportunity.

Maggie

Amid a "mass of bundles, shopping bags and suitcases," Maggie approaches the cottage, dressed up yet looking a mess. She is not just Joe's wife, or Steve's mother, but also the troop leader and family organizer. Despite her obvious leadership abilities, often times Maggie appears to be nervous, easily excitable, and highly agitated by her surroundings as well as by interactions with her husband. She reacts frantically to Joe and his attempts to talk to her about his disease, avoiding connection with Joe's illness by refusing to discuss it. After months of separation, she tells Joe that he "doesn't have total" her about his condition, that she can see Joe is "fine." More dramatically, Maggie refuses to walk into the cottage, stating "I'll go when I'm good and ready." In a tense moment, she resorts to slapping her son and fleeing from the cottage to avoid entering Joe's world.

Mark

Male companion and nurse to Brian, Mark is somber character in the work. In contrast to Brian, he is rather serious, appears to be overly protective, and is a bit standoffish with Brian's ex-wife, Beverly. Upon meeting her, he immediately launches into an explanation of his experiences with Brian, as if the pain and suffering were his own. Mark warns her of Brian's changed appearance in graphic detail.

In revealing details of his relationship with Brian to Beverly, the audience discovers entirely different, selfish motives for Mark's devotion to his dying lover. He admits to working as a male prostitute before being invited into Brian's home. For Mark, Brian is his second chance. Now Brian's death means Mark is finished too.

Steve

Steve is Joe's son, an energetic boy of fourteen. Unaware of Joe's illness, Steve becomes the subject of controversy between his father and mother, Maggie.

Themes

Death and Dying

The perspectives on death offered by three terminally ill patients define the plot of *The ShadowBox*. Voices of the patients and family members alike illuminate many aspects of death. Each character gives the audience a glimpse of death and dying that is different from the next. Those experiences□whether it be those of a concerned husband, fearful wife, or angry patient□come together to give the work a richness and depth unattainable inconsideration of any one experience.

Joe's emotional efforts are spent trying to help his wife, Maggie, accept his approaching death, rather than on his own grief. Maggie is reluctant to face Joe's condition, refusing at first to enter the cottage, and then to acknowledge he will never be returning home, "Don't believe what they tell you. What do they know?" Mark, Brian's companion, shares with Beverly the horror he faces daily caring for a dying friend, speaking of death, "You can wipe up the mucous and the blood and the piss and the excrement, you can burn the sheets and boil his clothes, but it's still there." As a patient, Felicity is the only one to express anger toward the interviewer, "Patient? Patient, hell! I'm a corpse."

Appearances and Reality

All of the characters, either those dying or those affected by a dying loved one, must face the reality of death, that death is part of the human condition. Depending on the characters themselves, this process of acceptance is expressed in a wide range of emotions. Brian expresses feelings of disbelief in an unguarded moment with the interviewer, confiding, "It's a bit of a shock, that's all. You always think. . . no matter what they tell you . . . you always think you have more time. And you don't." He expresses the sentiment of the overall work□he, not unlike the other characters, struggle with the idea of what it means to be in the process of dying as well as how to cope or live with such an idea. Others choose denial as a means of coping.

From the outset of the play, Maggie resists Joe and his attempts to involve her in his life on the hospital grounds, by refusing to enter the cabin and refusing to speak to Joe on the subject of death and change. "I'm telling you I don't want to talk about it," exclaims an insistent Maggie in an intimate moment with her husband. Because her husband appears to be fine, Maggie won't discuss his illness, claiming that Joe "looks fine," and is "getting stronger everyday." Maggie also says to Joe that she bought a "big red chair just for [Joe]" to surprise him. For Maggie, Joe's death will transform her life in ways she doesn't want to acknowledge or cope with. The idea of this event is impossible for her to embrace.

Dehumanization and Dignity

Terminal illness has a very dehumanizing effect on Joe, Felicity, and Brian alike, stripping them of human dignity. During the course of what seems to be lengthy medical treatment, each one has fallen victim to some form of poking, prodding, or cutting, as if each were part of an experiment. As a function of this scientific approach, the treatments these patients receive are also rather cold and mechanical, and by their very nature deprive these patients of human qualities or attributes. Joe is frustrated by his treatment, sharing that "nobody wants to hear about" how he feels, adding that "even the doctors . . . they shove a thermometer in your mouth. . . . How the hell are you supposed to say anything?" Felicity is more daring in her protests. She too feels dehumanized by the experience, and voices this sentiment loudly to the interviewer, "I have one lung, one plastic bag for a stomach, and two springs and a battery where my heart used to be." She refers to those responsible as "butchers" stating that they "cut [her] up and took everything that wasn't nailed down." Mark's recollection of Brian's appearance after cortisone injections evoke monster-like images akin to those of Frankenstein, "the skin goes sort of white and puffy. It changed the shape of his face for awhile, and he started to get really fat." Outside of these treatments, Mark confides that Brian's dizzy spells are also a source of embarrassment for him.

