# Shadowlands Study Guide

## Shadowlands by William Nicholson

BOOKRAGS

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# Introduction

That the core love story of William Nicholson's *Shadowlands* has staying power seems undeniable. The account of the unusual relationship between British author and scholar C. S. Lewis, who wrote on Christianity and literature, and also wrote the *Namia Chronicles* many other children's books, and Joy Davidman Gresham, an American poet and self-described Jewish-Communist-Christian, has been told in three mediums. Nicholson originally wrote it as a television movie for the BBC in 1986 before adapting it for the stage in 1989 and for a feature-length film, which garnered an Academy Award nomination in 1993.

The theatrical production of *Shadowlands* debuted at Theatre Royal in Plymouth, England on October 5, 1989. The production later ran for approximately a year in London, winning the *London Evening Standards*, award for Best Play of 1990. *Shadowlands* made its New York premiere on November 11, 1990, at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre on Broadway. This production ran for about 180 performances.

Critics were sharply divided on *Shadowlands*. While many agreed that the play was very meaningful and tapped into powerful emotions about the nature of life, death, love, and suffering, others believed it was trite and inaccurate, if not sappy. But even critics that had problems with the play reported that *Shadowlands* had a cathartic effect on audiences, often leaving them in tears. For example, an unnamed critic in *Variety* questioned why the play even was written. The critic writes, "it is not clear why Lewis' musings or his 10 year relationship with Davidman needs to be staged. The story is both tragic and difficult." Yet other critics found much to praise. Gerald Nachman of the *San Francisco Chronicle* states "*Shadowlands* poses classic questions about God, pain and love, but mostly it makes you determined to embrace life. You can't ask much more of play than that."

# Author Biography

Nicholson was born in England in 1948. During Nicholson's childhood, his father worked as a doctor in Africa, while his mother raised the family (which included two sisters) in Sussex. Raised as a Catholic, Nicholson attended prep schools and public schools, mostly all-male boarding schools, in Great Britain before entering Cambridge University.

After graduating from Cambridge in the mid-1970s, Nicholson became a graduate trainee at the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation). For the next ten years, he wrote, directed, and produced over fifty documentaries for the network. Nicholson also executive produced several television series.

While working for the BBC, Nicholson pursued his dream to become a novelist. He wrote each morning before going to work, eventually producing eight novels. However, Nicholson could find no publishers and he abandoned this goal. Instead, in the mid-1980s, he turned to writing dramatic scripts for television.

In 1985, he wrote a fifty-three-minute movie, called *Shadowlands*, about children's author and religious writer C. S. Lewis's relationship with American Joy Gresham. The movie, which aired on the BBC, met with positive reviews. Nicholson began writing many biographical dramas, influenced by techniques he learned as a documentarian.

Nicholson began writing screenplays in 1986 with his first feature, *New World*. He continued to work in television. In 1987, he wrote another drama for British television entitled *Life Story*, which was later aired in the United States under the titles of *Double Helix* and *The Search for the Double Helix.*

In 1989, Nicholson expanded his writing career to the stage. He adapted his television movie Shadowlands into a successful play in 1989. Nicholson would only produce a few more stage plays in his career. They included *Map of the Heart and* 1999's *Retreat from Moscow*, the latter being influenced by the failure of his own parents' marriage.

Primarily, Nicholson focused on screenplays. In 1993, he adapted his stage play for *Shadowlands* into a major motion picture. He received an Academy Award nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay. Other movie scripts that he wrote or adapted include *Sarafina*! (1992, based on a stage play)*; Nell* (1994, with Mark Handley, a fellow playwright), *First Knight* (1995), *Firelight* (1997), and *Gladiator* (2000, coauthor). Nicholson also tried his hand at directing with the script Firelight.

Much of what Nicholson wrote for television in the 1990s was biographical in nature. For HBO, he wrote *A Private Matter* (1992) based on the true experiences of a children's show hostess who traveled to Sweden to get an abortion. In 1996, Nicholson penned *Crime of the Century* about the Lindburgh baby kidnapping trial for HBO. By 1998, eleven of his nineteen dramatic scripts were based on true stories or people's lives.

Nicholson never forgot his desire to write books. Influenced in part by his work on C. S. Lewis, Nicholson published his first children's book, *The Wind Singer* (2000), part of a planned trilogy called *The Wind on Fire Trilogy.* Nicholson resides in England with his wife, Virginia Bell, and their three children.

# Plot Summary

## Act One

*Shadowlands* opens with a monologue by C. S. "Jack" Lewis. He addresses the audience as if they were attending a lecture. He talks about how much he knows about pain, love, and suffering, and why God lets tragedies happen to people. Lewis argues that God does not want us to be happy, but rather, he wants us to be worthy of love. He believes that suffering is God's love in action.

In an Oxford dining hall, Lewis sits with his elder brother, Major Warner "Warnie" Lewis, and several colleagues from the university. They discuss how women are different. Lewis' friends chide him for his vast experience with women, especially since he is defending them in this conversation. Lewis tells them about his correspondence with women. As the group breaks up, a slightly drunk Warnie begins to recite poetry. Lewis leads him home. They discuss their friends, revealing the brothers' close relationship.

Lewis sits at his desk in his study in the morning, reading and writing letters, including a letter for a Mrs. Joy Gresham. It seems she has been writing many letters to Lewis and they have had an extensive correspondence. Lewis tells Warnie that he is curious about her. The letter indicates that she is coming to England and wants to meet the brothers. Lewis seeks his brother's advice about meeting Mrs. Gresham in a hotel. Warnie is not helpful, but Lewis decides that they will go.

At the tea room of an Oxford hotel, Lewis and Warnie meet Mrs. Gresham and her eight-year-old son Douglas. Warnie still is not sure about the situation. Douglas tells Lewis that he does not look like he should. The polite conversation is a bit tense, especially after Mrs. Gresham tells Lewis that his letters are the most important thing in her life. They talk about Lewis' religious writings. Mrs. Gresham talks about her religious experiences, including her transitions from Judaism to communism to Christianity. Warnie asks Mrs. Gresham about her poetry; she says that she only used to be a poet. Mrs. Gresham shows that she understands Lewis' thought processes. As Mrs. Gresham and Douglas move to leave, Lewis invites them to have tea at his home before they leave England.

Before the tea at Lewis and Warnie's home, Lewis tells his brother that he enjoys talking to Mrs. Gresham. They both still wonder about her and her motivations. When Mrs. Gresham arrives, she and Lewis discuss literature as Douglas reads a book. Lewis prevails upon her to recite one of her poems. Lewis is surprised by it. They discuss her poem and how personal experience and pain inflect their writing. Lewis tells her about how he was hurt by his mother's death from cancer when he was eight years old. As Mrs. Gresham (now called Joy as she and Lewis are on a first name basis) and Douglas leave, Lewis invites them to spend Christmas at his home.

Later, at a pre-Christmas party at Lewis' home, his colleagues from Oxford meet Joy. The colleagues are rather condescending to Joy, but she stands up for herself. Some of his colleagues believe that Lewis has found his soulmate. Joy soon leaves the party and reads a distressing letter. In the meantime, Lewis' colleagues speak disparagingly of her to him. He does not really care. After they leave, Joy tells Lewis that her husband has written a letter in which he indicates that he has fallen in love with another women and wants a divorce. Joy also confides that her husband has an alcohol problem. Joy decides to give him what he wants. Lewis promises to be her friend.

After Joy and Douglas have gone back to the United States, Lewis implies to his brother that he misses her. One of his colleagues, Christopher Riley, visits. He antagonizes Lewis over Joy and their unusual friendship. Riley leaves, and Lewis returns to work. A few moments later, Joy comes in unannounced. She and Douglas have moved to Oxford, much to Lewis' surprise. He tells her that he is glad to see her. Later, at Joy's new house, Lewis helps her unpack. Joy tells Lewis that while her husband did not like her moving to Britain, it is cheaper to live there than the States. Joy asks him if he minds that she has moved there. He does not, and they confirm the importance of their friendship.

At Lewis' house, Warnie again asks Lewis about the nature of his relationship with Mrs. Gresham. Lewis says that they are merely good friends, though he has agreed to marry her so she can stay in England. Lewis calls it "technically" marrying her. No one will know about the arrangement. The scene moves to the Registry Office where Joy and Lewis marry, with Warnie as the witness. It is an uncomfortable ceremony. Later, Lewis visits Joy at her home. They are comfortable in their secret: everyone thinks they are having an affair, when in fact they are married and are having no affair at all. As Lewis leaves, Joy has a pain in her leg and crumples to the floor.

## Act II

At the beginning of Act II, Lewis again speaks to the audience. Without naming Joy, he tells them that she has bone cancer and is in pain. He again talks about faith and suffering. Warnie and Douglas enter. Lewis tells his brother that Joy is not well. While Douglas visits his mother in the hospital, Joy's doctor tells Lewis that she will probably die soon. After Warnie takes Douglas to tea, Lewis visits Joy himself. Joy wants to know the truth about her condition, which Lewis tell her only after being prodded. Lewis admits that he does not want to lose her. Joy tells him that she loves him, but he cannot say it back.

Lewis runs into his colleagues in a street. They are apologetic to the distressed man. He asks Harry Harrington, a chaplain, to marry them in a religious ceremony. Harrington declines because she is divorced. Returning to Joy's bedside, Lewis tells her that he wants to marry her in this way and that he is afraid of losing her. She agrees. They have the ceremony in her hospital bed, with Douglas and Warnie present. Some time passes. Joy's doctor and Lewis talk. The progress of Joy's disease has slowed. Lewis and Joy's visit shows how close they have grown.

Warnie, Lewis, and the Oxford colleagues talk. Lewis tells them that Joy is getting better. The scene returns to the hospital room. Joy can now manage a few steps, and the doctor expects her to live for some time. Lewis soon takes Joy (and Douglas) to his home. Joy and Lewis continue their intellectual banter before deciding to honeymoon in Greece. The action shifts to Greece, where Joy and Lewis are in a hotel. Lewis remains stiff, but Joy tries to loosen him up. They discuss their happiness.

