

SHADOWLANDS

Introduction

'Shadowlands' tells of the extraordinary love between C. S. Lewis, the famous writer and Christian academic and Joy Gresham, an American poet who came to know him first through his writing. She was to die shortly after their marriage.

'Shadowlands' was first a television and then a stage play and is now a film starring Anthony Hopkins and Debra Winger. This guide is for use before and after a viewing of Richard Attenborough's film. It seeks to expand for class work the themes of love and bereavement, the risks of emotional involvement and the challenge to all faiths of pain and tragedy as well as discussing the way film tackles these difficult subjects.

JACK AND JOY

Olive Staples Lewis - known always as Jack - was born in 1898 in Belfast three years after the Lewis's first son, Warren or "Warnie". The brothers were very close, and spent much of their adult bachelor life living together near Oxford in a ramshackle house, The Kilns, known to their friends as The Midden (Old English for dung heap).

What impressions do we first receive of the brothers?

How does the film express briefly a little of their life "before" Joy?

What do we learn during the course of the film of C. S. Lewis's world?

Apart from Joy, what other women do we "meet" in 'Shadowlands'? How are they represented?

Find out a little about Britain in the 1950s. Who was Prime Minister? When did rationing end? Why was Princess Margaret known as the "heartbreak princess"? As well as picture and library research, ask those who were alive at the time.

Helen Joy Davidman's world was very different from that of the Lewis brothers. Born in New York City in 1915, Joy was, she later wrote "a well-brought-up, right thinking daughter of materialism.. .By now there is a whole generation like me in the cities of America. I was an atheist and the daughter of an atheist; I assumed that science had disproved God.. .Before my time an atheist had to be a religious man, one who had thought hard about God. But my generation sucked in atheism with its canned milk..."

Like many intellectuals of her generation, Joy became a Communist in the 1930s.

She was no longer a Communist, and indeed no longer an atheist when she came to know the works of C. S. Lewis. Lewis's writings - on Christianity and on literature as well as his children's books, all sold well in America.

Joy was also married, though unhappily, to a writer called Bill Gresham and had two children; David and Douglas. "She appeared," Warnie later wrote, "as just another American fan, Mrs W. L. Gresham from New York. With the difference that she stood out from the ruck by her amusing and well-written letters."

C. S. Lewis maintained correspondence with many people, including many abroad - and his relationship with Joy might never have gone any further.

What reason is finally given for Joy's initial trip to England in the film?

Write a list of all the differences between Jack and Joy - think also about their different "worlds" (little is shown of Joy's American background, but plenty is hinted at!) Then compile a list of all they seem to have in common.

Which list is longest?

THE DEATH OF A PARENT

Perhaps the crucial period in Jack and Warnie's early life - that bound them so closely as brothers - was the death in 1908 of their mother. C. S. Lewis later cited this trauma in explaining his own emotional reticence; the person he loved most in the world was taken from him.

How does Jack describe this time in the film 'Shadowlands'?

Years later, when writing 'The Magician's Nephew' in his 'Narnia' series, Lewis wrote of the pain of losing a mother when the boy, Digory, is forced to choose between obeying the great lion Asian or obtaining the means to heal his dying mother.

"But please, please - won't you - can't you give me something that will cure Mother?" Up until then he had been looking at the Lion's great front feet and the huge claws on them; now in despair, he looked up at its face. What he saw surprised him as much as anything Th his whole life. For the tawny face was bent down near his own and (wonder of wonders) great shining tears stood in the lion's eyes. They were such big, bright tears compared with Digory's own, that for a moment he felt as if the Lion must really be sorrier about his Mother than he was himself."

In the story, Asian brings the Mother back to life - he is a "magician" where it seems God is not, or chooses often not to be.

Having been taught that prayers made in faith are answered, the 10-year-old Jack had set about praying when his mother first became ill. He prayed - he later wrote - to a God whom he viewed "neither as saviour nor as judge, but merely as a magician".

The fact that God apparently ignored his pleas was one of the first attacks upon a childhood faith, and a few years later he was writing “All religions, that is all mythologies, to give them their proper name, are merely man’s own invention”.

