

# The chrysalids by john wyndham: literary analysis

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## **The Chrysalids Analysis Paper**

An author's intent for a novel can remain unclear should they choose to withhold their view, and let the reader discover it alone. In *The Chrysalids*, by John Wyndham, the author uses a first person view to accomplish this. Themes of truth and religion surface throughout the novel and lead the reader to consider whether the book is against religion entirely. When analyzed closely, the majority of the text does not hold an anti-Christian view. Through the plot, voices, and tone of the author, the story is shown to be incredibly thought provoking and free from any negative motive.

The plot, told through the eyes of a boy named David Storm, is a key aspect to knowing the author's message. It begins in the cultish town of Waknuk where the religious practices are made to be the town's ignorance and corruption. This may feel very anti-religious, but by the end of the book, the plot shows the same failings in every type of society; even progressive aesthetic societies are shown to struggle with the same problems of Waknuk. This continuous dystopia that is shown to the reader implies that the author understands the corrupt nature of humans and its affect on society. This also indicates that there is a solid truth of what is right or wrong, and nothing displays this better than the voices of the author.

Characters such as Uncles Axel or Aunt Harriet were used by Wyndham to speak his mind on certain topics without directly telling the reader. Aunt Harriet is hardly in the book, aside from part of a chapter, and yet she is one of the most memorable people. Her scenario is created to illuminate the evil values that the Waknuk society holds. She is technically an outlaw and in the

wrong from her actions, but the reader does not consider this when their conscience is saying otherwise. This gut feeling of right and wrong is used to show that there is a universal truth or standard which the many societies fail to comply with. Wyndham hammers this in with strong lines from Harriet:

“ Why should I? I’ve done nothing to be ashamed of. I am not ashamed — I am only beaten.” (Wyndham, p. 72)

“‘I shall pray,’ she said. ‘ Yes, I shall pray.’ She paused, then she went on, her voice steady and harder: ‘ I shall pray God to send charity into this hideous world, and sympathy for the weak, and love for the unhappy and unfortunate. I shall ask Him if it is indeed His will that a child should suffer and its soul be damned for a little blemish of the body. . . . And I shall pray Him, too, that the hearts of the self-righteous may be broken....’” (Wyndham, p. 73)

Uncle Axel plays a large role in this as well. He is the most prominent voice of the author, and hardly serves the plot in any way other than providing the reader with information or ideas. He describes the world as full of societies just like Waknuk except they think they are the most important in some way. This solidifies that the varying societal failures are not limited to Christian stereotypes or views. Wyndham is showing the failure of cultures consistently closing themselves from the world, not the effects of religion on culture. It also is surrounding the physical changes in people, rather than any moral or spiritual belief.

In addition to not attacking Christian beliefs, Wyndham also keeps a very neutral tone for the majority of the book. Instead of telling how things should be, he addresses problems in the story and allows the reader to make their own conclusions without being forced an opinion. This is crucial to what could have been a very self motivated book. Wyndham admits through Uncle Axel that he may not know the purpose of life or society, and he shows flaws in many varying cultures. His tone lets the reader develop their own ideas as David begins to form his own beliefs during a very chaotic upbringing. Without this, the book or characters would be much less intriguing.

The greatest argument for a anti-Christian story would be a relative view on society, but even this is not accepted by the author. A relative view would believe that each culture was doing the right thing because truth is relative and evolving. To guarantee the reader does not conclude this, the author uses the concept of absolute moral guidelines to admonish the societies that hurt others simply because they are different, whether in appearance or beliefs. If the author had intended a relative outcome, the beliefs of these cultures would not have been attacked.

The Chrysalids proposes many questions while answering few. This not only allows the reader to consider their own beliefs, but not feel attacked for them as well. For this reason, the book is not anti-Christian. As evidence, the plot, characters, and writing style all support this conclusion. Even if the author was against religion, the book remains a fairly neutral satire which manages to force the reader to question the most rooted problems in humans.