About three years later, Lewis tells Douglas that his mother is going to die. At her bedside, Lewis and Joy talk about dying. Lewis promises to take care of Douglas, and tells her that he loves her. The scene moves forward in time to the high table at the dining hall. Harrington, Riley, and others talk about Joy's funeral. Lewis joins them, but soon leaves when they do not understand his pain. Lewis comforts Douglas, and both cry in each other's arms. *Shadowlands* ends with Lewis continuing his talk on human suffering. He realizes that pain is part of happiness.

# Act 1, Scene 1

## Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

The play is set in Oxford, England in the 1950s. On stage, there are two rooms, one within another, blocked by a translucent screen. C.S. Lewis, referred to as Jack, enters with a newspaper. Lewis is in his mid 50s, well dressed and extremely well spoken. He begins to address the audience as though he were giving a lecture, introducing the topics as love, pain and suffering. Clarifying the type of love he is discussing, he addresses the question 'If God loves us, why does He allow us to suffer so much?' Lewis asserts that perhaps God does not want us to be happy, but rather loveable, and as a mechanism to break through the selfishness of our nature, has created suffering. Suffering, he claims, is intended to wake us from the illusion that everything is all right. This life is, Lewis describes, a mere shadow of the next.

## Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

C. S. Lewis (the character is based on the author of The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe and the other Narnia Chronicle books) first appears on stage as an intellectual, giving an address or lecture to a panel of equally sound-minded adults. He is puzzling over the existence of God, and addresses the audience in such a way that indicates they presumably hold similar religious belief and are wrestling with similar questions. It is interesting to note that Lewis equates suffering and love. He speaks of the good lying not in this world, but another: making it fair, a reward for those who have struggled. "For believe me, this world that seems to us so substantial is no more than the shadowlands. Real life has not begun yet." (Quote, page 3.) This first scene functions essentially as a preface, emotionally foreshadowing the obstacles that will be faced. It creates a stage and fills in the story reminiscent of the Greek Chorus device.

# Act 1, Scene 2

## Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

The second scene opens in an Oxford college dining-hall where Lewis joins Christopher Riley, Harry Harrington, Maurice Oakley, Alan Gregg and Major Warnie Lewis. Warnie is Lewis' bachelor brother, described as having had too much to drink. The men are joking cleverly about their diverging opinions on women. All clearly academics, their humor is highbrow and British. The party breaks up and Lewis escorts his drunken elder brother back to the house that they share. The two men continue to discuss the subject of women in a rather nostalgic tone, bidding each other goodnight.

## Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

Scene 2 provides us with a glimpse into the world to which Lewis belongs. The all male realm of traditional academia has been his home since his own college days. On the subject of women, Riley's theory is that they are extremely different from men. He pinpoints in his example a moment when a particular woman was apparently unable to distinguish between an emotional attack and an intellectual attack, suggesting that perhaps this lies at the core of the problem. The men quickly launch into a series of jibes, maintaining the jocular atmosphere of their gathering. After the party has broken up and Lewis and Warnie are walking home, they suggest a slightly different attitude toward women. Warnie suggests that perhaps women are more interesting in theory than in practice, but then adds that he knows it is best not to conclude anything.

# Act 1, Scene 3

## Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

Scene 3 opens in the study where there is first mention of the wardrobe at the back of the room. Lewis is seated at his desk writing letters, when Warnie enters with a breakfast tray. Warnie reading the newspaper and Lewis sorting through the mail, the two men carry on the simultaneous yet independent dialogue of familiarity. Lewis mentions a Mrs. Gresham, whose letter he has been reading. Joy Gresham is an American woman who obviously takes great interest in Lewis' craft. She is coming to England on a trip with her son and she expresses her desire to get together with both gentlemen while she is in town. The brothers proceed to joke about her sanity and her appearance with sibling zest. However, at Lewis' encouragement, Warnie agrees to join him in meeting her.

## Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

Scene 3 marks the first appearance of the wardrobe, which served as a gateway into the other world in Lewis' novels. On the set, the wardrobe is oversized, appearing as it would to a small child, adding an element of magical realism. The brothers' dialogue here is presented in the form of two overlapping monologues that are a successful mode of communication because the men have lived together for so long. Discussing Mrs. Gresham's letter, Warnie confesses a traditional stereotype about Americans. He says, "Americans don't understand about inhibitions" meaning that Americans are frequently unaware of the social faux pas they have committed or boundaries they have overstepped. His comment reflects two differing social structures that have grown from the same stem.

# Act 1, Scene 4

## Act 1, Scene 4 Summary

The fourth scene has progressed to the hotel tearoom where Lewis and Warnie sit waiting for the American. Warnie is skeptical about her intentions, but Lewis remains casual. Joy enters with her son Douglas, who does not recognize the author how he imagined. Joy is candid in her admiration of Lewis' talent and speaks of her husband, Bill back in New York. Douglas asks Lewis to sign his copy of The Magician's Nephew and questions whether the story is true. It is soon revealed that Joy too is an author, a poet who shared a national poetry award with Robert Frost. She claims to write no longer, having chosen to focus her energy outward. Lewis begins to develop a deep respect for Joy when she calls him on his debating strategy. They make plans for a home-brewed cup of tea before her return to America. Douglas dallies at the table, wanting badly to ring the service bell. Lewis reminds him of a passage in the book. Douglas decides to ring the bell and he is given a brief glimpse into a magical world of paradise before the scene closes.

## Act 1, Scene 4 Analysis

In scene four, Douglas brings up the subject of truth, wondering whether the story in Lewis' novel is true. As a child, one is often asked to accept multiple divergent viewpoints. Sorting out the difference between each person's own reality and the imaginary realities created by books and television and our own minds can be quite challenging. Douglas summarizes the events of the story in The Magician's Nephew, remembering how the boy brought a magic apple back to his sick mother to make her well. This is an additional moment of foreshadowing. In response to his question, Lewis explains to him that it is true within the world of the story. Douglas seems slightly disappointed by his answer.

Continuing on the topic of writing, Joy confesses her own brief success as a poet. She claims that her writing is all in the past because she has "turned away from the mirror." (Quote, page 18.) Lewis probes further, trying to discern whether she turned away from the reflection of herself or the reflection of the world. Joy explains that both created a separation, dividing her and the world into realms of otherness. She has chosen not to believe in this separation anymore.

# Act 1, Scene 5

## Act 1, Scene 5 Summary

Scene 5 opens in the study as Lewis and Warnie prepare for Douglas and Joy's visit. Lewis is defensive about wanting to see her in the face of Warnie's skepticism about her character and expectations. The guests arrive and Warnie prods at Joy about her poetry. She and Lewis banter about other authors like old friends, giving her the confidence to recite one of her poems. Lewis is surprised by its quality and touched by its intention. They continue to discuss writing and end up talking about Lewis' Mother's death of cancer when he was eight years old. They feel a bit awkward after the serious conversation and Joy prepares to leave. It is at this point that Lewis asks Joy and Douglas to come for Christmas. She is hesitant at first, feeling as if she might be overstepping her bounds and tells him to check with Warnie to see whether they would really be welcome.

## Act 1, Scene 5 Analysis

In scene five, Joy and Douglas make their first visit to Lewis and Warnie's home. After a bit of pressure, Joy recites one of her poems. The poem foreshadows both their love and her death. In their conversation, Lewis and Joy continually cross over the line of intimacy and then retreat. Joy asks several inappropriate questions, to which Lewis opens up and gives a thoughtful reply. This brings them to the subject of his mother's death. Lewis's relationship to his mother and his loss of her is mirrored in the path that his relationship with Joy follows.

# Act 1, Scene 6

## Act 1, Scene 6 Summary

The scene begins with the guests arriving to a Christmas party. Warnie, Riley, Oakley and Harrington are gathered with drinks. Lewis joins them and they discuss their divergent feelings about the holiday. All are quite surprised to discover that the American and her son are again visiting. Joy enters and she is introduced. The conversation turns toward poetry and Lewis and Joy's companionship becomes evident. Riley, feeling excluded, teases Lewis that he has found his soul mate and does so in a way that he manages to lever an enormous insult toward women. Joy responds to the insult with wit and all but Riley are impressed. The situation having grown a bit uncomfortable, Joy excuses herself and Riley makes his disfavor of her apparent to Lewis. The party breaks up and the guests leave. Lewis discovers Joy in the hallway where she stands reading a letter. After a bit of encouraging she shares with him that the letter is from her husband Bill and that he has admitted to an affair and requested a divorce. They discuss the details of the marriage, the weak spots that had begun to show. Lewis asks her if she will be returning to the house where her husband and his mistress are when she returns to America. She tells him that she has no other place to go. Not knowing how to help, Lewis nonetheless offers. Joy asks that he simply be her friend, before leaving in tears.

## Act 1, Scene 6 Analysis

Scene 6 involves Lewis and Warnie's pals discovering the friendship that has blossomed between Joy and Lewis. Their level of comfort with each other raises suspicion. The men are skeptical of Joy at first, as a woman and an American. Riley succeeds in offending her on both levels and is appalled when she strikes back. After the party has dissolved, Lewis discovers that Joy has received a letter from her husband in which he asks her for a divorce. This pushes the boundaries of their friendship again, forcing them to address topics that might otherwise not be brought up for years.

# Act 1, Scene 7

## Act 1, Scene 7 Summary

Scene 7 begins in the study, where Lewis and Warnie are once again enjoying their breakfast. Warnie points out that Lewis misses the American woman, and though reluctant, he does admit certain tenderness. Riley enters making a quip about not wanting to run into Joy. Lewis reminds him that she returned to New York weeks ago. Riley advises him of the gossip that has spread. Lewis, irritated that adults never seem to be allowed friendships with those of the opposite sex, changes the subject betraying his melancholy. Riley follows Warnie out, reminding Lewis that spring is on its way.

