



C.S. Lewis'
The Great Divorce:

Questions for Socratic Discussion
by Missy Andrews



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QUICK CARD



Reference	<i>The Great Divorce</i> . C.S. Lewis. 1945. ISBN: 978-0060652951																						
Plot	A day trip to the outer regions of Heaven gives inhabitants of Hell a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity: to experience Paradise and its “Solid People” and to choose their own citizenship.																						
Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grey Town (Purgatory or Hell) • Solid Land (Outskirts of Heaven) 																						
Characters	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">Narrator</td> <td style="width: 50%;">Ikey</td> </tr> <tr> <td>The Solid Beings</td> <td>The Hard-Bitten Man</td> </tr> <tr> <td>George MacDonald</td> <td>The Well-Dressed Woman</td> </tr> <tr> <td>The Solid Land</td> <td>The Survivalist</td> </tr> <tr> <td>The Big Ghost</td> <td>The Grumble</td> </tr> <tr> <td>The Fat Ghost</td> <td>The Sensual Ghost</td> </tr> <tr> <td>The Famous Artist Ghost</td> <td>The Wife Ghost</td> </tr> <tr> <td>The Mother-Love Ghost</td> <td>The Ghost with the Lizard</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">The Tragedian and Dwarf Ghosts</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">The Ghosts who come near to Heaven</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">The Ghosts MacDonald catalogs</td> </tr> </table>	Narrator	Ikey	The Solid Beings	The Hard-Bitten Man	George MacDonald	The Well-Dressed Woman	The Solid Land	The Survivalist	The Big Ghost	The Grumble	The Fat Ghost	The Sensual Ghost	The Famous Artist Ghost	The Wife Ghost	The Mother-Love Ghost	The Ghost with the Lizard	The Tragedian and Dwarf Ghosts		The Ghosts who come near to Heaven		The Ghosts MacDonald catalogs	
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Conflict	<p>Man vs. God</p> <p>Man vs. Himself</p> <p>Man vs. Man</p>																						
Theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sinfulness of man. • The goodness and mercy of God. • Man’s need for redemption. 																						
Literary Devices	<p>Simile</p> <p>Metaphor</p> <p>Irony</p> <p>Allusion</p> <p>Symbolism</p>																						

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: SETTING



In what country or region does the story happen? (1a)

The story begins on a mean street in what the Narrator calls the Grey Town. In particular, the Narrator is standing in a queue with some argumentative and combative companions, all of whom are waiting for a bus. They are of differing economic and educational status. One learns throughout the story that these characters are damned souls on holiday, and that the Grey Town is Purgatory for some and the outskirts of Hell for others.

What is the mood or atmosphere of the place where the story happens? (1d)

The atmosphere of the place is dreary, dull, dirty and bleak. The place, for all its vastness, seems empty and insubstantial.

What is the weather like in the story? (1e)

The Narrator tells readers that in the Grey Town, he is “always in the rain and always in evening twilight” (1).

Is the setting a real or imaginary place? If it is imaginary, it is subject to the same physical laws as our world is? (1g)

Lewis is careful in his introduction to distinguish that he sets out to write a piece of fiction, and in no way is his story to be confused with his works of theology. Although the Grey Town is revealed within the contexts of the story to be the outer limits of Hell, or Purgatory for those who will eventually reach Heaven, the reader is to consider this an imaginative representation of Hell, rather than an accurate, Biblical representation of the real Hell.

Does the story happen in one spot, or does the action unfold across a wide area? (1c)

The setting of the story ranges from this dreary land to the Celestial Realm or Solid Land, a completely different place. Not only is the place different in location, it is different in kind. Whereas in the Grey Town it is always twilight, in the Celestial Realm it is always daybreak. While the Grey Town is phantom-like and vacuous, populated by contentious ghosts, the Celestial City is solid and substantial, inhabited by “solid people.” There it is always sunny and pulsating with life. While the Grey Town is dark and dingy, the Celestial City is full of light. It is enlarged and open, complete with the kind of topography one sees here on earth. The Grey Land is small, pinched, and compressed. Although its inhabitants spread out so as to be away from all neighbors, they take up so

little space, being insubstantial beings, that all their vast land could be swallowed by a butterfly and yet go undetected.

Do you long to climb into the pages of the book to live in the world, or does it repel you? (1f)

Whereas the Grey Town holds no allure, the Solid Land seems simultaneously inviting and fearsome, at least for the ghostly souls that vacation there. Because it is so substantial, the very blades of grass poke like knives. The apples that hang on the trees are too heavy for the ghosts to lift without great effort. The water in the river is solid enough for the Narrator to walk upon. This place seems the reality of all that the earthly world shadowed. Pulsating with life, the place seems infused with victory and hope.

When does this story happen? (2)

Since they represent Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven, both the Grey Town and the Celestial Realm stand outside of time. The events described take place after the earthly lives of the characters have run their course.

How long a period of time does the story cover? (2b)

The story covers the events of a single day for these ghosts.

NOTES:

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: CHARACTERS



Who is the story about? (3)

The story is written in the first person in C.S. Lewis's own voice. He himself is the Narrator. As such, he is an observer rather than a participant for much of the story. He experiences both settings, but is primarily concerned with watching the other ghosts in their interviews with the Solid Beings they encounter on their day trip. *The Great Divorce* is thus a study of human nature, sin, and redemption as understood by the Narrator. In particular, the Narrator makes observations of the insidious nature of sin – sin that parades itself as righteousness.

Make up a list of adjectives that describe the protagonist (3f)

Some adjectives describing the main character include: philosophical, curious, concerned, compassionate, mistrusting/suspicious, afraid, cautious, intelligent/intellectual, sinful/evasive, and uncertain.