Memory and Reminiscence

All of the characters reminisce about their lives before illness. Whether patient or family member, these memories are the connection to normalcy, to happier times, and those closest to them. Most of the time, these memories also serve to ease conflict and tension during interactions between characters. For both Maggie and Joe, fond recollections of their life together create the tonic necessary to soothe the reality of the present. These shared moments provide stability; they are calming because they are pleasing to both Maggie and Joe. They provide moments of neutrality in otherwise troubled discussions of Joe's condition.

It is unclear whether Felicity is suffering from dementia or denial in her refusal to accept her daughter's death. Agnes, another daughter and caretaker, insists that the memory of Claire "keeps[Felicity] going," explaining to the interviewer that, "It means so much to [Felicity]. . . . It's something to hope for. You have to have something. People need something to keep them going." Claire is a connection between the mother and the daughter unaffected by illness. Also, by denying Claire's death, Felicity finds a way to deny the passage of time and by extension, the inevitability of death. But memories also form the basis for some stark realizations. Brian recalls a moment with a doctor when he asks why he is shaking so badly. When the doctor can offer no reasonable explanation, Brian recalls a time in his childhood when he was separated from his father during a train ride to Coney Island. He tells Mark that when he tried to ask for directions he "couldn't talk because he was shaking so badly . . . because he was frightened." He then realizes that he "shakes now" for the same reason, he is afraid, afraid to die.

Remorse and Regret

Taking an inventory of one's life, one's accomplishments, is an understandable response to terminal illness. What is left unsaid and undone becomes of primary importance to several of the characters during the course of the play. All share regrets ranging from bitter disappointment to sadness or longing for something unsaid or undone. Towards the end of the play, Joe tells Maggie that to have a house was something tangible, a symbol of life, a place where he could "put in one more . . . tree . . . .x up another room . . . see grandchildren," dwell in possibility. Joe feels a sense of loss or longing for opportunities long gone, those taken by the financial burden of illness. He also betrays feelings of disappointment concerning the finality of his condition: "one day, somebody walks up and tells you it's finished. And me . . . all I can say is 'what' . . . what's finished?" Brian approaches his mortality driven to offset, or avoid, regret by personal achievement. He explains to Beverly that the moment he discovered he was going to die, he realized "that there was a lot to do that I hadn't done yet." Brian wants to champion death, claiming, "the only way to beat this thing is to leave absolutely nothing behind." He will accomplishthis by avoiding "anything unsaid, undone," wishing even the loneliest "obscure, silly, worthless thought" be expressed in some fashion.

Style

Structure

The play is comprised of three different plots working together to create a sense of overall unity. Transitions in plot are indicated smoothly, at specific points in the play, during which one dialogue is faded out as another is woven in. The perspectives of characters involved in three different plots come together at the end of the play to give a fuller, richer picture of what it means to be dying, and how this condition impacts both the lives of those close to the terminally ill and the patients themselves. In Cottage One, Joe struggles to reach his wife, to share histhoughts and feelings with her about dying, but also to help her cope with his illness so that she is prepared for a future without him. In Cottage Two, Beverly and Mark struggle with each other concerning Brian's well-being. And in Cottage Three, Agnes struggles with the guilt and pain of failing to live upto her dying mother's expectations. Despite this blending of plots, the play does follow some strict patterns of dramatic structure. The action of the plot occurs in the course of a day, and the scene is limited to a single location, that is, the grounds of a hospital.

Point of View

Events of the play are presented outside of anyone character's perspective, in the third person. At no time does a character address the audience oroffer any special insight into his or her motivations or actions. Instead, the audience is able to draw conclusions about the characters themselves by observing them in dialogue with various other characters. The dynamic nature of such interactions gives breadth and depth to these individuals and helps the audience to better understand their motivations.For example, Agnes reveals to the interviewer that she has been writing phony letters fromher deceased sister to her mother, Felicity, for two years. In later scenes with her mother, Agnes sayssimply, "If I told you the truth, mama, would you listen?" The audience is already privy to what the truth is without actually hearing Agnes's admissionto her mother.

Objectivity

The work achieves a sense of objectivity primarily because of its structure. It offers snapshots or glimpses into the lives of three different groups of individuals and their struggle to cope with terminal illness, without coming to a particular consensus as to what it means to "die," or what right action that one who is affected by terminal illness should take. The characters often bounce around ideas of whatterminal illness means for them, working off each other to reach their own conclusions. Upon observation, this open-ended structure allows the audience to view terminal illness from many different

perspectives, creating a heightened awareness, thus opening up different emotional possibilities. For example, Beverly's way of facing her ex-husband's illness is to confront it head on, interjecting humor into her conversations as a means of coping. Contrastor compare this method to Maggie's avoidance. Maggie avoids the topic of Joe's illness altogether by insisting they continue on with their lives unchanged by Joe's hospital stay.