Trying to focus on his work, Lewis is startled by the sensation that someone is in the room with him. He is shocked to see Joy and even more surprised to learn that she and Douglas have moved to Oxford. Joy seems a bit cautious to relate this information, not wanting to overstep any boundaries, but Lewis seems comfortable with the new arrangement. They discuss what she missed during the time she was away, a new teaching position that Lewis has recently accepted. He tells her that he is excited that she is back and will be much closer. However, things quickly become awkward and to ease the tension, he begins to help her unpack. The set has changed during their conversation, so that they are now in Joy's new house. They discuss the process of moving and the details of Joy's new situation. Lewis reassures her that he does not feel strange about her relocation and promises to keep her apprised of anything that might affect their friendship.

## Act 1, Scene 7 Analysis

Scene 7 begins several weeks after Joy and Douglas have returned to New York. Warnie establishes that Lewis misses them both. When Joy unexpectedly returns, Lewis is thrilled. Her move does however change things between them and they begin sorting out their new boundaries as Lewis helps her unpack.

# Act 1, Scene 8

## Act 1, Scene 8 Summary

Scene 8 opens on Lewis and Warnie reading. Warnie brings up Joy's move and reminds Lewis how it appears. Lewis assures his brother that they are nothing more than friends and then tells him that he has agreed to marry her in order to extend British citizenship to both her and the boy. Warnie does not appear thrilled.

## Act 1, Scene 8 Analysis

Joy has apparently asked Lewis to marry her (on a technical level only) to extend British citizenship to both her and her son. Lewis agrees. His willingness to do so exposes the depth of his tenderness for them both.

# Act 1, Scene 9

## Act 1, Scene 9 Summary

The scene begins in the Registrar's office where Lewis and Joy take their vows of marriage. It is a business-like exchange, no rings or flowers, after which Warnie offers to take Joy out for a drink because Lewis had to get back to school.

## Act 1, Scene 9 Analysis

Scene 9 follows Lewis, Joy and Warnie to the Registrar's office. Their vows are recited in a manner similar to the mono-dialogue seen between Lewis and Warnie. After the awkward ceremony, Joy invites both men for a drink, but as Lewis is unable to oblige, Warnie steps in.

# Act 1, Scene 10

## Act 1, Scene 10 Summary

Scene 10 opens in Joy's new house where Lewis and Douglas are having a chat about how he likes England. Douglas heads to bed and Joy explains to Lewis that though he does not seem very excited, they are both settling in quite well. They joke about their secret marriage and the rumors that have spread about their intimate friendship. Lewis exits as Joy turns to put Douglas to bed, but instead she collapses on the floor in pain.

## Act 1, Scene 10 Analysis

In scene 10, Lewis reaches out to Douglas about the recent events. He asks him how he feels about moving and their new house. He asks the boy about his father and his lack of response speaks volumes.

Before he leaves, he and Joy exchange some marriage humor about their mysteriously non-existent love affair and the gossip that has grown around them. At this point, when they have begun to establish a comfort level with the arrangement, Joy collapses.

# Act 2, Scene 1

## Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

Act 2 begins in much the same way as Act 1, with Lewis addressing the audience. He again speaks about the existence of God, only this time he brings up Joy's discovery of bone cancer. His stance falters and he is obviously having a hard time coping with the recent events. Warnie and Douglas enter and ask Lewis about Joy's condition. Lewis confesses that he has not been able to sleep because he wants so desperately for her to get better.

## Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

Though Lewis' speech begins in much the same way as Act 1, it becomes evident that he is using it as a way to try to convince his self of a belief that is slipping. He is trying to hold onto the reasons he has traced for the pain, but has lost sight. He is hurting and angry and his lecture dissolves into emotion. When Warnie and Douglas enter to check on her condition, Lewis remarks that they give her morphine for the pain, but nothing for his pain.

# Act 2, Scene 2

## Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

Lewis and Warnie prepare Douglas to see Joy. She is heavily medicated and she sleeps a great deal. Lewis questions the doctor about how much she has been told. He describes her condition as it was relayed to her and he assures Lewis that she is aware of the gravity of her situation. Warnie takes Douglas in search of muffins to give Joy and Lewis some time together. They talk about the pain and how often Lewis has visited. She apologizes for being such a bother and causing so much worry. Lewis reassures her that she is not a burden, but that he wants her to get well. She asks him about the severity of her condition. Reluctantly he tells her that the doctors suspect she will not survive. Joy attempts a joke, but Lewis is sad. She warns him before telling him that she loves him. A sudden wave of pain brings in the nurse and the doctor.

## Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

In scene 2, Lewis is trying to keep the belief alive for Douglas who is very scared seeing his mother so sick. Lewis does not want to see him go through what he himself had to as a child. When Lewis and Joy speak, it is only now that there is such urgency behind it that they can be completely honest and open about their feelings for each other.

# Act 2, Scene 3

## Act 2, Scene 3 Summary

Harrington and Riley discuss Joy's condition and Lewis' involvement in the situation. Lewis enters, distracted. There is a moment of silence in which all try to figure out how to bring up Joy. Eventually Lewis just begins to speak as though the thought was on everyone's mind. Harrington and Riley question what will happen to the boy if she should die and are surprised by the anger in Lewis' voice when he explains that he will take him in, reproachful of their insinuation that it is not appropriate because they are not married. Lewis then declares that he will marry Joy and asks Harrington to perform the service. Harrington and Riley remind him that because she is a divorced woman, the church would not recognize it. Harrington feels jeopardized on a professional level. Lewis tells him that he will find someone else.

## Act 2, Scene 3 Analysis

Harrington and Riley are obviously well educated men, but when it comes to providing sympathy or reassurance to a friend in need, they are empty-handed. They are callous in their questioning of her affairs, bristle at Lewis' tenderness and need to protect her and her son. When Lewis declares his intention to marry Joy (for love not a technicality this time), Harrington is not able to put aside his own professional and personal beliefs to help his friend.

# Act 2, Scene 4

## Act 2, Scene 4 Summary

Scene 4 returns to the hospital room where Lewis sits with Joy. He checks to see how the pain is and whether or not she is feeling lucid despite the medication. He tells her that he wants to marry her, again but properly this time. She indicates that he has not really proposed and he asks her again formally. Douglas, Warnie and a Priest enter. As they read their vows, Douglas sees the wardrobe door swing open. He moves away from the group slowly toward the other world. Within the magic world, he walks up to a tree and picks a glowing apple from it. Lewis puts the ring on Joy's finger. Douglas carries the magic apple back to his mother's bedside. The ceremony finishes and Joy drifts back to sleep. Douglas puts the magic apple in her hands and kisses her before they leave the room.

## Act 2, Scene 4 Analysis

While the wedding ceremony takes place, Douglas is given the opportunity to visit the magic otherworld. The innocent need of a child to make his mother well allows him to believe in his own magical power to heal her. He follows the storyline of Lewis' book and picks the magical apple, which he places in his mother's hands.

# Act 2, Scene 5

## Act 2, Scene 5 Summary

Lewis sits at Joy's bedside as the doctor enters. The doctor attempts to encourage Lewis but has little concrete evidence of improvement to offer him. Joy wakes up in good spirits. They cautiously discuss her improving health, not wanting to jinx the situation. She asks if she will have to return the ring if she gets better. He tells her that it is hers to keep for all eternity.

## Act 2, Scene 5 Analysis

As Joy's condition improves, everyone is afraid to embrace the good news, to get his or her hopes up. Even their belief in God's wisdom is not strong enough to allow them to be confident in the turn of events. They are superstitious and careful in their happiness.

# Act 2, Scene 6

## Act 2, Scene 6 Summary

Warnie and Harrington discuss their concern about Lewis' condition. Harrington is concerned about appearances and the fact that he expects her to die. Warnie informs him that she has taken a turn for the better. Riley enters and they discuss the power of prayer. Lewis enters and they all congratulate him on the good news.

## Act 2, Scene 6 Analysis

In scene 6, Harrington and Riley react to the news of Joy's improving condition. They comment on how her recovery will effect Warnie's living arrangements in the household. Again, they are very callous in their handling of the matter, making a joke about calling her Mrs. Lewis.

# Act 2, Scene 7

## Act 2, Scene 7 Summary

Lewis and Warnie return to visit Joy at the hospital. They find that she is doing well, out of bed and getting around on crutches. Lewis is thrilled. The doctor tells him that he can take her home for as long as the cancer stays in remission and they really do not know how long it will be. Joy is not sure which home is home and indicates to Lewis that he needs to arrange things with Warnie to be sure he does not feel put out. Lewis tells his brother that he does not want him to move out and the three are content. Warnie exits. Lewis and Joy try discussing the possibility of miracles.

## Act 2, Scene 7 Analysis

Scene 7 brings Joy even further into recovery and Lewis discovers that she is strong enough to get out of bed. Warnie addresses his concern about the living arrangements; however, Lewis and Joy are not bothered by the formality of it and tell him that they expect him to remain at home. Lewis is adamant in his refusal to hear about miracles. He admits that he is frightened to be too happy because he knows that it will turn to anger if she should again take a turn for the worse. He confesses that this love of God is conditional upon getting what he wants and therefore selfish.

# Act 2, Scene 8

## Act 2, Scene 8 Summary

Scene 8 begins with Joy's return home from the hospital. Lewis and Warnie allow her to make herself at home there and try to make her comfortable. Douglas enters and sits down to a game of chess with Warnie. Joy works at a crossword puzzle as the three adults share a conversation of monologues much like the brothers' earlier dialogue. Joy calls Lewis on some of his outdated theories about education and they banter like a couple that has been married for years. It is at this point that Warnie brings up the lack of a honeymoon. They discuss the idea and decide upon a little hotel in Greece.

Lewis and Joy move across the screen and a waiter enters with their luggage indicating that they have traveled to Greece. They order drinks from the waiter and enjoy the feel of the sunshine on their faces. Then they move back across the stage and sit in the garden, indicating that they have returned home to Oxford.