What does the protagonist do for a living? Is he a professional, or a blue-collar worker? Is he wealthy or impoverished? (3h)

We learn that the Narrator is a man of learning. His guide George MacDonald, in explanation of the ghosts' circumstances during their visit to the solid land, states, "a man of your advantages might have read of it in Prudentius..." (67). The Narrator is of a philosophical bent. He is drawn to literate and rational characters who behave in non-emotional and deliberate manners. He is most concerned with the nature of God – His goodness and trustworthiness. (57,67) He is also concerned with theology. (68)

An inquisitive character, the Narrator asks a variety of questions of his guide. These include the following:

1. Do any of the ghosts stay? Can they stay? (67)
2. Is judgment not final? (68)
3. What of the saved? (70)
4. Are Heaven and Hell real places, or merely states of mind? (70)
5. Is there a real choice after death? (71)
6. What is it that the ghosts who go back to the Grey Town choose? (71)
7. Are none lost to sensual vices? (72)
8. Why don't the Solid People go into Hell to rescue the damned? (74)

9. What about the ghosts who never see the Solid Land with its Solid People? (75)
10. Why must God judge the garrulous woman who feels overlooked and alone? (77)
11. Are some natural feelings better than others? Are some a better starting point for the “real thing” or divine love? (104)
12. When is it right to confront the “perversification” of a natural affection in another soul? (105)
13. Can everything that is in us, even the perverse, be transformed and go with us into the Kingdom? (114)
14. Is mother love an excess or defect? (114)
15. “Is it really tolerable that [Sarah Smith, the Solid Person] should be untouched by [the dwarf’s] misery, even his self-made misery?” (135)
16. What is the difference between the action of Pity and the passion of Pity? (136)
17. What is Hell? (137-38)
18. What is Universalism? Does the Narrator rule on this theological heresy? (140)
19. Are the choices of the ghosts that he witnesses on his excursion real, or is there a giant mind playing “chess” with all men? (143-44)

Is the character a "sympathetic character"? Do you identify with him and hope he will succeed? Do you pity him? (3q)

These questions are universal questions most thoughtful human beings ask of God at some time during their lives. Consequently, the Narrator is a sympathetic character.

Who else is the story about? (4)

Because the Narrator is primarily an observer, the other characters in the story play a central role. The verification code for this resource is 380186. Enter this code in the submission form at www.centerforlitschools.com/dashboard to receive one professional development credit. They include:

The Solid Beings – These are inhabitants of the Solid Land, souls who have been glorified after death by the Savior, Creator, and Resident of the Solid Land. Each approaches one of the ghosts with whom he or she had had relationship during their earthly lives in an effort to induce them to gain citizenship in the Solid Country. The ghosts see these beings as antagonists because they confront the ghosts with their sin. However, they do this for the good of the ghosts.

George Macdonald – This is the Narrator’s guide. Macdonald is not a fictitious figure, but a Victorian era author of notable books such as *Phantastes*, *The Princess and the Goblin*, and *At the Back of the North Wind*, and whose works had particularly influenced Lewis. Lewis considers Macdonald a father figure and mentor, and credits him in part for his understanding of God. In this story, Macdonald guides Lewis in much the same way that the poet Virgil guides Dante in *The Divine Comedy*.

The Solid Land itself is a kind of antagonistic force for the Narrator. It is personified. The very waterfall speaks. The Narrator is drawn by a desire to stay in that land, but fears that the very desire is a form of torture. He is prone to mistrust both the Land and its Creator. This is indicative of the central Man vs. God conflict around which the story turns.

The most important characters in the story, however, are the ghosts on holiday. These include:

The Big Ghost – This man is indignant to find that a murderer he knew in his previous life should be saved, rather than he who had “done [his] best.” He asks for nothing but “his rights.” He believes he has “never done nothing wrong.” The Solid Being he encounters encourages him to “ask for the Bleeding Charity” (28).

The Fat Ghost with gaiters – This ghost is unaware that the Grey Town he has inhabited is Hell. The Solid Being he encounters calls him an apostate. Even in spite of his own experience in the Grey Town, he doesn’t believe people are penalized for holding what he calls “honest opinions” (36). His are sins of the intellect. He apparently rejected the Resurrection in his former life. He had wanted to be modern and successful then, and had sacrificed his sincere faith for success and prestige in the modern church. He embraced liberal theology and higher criticism, otherwise known as Biblical reductionism, and is referred to as the Episcopal Ghost. The Solid Being tells him that, in the Solid Land, he is not needed, only forgiven. The Solid Land, he is told, is not a land of questions, but of answers. Even so, the Fat Ghost insists, “To travel hopefully is better than to arrive.” He leaves the Solid Being to return to the Grey Town whistling an old hymn.

Ikey – This one is a thieving ghost. The Narrator observes him trying to steal “solid” apples he can barely lift. In his foolishness he hopes to profit from them in the Grey Town, as if any part of the Solid Realm could be imported to that land of shadows.

The Hard-Bitten Man – The Narrator considers this man instinctively reliable. He is a suspicious man, and is the first to suggest to the Narrator that the invitation for the ghosts to stay in the Solid Land is a ruse or fantastic joke. “All that idea of staying is only an advertisement stunt,” he says. (52) He is skeptical of people he refers to as “they” and “the management.” He asks, “what if it rains?” thereby calling into question the integrity of God’s motives, planting doubt, disbelief, and fear in the heart and mind of the Narrator. (56)

The Well-Dressed Woman – This ghost is hiding. “They’ll see me,” she says. She is ashamed of her insubstantiality, fearing it worse than being underdressed, saying, “everyone is staring through me” (60). Her Solid Guide says “if you will drink the cup [of shame] to the bottom – you will find it very nourishing; but try to do anything else with it and it scalds” (61). She is totally self-absorbed and unable to see anyone but herself. In an attempt to shake her from this preoccupation, the Solid Being calls a herd of Unicorns. The Narrator flees and never sees the end of her interview.

The Survivalist – This ghost, upon arriving in the Solid Land, finds his work unnecessary since everyone there has already survived. He returns to the Grey Town where he hopes to be “useful,” thereby forfeiting Heaven for his own sense of purpose.

The Grumble – This female ghost’s grumbling has consumed her so that she ceases to sin in her grumbling, but has instead become sin. The guide explains that in cases such as these, there’s “no you left to criticize the mood [of grumbling]...but just the grumble itself going on forever like a machine” (78).

The Sensual Ghost – Like the Well-Dressed Woman, this ghost is also self-consumed. She appears to be unaware that her body is no longer substantial and contorts herself in ways designed to seduce the Solid Being who attends her.