Foils

The various characters work as "foils" to one another, their psychological qualities often contrasting strongly. Such characters are either those interacting within a particular plot or on the basis of comparing actions of characters in different plots. Beverly's honest, if somewhat abrasive, or realistic,approach to dealing with Brian's illness, for example, illuminates the true nature of Mark's seemingly selfless concern and self-sacri.ce as being a function of self-interest. Beverly is a drunk and a bit of a floozy, but she is able to admit to her shortcomings,that she is not a hero but a "whore," unlike Mark who spends much of his time feigning insult and injury in response to Beverly's remarks. Maggie, in contrast to such boldness, such brashness, cannot process her husband's death. Unlike Beverly, she is unable to confront the situation head-on and offer a listening ear, which would provide some much needed comfort to her husband, Joe; therefore, where Beverly seems to succeed, Maggie does not.

Climax

Both acts 1 and 2 reach a point in the rising action at which a climax is realized, apparent in the dramatic shift in dialogue. In a powerful moment at the play's conclusion, all of the characters express what is important to them, what makes them feel alive, each offering an idea, "this smell, this touch" offers Joe, "this taste" offers Beverly, and for Brian it's "this moment." This finale supports the simplicity of a moment in which all characters, despite their differences, come together in agreement, mirrored by the statement, "They tell you you're dying, and you say all right. But if I am dying. . . I must still be alive."

Historical Context

The era of the 1970s was the backdrop for Cristofer's *The Shadow Box*, an era marked by uncertainty.First, American political condense was in crisis after Nixon's resignation from office. At no other time in history had a president violated the sanctity of public office as Nixon had. The country also had to cope with the aftermath of the Vietnam conflict and the failure it came to represent. Vietnam veterans returned home, greeted by indifference rather than applause. This climate led America to question its values, and image, on a national level. Part of the political as well as social climate fixated or focused on issues surrounding the right to die and the nature of life. This concern is indeed reflected in Cristofer's in-depth exploration of mortality in his own work. The case of Karen Anne Quinlan, like Cristofer's play, explores questions concerning quality of life, and when life ends. Quinlan lost consciousness after allegedly combining alcohol and narcotics on April 15, 1975. She eventually fell into a coma and was sustained with artificial life support systems, such as respirators and intravenous nutrients. According to doctors, her brain was damaged beyond repair, leaving her body dependant on life support. But it was traces of electrical brain activity on an electroencephalograph, or EEG, that determined she was alive, from both a medical and legal perspective. Quinlan's parents demanded the right for their daughter to die with dignity rather than be connected to life-support systems, and they pursued this right legally. What transpired was a long courtroom discussion amongst physicians, medical ethicists, and jurists as to when life ended. Some felt life was sacred, no matter what the individual's physical state, while others sided with the Quinlans.

The 1970s was also marked by religious fanaticism. In 1978, Leo Ryan and a group of journalists and relatives of cult followers traveled to Guyana, South America, to investigate cult leader Jim Jones. The group was acting on the request of family members related to those participating in the Jonestown cult. They feared their relatives were being exploited financially, physically, and emotionally. When Ryan and his group tried to flee with fourteen defectors, Jones's assassins .red upon them. Some were killed, others narrowly escaped. Fearing the repercussions of such violence, Jim Jones staged a massive suicide, commanding his followers to drink cyanide-laced fruit punch. A total of 913 people died, and 276 of them were children. At home, the United States in the 1970s was suffering economically from "Stagnation," a combination of high unemployment and inflation. The situation was worsened by the increasing cost of petroleum imposed by foreign countries. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)was formed by key Middle Eastern countries who imposed an oil embargo against the United States and other nations, causing gas prices to soar. In midst of what seemed like economic doom, the country was also undergoing great technological advancements with the advent of the personal computer. No longer a science fiction dream, the PC or personal computer could be purchased by the average American for a nominal price, allowing them access to seemingly unlimited amounts of information. Excited by this new technology, theorist Marshall McLuhan saw the PC, along with the advent of the television, as a means of creating "global village," an international community devoid of borders or political preference.

Critical Overview

Jack Kroll's reaction to *The Shadow Box* in his article "Where is Thy Sting?" was "The American way of death is to domesticate it." While Kroll realized Michael Cristofer's abilities, he did not necessarily find Cristofer's brilliance exhibited in this play. The reaction on Broadway during the first weeks of the play's run was also less than favorable, but as word spread, attendance increased. What most critics seem to converge on, or wholeheartedly agree to, is the play's ability to present life as a celebration rather than as a means to an end. In the *Washington Post,* Richard L. Coe expands on the idea, stating, "the stings of humor and irony quicken what might have been lugubrious sentimentality." Another value that critics like Coe assign to the work is its ability to express the carelessness with which human beings approach life, and their inability to grasp on to every moment and treasure it. Instead, man, quite naturally, tends to move through life with a sense of urgency and of immediacy from day to day.

The work's unifying force is its subject matter. Although the inhabitants of Cottages One, Two, and Three are separated physically, their voices come together in the end of the play in a sort of collective resolution. These voices crescendo, and in the end, only serve to amplify the message Cristofer is communicating about the transience or temporary quality of life.