Lewis and Joy talk about how perfect the trip was and how much they want this happiness to last. Joy asks Lewis what he will do when she is gone. He does not want to talk about it, but she assures him that talking about it now is the only way she can stay with him after she dies.

## Act 2, Scene 8 Analysis

Scene 8 illustrates how Joy and Douglas are woven in to the household rhythm the two brothers have shared for the past several decades. The transition is relatively seamless. Their honeymoon, though brief is exactly what they wanted. Back at home, Joy indicates to him that the pain that will come is part of the happiness now. She tells him that it needs to stay connected, so that she can stay with him even after she is gone.

# Act 2, Scene 9

## Act 2, Scene 9 Summary

The dialogue of scene 9 takes place as the lighting changes rapidly to indicate time passing. Joy and Lewis speak slowly, reflectively. They talk about how well they have come to know each other and how they want to remain oblivious to the passage of time.

Douglas enters. Joy is asleep. Lewis informs him that she is again very sick. Douglas asks him if she is going to die. Lewis does not know how to answer. The boy asks if he can do something. Lewis tells him that there is not. Douglas accepts this answer and leaves.

Lewis pulls his chair up to Joy's bedside. She wakes and tells him to go to bed. She asks him if it has been worth it, to have three years of happiness and now lose her. She tells him that she first fell in love with him through his stories. She tells him that he has to let go of her. He tells her that he does not think he can. In great pain, she asks Lewis if he will care for Douglas once she is gone. He agrees. He tells her how much he loves her as she eases again into unconsciousness.

## Act 2, Scene 9 Analysis

Scene 9 begins with a montage of their happy times together while indicating the passage of time. When it stops, Joy has slipped into illness again. Lewis is forced to deal with the inevitability of losing her and the fact that Douglas will be forced to cope with the same loss as in his own childhood.

# Act 2, Scene 10

## Act 2, Scene 10 Summary

Harrington, Gregg and Riley discuss the speed of Joy's passing. They discuss Harrington's speech at her funeral. He had said that all who knew her loved her, and now they remark about how the statement was untrue because they did not like her. Warnie joins them and they ask if he liked her. Warnie tells them not at first, but yes. Lewis enters. He is making an effort to hold himself together. The men try to say something appropriate, but only succeed in aggravating Lewis. He does not want to hear their academic reasoning on the subject. He wants to be left alone with his pain. He apologizes for having come and excuses himself. Warnie follows him.

Lewis and Warnie talk about how there is nothing to say to make the pain go away. Douglas enters. Warnie tells Lewis that he needs to talk to Douglas, to share his grief with him. Warnie exits. Lewis talks to Douglas about how he felt when his own mother died. He talks to him about the unfairness. Douglas asks if he believes in heaven and Lewis replies that he does. Douglas tells him that he does not. Douglas reaches out and Lewis embraces him. Their tears fall as they release all the anger and the sadness. After some time, Douglas breaks away and exits.

Lewis again turns and begins to address the audience. He begins in the middle of his speech, but this time he speaks of his choice to love Joy even though it meant losing her. He begins to address her memory. "The pain now, is part of the happiness, then. That's the deal." (Quote, page 100.)

## Act 2, Scene 10 Analysis

In the last scene, everything comes full circle. Joy has died and been buried. Lewis is forced to confront his pain and to comfort Douglas in his loss. Lewis addresses the audience in the manner in which the play opened. His lecture has changed a bit with the recent experience of grief. He has come to accept losing Joy as part of loving her.

# Characters

## Mrs. Joy Davidman Gresham

Joy Gresham is an American woman in her late thirties, the mother of one son, Douglas. Born Jewish, Joy later became a communist, then a Christian. She also was a poet who once won a national prize that she shared with Robert Frost. Gresham is having problems with her marriage to a fellow writer in the United States. By the beginning of the play, her correspondence with Lewis has become the most important thing in her life. On a trip to England with her son, she meets Lewis and finds that even in person they have an intellectual kinship that grows into a strong friendship. After meeting him in a hotel for tea, then accepting his invitation to come to tea at his house and staying there for Christmas as well, Gresham divorces her husband and moves to Oxford. Joy soon discovers that she has bone cancer and is dying. Her friendship deepens into love, a feeling the repressed Lewis comes to share. Though she gets a three-year reprise from her disease that allows her and Lewis to take a honeymoon to Greece and live in their love together for a while, Joy dies before the play's end.

## Douglas Gresham

Douglas is the eight-year-old son of American writers Joy and Bill Gresham. Douglas is very close to his mother, and obeys her without question. Like his mother, Douglas is a fan of Lewis' books. For him, however, the *Narnia Chronicles* are favorites. When he first meets Lewis on a trip to England with his mother, Lewis disappoints Douglas. As Lewis and Joy grow closer, Douglas becomes somewhat close to Warnie, Lewis' brother, and Lewis as well. When Joy becomes ill, Douglas follows the course of action prescribed by the hero in Lewis' *The Magician's Nephew*. Unlike in the book, Douglas' mother dies. It is only when Lewis comforts him that Douglas can cry for his mother's death. After her death, he is to be raised by Lewis and Warnie.

## Harry Harrington

Harrington is a chaplain at Oxford and a close friend of Lewis'. Like many of Lewis' colleagues, Harrington does not approve of his relationship with Joy. Not as overtly offensive as Riley, Harrington encourages others to express their negative feelings on the subject. Though Joy is dying, Harrington will not perform a religious wedding ceremony for his friend. Harrington does perform her funeral, but admits he just said what he thought Lewis needed to hear.

## Jack Lewis

See C. S. Lewis

## C[live] S[taples] Lewis

Lewis is the central character in *Shadowlands.* He is an Oxford scholar and professor in his late fifties. An expert in English literature, Lewis is also the author of religious writing and famous children's books, including the *Narnia Chronicles*. A rather cold man at the beginning of the play, Lewis is also deeply religious and already pondering the meaning of life, death, pain, and suffering. He lives with his brother, Warnie, in a bachelor-type existence that is turned upside down when one of his pen pals physically comes into his life. American Joy Gresham is unlike any woman he has ever known. They first meet when she, while on a trip to England, visits him in Oxford. Then, he invites her to his home for tea and, later, Christmas. While there is an intellectual kinship, it develops into love after Joy returns to England permanently. Lewis realizes that he loves Joy, which changes his life. Their marriage ends with Joy's death from cancer. Through her suffering in the last years of her life, Lewis learns that with happiness comes pain.

## Major Warner Lewis

Warnie is the elder brother of Jack Lewis. Like his brother, Warnie is a bachelor. They live together in Lewis' house, with Warnie talking care of his brother's domestic needs. Lewis also takes care of his brother as well. Throughout Act I, Warnie is suspicious of Joy and her motivations, but goes along with what his brother wants. As Lewis grows closer to Joy and becomes a different person, Warnie too begins to like and care about Joy and her son. He and Douglas seem to be particularly close. Warnie and Lewis depend greatly on each other, and their closeness helps Lewis deal with his pain and suffering.

## Christopher Riley

Riley is one of Lewis' colleagues at Oxford, a fellow don. Riley is rather pushy and condescending, especially about women. When he says something implicitly offensive to Joy, she does not hesitate to put him in his place, much to Lewis' delight. Riley does not approve of Lewis' relationship to Joy, and tries to show it at every opportunity.

## Warnie

See Major Warner Lewis

# Themes

## Love and Passion/Change and Transformation

At the beginning of *Shadowlands*, both Joy and Lewis are rather unhappy in their own way. Joy is stuck in a bad marriage. Her husband, Bill, is an alcoholic and has had numerous liaisons during their marriage. She finds solace only in Lewis' letters to her and in his published books. When she comes to England on vacation with her son, Douglas, Joy finally meets the man behind the letters. They grow closer, though Lewis is much more stiff and formal than she is. But after Joy moves to England, and Lewis marries her "technically" so she can stay in the country, their relationship deepens. It blooms into love when Joy becomes ill with bone cancer, and Lewis and Joy realize that they will soon be losing each other. Joy says "I love you" first, much to Lewis' discomfort, but Lewis soon comes to share her feelings. It is he who insists on another wedding, a religious ceremony, between Joy and himself. Through their passionate feelings for each other, each grows as a person, though Lewis' transformation is more drastic and obvious. He loosens up and is not afraid to express how he feels for Joy to his disapproving colleagues at Oxford. Even after Joy dies, Lewis continues to undergo change. Previously unable to cry, Lewis lets loose while comforting Douglas, who also lets the tears flow. By the end of the play, Lewis has been profoundly changed. Joy also has found the kind of passionate, intellectual love she wanted.

## Pain and Suffering

The other side of love and passion is pain and suffering. Lewis discovers that with love comes pain. It is only when Joy learns she is suffering from bone cancer, has a tumor in her breast, and breaks her hip that she and Lewis grow truly close and fall passionately in love. At first, Joy and Lewis believe she will die right away, but the disease's progression slows, giving them three years together. Hanging over this time is the inevitability of Joy's death. Both Joy and Lewis do not like the pain or the suffering. Joy, in particular, believes it is unfair that she becomes ill when she finds her soulmate. As religious people, it is hard for them to understand why God is making them suffer, especially considering all that Joy has already gone through. But by the end of *Shadowlands,* Lewis understands why and accepts that pain comes with happiness. Joy also comes to terms with this dichotomy before her death.

## God and Religion

Both Lewis and Joy are practicing, faithful Christians. Lewis has written religious works and gives talks on the subject. Indeed, at the beginning of *Shadowlands* in Lewis' first monologue, he introduces the idea that with happiness and pleasure comes pain and suffering. He argues that it is God's way of loving his creations. In the actual action of the play, Lewis and Joy's relationship with God is addressed and analyzed. Lewis does

not like that Joy has to suffer with her illness, that he has found love late in life but has to lose it. Yet he finds solace in prayer, he tells a colleague at one point, because it changes him. The experience teaches him about God. Lewis also has problems with the rules of religion. His friend Harry Harrington will not officiate at his wedding because Joy is divorced and it is against tenets of his religion. Lewis has rationalized the marriage and finds another minister to perform the ceremony. Joy also talks about her religious feelings and experiences. In the middle of Act I, she tells Lewis about a particularly dark moment in her marriage to Bill Gresham when she felt the presence of God coming to her in her hour of need. By Act II, her beliefs are tested by her illness, but she sees her temporary (three-year) recovery as a miracle and takes what she can get.

