

the great divorce study guide

The Great Divorce Study Guide serves as a crucial tool for both readers and students seeking to delve deeper into C.S. Lewis's profound allegorical novella, "The Great Divorce." This work, first published in 1945, explores themes of morality, choice, and redemption through a fantastical narrative that juxtaposes Heaven and Hell. In this study guide, we will explore the key themes, characters, and important symbols, as well as provide discussion questions and resources for further reading.

Overview of "The Great Divorce"

C.S. Lewis's "The Great Divorce" presents a dream-like journey experienced by an unnamed narrator who finds himself in a bleak and desolate version of Hell. This place is not the fiery pit of traditional lore, but rather a grey, dull city where the inhabitants are unhappy and self-absorbed. The narrator learns that he can take a bus ride to Heaven, where he encounters various souls who illustrate the choices that lead individuals toward either salvation or damnation.

Key Themes

Understanding the central themes of "The Great Divorce" is essential for any reader. Here are some of the most prominent themes in the novella:

1. Choice and Free Will

One of the most significant themes is the concept of choice. Lewis suggests that individuals have the power to choose their eternal fate. The characters in the novella represent different choices made in life, illustrating the consequences of those choices in the afterlife.

2. The Nature of Sin

Lewis examines sin not as a simple act but as a condition of the heart. The inhabitants of Hell are often blind to their own faults and refuse to acknowledge their need for change. This theme emphasizes the importance of self-awareness and repentance.

3. Redemption and Forgiveness

The possibility of redemption is a recurring theme throughout the novella. Characters are given opportunities to embrace forgiveness and transformation, highlighting the Christian belief in the grace of God.

4. Reality vs. Illusion

Lewis contrasts the reality of Heaven with the illusions of Hell. The various characters' perceptions of their own worth often cloud their judgment and prevent them from seeing the truth of their situation.

Characters

The characters in "The Great Divorce" are allegorical representations of different aspects of humanity. Each character embodies specific traits and moral dilemmas that highlight the themes of the story.

1. The Narrator

The unnamed narrator serves as the reader's guide through the story. His observations and experiences provide a lens through which we can understand the moral lessons presented.

2. The Ghosts

The inhabitants of Hell, referred to as "Ghosts," represent various sins and shortcomings. Each Ghost has a unique story that reveals their personal struggles and the choices that led them to their current state.

3. The Spirits

The inhabitants of Heaven, known as "Spirits," contrast sharply with the Ghosts. They embody love, truth, and joy, representing the ultimate goal of redemption and transformation.

4. Notable Ghosts

- The Big Ghost: Represents pride and self-importance, unable to let go of his earthly status.
- The Intellectual Ghost: Symbolizes skepticism and the refusal to accept spiritual truths, trapped in his own reasoning.
- The Dwarf Ghost: Illustrates self-pity and the limitations one places on oneself through negative thinking.
- The Woman with the Dwarf: A symbol of jealousy and the bondage it creates, preventing her from experiencing love and joy.

Important Symbols

Symbols play a vital role in "The Great Divorce," enhancing the novella's themes and messages. Here are some significant symbols to consider:

1. The Bus

The bus that transports the Ghosts to Heaven symbolizes the journey of choice and the possibility of transformation. It represents the opportunity to escape the confines of sin and embrace redemption.

2. The Mountains

The mountains in Heaven symbolize spiritual elevation and the pursuit of truth. They depict the idea that Heaven is a place of growth and fulfillment, contrasting with the stagnant existence of Hell.

3. The Light

Light in "The Great Divorce" signifies truth, understanding, and the presence of God. The brighter the light, the closer the characters are to divine reality.

Discussion Questions

To facilitate a deeper understanding of "The Great Divorce," consider using the following discussion questions:

1. What do you think C.S. Lewis intends to convey about the nature of choice and free will through the characters' journeys?
2. How do the Ghosts' attitudes and decisions reflect common human struggles with sin and redemption?
3. In what ways do the symbols of light and darkness enhance the understanding of Heaven and Hell in the novella?
4. How does the portrayal of Heaven challenge or affirm traditional views of the afterlife?
5. What role does forgiveness play in the interactions between the Ghosts and the Spirits?

Resources for Further Reading

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of "The Great Divorce," readers are encouraged to explore the following resources:

- **Books by C.S. Lewis:**

- "Mere Christianity" - An exploration of Christian beliefs and morals.
- "The Screwtape Letters" - A satirical look at temptation and spiritual warfare from the perspective of a senior demon.

- **Academic Analyses:**

- "C.S. Lewis: A Biography" by A.N. Wilson - A comprehensive look at Lewis's life and works.
- "The Philosophy of C.S. Lewis" by David J. D. McDonald - An exploration of Lewis's philosophical ideas and theology.

- **Online Resources:**

- The C.S. Lewis Foundation - Offers resources and information on Lewis's works.
- Study guides and analyses available on educational websites, such as SparkNotes and GradeSaver.

Conclusion

"The Great Divorce" remains a timeless exploration of the human condition, encapsulating the struggles with sin, the importance of choice, and the hope of redemption. Utilizing a study guide can enhance the reading experience by providing insights into the themes, characters, and symbols that Lewis masterfully weaves into the narrative. As readers engage with the text, they are invited to reflect on their own choices and the paths they may take in their spiritual journeys. Through discussion and further exploration, "The Great Divorce" continues to inspire and provoke thought on the nature of existence and the eternal questions that define humanity.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main theme of 'The Great Divorce'?

The main theme of 'The Great Divorce' revolves around the concept of choice between Heaven and Hell, exploring the nature of good and evil, and the consequences of one's decisions.

Who is the author of 'The Great Divorce'?

'The Great Divorce' is authored by C.S. Lewis, a renowned British writer and theologian.

What is the significance of the bus journey in 'The Great Divorce'?

The bus journey symbolizes the transition between the earthly realm and the afterlife, illustrating the choices individuals make that determine their eternal fate.

How does 'The Great Divorce' address the concept of regret?

'The Great Divorce' highlights how regret can prevent souls from embracing redemption and moving towards Heaven, emphasizing the need for acceptance and letting go.

What role do the characters in 'The Great Divorce' play in conveying its message?

The characters exemplify different attitudes towards sin, redemption, and the divine, serving as representations of the human condition and the struggles faced in the moral journey.

What does the landscape of Heaven represent in 'The Great Divorce'?

The landscape of Heaven is depicted as vibrant and real, symbolizing ultimate truth and fulfillment, contrasting sharply with the dullness of the characters' earthly experiences.

Can 'The Great Divorce' be considered an allegory?

Yes, 'The Great Divorce' is considered an allegory, as it uses symbolic imagery and characters to convey moral and spiritual lessons about life after death.

How does C.S. Lewis depict the souls in Hell?

C.S. Lewis depicts the souls in Hell as self-absorbed and resistant to change, emphasizing the idea that their own choices led them to their current state.

What is the significance of the title 'The Great Divorce'?

The title 'The Great Divorce' signifies the separation between the saved and the damned, highlighting the ultimate division resulting from individual choices regarding faith and morality.

What lessons can readers learn from 'The Great Divorce'?

Readers can learn about the importance of personal choice, the nature of sin, the possibility of redemption, and the eternal consequences of their actions and beliefs.

[The Great Divorce Study Guide](#)

The Great Divorce Study Guide

Related Articles

- [the girl scout law](#)
- [the greatest man who ever lived](#)
- [the far side school for the gifted](#)

[Back to Home](#)