Coe, in another article for the *Washington Post,* was moved to call *The Shadow Box* the ".nest play of the New York Season, a beautifully realized drama of sensitive perceptions often as funny as it is moving." The play did win both a Pulitzer Prize in drama and a Tony Award in 1977; however, Cristofer's career after this time did not measure upto these accomplishments. Brendan Lemon, in his movie review of *Gia,* directed by Cristofer, offered a luke-warm response to the film's release in 1998.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Kryhoski is currently working as a freelance writer. In this essay, Kryhoski considers Cristofer's commentary on the redemptive nature of death.

As a result of the play *The Shadow Box*, Michael Cristofer earned recognition for his honest, objective study of death, observed in the lives of three unrelated characters and their loved ones. The play, however, is more than just a playwright's attempt to come to terms with the mysterious. The very idea of death is a means of redemption for several characters of the play. While dying is an ending point for some of Cristofer's characters, it signifies the beginning, or rebirth, of others entering a new level of consciousness.

Maggie is perhaps the most resistant to change. It is clear at the outset of the play that she has beensuppressing Joe's death, making it all the harder on herself, as well as on Joe, to reunite on a conscious level. When Joe asks Maggie, "Aren't you ever coming in?" the inference is not that he is literally anxious or impatient to enter the cottage, but is attempting instead to reach out to Maggie on a deeper level. When Maggie replies, a little too firmly, "I'll go in when I'm good and ready," Joe's question takes on a different character. The cabin symbolically represents a world of sickness, of death, of finality for Maggie. By refusing to enter the cabin, she is, in effect, refusing to accept Joe's condition. What Joe is really asking Maggie to do is to accept his terminal condition so that they can move on in the relationship.

The tension in the play heightens as Maggie continues to resist, insisting Joe return home so that things are "made normal." Finally, Maggie is jolted into the present by her dying husband, who says, "Look at me. You want magic to happen? Is that what you want? Go ahead. Make it happen. I'm waiting. Make it happen!" In hearing her own words, "I can't, I can't," Maggie suddenly surrenders, asking Joe to tell her that he is dying. Her admission that she doesn't know what to do for Joe eases the tension between husband and wife, Joe no longer having to "do it alone."

Mark prides himself on his involvement with Brian and the support he gives to a terminally ill companion. He knows every aspect of Brian's condition, and is painstaking in recounting the nature of his friend's suffering to Beverly, Brian's ex-wife. It is Beverly who is quick to comment on this quality. When Mark shares that Brian "falls down a lot and his face gets a little purple for a minute," Beverly quips, "All the details. You're very graphic," as if she is responding to a horror .lm. Beverly and Mark continue to knock heads in a combative fashion, leading to Mark's hasty exit on several occasions. Annoyed and flustered by Brian's visitor, Mark excuses himself, but not before Beverly is again quick to note, "How are we ever going to get to know each other if you keep leaving the room?" When Beverly pushes Mark one last time, he fires back, "We are dying here, lady. That's what it's about. We are dropping like flies. Look around you, one word after another, one life after another. . . .Zap. Gone. Dead."

Mark is dying, symbolically, because his future□supporting Brian□will be denied to him with Brian's death. Beverly exposes Mark's selfish motives for taking care of Brian. She tells Mark that he doesn't "need to dirty" his hands with "that kind of rotten, putrid, filth, unless of course you need the money." The scene reaches its climax as Mark and Beverly exchange slaps. At this point, Mark breaks down, stating, "I don't want him to die," repeatedly. The tension eases at the end of the play when the audience discovers Mark has chosen to remain with Brian, and has undergone an emotional transformation. When Brian calls himself disgusting, Mark replies, "No you're not. Just wet." Finally, there is Agnes. She reveals in a conversation with the interviewer that she has actually been humoring her mother by writing letters to her. Agnes composes and signs the letters as if they are actually from Claire, who has, at this point, been dead for several years. She offers an explanation, claiming that "it means so much to [Felicity],"adding, "people need something to keep them going." At first, it would seem Felicity was the person who needed to be humored. When asked if such letter writing makes her happy, Agnes hesitates before answering "yes." Agnes reveals a need to write letters to maintain a relationship between herself and her mother.

Failing to make a connection with Felicity, Agnes tries to reach out to her by conjuring up images of her dead sister. In engaging in this activity, Agnes is avoiding the opportunity to resolve her relationship with Felicity. The interviewer gives her pause to think, stating that Felicity is "waiting for Claire." Agnes responds, stunned, and the interviewer offers that "[Felicity's] made up her mind that she's not going to die until Claire arrives," that "it might easily be the reason, now that [Agnes] has explained about the letters." Agnes makes several feeble attempts to reconcile with her mother, by admitting the letters are forgeries, with no success. At the play's conclusion, a strong and resolute Agnes tells her mother "it's time to stop," signifying the relationship is undergoing a transformation. Other parallels can be drawn in consideration of the regenerative powers at work in the play. The play has been identified to be built, at least structurally, by threes□there are three cottages, housing three related characters, all of whom seem to form a trinity of sorts, identical in ways that the groups consist of one terminally ill patient and two other people who are close to them. The Biblical trinity is also composed of three divine figures: God, divine Wisdom, and the Spirit of God. None preceded each other or challenge one another in power or stature. They are understood, in theological terms, to be one in substance. All share an eternal quality, all are equal. In other words, God is one nature in three persons.