# Style

## Setting

*Shadowlands* is a drama set in the 1950s. Much of the action is confined to Oxford, England, except for a brief scene in Act II that takes place at a hotel in Greece. Most of the scenes in Oxford are set in Lewis' world: a lecture room, his home and study, the main dining hall at Oxford, and the surrounding streets. When Lewis and Joy first meet, they have tea at a hotel with Douglas and Warnie. After Joy moves to Oxford, she has her own home with Douglas, where Lewis visits. So that Joy can stay in England, she and Lewis marry in an uncomfortable scene in the local Registry Office. When Joy becomes sick, many of their most intimate scenes take place in her hospital room. *Shadowlands* only leaves Oxford for Joy and Lewis' honeymoon in Greece during a temporary reprise in her illness. These settings underscore what Lewis' life was like before Joy and after, and how events have profoundly changed him.

## Staging/Transitions within Acts

Within each act in *Shadowlands,* Nicholson has numerous small scenes with clever staging that underline the play's themes and the characters. It is the staging that often defines the transitions between these scenes. The stage directions call for the stage to be divided in two by a translucent screen. The screen defines an inner area and an outer area. Only certain kinds of scenes take place in the inner area: the scenes in the Oxford dining hall; Lewis' study and home, except for one towards the end of Act I when Joy goes into another room during the Christmas party and reads a letter from her husband who wants a divorce; Joy's home in Oxford; the Registry office; and Joy's hospital room. Others take place in the outer area in front of the screen: Lewis' monologues; scenes on the street where characters are walking; the hotel tea room; certain scenes in Lewis' house, especially those in which the outside world is intruding on Lewis; the corridor outside of Joy's hospital room; the scene in Greece. The scenes in front of the screen generally signify the outside world, while those inside are more personal and deep. Changes in lighting also define the passage of time and the change of scene.

Another staging device is a large wardrobe at the back of the stage, looming over the proceedings primarily in the stage's inner area. The wardrobe itself refers to a series of children's books written by Lewis, the Narnia books, including *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Douglas is already a fan of Lewis' books and carries around *The Magician's Nephew* with him. After his mother has tea at the hotel with Lewis and Warnie in the middle of Act I, Douglas effects a transition in the scene by ringing the bell on the table, as a character in the book does. This makes the screen rise and Douglas walks into the world of Narnia inside the wardrobe. He returns to the other world in the wardrobe in Act II during the religious ceremony that marries his mother and Lewis.

Douglas is reenacting the story line from *The Magician's Nephew*, though this time the magic apple does not cure the mother permanently.

## Monologue

At the beginning of each act in *Shadowlands* as well at the end of the play, Lewis delivers a monologue to the audience. It is done in the form of a talk or lecture, as Lewis gave these often in his lifetime. These monologues reveal much about Lewis' character, motivations, and how he changes over the course of the play. The topic of his talk does not change. It is about human "love, pain and suffering, " and the role God plays (or does not play) in it. During the first monologue at the beginning of Act I, Lewis believes that suffering is God's "love in action." He seems to talk of such pain in a detached tone. At the beginning of Act II, Lewis continues the same train of thought in his lecture, but questions suffering from a more personal place. At the end of the play, Lewis has been completely transformed by suffering and his monologue is barely a talk, but more of a conversation with himself. He is quieter and more reflective about his relationship with Joy. God is not directly mentioned.

# Historical Context

## Philosophy of Political Leadership

The decade of the 1950s had much in common with the late 1980s in British history. For much of the 1950s and into the early 1960s, Great Britain was ruled by a Conservative government. Winston Churchill was prime minister from 1951 to 1955, Anthony Eden from 1955 to 1957, and Harold Macmillan from 1957 to 1963. The country was still recovering from the effects of World War II, and while there were some prosperity and expansion, much of it was illusionary until the end of decade. Still, high interest rates limited growth. Also, in 1957, Great Britain declined to join the European Economic Community (EEC), a burgeoning organization designed to regionalize trade and other economic concerns.

By 1989, the Conservatives were again entrenched in power, as they had been since 1979. They only had one prime minister in that time period: Margaret Thatcher. In 1988, after winning her third general election, she had become the longest continually serving prime minister. Under her leadership in the 1980s, Great Britain had eradicated the social welfare state that had been built up after World War II. Most major industries (such as coal mining) were denationalized and much of the power of trade unions was taken away. Like her Conservative predecessors, Thatcher opposed Great Britain becoming part of the European-wide currency.

Despite her best efforts, Thatcher did not totally dismantle the welfare state. Pensions and the National Health Service (NHS) remained, though they were reorganized in 1982 and 1988 to increase efficiency and accountability. Because of a sluggish economy, many were dependent on welfare at this time. Thatcher was forced out of power in late 1990 when she tried to put a uniform poll tax on British citizens in place of local property taxes. This proposal led to riots in London and other parts of the country, and Thatcher lost the support of her own Conservative party. She was replaced by a fellow Conservative, John Major.

## Education

Only about four percent of all British, and less than three percent of British working class adolescents, went to university by the late 1950s, a percentage that was much less than the United States and other countries in Europe. By the late 1980s, more British students went to university, but the proportion relative to the population did not change much. Education was a way to become socially mobile, but few were in the position to take advantage of it.

While in office, the Thatcher-led government worked to reform the government-sponsored educational system. Before these changes, a test given at the age of eleven determined what kind of comprehensive school they would attend. About 88 percent of

British children attended these schools. Kenneth Backer created a national curriculum for schools with the Education Act of 1988. More vocational programs and technical colleges were also created in the late 1980s and 1990s to give young people more educational options. By the end of the decade, many more mature students went to university, about 237,000 towards the end of the decade.

To become truly part of Great Britain's elite (leaders in government, industry, and banking), however, it seemed that one had to attend public schools (comparable to U.S. private schools) such as Eton. By 1988, 119,002 were in such public schools, where just over 95,000 were in such schools at the end of the 1950s. Fees over that period had greatly increased, limiting their access even further. Since many products of public schools went on to Oxford, Cambridge, and other select universities, educational opportunity greatly determined who would be in power and determine policy in Great Britain.

# Critical Overview

Since its earliest productions, *Shadowlands* has split critics. While many believe the play is a powerful study of the human condition that left audiences openly weeping, some have questioned the authenticity of this portrayal of C. S. Lewis and Joy Gresham. Several critics highlighted inaccuracies, such as the fact that Joy really had two sons, not one, and that both Lewis and Joy were much more difficult people than Nicholson's portrayal suggests. Many compared the stage play to the original BBC television movie, somewhat unfavorably.

Of an initial British production in the Queen's Theatre on London's West End, John James of the *Times Educational Supplement* wrote, "William Nicholson's witty, humane script brings them both to theatrical life so truthfully that we are caught up in their autumnal romance." The unnamed critic of *Financial Times* argued, "The play describes but does not illustrate. We never know why this bumbling bachelor falls in love, if not through pity." Still, this critic concluded, "For all its ultimate evasiveness, it deserves to flourish." Claire Armistead of *New Statesman and Society* believed Nicholson skimmed on the truth for dramatic purposes. She wrote, "in the interests of portraying their romance on stage William Nicholson's four-tissue weepie makes only cursory mention of his arrogance and her waspishness."

Some of these same issues came to the fore when *Shadowlands* made its New York debut in late 1990. Frank Rich of the *New York Times* believed, "How you feel about *Shadowlands* depends a great deal on your degree of Anglophilia. The play... has little more intellectual or emotional depth than a tear-jerker set in a two-car-garage suburbia, but it does boast a certain rarefied British atmosphere." Rich's colleague at the *New York Times* David Richards saw the play as part of a trend towards tear-jerkers. He wrote that *Shadowlands* "represents the tear-jerker in full glory, and I say that admiringly. Oh, you can look down your nose at it and accuse it of middlebrow pretensions, if you wish. You can fault it for not always sidestepping the cliches of love and regret, for saying nothing that hasn't been said before. But in the end, you'll probably conclude that your reservations count for precious little."

Many New York critics still expressed reservations. Howard Kissel of *theDailyNews* wrote "You sense that Nicholson has been extremely careful about the words he puts in Lewis' mouth, and that much has been culled from Lewis' own writing. Such genial wit is the chief virtue of this rather plodding account of their lives together, which tells us very little about either of them." Mimi Kramer of the *New Yorker* also had problems with the way the characters were drawn, as did other critics. Comparing it to the previously aired television movie, she wrote "What's missing from this stage version is any sense that Joy had a life apart from Lewis she seems to be merely a woman obsessed with C. S. Lewis, a celebrity seeker and any sense of the world she was invading." Further, Kramer argued, "*Shadowlands* seems to suggest that what makes the events it recounts tragic is the fact that it happened to C. S. Lewis."

Kramer's sentiments were echoed by other critics. Jan Stuart of *New YorkNewsday* argued that "*Shadowlands* is a sterling example of that uniquely British hybrid, the polemical soap opera. It is so artfully constructed that you may not be able to tell whether you are being lured into its fundamentalist ideology with prime-time melodrama or vice versa. And it is so skillfully acted that you probably won't care." Some critics had similar problems with how themes and settings were handled. Gerald Weales of *Commonweal* wrote, "A rather unusual love story, then, the play ... is really about grief, pain and Christian faith. At least, it toys with those ideas." Though Clive Barnes of the *New York Post* found much to praise about the play, he writes "The play is full of bright speeches some more convincing than others and offers a quaint and cozy view of Oxford Academic life that admittedly has more the tone of friendly caricature than reality."