The Ghosts who come near to Heaven to tell the Solid Beings about Hell (79)– These ghosts hope to reduce the joy of the heavenly beings by exposing them to tales of Hell.

The Ghosts Macdonald catalogs for the Narrator. He calls them ghosts who desired to extend Hell into Heaven. (80-81)They include:

- the “tub-thumpers” who call upon others to “seize Heaven for your own”
- the “planning ghosts” who hope to destroy Heaven through development and urbanization
- the “materialistic ghosts” who say that the whole of Heaven is an illusion
- the “bogies” who hope to frighten others in an effort to stave off the fear of their own decay.
- the “contemporary ghosts” who enjoy spewing venom and hatred. Macdonald says he has sometimes seen these ghosts converted to stay in the solid land. “Those that hate goodness are sometimes nearer than those that know nothing at all about it and think they have it already,” he says. (82)

The Famous Artist Ghost – This ghost chooses the shadow of the earthly creation over the Solid Land it prefigured. He is not interested in God, but rather in what the nebulous “they” say about Him. (85) His Solid guide suggests that he drink from a fountain in the Solid Land that causes artists to forget their proprietorship in their own works, creating a disinterested appreciation in their art without false modesty or pride. (85-86)

The Wife Ghost who did her duty – This ghost nagged and prodded her husband to death in their former life, and hopes to inhabit heaven to do likewise to him in eternity. She says, “I must have someone to do things to” (95).

The Mother-Love Ghost – A monomaniac, this ghost made an idol of her love for her son. Macdonald says of her, “no natural feelings are high or low, holy or unholy, in themselves...They all go bad when they set up on their own and make themselves into false gods” (100). She claims ownership of her son. Macdonald says, “Every natural love will rise again and live forever in this country: but none will rise again until it has been buried” (105).

The Ghost with the Lizard – This ghost has a lizard perched upon his shoulder who whispers threats into his ear and keeps him in a constant state of fear. It seems as though the lizard represents some kind of fleshly lust. The lizard hopes to keep the ghost in bondage by suggesting he will die without his demonic companion. The ghost, in fact, seems to confuse himself with the demon or his own sin. The Solid Being offers to kill the lizard, but says he is only free to do so by the ghost's own consent. The ghost rationalizes keeping the lizard, but finally states that even death would be better than life with the demon, crying out, "God help me!" At this point, the Solid being destroys the lizard in one quick movement. Both he and the demon are resurrected and transformed. He rides away upon the lizard, now a stallion, master of the beast that had mastered him. (109,111,113)

The Tragedian and Dwarf Ghosts – The dwarf is the ghost of what was once a man, and the tragedian a mere puppet or image that the dwarf feigns to induce pity and sympathy in the heart of his one-time wife, who is now a Solid Being. He uses theatrics in order to manipulate others' emotions through pity. This is a form of emotional terrorism. Macdonald calls it "using pity." "It can be used for a kind of blackmailing. Those who choose misery can hold joy up to ransom, by pity" (131). Macdonald explains why the loss of the dwarf cannot diminish the Solid Being's joy. (135) Pity for the unsaved ought not to be allowed to impinge upon the joy of the saved. He states, "The demand of the loveless and the self-imprisoned that they should be allowed to blackmail the universe...that Hell should be able to veto Heaven" won't be permitted in the Solid Land. (135)

In what way are these characters antagonistic? What goals of the protagonist, are they opposed to? (4b)

None of these characters represent direct antagonists for the Narrator. Rather, they represent character studies he observes as he learns about the nature of man and the nature of God. Each, in his interview with his individual Solid Guide, is confronted with his own sin and need for redemption. The majority of the ghosts refuse to acknowledge their sin, but instead seek to justify themselves to their listeners. They are their own worst enemies, and their pride is all that stands between them and eternal bliss (this is a Man vs. Self conflict). They would rather return to the Grey Land retaining their own sovereignty than submit themselves to God and agree with His evaluation of them (this is a Man vs. God conflict).

As he watches, the Narrator is convinced first of the goodness and mercy of God, and second, of his own need for redemption.

Each interview is a mini-story, with its own plot and conflict (see the story charts). The conflict in each vignette is: will the ghost "see" himself and his sin and turn from it - embracing a sort of death - or will he refuse to acknowledge his sin in an effort to preserve his own life? Each interview is thus a life or death decision for the ghost in question. In this way, Lewis suggests that every vice presents a life or death decision. As Macdonald puts it, "This moment contains all moments." Lewis confronts his readers

with their own sin nature and creates a sense of urgency for their own ultimate citizenship, be it in the Grey Land or Solid Country. He seems to ask, will you, the reader, choose death or life?

NOTES:

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: CONFLICT AND PLOT



What does the protagonist want? (5)

The Narrator wants two things: for God to be good and trustworthy, and to be himself clothed in Solid flesh like the Solid People he sees on his day trip.

Does he attempt to overcome something -- a physical impediment or emotional handicap? (5b)

In order to achieve his goals, the Narrator needs to be redeemed by having his own vices illuminated and transformed.

Is the conflict an external one having to do with circumstances in the protagonist's physical world, or is it an internal conflict taking place in his mind and emotions? (5e)

This is an inner conflict, a problem within his soul.

Do the protagonist's objectives or goals change throughout the story? How? Why? (5f)

Whereas at the start of the story, the narrator is merely an observer, his trip to the Solid Land draws him into the story. First, he contemplates the goodness of God by asking, "can the ghosts really choose to stay in the solid land?" Second, he becomes more involved in the drama of the story during his own interview with his guide, Macdonald, when he is confronted with his own character flaws and sins. *"There have been men before now who got so interested in proving the existence of God that they came to care nothing for God himself..."* (74). Macdonald calls this "the subtlest of all snares." This is what the narrator most fears in himself. He is "moved by a desire to change the subject" as Macdonald's words pierce his heart. He fears reach a climax as the dawn breaks, and he is terrified to find that he has not chosen life, and hence is caught as a ghost.