Native Americans have also realized value in the process of transformation. The life-death-lifecycle in some Native American cultures implies that the death of one living organism contributes to or impacts the life of something else. Three also gives expression to the play's ultimate resolution. If the resolution of the play is death, then perhaps it is fitting that there are only two acts which comprise the play. The third, or missing act, is "death."

In *The Shadow Box*, the truth is ultimately realized through three groups of three characters, and their interactions with each other. Cristofer's truth comes out in a multitude of voices representing all of the characters in the final lines of the play. The lesson they communicate is that life should be celebrated in the moment. Brian's final

realization is perhaps the most profound of all, one that captures the spirit of the work, "They tell you you're dying, and you say all right. But if I am dying . . . I must still be alive."

Source: Laura Kryhoski, Critical Essay on *The Shadow Box,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

Wallace's stories, poems, and essays appear in publications around the country. In this essay, Wallace considers the way in which Cristofer's characters represent different stages in the grieving process, and the progress each character makes toward acceptance of death during the course of the play.

Death, it has been said, is the one sure thing in every life. But individuals deal with the possibility, and the reality, of death in myriad ways. Some welcome it as an escape from a painful world. Some fear it so deeply they have trouble living life. Some court death, dancing to the edge of mortality, then leaping back. Some, with an eye on the grave, live life with great abandon, against the day when they will cross the mysterious border into the unknown afterlife. Some, with an eye on the afterlife, live life with great care, in hopes of receiving reward, and avoiding punishment, after they die.

But, despite the varying ways in which humanity responds to the inevitability and tragedy of death, most people deal with grief in recognizable stages. Bad news is at first unbelievable, and victims and families may respond to it with denial: "This isn't happening." When reality sets in, a sense of anger often comes with it: "This isn't fair!" As anger wanes, people may try to cut a deal with God, or death, or the world, in a stage termed bargaining: "If I can just do this, maybe they won't die after all." The final stage is termed acceptance—when victims and families finally understand the reality of their situation, and are able to face death with open eyes.

Michael Cristofer's 1975 play, *The ShadowBox*, is set in a woodland hospice, where the families and friends of three terminally ill patients come to visit them in the last days or months before their inevitable deaths. In real life, the stages of grief over death are nowhere near as clean as they may appear in psychology textbooks: the human heart is a complicated organ, and stricken victims or relatives may move back and forth between emotions over the course of the grieving process. Nevertheless, each patient and visitor represents some point on the continuum of grief, and each makes some progress toward acceptance over the course of the play. Steve, the son of Joe, a dying patient, is at the earliest end of the grief spectrum: when he arrives, he isn't even aware of his father's condition. This is an interesting, and tragic, consequence of the stage his mother, Maggie, is in: denial. Maggie, when she arrives, is so far in denial that she has forgotten not just the fact of Joe's impending death but also everything else he has told her about the hospice. Despite the fact that Joe told her in advance that everything they needed would be available there, she has packed her suitcase with everything from a ham to canned pumpkin, in complete denial of both his death and even the substance of the place where he awaits it. Maggie's actions may also reveal some aspects of the later stage of bargaining, a sense that if she can just do enough, she can hold back her husband's death through her offerings. In any case, she has distinctly not reached acceptance. She refuses to enter Joe's cottage, which somehow represents the reality of his death to her. And when he comes down to talk, she insists on hanging on to the fiction of his eventual recovery. "You're fine," she tells him. "I can see it's all right." And Joe, giving in, agrees.

Interestingly, although his wife and son are among the characters who stand farthest from acceptance of the fact of death, Joe himself seems to have a simple, but profound grasp of his own passing. He's already been through several familiar grieving stages, he reveals in a conversation with the interviewer, telling him, "You get scared at first. . . and then you get pissed off." But by the time his wife and son arrive, Joe has accepted his fate, saying, "I mean, it happens to everybody, right? I ain't special."

Brian, the patient in the cottage next door, echoes Joe's accepting sentiment. "It's the one thing in this world you can be sure of!" he announces to the interviewer. "Sooner or later, it's going to happen. You're going to die." But as Brian continues to speak, his bravado becomes less convincing. Instead, the audience begins to see an intellectual who has always attempted to control life through knowledge, and who is now attempting to work the same trick on death, by claiming that he can know and control it, as well. So although the interviewer tells Brian his analysis of death is "very helpful," Brian corrects him, saying "too much thinking and talking," adding that his former wife, Beverly, left him because of his tendency to intellectualize everything. In reality, his "acceptance" is a smoke screen. If it doesn't hide outright denial, Brian's "thinking and talking" is at least a form of bargaining: if he knows enough, he thinks, maybe his death won't really happen. His bursts of creative activity are transparent, attempts to achieve some measure of immortality.