What would you say is the view of God held by most young children?

Do you think children - even if their parents have a faith - should be encouraged to pray if they do not fully understand what they are doing? If so, why?

How and in what ways should children be exposed to the idea of death?

Some parents keep their children away from family funerals: do you think this is ever -or never - a good idea?

How is the pain of losing a parent “re-lived” for C. S. Lewis in ‘Shadowlands’?

How does he say he copes differently with the death of Joy than the death of his mother?

Why do you think the filmmakers chose to give Joy just one son instead of the two she really had? Dramatically how does this alter things? What would you have done?

What are the responsibilities of a parent to the children he or she is leaving? What does Joy mean by “old enough to hurt”?

At the end of the film it is not made clear what happens to Douglas. Does he go back to America? Go away to school? Live with Jack and Warnie? Discuss what you think would be best.

THE WRITER, THE FILMMAKER AND THE WARDROBE

Before seeing ‘Shadowlands’ had you heard of C. S. Lewis? It is possible you have read his ‘Chronicles of Narnia’, or seen their television adaptations; ‘The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe’, ‘The Voyage of the Dawn Treader’, ‘Prince Caspian’, ‘The Silver Chair’ and so on. Nowadays, it is these stories rather than his wartime lectures that have made C. S. Lewis a household name.

It seems likely that the story of his love for Joy and her death might never have reached such a wide audience were it not for Lewis’s continuing fame as writer of the ‘Narnia’ series.

At what point is ‘Narnia’ alluded to in the film?

What does the world of ‘Narnia’ represent for Douglas and for Jack?

Is there a place for a “childish” vision of heaven? Do you remember yours?

What visual image is used in the film ‘Shadowlands’ to hint at the idea of heaven?

Just as the film is infused with some knowledge of the world of ‘Narnia’ - (even the Golden Valley, which isn’t of course golden, perhaps represents something similar) -so the ‘Narnia’ series is infused with Lewis’s own knowledge of Christian imagery.

He claimed that 'The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe' did not begin as a Christian story "that element pushed itself in of its own accord" and Asian slowly became a symbol of Christ and the book an allegory of Christ's death and resurrection:

'Asian stooped his golden head and licked her forehead. The warmth of his breath and a rich sort of smell that seemed to hang about his hair came over her. "Oh you're real, you're real! Oh Asian!" cried Lucy, and both girls flung themselves upon him and covered him with kisses.

"But what does it all mean?" asked Susan.

"It means," said Asian, "that though the Witch knew the Deeper Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who has committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, Death itself would start working backwards

And from 'The Silver Chair':

"... Then Asian stopped, and the children looked into the stream. And there, on the golden gravel of the bed of the stream, lay King Caspian, dead, with the water flowing over him like liquid glass And all three stood and wept. Even the Lion wept; great Lion tears, each tear more precious than the earth would be if it were a single solid diamond...

"Son of Adam," said Asian, "go into the thicket and pluck the thorn that you will find there, and bring it to me."

Eustace obeyed. The thorn was a foot long and sharp as a rapier.

"Drive it into my paw, son of Adam," said Asian, holding up his right fore paw and spreading out the great pad towards Eustace.

"Must I," said Eustace?

"Yes," said Asian.

Then Eustace set his teeth and drove the thorn into the Lion's pad. And there came out a great drop of blood, redder than all the redness you have ever imagined. And it splashed into the stream over the dead body of the King. And the dead king began to be changed. His white beard turned to grey, and from grey to yellow, and got shorter and vanished altogether; and his sunken cheeks grew round and fresh, and the wrinkles were smoothed, and his eyes opened, and his eyes and lips both laughed, and suddenly he leaped up and stood before them - a very young man - or boy.. And he rushed to Asian and flung his arms as far as they would go round the huge neck; and he gave Asian the strong kiss of a King, and Asian gave him the wild kisses of a Lion...

"But "said Eustace, looking at Asian "Hasn't he - er - died?"

"Yes," said the Lion in a very quiet voice, almost... as if he were laughing, "he has died. Most people have, you know Even I have..."