Why can't the protagonist have what he wants? (6)

The narrator can't have what he wants, barring an act of God, because he is blind to his own state, and his own flesh seeks to evade the responsibility of his own sin. He prefers self-justification to the justification of Christ. To be clothed in flesh, he must first believe that God is good, and wishes to clothe him, and second that he needs clothing. He must believe in the goodness of God before he can trust enough to see himself and accept his own poverty of spirit and need of redemption. Then, he must have the help of the divine to forsake his flesh, die to it, and be regenerated as a new man.

This represents both a Man vs. God and Man vs. Himself struggle. While the characters the narrator observes in their interviews wrestle with their Solid guides, it is really not the guides they combat, but acknowledging the lordship of God and admitting their own culpability. The Solid Beings are mere scapegoats that allow the ghosts to evade their own culpability. The apparent Man vs. Man conflict here is illusory.

For the narrator, the main thing that keeps him from his goal of being clothed in immortal flesh is his own intellect. He distances himself from the reality pulsating around him by theorizing about the nature of the God of life. Intellectualizing reality keeps everything impersonal, and leaves him free of the implications of his theories. This puts him among those Jesus described as "always seeing but never perceiving." (Mark 12)

Are there other things in the story (people, responsibilities, etc.) that distract the characters from their main goals? (7a)

Each of the ghosts encounters a Solid Being that he knew in his former physical life on earth. The interviews that the narrator witnesses are mini stories, complete with their own characters and plots, their own conflicts and themes. They work together to underscore the overarching conflict and theme of the story – the sinfulness of man and his need for redemption.

How do the interactions of the characters heighten the tension of the conflict that exists? (8c)

The Narrator observes each interview, and thereby gleans information about the Solid Land and its Creator. He is led at one time to doubt the goodness of the "Management." This induces him to fear and nearly causes him to return to the Grey Town.

How are the protagonist's obstacles finally overcome? (9b)

His own interview with his Solid guide, Macdonald, and his observation of the Ghost with the Lizard who is transformed into a Solid Being before his eyes, work together to undo the Narrator's doubts. In addition, Macdonald's explanation of each interview serves to strengthen the narrator's opinion concerning the justice and goodness of the Creator of the Solid Land. His questions are answered. In addition, through Macdonald's words, he is confronted with his own sin and need for redemption.

What events form the highest point or climax of the story tension? Are they circumstantial events, or emotional ones? Is the climax a spiritual or physical one? (9d)

The story has two major climaxes. The first occurs when the narrator witnesses the transformation of the ghost with the lizard. This convinces him that it is possible for the ghosts to choose to stay in the Solid Land. That is, it convinces him of the sincerity of "the Management." He finds that God is both just and merciful. His discussion with Macdonald provides answers to such questions as: Is it all fair? Can we know, understand it all? What is the nature of Heaven and Joy? (135-40)

The second climax comes with the Dawn as the narrator, terrified, screams, “The Morning! The Morning! I am caught by the morning and I am a ghost” (145). The approach of Dawn seems to indicate the return of Christ and the end of time. At this point, the narrator, not yet clothed in flesh, wakes up from what he finds was only a dream. This resolves the conflict, providing the narrator with additional time to make the decision he had not yet made within his dream, rectifying his own state before he finds himself in truth, caught by the Dawn as a ghost.

NOTES:

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: THEME



Is the protagonist changed in his mind or heart by the events of the story? (11a)

The protagonist is changed in mind and heart by the events in the story. He comes to see, and even to intensely feel, his own need for redemption. In this way he is brought to a sense of urgency. *“I am caught by the morning and I am a ghost!”* (145)

What is the main idea of the story? (13)

The theme is not only the sinfulness of man, God’s goodness, and man’s need for redemption, but also the urgent need of all men to be clothed in Solid Flesh. The reader experiences the entire drama in the first person. The narrator’s predicament dawns upon the reader as it dawns upon him, and when he is caught by the morning, his dilemma is keenly felt by the reader, who may be in a similar state of ghostliness. The restoration of normal surroundings delivers narrator and reader from eminent peril and restores to each one the gift of Time – and hence of choice.

NOTES:

QUESTIONS ABOUT STYLE: LITERARY DEVICES



Simile -- Does the author used the words "like" or "as" in making comparisons between two or more dissimilar things? (16d)

"My fellow passengers fought like hens to get on board the bus, though there was plenty of room for us all" (4).

"At last, the top of the cliff became visible like a thin line of emerald green stretched tight as a fiddle string" (19).

"The little flower was hard, not like wood or even like iron, but like diamond" (21).

"I will bring you where you can taste it [truth] like honey and be embraced by as by a bridegroom" (40).

"and I saw now (though it did not cease to look like a waterfall), that it was also a bright angel who stood, like one crucified, against the rocks and poured himself perpetually down towards the forest with loud joy" (49).

"Don't you remember on earth -- there were things too hot to touch with your finger, but you could drink them all, right? Shame is like that. If you accept it -- if you will drink the cup to the bottom -- you will find it very nourishing: but try to do anything else with it and it scalds" (61).

"Don't you understand? The glory flows into everyone, and back from everyone: like light and mirrors. But the light's the thing" (86).

Metaphor -- Does the author make comparisons of dissimilar objects or things without the use of the words "like" or "as"? (16h)

"They were in fact, ghosts: man-shaped stains on the brightness of that air" (20).

"The morning! The morning!" I cried, "I am caught by the morning and I am a ghost" (145).

Irony -- Do you know more about a character than the character himself does at any point in the story (dramatic irony)? Because of this, do a character's words convey the opposite of their intended meaning? (17a)

"I'd rather be damned than go along with you. I came here to get my rights, see?" (31).

"I only want my rights. I'm not asking for anybody's bleeding charity.' 'Then do. At once. Ask for the Bleeding Charity'" (28).

Allusion -- Does the author refer to other works of literature, historical events, works of art or well-known ideas in his work? (17f)

The Great Divorce contains several powerful allusions. You might say, in fact, that the entire story is an allusion to Dante's *Divine Comedy*. In this connection, the narrator's guide George MacDonald is an allusion to the ancient poet Virgil, who guided Dante through the Hell, Purgatory and Paradise.