Brian's true stage is hidden below the surface, and so are the positions of his two visitors: Beverly, his former wife, and Mark, his current lover. At first glance, Mark seems to be squarely in acceptance. After all, he's the one who has been taking care of Brian for the duration of his illness, wiping up "the mucous and the blood and the piss and the excrement," burning the sheets and boiling the clothes, becoming acquainted with the sights and smells of impending death. And Beverly, who arrives already drunk, in a blouse hung with pins and jewelry from her former lovers, and dances in her sick ex-husband's cottage, appears to be solidly in denial. But as the day progresses, it becomes clear that Beverly, in fact, is the one who has accepted the fact of her former husband's death. The acceptance causes her pain, but the alcohol she uses to deaden it doesn't change her essential grasp on the facts. Beverly has come to say the things she didn't want left unsaid, and to have the dance she and Brian never danced in their life together. And it is Beverly who insists to Mark that he has not really accepted the fact of Brian's death, and points out how essentially angry Mark's position is□and that his anger has made him self-pitying, hindering his ability to offer Brian the help he needs.

Agnes and her ailing mother, Felicity, residents of the final cottage, are coping with two deaths□the death of Agnes's sister, Claire, decades earlier, and Felicity's own imminent passing. Felicity, who has gone senile but retains her salty tongue, fades into and out of reality, and may not ever be able to fully comprehend the fact of her own death. But even when lucid, she never accepted the death of her favorite daughter, to the extent that she has now completely forgotten it, and believes that the fictional letters that Agnes reads to her are really from Claire, who Felicity believes will one day be a second visitor to her hospice cottage. Agnes, who has never had an easy relationship with her mother, claims to have accepted the fact of her mother's death, and even asks the

doctors why she hasn't died yet—but her actual position is somewhat more complicated. Although she says she writes the fictional letters from Claire simply to spare her mother grief, her extended fiction may actually reveal her own denial of the loss of her sister. And the death of her mother, to whom she has devoted her life up to this point, will leave her alone, and aimless. The missing sister, Claire, is an interesting final case, the only character in *The Shadow Box* who exists beyond the farthest reaches of the grief spectrum. Although she lives in the play in the minds of both her mother and sister and still affects their daily lives, she has moved irretrievably beyond them, and the human grief spectrum. Claire is the only character who has passed over into death, the only character who really knows the truth of what everyone else is talking about—and the only character who can't speak for herself.

As the day progresses, the residents of each of the cottages make progress toward acceptance of the death they must deal with. Joe and Maggie near acceptance by navigating together the grieving process he's accomplished and she's missed. Interestingly, Maggie, who has forgotten so many details concerning her husband's illness, complains about the comfort of the hospice, saying, "They make everything so nice. Why? So you forget? I can't." Nevertheless, together, they think back on the way things used to be. During the conversation, they admit that it's difficult to believe how things have changed, express their anger over what they've lost, then move into acceptance. Their process complete, Maggie finally agrees to enter the cottage, to break the news to Steve, so that he can begin his own grieving.

Brian, after discussing his attempts at immortality through writing with Beverly, finally attempts to dance with her the dance he never danced before. The effort proves too much for him, and he's overcome, falling to the ground. But even as he rises, he tries to insulate himself with intellectual chatter, announcing, as if describing a carnival attraction: "He walks, he talks, he falls down, he gets up." But his punch line, "Life goes on," doesn't ring true, and he stumbles off to the bedroom. In Brian's absence, Beverly reveals to Mark the truth of his attitude, and Mark sobs out the truth behind his feigned acceptance of Brian's death: "I don't want him to die." Gently, Beverly encourages Mark to move into a true acceptance, so that Brian can. "Just one favor you owe him," she says. "Don't hurt him with your hope." When Mark reenters Brian's sickroom, some of his concern for himself seems to have faded, and he's able to help Brian negotiate his own way. When Brian, in a flash of lucidity about his condition, declares that he's "truly disgusting," Mark corrects him with reality, responding, "No, you're not. Just wet." In the closing scenes, Agnes, like Mark, also discovers the dangers of lack of acceptance of death. In response to her question about why her own mother has not yet passed away, the doctors inform her that, perhaps, her mother is holding out for a visit from Agnes's missing sister—a visit that can never happen because Claire is already dead. Felicity' slack of acceptance of that death, and Agnes's complicity in the self-deception, has led to a situation in which Felicity is delayed indefinitely from letting go of a life she is only barely living, and in which Agnes's own life is also on hold. Ironically, if there is an afterlife in which Felicity might be reunited with Claire, Felicity's lack of acceptance of death delays Felicity from meeting her daughter again. People don't move into acceptance of a death, especially one as troubling and complicated as Claire's, over the course of one short day, and although Agnes grasps the reality of her mother's situation

quickly, she doesn't bring herself to break the truth to her during the course of the play. In fact, Agnes wonders if Felicity, in her advanced senility will even believe the truth if it is told to her. But

Agnes herself moves a step forward into real acceptance of both of the deaths in her family, telling her mother near the end of the play, "It's time to stop." In some ways, Agnes's statement is a very simple definition of death. And at the close of Cristofer's *The Shadow Box*, each patient and each visitor, in their own unique way, has grappled with and grown closer to accepting it.