Is it important to understand the allusions in 'The Chronicles of Narnia' to Christianity in order to appreciate the stories?

Is it similarly important to understand the allusions to 'Narnia' in 'Shadowlands'?

BELIEF CHALLENGED

The love C. S. Lewis came to know for Joy Gresham, and her subsequent sufferings and death from cancer contributed to a profound questioning on his part of attitudes to pain and death.

In 'Shadowlands' too we are invited to consider with Jack - why, if God is good He allows such pain in the world. C. S. Lewis put the problem succinctly, like this:

"If God is good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy and if God is Almighty He would be able to do what he wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks either goodness, or power, or both."

Jack's own pain and his attempts to reconcile personal tragedy with the ideal of a loving God he explored most clearly in 'A Grief Observed', written in the months immediately following Joy's death.

Look at these extracts:

"Talk to me about the truth of religion and I'll listen gladly Talk to me about the duty of religion and I'll listen submissively But don't come and talk to me about the consolations of religion or I shall suspect you don't understand. Unless of course you can literally believe all that stuff about family reunions "on the other shore" pictured in entirely earthly terms. But that is all unscriptural, all out of bad hymns and lithographs. There's not a word of it in the Bible."

"Where is God?" he wrote. "Go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is in vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the other side... There are no lights in the windows. It might be an empty house. Was it ever inhabited?"

"What chokes every prayer and every hope is the memory of all the prayers we offered and all the false hopes we had. Not hopes raised merely by all our own wishful thinking; hopes encouraged, even forced upon us, by false diagnoses, by X-ray photographs, by strange remissions, by one temporary recovery that might have ranked as a miracle. Step by step we were "led up the garden path". Time after time, when He seemed most gracious He was really preparing the next torture..."

Lewis seemed to arrive, more by anguish than by logic, at an extraordinary theory: supposing God were bad? Supposing men were nothing more than rats trapped in the laboratory of a mad celestial vivisectionist?

Jack described the idea as “a yell rather than a thought” - but it had to be argued through nevertheless. “Is this rational,” he asked, “to believe in a bad God? Anyway -in a God so bad as all that? The Cosmic Sadist. The spiteful imbecile?”

Do you recognise how these ideas were dramatised in ‘Shadowlands’?

In the film, what key lines from the C. S. Lewis speech below are used repeatedly to express his attitude to God’s plan in allowing suffering?

“When a loved one dies we think of this as love cut short; like a dance stopped in mid-career or a flower with its head unluckily snapped off - something truncated and therefore lacking its due shape, whereas it is really a universal and integral part of our experience of love. It follows marriage as normally as marriage follows courtship, or as autumn follows summer. It is not a truncation of the process but one of its phases; not the interruption of the dance but the next figure.”

Can you remember the closing lines of the film?

What other idea is taken up by Lewis the character (or Nicholson the screenwriter) to “explain” suffering - or make it bearable for Lewis - or for us?

IDEAS ON STAGE - IDEAS ON SCREEN

‘Shadowlands’ started life as a TV play commissioned by the BBC. The writer, William Nicholson was asked by a theatre producer to rewrite it for the stage, and its success in London and New York encouraged the same producers to make it into a film.

Theatre and film tell their stories in very different ways.

One example of this would be the Golden Valley sequence which appears in the film, not the play - and indeed did not take place in real life - they went to Greece!

In the play a large wardrobe at the back of the stage is opened at key moments in the story to reveal a child’s vision a heaven - a sort of ‘Narnia’.

Why do you think this idea was cut from the film?

How does Nicholson weave the idea of the Golden Valley into the screenplay and to what purpose?

Here are the openings of the play ‘Shadowlands’, and the opening of the screenplay which Nicholson also wrote. Read them both carefully.

In two columns, write lists of all the differences: how many characters, how much is spoken, what we the audience see etc.

At the bottom of each column, see if you can write a sentence or two on the difference impressions you get of the drama you are about to see.

How many of the themes of 'Shadowlands' are introduced in the opening of the play?

How many in the film?