Various characters in the story make allusions to works of philosophy and theology, such as Augustine's *City of God*. (44) The narrator also alludes to the myth of Tantalus, the book of Revelation, the works of Cowper, Hans Andersen's *Little Mermaid*. (25,57)

Symbolism -- Does the author use any objects, persons, pictures or things to represent an idea in the story? For example, darkness may be used to represent wickedness. Light may be used to represent truth and goodness. In the allegorical play every man, the main character represents or symbolizes sinful man. The symbol of a dove represents the person of the Holy Spirit in the Gospels. (17l)

Symbolism, of course, is Lewis' main literary device in *The Great Divorce*. Just about every element of fiction in the story – setting, characters, plot, and conflict in particular– is used and developed in a symbolic way. The twin settings of the Grey Town and the Solid Land symbolize hell and heaven, respectively. The plot, a bus ride from hell to heaven, symbolizes the journey of the human soul. Each ghost symbolizes a particular character flaw or human foible– a particular kind of sin. The arrival of the Morning, which catches the narrator by surprise at the climax of the story, symbolizes the Second Coming of Christ, after which no more decisions are possible.

NOTES:

QUESTIONS ABOUT CONTEXT: AUTHOR



Who is the author? (18)

The author is Clive Staples Lewis (1898-1963), the Irish-born author and professor of English literature at Oxford and Cambridge universities.

Where did the author live? (19)

C.S. Lewis was born in Belfast Ireland in 1898. His mother died when he was 10 years old, and he was sent to boarding school in England. He read and studied languages such as Latin, French, German, and Italian and developed his talents as a scholar. He went to Oxford University, but enlisted in the British Army in World War I. After the war he returned to college, where he graduated with honors in Greek and Latin literature, philosophy, ancient history, and English literature.

Lewis earned a teaching post in English at Magdelene College, Oxford, which he held for 29 years. He then became professor of medieval and Renaissance studies at Cambridge University.

Lewis maintained a close friendship with J.R.R. Tolkien, author of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. He and Tolkien shared their writings with each other regularly throughout their careers.

Lewis married American Joy Davidson Gresham in 1956. She died of cancer in 1960, leaving her son with Lewis.

Lewis wrote many works of fiction, literary criticism, theology, and philosophy, and became one of the best loved Christian writers of the 20th century. His most famous works include *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *the Screwtape Letters*, *That Hideous Strength*, *'Till We Have Faces*, *A Grief Observed*, *Pilgrims Regress*, *Experiment in Criticism*, *Mere Christianity*, *The Abolition of Man*, and many more.

Lewis died November 22, 1963, the same day that US President John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

NOTES:

STORY CHARTS



The following pages contain story charts of the type presented in the live seminar *Teaching the Classics*. As is made clear in that seminar, a separate story chart may be constructed for each of the conflicts present in a work of fiction. In particular, the reader's decision as to the **climax** and central **themes** of the plot structure will depend upon his understanding of the story's central **conflict**. As a result, though the details of setting, characters, exposition, and conclusion may be identical from analysis to analysis, significant variation may be found in those components which appear down the center of the story chart: Conflict, Climax, and Theme. This of course results from the fact that literary interpretation is the work of active minds, and differences of opinion are to be expected – even encouraged!

One particular benefit of *The Great Divorce* is that each interview between the Narrator and a ghost can be diagrammed on a story chart as having its own conflict, rising action, climax, and conclusion. As an example, three of these "mini story charts" have been filled in on the next pages, in addition to two story charts that cover the novel as a whole.

Finally, a reproducible blank chart is included to allow the teacher to examine different conflicts in the same format.

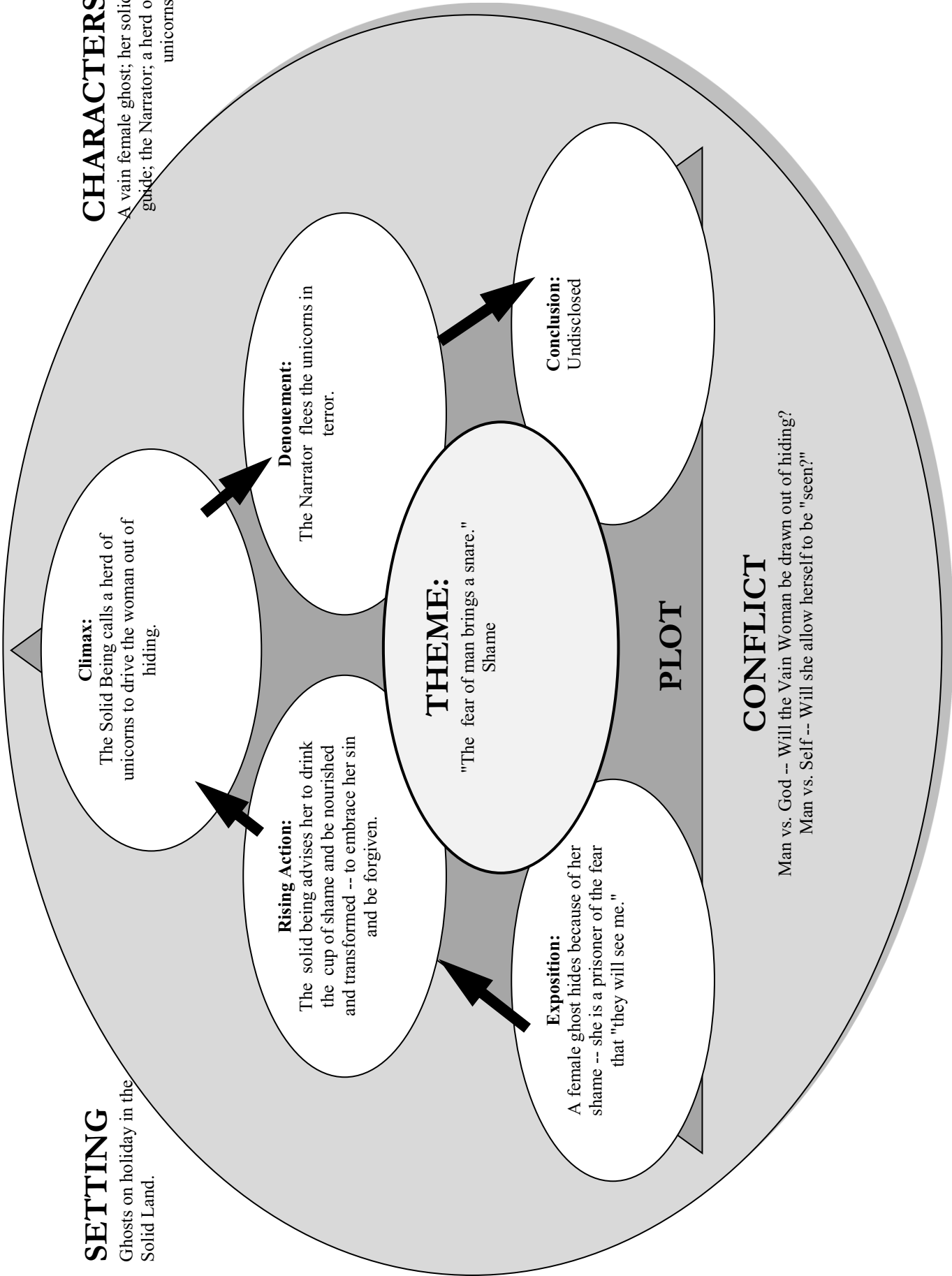
The Great Divorce by C.S. Lewis: "The Vain Woman"