Though many critics were critical of aspects of *Shadowlands*, there were a few who unabashedly praised it. John Beaufort of *Christian Science Monitor* believed that "because of the depth of love that has been expressed and shared, it is not a depressing play. Much of this is due to Nicholson's wit and style as a dramatist." Edwin Wilson of *Wall Street Journal wrote* that the play "is a rarity on Broadway: a well-crafted drama with a strong emotional appeal. Based on the life of writer C. S. Lewis, William Nicholson's play is a most unusual love story, but all the more affecting for that."

# Criticism

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

*In this essay, Petrusso compares and contrasts the stage version of* Shadowlands *with its feature film counterpart.*

While both the stage play and film versions of *Shadowlands* were written by the same author, William Nicholson, they each present the story differently. This is due in part to the nature of each genre. Dramatic stage plays only have limited setting possibilities and are focused primarily on dialogue. Movies are generally more visual than stage plays because they are not constrained by the demands of the theater. Film scripts also can be constructed differently than stage plays, which affects the flow of action, dialogue, and character development. Some of these differences are apparent when comparing the stage play to the movie version of *Shadowlands.*

In the play version of *Shadowlands*, Nicholson calls for a symbolic staging. The stage is to be divided into two areas (inner and outer) by a translucent screen. Some action takes place in front of it. Other times, the screen rises, revealing Lewis' study, Joy's hospital room, the main dining hall at Oxford, and other places. These places are Lewis' intimate surroundings, where most of his personal transformation take place.

Also dominating the stage, in the scenes that take place inside Lewis' study, is a giant wardrobe. This wardrobe refers to the famous wardrobe in Lewis' *Narnia Chronicles,* a series of children's books. The wardrobe is the portal to a parallel world. It symbolizes a number of things to Lewis, and to Joy Gresham's son Douglas, including Lewis' books and their themes and, for both, the loss of their mother. In a highly symbolic moment in Act I, Douglas actually goes into the wardrobe and disappears. In Act II, during the religious ceremony, which unites his bed-ridden mother and Lewis in marriage, Douglas again goes through the wardrobe to the Other World. He retrieves the magic apple, as described in Lewis' *The Magician's Nephew*, in hopes it will cure his sick mother just as it does in the book. Joy's bone cancer does go into remission, but she still dies at the end of the play.

The movie has a much richer visual text, though this *Shadowlands* has much in common with the stage play. Because there is no stage, the screen and its symbolism has been eliminated. The film takes viewers to Oxford and its hallowed halls, to train stations full of smoke and steam, to all corners of Lewis' home, to Joy's small place in England, and to the hospital during Joy's illness and treatment. By actually seeing the period settings, the world in which Lewis and Joy lived becomes clearer. The audience sees how they interact with their environment as well as many other people. It also gives the filmmakers the opportunity to make visual symbols stronger and deeper.

One aspect does not change: the wardrobe continues to play an important role in the movie, but more for Douglas than Lewis. In the movie, the wardrobe the actual one from Lewis' childhood nursery sits in his attic. When Douglas first comes to visit Lewis' home, Warnie, Lewis' brother and housemate, shows it to him on a tour of the attic. Douglas and Joy later return to stay for Christmas. At this time, Douglas sneaks up there and

opens the wardrobe, hoping to find the portal to the parallel world, as Lewis wrote in his Narnia books. Douglas is rather disappointed that this wardrobe has a solid back instead of an open gateway. Lewis discovers him there, which leads to a conversation about Douglas's alcoholic father. At the end of the movie, after Joy has died, Lewis finds Douglas in the attic, staring at the wardrobe. Though Lewis tells him of his mother's death, Douglas is more upset that the wardrobe does not "work," that there is no portal. It leads to both of them crying in each other's arms over their loss of Joy. Lewis also cries for the death of his own mother when he was a boy, a feeling he has apparently kept inside since the age of eight.

Another contrasting aspect of the play versus the movie is how characters are portrayed and developed. One criticism of the play that seems corrected in the movie is the development of secondary characters such as Warnie and Douglas. In reviewing the original Broadway production of *Shadowlands*, Frank Rich of the *New York Times* wrote, "the Lewises' fraternal bond, like the plays' other important secondary relationship, between Joy's son and Lewis, is so sketchily drawn that it cannot carry the dramatic weight it must in the evening's waning scenes." In the play, Douglas and Warnie are only in a handful of scenes and are barely developed as individuals. Warnie is merely a directionless man with a small alcohol problem who takes care of his brother's every need. Douglas comes off as a young boy who lives in a fantasy world and obeys his mother without question. He is upset at her death, but their closeness does not seem obvious.

In the movie, both Warnie and Douglas are still secondary to Lewis and Joy, but Warnie seems more like Lewis' equal. They have a housekeeper who takes care of them, and Warnie has his own desk in the study. While Lewis still looks to Warnie for opinions and approval as he does extensively in the play, Warnie's support seems more respected and real. Douglas's character is even better developed than Warnie's in the film version. Douglas is not merely an obedient boy-machine who only breaks down in the end as in the play. While he is still very affectionate, he shows more anger about being in England away from his home and father, and his mother's illness and death. He is scared when his mother comes home to die. In addition to the wardrobe scenes described above, the very end of the movie shows Lewis and Douglas together walking through the nearby countryside with a dog in tow. This gives some closure to about the issue of what happens to Douglas after his mother dies. The play does not say that Douglas lived with his stepfather until Lewis himself died a few years later.

Both Joy and Lewis are also better and more completely developed in the movie than in the play version of *Shadowlands*. Mimi Kramer of the *New Yorker* argued that in the play version, Joy only existed in terms of Lewis. She was an obsessed fan who met him and invaded his world. The play does include facts about Joy she has a husband in New York who asks for a divorce in Act I, she used to be a poet who once won a national poetry award, and she moved to Oxford because it would a cheaper place to live far from her now ex-husband. Yet every scathing remark Joy makes, whether it be to one of Lewis' boorish colleagues or Lewis himself, is ultimately for Lewis' benefit and entertainment. Nothing pithy comes from Joy outside of that relationship.

While the majority of the film, and even more of the play, is interaction between Joy and Lewis, in the movie, Joy does have a more separate and individual character. In the movie, she does not move to Oxford, but to London. Lewis is forced to take a train to see her. When she enters a hospital, it is in London as well, so Lewis must journey to her. Only when Joy leaves the hospital after her cancer is in remission does she move to Oxford to live with Lewis. (Douglas apparently starts staying with them as soon as his mother becomes ill.) One critic of the play wrote that Joy seemed like the cat and Lewis the mouse she was hunting. In the play, Joy blurts out her feelings and Lewis holds back, keeping his rein on their relationship. In the movie, they are more balanced. Though Joy still does not have much of a life outside of Lewis in the movie, she seems more fleshed out, affectionate, and independent. More importantly, Lewis is portrayed much differently in the movie, which in turn changes how Joy's character is defined.

At the center of both the play and the movie is the enigmatic character of Lewis, the writer many people are familiar with because of his Narnia books, religious writing, and works on English literature. In the play, Lewis is depicted as an indecisive man who cannot admit his affection for Joy in any capacity until she becomes very ill with cancer and death seems imminent. He is rather cold, and his life seems to consist only of his relationship with his Oxford colleagues and with Warnie. At the beginning of the play, Joy is merely an interesting pen pal. The situation changes as he and Joy meet in a hotel tea room, at her request. Though Lewis invites her and her son to come to his house for tea, and then to stay for Christmas, Lewis seems very out of touch with his feelings. He does not cry until the end when Warnie essentially forces him to comfort the distraught Douglas.

The *Shadowlands* movie makes Lewis much more human from the start and gives him different forums in which to express his humanity. The play limits Lewis' interactions to Warnie, his colleagues, Joy (and illness-related people like doctors), and Douglas. In addition to those people, the movie also shows Lewis with students he teaches at Oxford. There is a very minor, but very important, subplot involving one of his students, named Whistler. The subplot shows what effect Joy has had on Lewis' life.

At the beginning of the movie, Whistler does not get along with Lewis when he tries to start an intellectual fight at a tutorial. The student later sleeps during another tutorial led by Lewis. Lewis catches Whistler stealing books, and offers him a loan, which the student turns down. By this point, Lewis has spent Christmas with Joy before she returns to the States. After Joy has moved back to England and the couple has married "technically" so that she can stay in the country, she attends a graduation ceremony with him. Afterwards they fight. Joy criticizes him for dealing only with those weaker than him or those who indulge certain parts of him, and she storms off. Lewis is befuddled by her claim. Then Lewis learns that Whistler is dropping out of school, which makes him wonder what it is everyone wants from him. Joy discovers she has cancer, and Lewis learns to love. After the religious wedding ceremony, Lewis runs into Whistler on the train. Lewis has mellowed and asks probing questions about Whistler's father, about whom the pair have already conversed. Whistler is working as a teacher, which makes Lewis proud. By the end of the movie, Lewis has a new student to teach. This time he does not verbally or intellectually intimidate, but listens to and interacts with the student.

There are many other differences between the stage and film versions of *Shadowlands*, including the key components of the core story as described here. Neither version is superior to the other, but the film gives Lewis and Joy's unusual love story a firmer visual foundation and deepens many of the characters. Both versions capture a wealth of emotions and show how hard it can be to suffer through love and loss.

**Source**: Annette Petrusso, in an essay for Drama for Students, Gale Group, 2001.

# Critical Essay #2

*A comparison between the play an the movie is given in this review by Richard Alleva.*

I reviewed the stage play, *Shadowlands*, three years ago (*Crisis* February 1991), praised it, but issued a warning that I now repeat re Richard Attenborough's film adaptation. "Let devotees of the life and works of Clive Staples 'Jack' Lewis go to ... *Shadowlands* .. . forewarned though not necessarily forearmed. If they go to sniff out omissions and distortions of facts, they will have a field day. But they won't have as good a time as those who attend the play to discover what idea, what compelling image the playwright William Nicholson perceived in ... Lewis's marriage to Joy Davidman, and how close Nicholson comes to realizing that image theatrically."