Source: Carey Wallace, Critical Essay on *The Shadow Box,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay excerpt, Kelley explores how characters in The Shadow Box *deal with imminent death, showing that how the characters view death defines their existence.*

During the late 1970's, a spate of plays with main characters who are dying appeared. The shift of focus in these works□from death to dying by terminal illness□substantiates one character's claim in *The Shadow Box* that "there's a huge market for dying people right now." This market is not only "huge," but also fairly new, since progressive, long-term diseases are a comparatively recent development, ironically linked with scientific advances.

This rise of science has altered not only the way we die but also the way we approach death. Although science has replaced religion as a dominant force in Western society, it does not meet the emotional and psychological needs of either the dying person or the survivors. It does not provide a new *ars moriendi* to replace those that religions offered. Perhaps in response to this perceived lack, Bernard Pomerance, Ronald Ribman, Michael Cristofer, and several others all suggest new arts, and do so by focussing on terminal illness. By pairing the dying protagonists with at least one physically .t character in each work, the playwrights offer a newly defined art of dying, and more importantly, an art of living until the final moment, and an art of living as the survivor. These arts, as presented in *The Elephant Man, Cold Storage,* and *The Shadow Box*, are primarily individualized, secularized, and interactive processes; and they are valuable replacements for the *ars moriendi* lost when faith became subordinate to technology□the very change which heightened the need for such skills. Quite clearly these plays offer new "mythologies of dying" which incorporate the current fascination with death and dying, while also beginning to overcome the concurrent reluctance to discuss death with those who are imminently approaching it. . . .

The characters in *The Shadow Box* dramatize the five stages of dying that Elisabeth Kübler-Rossout lined in *On Death and Dying:* denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. While the stages can overlap, the prevailing emotion must be acceptance in order for the individual to live fully at the end, and for the survivors to retain emotional equilibrium. Of the three characters who are dying, Joe and Brian have accepted death; the third, Felicity, is angry and still bargaining for time. Consequently, she is not able to live as the others do.

Joe is a simple, open character who explains that "you get scared at first. Plenty. And then you get pissed off." But he then concludes that "it happens to everybody, right?" Because he has reached this point, he regards the stay in the hospice almost as a vacation, which his wife Maggie will love. The early part of their time together is marred, though, by her inability to accept his approaching death. She refuses to discuss his condition with Joe or their son, and will not even enter the cottage□as if staying outside will insure that Joe will not die. She feels abandoned and frightened, and she begs Joe to come home. When he refuses, saying that he is going inside to tell Stephen that he is

dying, she makes him tell her first. Hearing it enables her to finally accept it, and she agrees to go inside, so that Joe does not have to struggle alone. Maggie is the least independent of the survivors, and needs the most guidance from the dying person. The role reversal is carried to an extreme to show that coping is an interactive process□both parties need help, and both must be able to offer some strength. Agnes and Felicity show a similar reluctance to confront and thereby cope with imminent death. Although Felicity realizes she is dying, she remains angry□telling the interviewer that she's a "corpse[with] one lung, one plastic bag for a stomach, and two springs and a battery where [her] heart use to be." She fluctuates between this aggressive hostility and a pathetic docility, waiting for letters from her daughter Claire. Trying to give meaning to the remainder of Felicity's life, Agnes began writing letters ostensibly from Claire, who had run away as a teenager, and died shortly thereafter. However, the Interviewer attributes Felicity's unanticipated longevity to a bargain that she has probably made with herself to live until Claire comes to visit. The result of this kind deception is an inability for either Felicity or Agnes to live. Since Felicity will not accept her death in a meaningful way, she cannot come to terms with it. Further, Agnes endures the difficult task of caring for her mother, and loses her own energy and vitality in the process. The failure to cope underscores the sadness of a death without new life.

Brian, by contrast, lives more fully in the time shortly before his death than he had up until that point. In his opening interview, he expresses not only acceptance of his approaching death, but also goes on to say that it is "a relief□if you think about it ... if you think clearly about it." His resignation allows him to live in his last few weeks. He explains to Beverly that he is writing again because "when they told me I was on my way out ... I realized that there was a lot to do that I hadn't done yet. So I figured I better get off my ass and start working." Approaching death intellectually, he reasons that "the only way to beat this thing is to leave absolutely nothing behind" because if it is "all used up" he can "happily leap into [his] coffin and call it a day."