Why do you think Nicholson chose to alter so radically his opening for the screen?

Do you think the stage opening could have worked on film? If not, why not?

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A PLAY BY WILLIAM NICHOLSON

ACT 1

The stage is divided into two areas, one within the other. The inner area, which takes up most of the stage, is concealed by a translucent screen.

LEWIS enters, holding a newspaper; and, standing before the screen, addresses the audience as if they have come to hear one of his popular talks.

LEWIS. Good evening. The subject of my talk tonight is love, pain, and suffering.

Of course, as a comfortably situated middle-aged bachelor, I must be quite an authority on pain and love, wouldn't you have thought?

Now, by "pain" I don't mean a nagging discomfort in the intestines. For that matter, by "love" I don't mean a nagging discomfort in the intestines, either. The question I will put to you this evening, and one which I will attempt to answer, is this: If God loves us, why does He allow us to suffer so much? War. Pestilence. Famine.

(HE waves his newspaper at the audience.)

LEWIS. This is this morning's paper. Last night, as I'm sure you know, a number 1 bus drove into a column of young Royal Marine cadets in Chatham, and killed twenty-three of them. They were ten-year-old boys, marching and singing on their way to a boxing match. The road was unlit. The driver didn't see them. It was a terrible accident. Nobody was to blame. Except...

(HE points an accusing finger upwards.)

LEWIS. Now, where was He? Why didn't He stop it? What possible point can there be to such a tragedy? Isn't God supposed to be good? Isn't God supposed to love us?

Now, that's the nub of the matter: love. I think I'm right in saying that by "love", most of us mean either kindness or being "in love". But surely when we say that God loves us we don't mean that God is in love with us... do we? Not sitting by the telephone, writing letters:

"I love you madly-God, xxx and hugs." At least I don't think so. Perhaps we mean that He's a

kind God. Kindness is the desire to see others happy. Not happy in this way or that, but just happy.

Perhaps we mean that He loves us with a more mature benevolence. Not so much a Father in heaven as a Grandfather. "I do like to see the young people enjoying themselves... What does it matter as long as it makes them happy?"

Here I'm going to say something which may come as a bit of a shock. I think that God doesn't necessarily want us to be happy. He wants us to be lovable. Worthy of love. Able to be loved by Him. We don't start off being all that lovable, if we're honest. What makes people hard to love? Isn't it what is commonly called selfishness? Selfish people are hard to love because so little love comes out of them.

God creates us free, free to be selfish, but He adds a mechanism that will penetrate our selfishness and wake us up to the presence of others in the world, and that mechanism is called suffering. To put it in another way, pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world. Why must it be pain? Why can't He wake us more gently, with violins or laughter? Because the dream from which we must be awakened is the dream that all is well.

Now that is the most dangerous illusion of them all. Self-sufficiency is the enemy of salvation. If you are self-sufficient, you have no need of God. If you have no need of God, you do not seek Him. If you do not seek Him, you will not find Him.

God loves us, so He makes us the gift of suffering. Through suffering, we release our hold on the toys of this world, and know our true good lies in another world.

We're like blocks of stone, out of which the sculptor carves the forms of men. The blows of His chisel, which hurt us so much, are what make us perfect. The suffering in the world is not the failure of God's love for us; it is that love in action.

For believe me, this world that seems to us so substantial is no more than the Shadowlands. Real life has not begun yet.

(As LEWIS exits, the screen rises to reveal the magnificently furnished high table of an Oxford college dining hall. This is the traditional all-male world to which Lewis belongs.

Round the table sit CHRISTOPHER RILEY HARRY HARRING TON, MAURICE OAKLEY ALAN GREGG, and MAJOR WARNIE LEWIS. WARNIE is drinking more than is good for him.

A ripple of laughter rises from the table. RILEY is holding forth.)

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A FILM SCRIPT BY WILLIAM NICHOLSON

1 INT. MAGDALEN COLLEGE CHAPEL, OXFORD - EVENING

CLOSE ON the ferocious grin of a gargoyle, bathed in amber light. The SHOT DEVELOPS to find the austere face of an Old Testament prophet, the pale stone warmed by a bar of ruby light.