SETTING

Ghosts on holiday in the Solid Land.

CHARACTERS

A vain female ghost; her solid guide; the Narrator; a herd of unicorns.



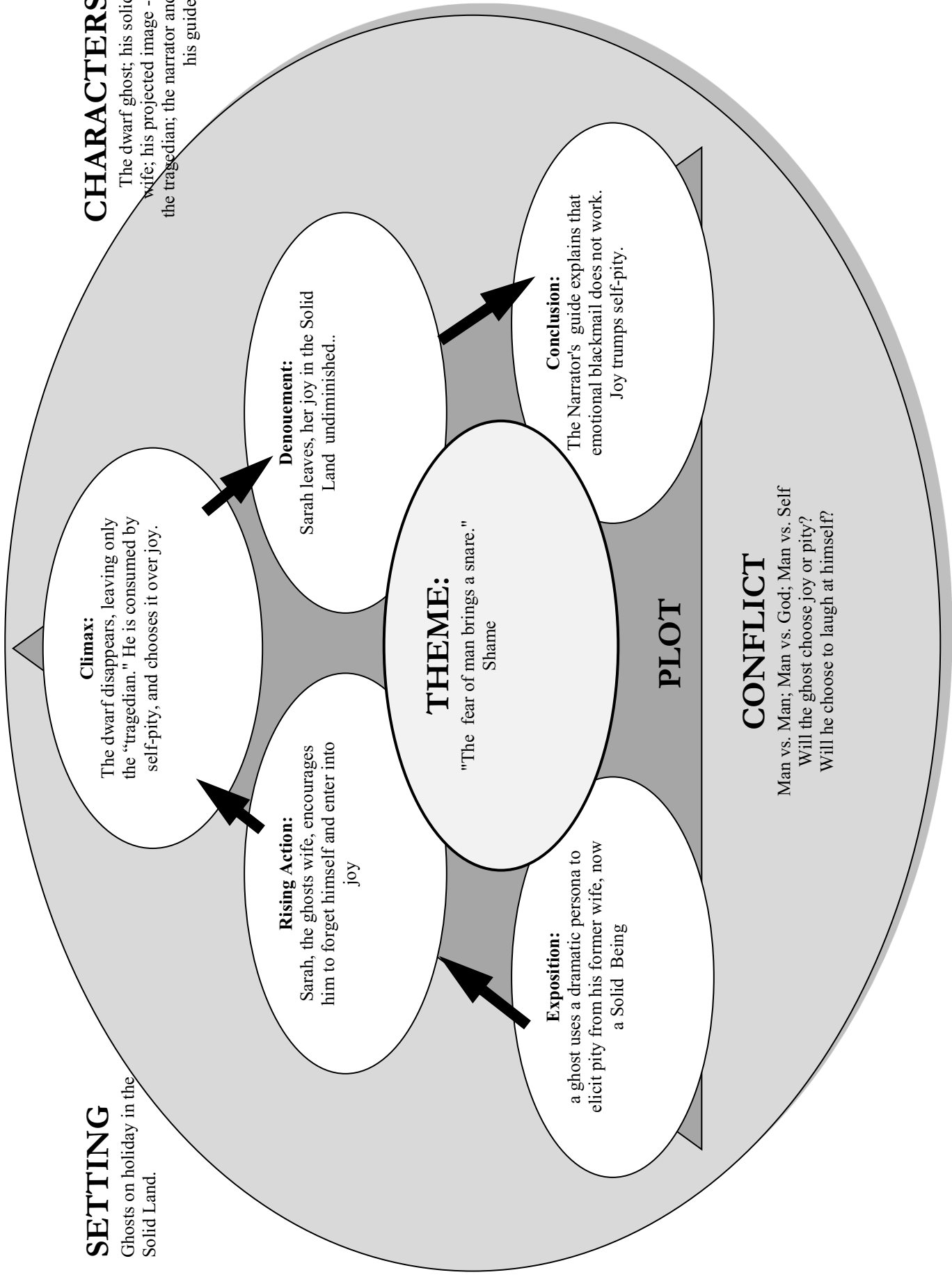
The Great Divorce by C.S. Lewis: "The Dwarf and the Tragedian"

SETTING

Ghosts on holiday in the Solid Land.

CHARACTERS

The dwarf ghost; his solid wife; his projected image -- the tragedian; the narrator and his guide.



The Great Divorce by C. S. Lewis: "The Man with the Lizard"

SETTING

Ghosts on holiday in the Solid Land.

CHARACTERS

The man and the lizard; the Solid Guide; the Narrator

Climax:

In desperation, the man cries out "God help me!" The Solid Being crushes the lizard

Rising Action:

The man's Solid Guide offers to kill the lizard. The man is afraid that he will die without the lizard.

Denouement:

Both the lizard and the man are transformed; the man into a Solid Being, the lizard into a stallion.

THEME:

Redemption
Life Comes Out of Death
God's power to transform evil into good

Exposition:

A man is ridden by a lizard, which represents some sort of besetting sin.