While Brian explains his preparations and upcoming death sometimes calmly, and sometimes almost exuberantly, neither his lover, Mark, or his former wife, Beverly, can entirely cope with Brian's disease. Mark is horrified and disgusted by the illness itself, and frightened at the thought of Brian actually dying. He clings to "a bad case of the hopes," and Beverly is afraid that this hope will hurt Brian, realizing as Brian does that living now begins with acceptance of death. Both Mark and Beverly are frightened; and while they believe in Brian's ability to cope, they can not completely share his acceptance of the inevitable. Even though Maggie, Beverly, and Mark have not reached the same degree of resolution about their fate that Joe and Brian have, they share in the final affirmation of life and death in the closing line of the play. These characters enumerate all that they have, and Brian observes that "they tell you you're dying, and you say all right. But if I *am* dying . . . I must still be alive." Given that, each of them affirms that what remains are "this smell, this touch," "this taste," "this breath," and lastly "this moment." The moving affirmation of the need to embrace "this moment" epitomizes the art of living that this play advocates. Only Felicity and Agnes do not participate in the affirmation; instead, Felicity repeatedly asks "what time is it?" to which Agnes replies "I

don't know." because they have not reached any resolution about their fates, they remain locked in a temporal framework, unable to transcend the fear of finitude that the others are beginning to escape.

Source: Margot A. Kelley, "Life near Death: Art of Dying in Recent American Drama," in *Text and Presentation,* edited by Karelisa Hartigan, University Press of America, 1988, pp.117-27.

Adaptations

The Shadow Box was adapted as a screenplay for television in 1980. It was directed by Paul Newman and starred Joanne Woodward, Christopher Plummer, and Ben Masters, among other notable actors.

Topics for Further Study

Examine arguments on both sides of the Karen Anne Quinlan decision. What did medical ethicists have to say about this case? What was the religious viewpoint? Others?

The creation of a test-tube baby or an embryo that was fertilized in-vitro, or outside the womb, led to speculation of a sinister future involving cloning and genetic breeding. How has the goal for "eternal" life been realized in stem-cell research? How do you feel about living forever?

If suddenly you found out you were diagnosed with a fatal disease, how do you think you would react? What resources would you call upon to try and cope with the situation? What would you try to accomplish?

Discuss the topic of homosexuality as it relates to *The Shadow Box*. Critics have applauded Cristofer's mention of the relationship between Brian and Mark. Study the subject of sexuality during the time period this play was written. How was the issue of homosexuality dealt within the 1970s?

Compare and Contrast

1970s: Karen Anne Quinlan's respirator is disconnected as a result of a New Jersey Supreme Court ruling.

Today: Dr. Jack Kevorkian is found guilty of second-degree murder in 1999 for helping patient Thomas Youk, who suffered from LouGehrig's disease, to die.

1970s: The American Psychological Association votes to remove homosexuality from its standard diagnostic manual of psychological diseases.

Today: The U.S. Supreme Court rules that the Boy Scouts may exercise their right to association by excluding homosexuals from leadership positions.

1970s: The heart of a chimpanzee is placed into the body of a fifty-nine-year-old man in Cape Town, South Africa.

Today: Scientists discuss genetically altering pig organs with human genes for the purpose of "xenotransplant," an animal-to-human organ transplant procedure.

1970s: Jimmy Carter is elected president of the United States in 1976 after enjoying much public popularity.

Today: George W. Bush is named president of the United States in 2000, in one of the closest and most debated elections in history.

1970s: Voyager, one of two United States space probes, is launched in 1977.

Today: Built by Russia, Mir is the longest lasting space station, orbiting Earth for fifteen years, which ended March 2001.

What Do I Read Next?

In *Tuesdays with Morrie: An Old Man, A Young Man, and the Last Great Lesson* (1997), Mitch Albom, a *Detroit Free Press* columnist, chronicles his visits with his dying former college professor and mentor Morrie, recalling stories of Morrie's life journey.

I Remain in Darkness (1997), published in English in 1999, is Annie Ernaux's touching, troubled account of her mother's illness, decline, and eventual death in an extended care facility. The basis for the actual memoir was compiled from scraps of paper filled with Ernaux's painful scribblings.

Death Be Not Proud (1949), by John Gunther, is a father's classic memoir and celebration of his son's life, who died of a brain tumor at age seventeen.

On Death and Dying is a classic by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, first published in 1969. One of the famous psychological studies of the late twentieth century, Kübler-Ross explores the five stages of death, offering sample interviews and conversations of patients and those closest to them.

Further Study

Carleson, James W., "Images of the Gay Male in Contemporary Drama," in *Gayspeak: Gay Male and Lesbian Communication,* Pilgrim, 1981.

In this critical study, Carleson comments on the homosexual image in Cristofer's work.

Cristofer, Michael, *Black Angel,* Dramatists Play Service, 1984.

This play is based on the story of a former Nazi who, upon being released from prison, must deal with the wreckage of his past.

Duclow, Donald F., "Dying on Broadway: Contemporary Drama and Mortality," in *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal,* Summer 1981, pp. 197-216.

In this work, Duclow comments on the work of Cristofer as it relates to death and dying.

Gross, Leonard, "Michael Cristofer Writes 'A Play of Questions,'" in *New York Times,* June 25, 1978.

Gross provides an insightful review of Cristofer's play.

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Kroll, Jack, "Where Is Thy Sting?," in *Newsweek,* April 25, 1977.

Lemon, Brendan, Review of *Gia,* in *Advocate,* No. 752, February 3, 1998, pp. 51-52.

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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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