The stage version is made of sterner stuff than the new film. In the play's first scene, Jack Lewis, delivering a lecture, addresses the question of why God makes or lets us suffer. His answer, "the blows of God's chisel, which hurt us so much, are what make us perfect," is something that Lewis believes intellectually but doesn't feel with his entire being. By the final curtain, because of the suffering he has undergone, Lewis faces the audience as a transfigured man, prepared, even longing to undergo his own death because only death can release him from the "shadowlands" of earthly life into the higher reality of heaven where he will be reunited with Joy. Head knowledge has become heart knowledge. The stage play, when well performed (as it certainly was on Broadway with Jane Alexander and Nigel Hawthorne), provides a deeply spiritual experience.

Not so the movie. Artfully directed, photographed, and played, it is a poignant, funny-sad movie that can provoke an instant nostalgia for the dreaming spires of Oxford even in the breasts of those who have never been anywhere near Oxford. But it is also about as untranscendent as any film about C. S. Lewis could possibly be. Quite a feat, that. How did Attenborough and Nicholson bring it off?

The lineaments of the plot are the same. Jack, self-trapped in the forlorn bachelorhood he shares with his brother, Warnie, and in the academic routine he shares with a bunch of academic stiffs (no Tolkein, no Owen Barfield, no Hugo Dyson on view in this movie, since any suggestion of bracing intellectual companionship would queer Nicholson's dramaturgical pitch), encounters an American, Jewish, ex-Communist, soon-to-be-divorcee Joy Davidman Gresham, marries her to give her British citizenship, then marries her before God when her first bout with cancer makes him realize how much he loves her. Joy has a seemingly miraculous remission, then succumbs. Lewis is left to spend the rest of his life.. .how?

The answer given by this movie indicates how a spiritual experience has been yanked sharply down to earth. In the early scenes, Lewis is still seen delivering his lectures about pain being the chisel-blows of God, and this statement is still perceived as an untested, purely cerebral concept. But, at the conclusion, Lewis does not affirm his belief as now verified by his experience. Instead, he quotes a remark of Joy's, "the pain

now is part of the happiness then." This Lewis isn't braced for the afterlife by the heartbreak of Joy's death. Rather, he has accepted suffering (as J. W. N. Sullivan said Beethoven did) "as one of the great structural lines of human life." Earthly happiness is worth the suffering we undergo when we lose the bringer of happiness. I found this conclusion quite as poignant as that of the play's but not quite so grand. Oddly enough, it makes Lewis's fiercely held Christian beliefs quite inessential to the main dramatic action. After all, an atheist or agnostic can learn to accept earthly suffering in the same way that this movie's version of Lewis does. There is no wholehearted acceptance of the strokes of God's chisel at this movie's fade-out, no more talk of Shadowlands.

Another way Nicholson diminishes the spiritual aspect of his story is by deleting the scene in which Joy tells Jack Lewis of her first apprehension of God's existence. Though many of Joy's qualities attracted Lewis, he would obviously be especially drawn by her personal experience of the holy. And since Joy came to her conversion after a long period of Communist commitment, we may well wonder how this transformation came about. But the script never answers this question and Lewis never even raises it. A breathtaking omission in light of who Lewis and Davidman were in real life, yet a logical omission considering the kind of movie Attenborough and Nicholson want to make. For *Shadowlands* is no longer the story of the romantic union of two equally life-perplexed, God-seeking individuals, perfectly matched in intellect and mettlesome high spirits. It is now the story of an overgrown teddy bear, lovably bookish and unworldly, who is rescued from emotional suffocation and his own virginity by a warmhearted, tough-tender earth mother who shatters his routine, skewers his narrow-minded colleagues, and takes him on a motor tour of the English countryside. Let's face it: this *Shadowlands* is really the latest rendition of *Goodbye, Mr. Chips.*

And a nice rendition it is. Richard Attenborough's direction is the best work of his career. It's as if the intimacy of the story had reined in Attenborough's penchant for visual fustian and incoherent storytelling. Each directorial stroke makes its point succinctly.

Following his triumph in *The Remains of the Day*, Anthony Hopkins's Jack Lewis comes across as The Butler Escapes. For, like Stevens in *The Remains of the Day,* Nicholson's version of Lewis is a man who has fashioned his own leash and wears it with conviction. In researching this role, Hopkins must have read Lewis's confession that emotional safe-playing was his greatest temptation. Hopkins has zeroed in on that trait and amplified it. This Jack Lewis is an overgrown boy who keeps his eyes on the carpet in the presence of an attractive female. This virginal, flustered quality is the keynote of the first three quarters of the performance. Later, when Lewis is moved to passion, first by the love of Joy, then by anger at her death, Hopkins's specialty staccato bursts of emotion issuing out of a seemingly passive exterior comes into play and makes viewers sit up wide-awake in the knowledge that there is more to this man's character than they had suspected. And so another triumph is added to Hopkins's seemingly unbreakable chain of triumphs.

But Debra Winger's triumph is bigger. While Hopkins tailors Lewis to match his peculiar strengths as an actor, Winger extends the boundaries of her talent to encompass Joy. Though too pretty and still too young for the role, she bestows the best sort of amnesia

on the viewer. She wipes out her own backlog of characterizations and makes you accept this woman as the only Debra Winger you have ever seen. Nicholson has given Joy a few too many wisecracks, but Winger never lets us forget the emotional neediness that deploys those wisecracks like SOS signals. When Jack casually asks his Yuletide guest if her husband is looking after himself for Christmas, Winger raps out "Yes!" with a speed and fierceness that bespeak a world of marital woe.

So, by all means, go see *Shadowlands* but be prepared to take it on its own terms. This is a C. S. Lewis biopic for secular humanists in search of a good cry. I believe they constitute a sizable audience.

**Source**: Richard Alleva, "Shadowlands," in *Commonweal*, Vol. 121, No. 2, January 28, 1994, pp. 22-23.

# Critical Essay #3

In the following, *an overview explaining the main points of the film are given.*

When we meet him, C. S. Lewis (Anthony Hopkins) is giving rather smug lectures about the blessed necessity for suffering in our life: "Pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world," he happily informs his listeners.

But what does Lewis Oxford don, literary critic, fairy-tale writer, Christian apologist actually know about the ordinary hurts of ordinary life? Or, for that matter, about life as most people know it? His beloved mother died when he was a child, and for decades he has lived in withdrawn bachelorhood. Snuggled up in a charming book-lined cottage with his brother Warnie (the excellent Edward Hardwicke), he is sage but distant with his students, witty but somewhat abstract with his colleagues at the high table.

The man needs shaking up. And Joy Gresham (Debra Winger) is just the woman to do it. She's an American, something of a poet, something of an imposition. But she's also someone any writer is bound to cherish, a knowledgeable fan. They meet for tea; she and her eight-year-old son (she's in the midst of a messy divorce) return for Christmas; and eventually they settle in London. Bemusement soon gives way to concern. Lewis marries her so she can stay in England, but true love does not happen until she falls ill with cancer. A period of remission offers them the opportunity for an idyll. That brief happiness, followed by the pain of her death, does indeed "rouse" Lewis. But in ways deeper and more mysterious than he formerly gabbled about.

*Shadowlands* is, in essence, a true story, though screenwriter William Nicholson, adapting his own play, admits that given Lewis' reticence, he has had to imagine much of what went on in the relationship with Gresham. And reticent is the word for Richard Attenborough' s film version. But that's a virtue, not a defect, when your setting is English academia (no one has more persuasively captured its manners) and your subject is mortality. There is something very moving in the understated way that these people confront it, something very sweetly believable in their courtship and in the brief bliss they shared. Hopkins gets to do what he could not in *The Remains of the Day*, shake off repression, and Winger is awfully good too; there is a steady pressure in her forcefulness that is never flashy or abrasive. They the entire movie are strong, unsentimental, exemplary.

**Source**: "Shadowlands," in *Time*, Vol. 142, No. 27, December 27, 1993, p. 72.

# Critical Essay #4

*Kramer points out the flaws in* Shadowlands *and explores the personalities of the different characters.*

*Shadowlands*, the William Nicholson play about C. S. Lewis, which ran for a year in London in a production directed by Elijah Moshinsky and starring Nigel Hawthorne and Jane Lapotaire, has just opened at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre. It turns out to be a major disappointment. Like the television film of the same name, which Mr. Nicholson wrote for the BBC, the play tells the story of Lewis's strange, doomed love affair with the minor American poet Joy Davidman Gresham. Anyone who has seen the movie version of *Shadowlands* (it has been broadcast on PBS and on the Arts and Entertainment cable network) knows how poignantly and affectingly this story can be told. She was a married woman with two children (boys), a Jewish convert to Christianity, and a former Communist, who, having initiated a correspondence with Lewis, sought an introduction to him on a visit to England, which she undertook when her marriage appeared to be failing. Eventually, she was divorced (her husband had left her for another woman), and she moved lock, stock, and barrel to Oxford (with the two boys), whereupon Lewis agreed to marry her for immigration purposes. She became the love of his life, and soon afterward died of bone cancer.

I have no idea what Joy was really like, or how Jane Lapotaire portrayed her in the West End production. But Claire Bloom, who played the role, opposite Joss Ackland, in the television movie, was beautiful, charming, and graceful, with a kind of lively-mindedness that made it perfectly clear why a celebrated author and academic might have turned, for love and friendship, to a Jewish American intellectual divorcee. Jane Alexander, who plays Joy, opposite Mr. Hawthorne, in the current production, brings to the role a combination of toughness and tartness that has served her well in other roles, but for lively-mindedness she substitutes belligerence, which reduces the relationship to a hackneyed conflict between American brashness and Oxford inhibition. Moreover, where Bloom was gawky only in approaching passion, Alexander is gawky in everything. (She seems to come onstage limping.) This, along with a certain freeness of the hands and upper torso, seems to be her way of getting the idea of Jewishness across. Owing partly to a quality of abrasiveness that Alexander brings to the role (something that A. N. Wilson, in fact, attributes to Joy in his new biography of Lewis, which is discussed elsewhere in this issue), and owing partly to Nicholson's script, which doesn't give the relationship between the two people much time to develop, Joy appears to be plotting: she seems to have designs on Lewis.

What's missing from this stage version is any sense that Joy had a life apart from Lewis she seems to be merely a woman obsessed with C. S. Lewis, a celebrity-seeker and any sense of the world she was invading. The film used pictures and tiny gestures to establish a moral context and ambience: a world of middle-aged men who talk to each other without looking up from their books. It juxtaposed scenes of Lewis reading, lecturing to students, and strolling through Magdalen deer park with references to and images from the sacred and secular medieval literature Lewis taught and studied.

Nicholson's script for the stage version substitutes Robert Louis Stevenson for Guillaume de Lorris and Chretien de Troyes; it has Paul Sparer, Robin Chadwick, Hugh A. Rose, and Edmund C. Davys (playing a collection of stereotypical dons and vicars) spouting some sort of ghastly parody of high-table conversation; and it vulgarizes everything that in the film was subtle. As for Mark Thompson's set, its only nod to the idea of Oxford is a vaguely Gothic front panel that moves endlessly up and down, up and down, allowing stagehands to get ready for the next scene.

Joy's younger son, Douglas, was in his teens when his mother died. The movie fudges this a bit, making him a child of eight or nine, and fair enough: the movie wants to offer a parallel between Joy's children and Lewis and his older brother, who lost their mother when Lewis was nine. It suggests visually that those two little boys might very easily become those two middle-aged men. In the movie, though, Lewis's brother, Warnie, was played by an actor whose puffy, feline face he was like a maiden aunt presented an image of passionlessness and sterility. Michael Allinson, who plays Warnie in the current production, cuts a rather dapper figure. He's tall and distinguished like an American's dream of the romantic English gentleman. Moreover, since the play reduces the number of Joy's children to one, the trumped-up parallel between Douglas and Lewis has to be pounded home verbally.

Douglas Gresham, who seems to have been involved with *Shadowlands* at every phase of its development, from screen to stage, has provided a program note for the current production in which he says that the play "comes closer to the truth" than anything else he has read "about the nature of my stepfather's relationship with my mother." The film version made some sort of spiritual sense out of the dilemma that Lewis' s Neo-platonic relationship with Joy posed to his Neo-platonic Christianity. But the play, which purports to answer the question "If God loves us, why does he allow us to suffer so much?," succeeds only in Broadwayizing everything. "Her death," Douglas Gresham writes of his mother, "taught him .. . that in the very deepest despair there is hope and when by grief the entire universe is suddenly emptied, there is God."

The movie script gave bigger play to what may have been Lewis's true final comment on life as symbolized by Joy's bone cancer: "This is a mess, and that is all there is to it." Cancer is a mess, and the stories of people who die from it don't usually get made into a play. *Shadowlands* seems to suggest that what makes the events it recounts tragic is the fact that they happened to C. S. Lewis. Given that Mr. Hawthorne, who hasn't the authority or the presence to play Lewis with any depth or complexity, is a television star before anything else (he plays the shady secretary in the popular series "Yes, Minister" and "Yes, Prime Minister"), the whole thing has the feel of a tourist trap the sort of play that gets mounted in London with the idea of capitalizing on America's love for anything having to do with Oxford or England.

**Source**: Mimi Kramer, "Shady Doings," in *New Yorker*, November 26, 1990, p. 124-125.

# Critical Essay #5

*The tragedy portrayed in this play is described by Henry as a "metaphysical dilemma."*

For almost every person of religious conviction, the most harrowing test of faith comes with the suffering and death of a loved one. It is hard to believe in a just and kind God who allows innocent people to suffer the physical agonies of dying or the mental agonies of being parted. Yet it is precisely at these moments that religious belief can be most comforting. Being sure that apparently pointless grief does serve some higher purpose, even if one cannot yet divine what it is, may enable a depressed mourner to get himself through the despondency of the day.

That metaphysical dilemma lies at the heart of *Shadowlands*, a new Broadway play that personalizes the issue in the life of Clive Staples Lewis, a distinguished literary scholar and one of the 20th century's foremost popular writers on Christian theology. When Lewis was nine, his mother died of cancer. When he was 61, his wife Joy died of the same disease. Both were racked with pain; both endured the false hope of brief remission; both left behind baffled, brittle sons. Part of Lewis plainly believed these horrors somehow reflected the Almighty's benevolent hand. Another part of him, the play argues, never could. That led him to escape into writing another kind of literature for which he is remembered: children's fables such as *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. He yearned, it is suggested, for a healing magic he could not find in the everyday world.

Writers' lives rarely yield good drama. Their work is mostly done silently and alone. They live out their fantasies more openly on the page than in company. They often thwart relationships with others because they view everyone as "material." *Shadowlands* might seem doubly doomed because it also embraces disease-of-the-week pathos of a kind that TV generally does better. The plot focuses almost entirely on Lewis' relationship with Joy, whom he met and married less to live as man and wife than to enable her and her offspring by a prior marriage to stay in Britain after a half-century of hearty bachelorhood. The script is far more graphic about her symptoms (her hip "snapped like a frozen twig") than about whether this marriage of convenience ripened into sexual love, and its overall view of Lewis as a near monk clashes with a recent biography. Moreover, the play is lumbered with Lewis' fellow Oxford dons, middle-aged men joking about women in an awed, distant, prepubescent way that may resonate for audiences in London, where the show originated, but does not for American theatergoers.

Yet *Shadowlands* does work. William Nicholson, adapting his 1984 TV drama, finds a wealth of delicate metaphor in the imagery of the title, a reference to Lewis' assertion that true life is inner life or afterlife and what happens on earth a mere shadow existence. He prospers by Jane Alexander's blunt, practical, meticulously underplayed Joy and by Nigel Hawthorne's epic performance, reminiscent of Ralph Richardson at his finest, as Lewis. Shuffling and shambling, looking as if forever surrounded by muddy acres and faithful hounds, Hawthorne is the embodiment of an older, surer England

coming to grips with anew world that is not so much brave as demanding of bravery. He makes theological abstractions breathe and weep.

**Source**: William A. Henry, III, "Shadowlands," in *Time*, Vol. 136, No. 22, November, 19, 1990, p. 106.

# Adaptations

*Shadowlands* was based on a television movie written by Nicholson and aired on the BBC in 1986. It later aired on PBS and A&E. It featured Claire Bloom as Joy Gresham and Joss Ackland as Lewis.

A feature film version was produced in 1993 with a script by Nicholson. Directed by Sir Richard Attenborough, the film featured Debra Winger as Joy and Anthony Hopkins as Lewis.

# Topics for Further Study

Research grief management techniques for both children and adults. How could such techniques have helped both Douglas and Lewis deal with Joy's illness and death?

Compare and contrast the character of Lewis with *Hamlet* in William Shakespeare's play Hamlet. Discuss how both men handle their tendency towards indecision.

Watch the 1986 BBC version of *Shadowlands* that Nicholson wrote before the stage version. Compare the two versions, focusing on how the characters of Lewis and Joy evolved.

Research the social and cultural history of the University of Oxford, especially the institution's dons. Did this insular society contribute to Lewis' problematic character at the beginning of the play?

# Compare and Contrast

1950s: The Labour Party is in power throughout 1951, though the Conservative Party rules Great Britain for the rest of the decade.

Today: The Conservative Party is in power through much of the 1990s, until the Labour Party returns in the late 1990s.

1950s: At Oxford, women and men have separate colleges. There is not talk of allowing women and men into some of the same colleges until the mid-1960s.

Today: Since the mid-1970s, at least some of the previously all-male colleges admit women, though the women's colleges fear they might return to secondary status again.

1950s: Great Britain is still recovering from the devastating effects of World War II on its economy, infrastructure, and people. Food is rationed until 1954, while coal is rationed until 1958.

Today: Fully recovered from World War II with no rationing, Great Britain still has economic problems but looks to the future in Europe with a common currency.

1950s: At the beginning of the decade, less than a third of those who reside in Great Britain own their home. Few homes contain featured televisions, washing machines, and refrigerators.

Today: Nearly 70 percent of those residing in Great Britain own their home. Since the consumer boom of the 1960s and 1970s, most homes contain "luxury" items such as televisions, washing machines, and refrigerators.

# What Do I Read Next?

*Grief Observed*, a nonfiction book written by C. S. Lewis in 1961 (originally published under the pen name N. W. Clerk), is about how Joy Gresham's death affected him.

*The Magician's Nephew* (1955), book six in C. S. Lewis' *Narnia Chronicles*, is the book that Douglas Gresham reads in *Shadowlands* and which underscores its themes.

*The Wind Singer* is a children's book written by Nicholson in 2000 about a parallel world not unlike Narnia.

*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), book one in C. S. Lewis' *Narnia Chronicles*, also prominently features a wardrobe and is mentioned in *Shadowlands.*

84 *Charing Cross Road*, based on material by Helene Hanff and published in 1983, is a play that was adapted for the stage by James Roose-Evans. At its center is an unusual romance between an unlikely man and woman.

# Further Study

Finkle, David, "For C. S. Lewis, Does Love Conquer All?" in *New York Times*, November 4, 1990, pp. HI, H5.

This article gives background on the relationship between Lewis and Gresham, how Nicholson came to write both the television movie and play, and the stage production.

Green, V. H. H. *A History of Oxford University*, B. T. Batsford, Ltd., 1974.

This nonfiction book gives the historical background at the institution where Lewis taught for many years and is used as a setting in *Shadowlands*.

Gresham, Douglas H., *Lenten Lands*, Macmillan, 1998.

This book by Joy Gresham's son who is a character in *Shadowlands*, describes his perspective on the relationship between his mother and Lewis.

Wilson, A. N., *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, Collins, 1990.

This is the definitive biography of Lewis and includes information about his relationship with Gresham.

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BOOKRAGS

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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.
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- 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

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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.

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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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