Conclusion:

The man rides a way on the stallion as its master. Earth sings praises.

PLOT

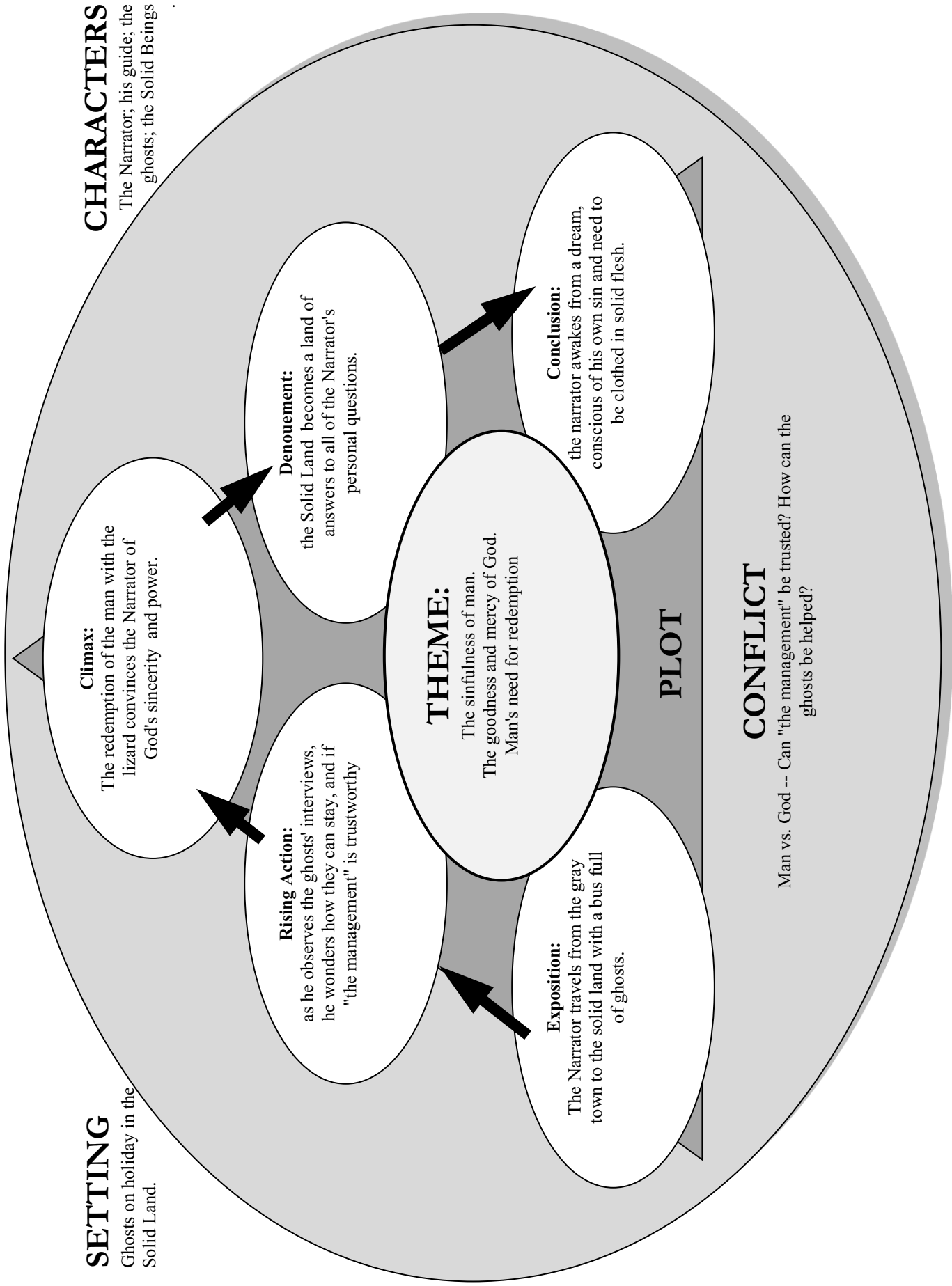
CONFLICT

Man vs. Self -- Will he succumb to his urge for self preservation?

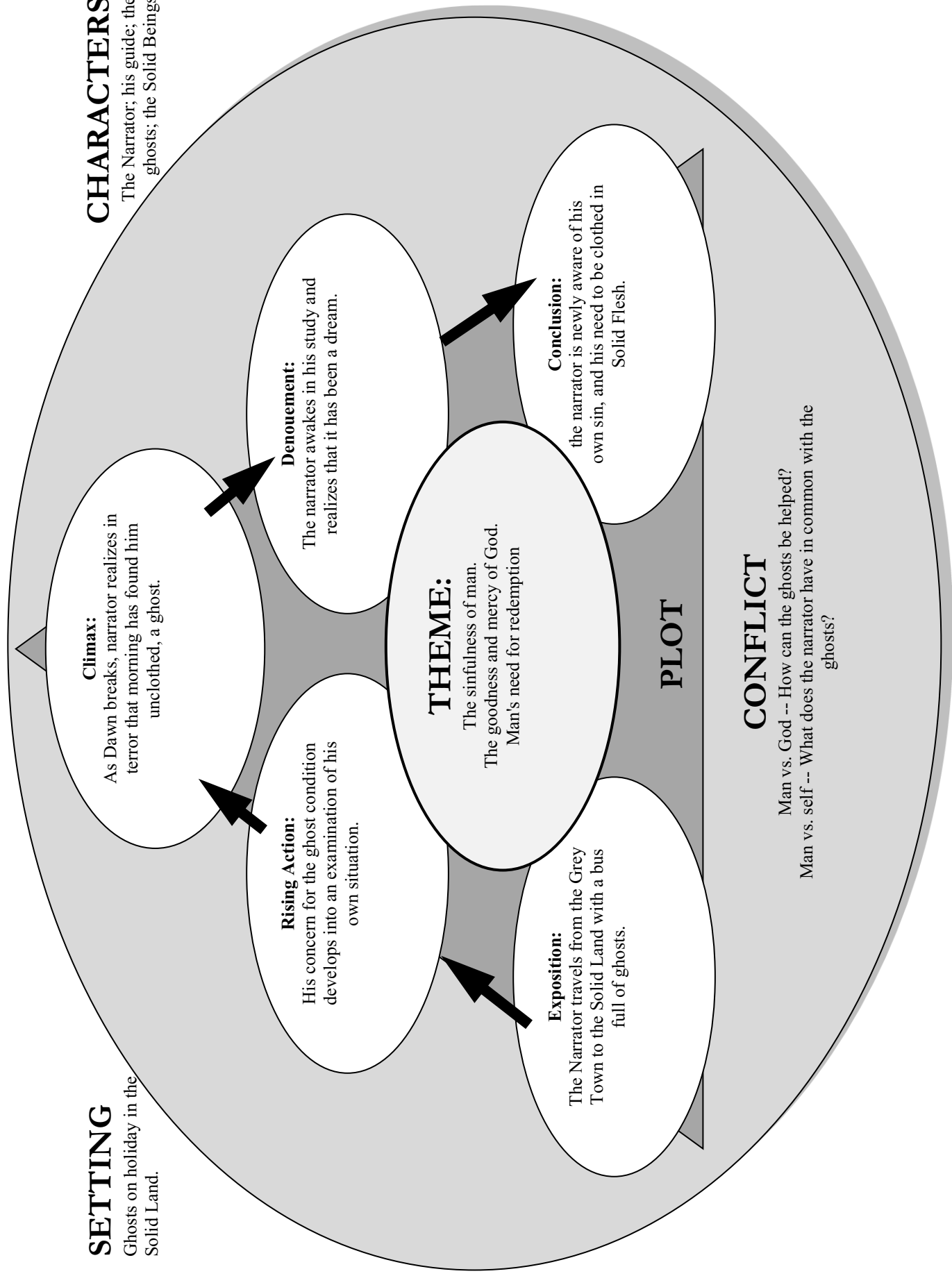
Will he allow the demon to live?