The soft timeless singing of a college choir -

Opening titles begin.

Beyond the stone prophet, another prophet, and another, a whole stern army of unmoving righteousness, bathed in soft colours, soothed by the flow of sound. The TURNING CAMERA catches the source of light now, a blast of glory flooding through a stained glass window, the setting sun turned gold and blood-red and aquamarine.

In the same moment, a CHOIRBOY begins to sing the solo passage of the haunting anthem. Out of the steady river of sound, like a bird escaping, springs an ecstatic leap of melody, up, up, climbing to heaven -

The CAMERA MOVES ON to find several FELLOWS of the college, unmoving as statues themselves in their white surplices and red—hooded gowns, ensconced in the ornately—carved pews: old CLAUD BIRD, well into his eighties, deaf as a post and wearing a hearing aid; BOB CHAFER, not yet forty, a fine sportsman still; little DESMOND ARDING, peering at a bad world through

his suspicious eyes; young NICK FARRELL; and the PRESIDENT of the college, isolated in his throne-like seat. The college chaplain, the Rev. 'HARRY' HARRINGTON, waits his moment; and beyond him, in his habitual place, a solidly-built man in his fifties, his face impassive, his thoughts far away with the song of the choirboy: C. S. LEWIS, known as 'Jack'.

The stream of melody hovers at its highest point, impossibly high, and then turns and begins to fall. The CAMERA MOVES ON, through the blur of red and white robes that make up the choir, to find the SINGER of the solo, a ten-year-old boy. And so remains on his young face, given up to the pure sound he is making, as the psalm comes stepping down, down, tumbling over itself in an enrapturing cascade, to return once more to earth.

2 DELETED

3 INT. MAGDALEN COLLEGE HALL - EVENING

The last of the sunlight shines through the centuries-old glass of a tall window. Through it we see movement, and then, led by the PRESIDENT, a procession of dignitaries enters through a small panelled door. The swish and scuffle of gowns as the DONS PASS THROUGH FRAME, pink-faced from their pre-prandial sherry by the fire, to take their places before the glittering array of college silver and college crystal.

Beyond them, now visible, the great panelled hall, filled with exuberant life: lines of gowned male STUDENTS, all eager for their dinner; among them ones we will meet again, WHISTLER, FRITH, STANDISH, LIEVEN.

Silence falls as the President says Grace.

PRESIDENT

Benedictus benedicat per Jesum Christum
Dominum Nostrum. Amen.

A crash of benches and chairs heralds the start of the meal. A few words caught through the hubbub of student chatter -

FRITH

How'd it go, Tom?

STANDISH

Thrashed 'em. Led all the way. Would have won if we hadn't sunk.

11

LIEVEN

And how they sank! Majestically! Nothing
in their race became them like the leaving it.

The CAMERA PICKS OUT faces at the high table: LEWIS: his guest and elder brother Major Warren Lewis, known as WARNIE, not wearing a gown; Professor CHRISTOPHER RILEY, a deceptively sweet—mannered don; a younger, harrassed—looking lecturer, RUPERT PARRISH; the college chaplain, HARRY HARRINGTON; ARDING, BIRD, and CHAFER; NICK FARRELL, youthful and eager, sitting beside Professor ARNOLD DOPLISS, and Professor DOPLISS's guest MARCUS. On all faces, the look of quiet satisfaction of men who live well, and take it for granted. This is a world of privilege and tradition, and it is entirely male.

An ancient dodderly wine steward, BARKER, passes along the high table handing out flagons of wine from a tray. Each flagon contains a different wine: the name of the don who selected it can be glimpsed on a scrap of paper beneath it. The dons are impatient for their wine, and the first act of each one is to pour himself a glass to check whether the college servants have got it right. By an oversight on LEWIS's part, WARNIE has no flagon of wine of his own. Conversations overlap.

B I R D

Thank you, Barker. Thank you very much.

ARDING
(suspicious)

I ordered the '45.

CHAFER

Can't beat a bouncy young Beaujolais.