Man vs. God -- Will he trust God and the Solid Being? Are they trying to kill him?

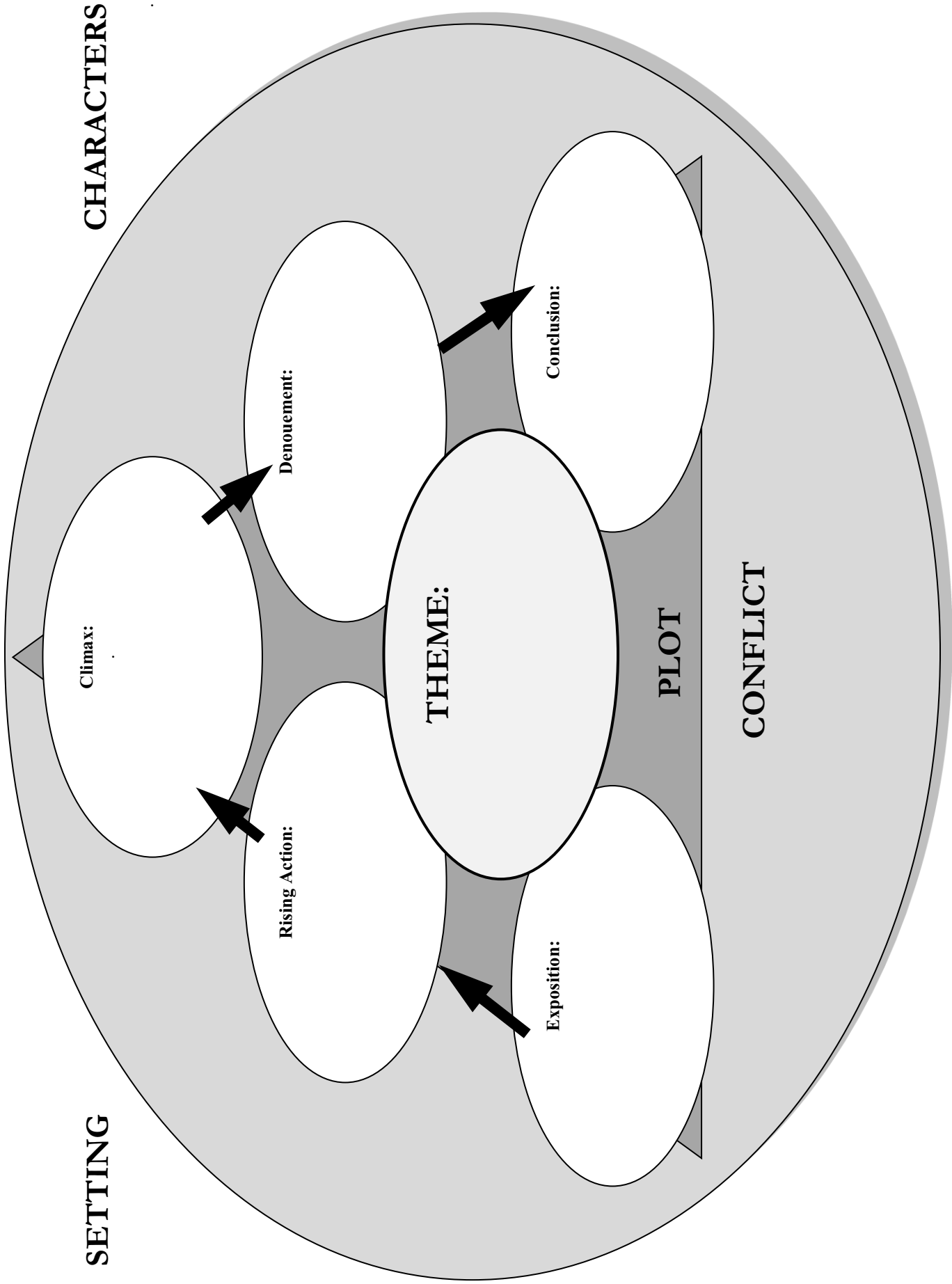
The Great Divorce by C. S. Lewis: Story Chart #1



The Great Divorce by C. S. Lewis: Story Chart #2



The Great Divorce by C. S. Lewis: Story Chart



SETTING

CHARACTERS

Climax:

Rising Action:

Denouement:

THEME:

Exposition:

Conclusion:

PLOT

CONFLICT

NOTES:
