Lewis in the Rye: An Approach to Controversial Literature

Abby Griffiths

A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Spring 2018

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program of Liberty University.

_____

Branson Woodard, D.A.
Thesis Chair

_____

Karen Prior, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____

Michael S. Jones, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____

Tess R. Stockslager, Ph.D.
Assistant Honors Director

_____

Date

Abstract

This thesis aims to coalesce literary criticism with Christian theology to provide a guideline for how Christians, who uphold a certain moral logic, should interact with literature that sparks controversy among readers. An analysis of J.D. Salinger's novel *Catcher in the Rye* (1951) will be considered through the lens of C.S. Lewis' commentary on good reading, good critique, and good art. *Catcher in the Rye,* an American novel, contains elements of derogatory language, promiscuous scenes, and insinuations of nihilism. How would C.S. Lewis, a British novelist and a prominent figure in Christian thought, read Salinger's work: would he find it delightful or would he even consider it at all? The conclusions from this case study may prompt some contemplation about the Christian experience of engaging with the world through literature.

Table of Contents

Lewis in the Rye: An Approach to Controversial Literature

Introduction

Literature elucidates the human experience and provides insight to the human condition. It is a broad art form that encompasses candid emotion and raw experience. Since a reader has endless books to choose from, he must resolve to cultivate a taste for good literature and thereby improve his reading. The reader must develop a standard to determine what literature best accomplishes the purpose of refining the reader's understanding of life. Fortunately, authors have wrestled with this idea of how to rectify the good and the bad of literature. If Christians have a qualm about reading a particular book because it affronts their morals, then they have scholarship to guide them.

C.S. Lewis, for example, offers more than science fiction and fantasy in his repertoire. He is also a prominent figure in discussing the study of literature. In his works "On Criticism" (1947) and *Experiment in Criticism* (1961) he explains how to be a fair critic, and these thoughts are worth considering. On the other side of the spectrum, with a work like *Catcher in the Rye* (1951), Christians have a choice to make: to read or not to read. If they do read, how might they read it well? Most might say that the work requires no deliberation, as the filthy language is reason enough to leave it alone. A few might read it several times just to look for a meaning that is not there. J.D. Salinger, whose own life may be echoed in the voice of a wandering Holden Caulfield, may not be the most inspiring author, but since his controversial novel is still being considered over sixty years after its publication, it must hold merit.

Based on his repertoire and disposition, would Lewis read *Catcher in the Rye* in

the first place, had he the opportunity? Perhaps Lewis would not have, just because he did not prefer the genre. The novel probably would not have surfaced in his circle of criticism. Rather the question is: how would Lewis read *Catcher?* He would not deem it good or bad art until giving it a fair judgment and would probably not be as opposed to Salinger's work as some. He would empathetically consider it, considering the broadness with which a critic can engage with literature. As a literary critic, Lewis encouraged readers to read with discretion; his principles of criticism and clarification of the role of critic construct a framework of good reading and appreciation of art for Christians who seek guidance on how to judge whether or not a controversial work of literature, such as J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, is appropriate to read.

The Critic

Lewis's Background. C.S. Lewis did not intend to be a literary critic, that is, someone who evaluates literature within a certain context. He was brought up with a classical education and developed a fondness for art appreciation rather than theories, or abstract analyses, about art. Perhaps in his early days when he was tutored by W.T. Kirkpatrick, Lewis discovered the side of him that loved to investigate and wonder about literature. By the time he went on to Oxford, Lewis was fully immersed in the world of academics— teaching, studying, and contemplating. Bruce Edwards says, "As tutor and literary scholar, Lewis is an astute chronicler of words, images, ideas, and meanings and their impact on texts and culture over time—and yet he is ever reluctant to be the critic" (191). Critic here means someone who looks for faults in literature. Lewis, truly a storyteller, discussed with keen interest literary works and the elements involved; he did

not evaluate a text at arms-length. His intention was to share his own experiences in engaging with the text and to offer a receptive reader his accumulated wisdom.

The activity of attentively reading literature, particularly what he called good literature, sparked an unwavering passion in C.S. Lewis. In a letter to Arthur Greeves, he says, "What can be better than to get out a book on Saturday afternoon and thrust all mundane considerations away till next week" (June 1920). Even in a casual sense, Lewis's idea of getting out a book involved focus, which other activities hinder. Edwards says, "Lewis loved to sojourn (with all that the verb portends) in another land, another time, another consciousness" (165). This word "sojourn" envisions Lewis on an imaginative holiday, transported simply by the words he reads. One wonders what books he chose to spend this undistracted, extensive time. Emphasizing his value for rereading and revisiting literature, he says, "You never get the same pleasure out of books as when you come back to them from these periodical exiles" (June 1920). Whatever book it was, its goodness apparently warranted a second read. In his own works, Lewis shared this enjoyment of good literature with others, hoping to inspire others as together they explored the human experience in all its wonder and mystery.

Lewis read well to write well as an author himself. His approach to writing served a similar purpose as his approach to reading. He says of his own works, "My task was simply that of a translator – one turning Christian doctrine, or what he believed to be such, into the vernacular, into language that unscholarly people would attend to and could understand" (*God in the Dock* 199). He did not reduce or lose the meaning of the ideas he translated; he simply wrote in a way that made the value of his words and interpretations

attainable. Through teaching others how to read good literature, Lewis equipped readers with tools necessary for the activity and reinforced his own process of reading.

As a sojourner of art, Lewis focused much of his commentary on poetry. Although he is mostly renowned for his later theological works and fictional stories, he originally wanted to be a poet. He was strongly influenced by his interest in medieval works and wrote poetry for much of his early career. His poetry was ultimately more of an outlet for his appreciation of classical models than an avenue to be published. According to this appreciation, he delighted in the imaginative occupation of reading and wanted readers of all literature to follow suit. Lewis makes his approach distinctive:

> I don't mean at all that we must never criticize work of a kind we have never done. On the contrary we must do nothing but criticize it. We may analyze and weigh its virtues and defects. What we must not do is to write imaginary histories. ("On Criticism" 138)

This command involves a caution to the reader: in reading a literary text, avoid misconstruing the author and do not add to the text something that does not exist. For the modern reader, Lewis's approach is not limited to poems and may be applied to other forms of literature. Moreover, the unique nuances of his approach are worth examining before applying them to *Catcher in the Rye.*

Lewis's Framework. Four principles inform Lewis's critical stance. First, the goal of all reading should be to "receive" rather than "use" the literary text, as Lewis explains in *Experiment in Criticism*. That is, the reader should aim to fully encounter the text, focus on what the text means, and find joy in reading as an activity. Second, readers should set

aside their bias against the text and use secondary materials wisely. That is, the reader should start with the text only, before considering any outside sources. Secondary materials help illuminate the interpretation, but should not hinder the reader's experience. Third, critics should provide an unobtrusive "map," especially for works particularly dense or linguistically distant (Edwards 166). The reader should consider the context of the work, outside sources, and the popular opinions about the text, which all comprise a map, as long as these elements do not distract from the text. Fourth, the intentions of the author, gauged somewhat from the craft of the text, should help temper our response to the text and our critical judgments (Edwards 166). This step involves a bit of unbiased investigation into what the author has said about the work. As a lover of literature, Lewis was in the "rye" himself. His reflections on reading reveal that he wished to save readers from jumping off the cliff of pretentiousness and to direct readers back onto a path of clear understanding.

In a short essay in the compilation *On Stories* called "George Orwell," Lewis expresses his discouragement that George Orwell's books *Animal Farm* and *1984* fare differently among the public. Both novels deal with the subject of disillusionment, which "concerns all" and is widely shared (Lewis 101). The latter is longer and duller, yet unfortunately more popular. Comparatively, the former accurately portrays humanity as beasts, capturing the essence of "very good, very bad, very pitiable, very honorable" (Lewis 104). He praises *Animal Farm* over *1984*, though it is not the popular opinion. He uses the criteria of length, content, accuracy and appropriateness of behavior (in the depiction of human nature), characterization, and satire to make his judgments. Yet these

are only criteria for evaluating the work: the distinction of Lewis's criticism is in his reception of the work and how he enjoys one over the other.

To explore how Lewis would read a controversial work, it must be emphasized again that his framework helped guide the reader into a humble, empathetic approach to appreciate the text fully. In *Experiment in Criticism*, Lewis makes a distinction between literary and unliterary readers. The difference, he explains, is how the unliterary use a work, while the literary receive a work of art by exerting their "sense and imagination and various others according to a pattern invented by the artist" (88). This does not mean that the reader neglects to think critically. Rather, the reader must recognize his or her own bias and how it affects their perspective. For Lewis, the "necessary condition of all good reading is 'to get ourselves out of the way,' and thus to encounter fully what an author has provided, untethered to the motive of evaluation" (93). The encounter is more important than the evaluation. Only then can a reader arrive at a solid interpretation and application for the text. Lewis preferred "attention to the work at hand and the world it evokes" as opposed to "spelunking for its origins or what lies 'between the lines'" (Edwards 168). This focus makes his approach valuable, for it seeks to understand the work first, then how the author and reader are affected.

Lewis's Contempt. A dichotomy exists between Lewis's reluctance to critique and his commitment to reading. The sojourner preferred to focus on the text, what some might describe as New Criticism, but he did not let this totally box in his reception of the text nor affect the reader's understanding of his advice. Lewis chose to reckon the text as the "essential meeting place" for an encounter to occur between author and reader (Edwards

167). If a critical method is to be helpful, it must enhance the reader's experience with the text. Lewis offered this reckoning in his works "On Criticism" and *Experiment in Criticism,* among others. His speculative writings helped to bridge the gap between the dichotomy and to solidify his framework. Lewis's desires to elucidate texts, yet to stay humble and appreciative in his approach, illuminated his wise observations.

Compared to others in the field, Lewis was probably one of the more contemptuous of literary criticism, at least what he considered it to be. That is, the practice of fault-finding, in which the reader's experience of a text is overlooked. Since Lewis seemed to disregard the label of "literary critic," his identity as a scholarly figure deserves a different description. Edwards says that a more precise description of Lewis's academic vocation primarily is that of "literary companion," who is a "knowledgeable traveler and navigator [of literature], drawing our attention from time to time to landmarks of the textual journey we might miss, but allowing us the freedom to explore on our own" (165). Rather than find his identity in the title of literary critic, Lewis preferred to walk in step with the reader and be a companion on the journey of reading. He was, as Walsh says, "[A] prime example of a man who was at the point where he could have crowned his academic career with some work of supreme importance" (108). Yet Lewis did not buy in to any incentives of fame, nor did he want to drown out any other voices. Despite his contempt, Lewis did not avoid the practice of critique altogether, and his insights, unrestrained by the passage of time, are valuable to readers of the twenty-first century.

In his essay "On Criticism," Lewis describes the practice of being a critic and

presents many of his dissatisfactions with the literary critics of his time. One of his most poignant comments is this: “If you are often reviewed you will find yourself repeatedly blamed and praised for saying what you never said and for not saying what you have said” (131). This frustration with critics is that they have the tendency to put words in the author’s mouth, which makes it easy to spin the analysis any way they want. Lewis had no reservations when he spoke of critics and was not ashamed to group himself with the mistakes they have the tendency to make. He said with humor, “Critics, and of course we when we criticize, are often deceived or confused as to what they are really doing” (135). Lewis did his best to explain what he meant by the words he chose. Underscoring the importance of choosing one’s words carefully, he continues, “You and I might condemn a passage in a book for being 'labored.' Do we mean by this that it sounds 'labored'? Or are we advancing the theory that it was in fact 'labored'? Or are we sometimes not quite sure which we mean?” (135). Lewis emphasized a point that often needs to be made in discourses about literature: literary critics often have misconceptions about the text they critique. Lewis related his own experience: “The imaginary histories written about my books are by no means always offensive. Sometimes they are even complimentary. There is nothing against them except that they're not true, and would be rather irrelevant if they were” (“On Criticism” 133). These imaginary histories are more of a source of confusion and mislead the reader from an otherwise sound analysis. For instance, a critic may say an author is dated to dissuade readers from that author’s work. In “Period Criticism,” Lewis delineates how shortsighted this evaluation is: “A man may be dated in the sense that the forms, the set-up, the paraphernalia, whereby he expresses matter of permanent

interest, are those of a particular age" (115). However, the issue of interacting with a supposed outdated author in this sense disappears if the critic places the discourse in the right context. The critic's goal should be to produce a clearer interpretation and better reading.

Lewis also recognizes the difficulty in criticizing a work that the critic has never attempted himself. Again, he is no stranger to the faulty critique of others: "Many critics quite clearly have an idea of how they think they would proceed if they tried to write the sort of book you have written, and assume that you were doing that. They often reveal unconsciously why they never have written a book of that kind" ("On Criticism" 138). Perhaps the critic should deny what he would do in the author's situation and focus on evaluating the text apart from his bias. Lewis says, "We must realize that we do not know how such things are written and what is difficult or easy to do in them and how particular faults are likely to occur" (138). Lewis suggests a response of humility and empathy. His desires to elucidate texts, yet to stay humble and appreciative in his approach, illuminate his wise observations.

Furthermore, when a critic makes an assertion against the author, he only has so much information to back up his claim. Lewis explains, "Nearly all critics are prone to imagine that they know a great many facts relevant to a book which in reality they don't know. The author inevitably perceives the critics' ignorance because he (often he alone) knows the real facts" ("On Criticism" 132). Lewis probably felt embittered towards some critics for supposing that his Narnia Chronicles were intentionally allegorical. Only he was privy to how his writings came about. He says of critics, "They seem to fancy that a

book trickles out of one like a sigh or a tear of automatic writing. It may well be that there is much in every book which comes from the unconscious. But when it is your own book you know the conscious motives as well" (135). The misconception Lewis debunks is that writers have a natural flow of ideas easily transcribed. Critics seem to disregard the grueling writing process, although they often are writers themselves. Speaking from his own experience, Lewis expounds: "Ignorant as [the author] may be of his book's value, he is at least an expert on its content. When you have planned and written and re-written the thing and read it twice or more in proof, you do know what is in it better than anyone else" (130). Without a doubt, the author is the closest to the text; the words and the way they were fashioned are his. No critical reader can conjecture exactly how the author's words were shaped. Lewis identifies himself with both the critic and the author, and thus has adequate insight to inform readers.

From his contempt and dissatisfaction with the misguided role of critics, Lewis arrived at a revelation that elevates his criticism above others. He says, "At least I assume that critics ought to interpret, and ought to try to find out the meaning or intention of a book" ("On Criticism" 139). When a reader sets out to engage with a book, he or she is going to extract some meaning by the end of reading. The critic's job is to aid the reader, not monopolize the conversation of what the text is or is not. Lewis walks alongside the reader and explains: "I have said vaguely 'meaning' or 'intention.' We shall have to give each word a fairly definite sense. It is the author who intends; the book means" (139). For the author to intend means to have an idea of how the reader might interpret the written work. The meaning is the product of the author's intention; it may deliver the author's

intention successfully or not. Regardless, the reader will come away with some sort of understanding of what message the written work conveys. These definitions help inform a reader's understanding of literature. Lewis went on to say, "The author's intention is that which, if it is realized, will in his eyes constitute success" (139). However, success in the author's eyes is not the reader's concern. Authorial intention is not always the most important aspect to consider in literary criticism. Recognizing that the author's intention may be lost in interpretation and that the author cannot dictate what the reader gleans from his words, Lewis says, "The critic has great freedom to range without fear of contradiction from the author's superior knowledge" (140). Lewis thus makes a guided case for the role of a good reader and critic of literature, and how any work, such as *Catcher in the Rye* can be read closely, yet widely.

The Critique

Context of *Catcher in the Rye*. Lewis's framework may be applied appropriately to *Catcher in the Rye.* First, Lewis would consider how to receive rather than use this text. The application of this principle of his method of criticism helps alleviate the controversial elements of the novel by providing a standard by which to judge *Catcher*. If it has nothing of merit even when read well, then a fair judgment can be made of its value to the reader. Mizruchi makes the claim that "Nearly everyone has read *Catcher in the Rye*, but few have read it well" (24). She describes at length how critics receive Holden's journey. The innocence he is intent on keeping intact, at least for those he can spare, is "a sign of immaturity" (35). Only children could hope to have such a compassionate harmony and to keep the real world's inconsistencies at bay. Holden is learning through

his experiences, and it is painful but necessary for him to realize that the world cannot be as he fantasizes. Mizruchi says, “The recognition that Holden Caulfield is flawed, a whiner and hypocrite, is the sign that the reader has matured” (25). This recognition insinuates the reader has read the book a second time. If a reader has the desire to read *Catcher* again later on in life, then maybe the book has more to say than the reader initially expected.

The text must be fully encountered even in its guileless presentation, as Lewis would not shy away from the anti-conservative characteristics. Holden fears what he does not know and holds to childish ways. When the reader understands this tension, the text can be received. Slabey describes the difference between the character and author’s view of innocence and how the views complement each other. “Holden,” he says, “equates innocence with the Puritan definition, sex being something he does not understand and knowledge something he is afraid of” (180). Holden’s views make more sense when understood in context. Salbey goes on, “Salinger, on the other hand, affirms the Humanist position: man cannot remain a child forever; he must lose his ‘innocence’ and come to grips with reality (which is a mixture of good and evil), assume moral responsibility, and perform meaningful acts; withdrawal is not an effective means of coping with the world’s distress” (180). Yet Salinger himself withdrew, and this fact perhaps illuminates the author’s own inconsistencies, thus giving the reader a realistic view of what Holden struggles with.

Next, Lewis would engage with the text itself. *Catcher in the Rye* is written in first person from the eyes of Holden Caulfield, a prep-school drop-out who is fed up with

phonies. From an institute far removed from the events that take place, he reminisces on his dissatisfaction with life. The narrative of his journey starts at the desolate school grounds, where he finds no friendship. He takes a train into New York City and checks in to a swanky hotel. He drifts into a bar, wanders the streets, and ponders his situation. He neglects to tell his parents that he has flunked out of another school. He visits his little sister Phoebe at home, yet remains undiscovered by his parents. While walking along the sidewalk, Holden reveals that he sees himself as the catcher in the rye:

> I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around - nobody big, I mean - except me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff - I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing I'd really like to be. I know it's crazy. (Salinger 1)

This revelation is the framework of the entire novel: Holden wishes to save others from the loss of innocence he has endured. Holden experiences a harsh reality, and his reflection on it is confused, yet honest; this is what Lewis would really want to focus on.

Then, Lewis would look to what critics have said about the novel. *Catcher* was published in 1951 and within two weeks secured the top position on *The New York Times* best-seller list for thirty weeks (Telgen 116). Its popularity among teenagers and young adults - who are tough critics in a way that gauges the relevancy of a text - was sustained by its “fresh, brash style and anti-establishment attitudes—typical attributes of many

people emerging from the physical and psychological turmoil of adolescence" (Telgen 116). However, relatable as it was, Catcher's reception beyond its audience was often negative. In "Cherished and Cursed: Toward a Social History of *The Catcher in the Rye*," Stephen Whitfield traces the novel's acclamations and rejections since publication, mentioning cases of the book's involvement with mentally unstable people committing illegal acts, censorship in schools, political agendas, and allusions to the Cold War. Helen Frangedis explains her perspective as a teacher in "Dealing with the Controversial Elements in The Catcher in the Rye" and explains that "[t]he foremost allegation made against Catcher is, of course, that it teaches loose moral codes; that it glorifies attitudes and behaviors which parents condemn in their teenagers – drinking, smoking, lying, promiscuity, and more" (72). Whitfield offers more explanation: "Salinger's novel may also be about history veering out of control, about the abyss into which parents could no longer prevent their offspring from staring, about the impotence to which a can-do people was unaccustomed" (593). Holden's unprecedented stream of consciousness exposes his candid experience of life, which frightens and inspires readers. While the novel is not so dense readers cannot understand what is happening, it does require a reader's willingness to reflect on the implications of how the adolescent mind is shaped by society and an empathy towards Salinger who was candid enough to paint the image of Holden.

Finally, Lewis would consider the intentions of the author. Probably intended for adults, *Catcher* was produced as a reflection on loneliness and the loss of innocence. Robert Slabey says that the "core conflict" of Holden's life, in short, is "how he can hang onto the innocence of childhood while moving, inexorably, into the phony world of

adulthood, or, how he can discover that changeless, inviolate innocence that never flies away" (122). Adults reading *Catcher* might recognize the times of their lives when they felt pressured on all sides to conform to society, to become a grown-up version of themselves. According to Danielle Roemer, "The novel encourages readers to consider some of the emergent yet expectable dynamics of everyday identity…by referencing dynamics of personal storytelling, which is 'the making of identity across separation'" (Roemer 5). Yet *Catcher* appeals to high-school aged students, because, in addition to this idea of personal identity, it unabashedly relates emotions centered on loneliness. In the book, Mr. Antolini subtly appeals to Holden's dream: "I can very clearly see you dying nobly for some highly unworthy cause" (244). Mr. Antolini is pointing out that many have been "just as troubled morally and spiritually" as Holden, and that he is not the first person in history to be "sickened by human behavior." He reminds Holden, "You're a student whether the idea appeals to you or not" (Salinger 180). So whether Salinger intended for adults to take away a nostalgic reflection, or teenagers to search for their own identity in the face of social pressures, all readers are left with some effect of the difficulty of being human.

Furthermore, in understanding the intentions of the author, Lewis would be concerned with Salinger's background, not necessarily the intricacies of his psyche. Salinger's life closely resembles Holden's life, as he also attended private schools and found disappointment in making relationships with people. Susan Mizruchi, in "The School of Martyrdom: Culture and Class in Catcher in the Rye," points out these similarities:

> A set of letters in New York's Morgan library released soon after Salinger's death yields another tantalizing example of Salinger's hunger for meaning. Over the ten years he took writing *The Catcher in the Rye*, J. D. Salinger succeeded in Holdenizing himself thoroughly. The diction of these letters to a friend, extending from 1951 through 1990, parallels strikingly that of his teenage alter-ego, while their content confirms the author's and character's shared preoccupation with religion, their shared hankering for spiritual intensity. (37)

Depicted in the character of Holden, Salinger wrestled with the meaning of life and related to his readers the emotions this crisis elicits.

The authors that influenced Salinger would be of much interest to Lewis' critique because such a list provides a canon for accessing Salinger, yet insinuates an appreciation of those authors' works as well. Michael Katz, in his article "The Fiery Furnace of Doubt," explains at length Fyoder Dostoevsky's impact on Salinger. He says that J.D. Salinger only granted a few interviews, and once said, "A Writer, when he's asked to discuss his craft, ought to get up and call out in a loud voice just the names of writers he loves. I love Kafka, Flaubert, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Proust, O'Casey, Rilke, Lorca, Keats, Rimbaud, Burns, Emily Brontë, Jane Austen, Henry James, Blake, Coleridge" (Katz 536). Salinger never did share much about his life and he lived as a recluse to avoid the limelight. However, the parallels between his life and the book are worth considering, because to Lewis, they help illuminate who the character Holden is, and therefore make his complexity more accessible to the reader. This discussion of *Catcher* in light of Lewis's reading tactics clarifies how Christians might approach any

controversial work.

The Christian

To Appreciate Art. C.S. Lewis has much to say about how to cultivate a perspective on literature. He insinuates that discretion is mandatory, while subjectivity is optional. The premise of his view is straightforward: "If you don't read good books you will read bad ones" ("Learning in War-Time" 33). He makes several distinctions between good and bad art. In "Different Tastes in Literature," Lewis says, "I am going to submit that, in a certain recognizable sense, bad art never succeeds with anyone" (119). Lewis takes pains to describe what he means by bad art:

> But have we evidence that they fill in anyone's life the place that good art fills in the lives of those who love it? Look at the man who enjoys bad music, while he is enjoying it. His appetite is indeed hearty. He is prepared to hear his favourite any number of times a day. But he does not necessarily stop talking while it is going on. He joins in. He whistles, beats time with his feet, dances round the room, or uses his cigarette or mug as a conductor's baton. And when it is over, or before it is over, he will be talking to you about something else. I mean when the actual performance is over; when it is over in another sense, when that song or dance has gone out of fashion, he never thinks of it again except perhaps as a curiosity. ("Different Tastes in Literature" 120)

The instant disinterestedness of the man who enjoys bad music gives an example of how a person who enjoys bad literature may look.

Not only is the awareness of bad art necessary, but good taste implies an interest

in good art. Lewis says, “We should, indeed, be justified in propagating good taste on the ground that cultured pleasure in the arts is more varied, intense and lasting, than vulgar or ‘popular’ pleasure” (“Christianity and Culture” 176). Good art is not necessarily popular art. Lewis says, “The point is that no one cares about bad art in the same way as some care about good” (“Different Tastes in Literature” 124). The debate can get tricky, so Lewis is careful to be specific, “We have, in fact, been the victims of a pun. The proper statement is that some men like bad art: but that good art produces a response for which liking is the wrong word. And the other response has, perhaps, never been produced in anyone by bad art” (“Different Tastes in Literature” 122). Lewis talks at length about how good and bad art elicit experiences in the reader, and thereby defines what he means by good art. He says, “I suggest that any work which has ever produced intense and ecstatic delight in anyone – which has ever really mattered – has got inside the ring fence, and that most of what we call popular art has never been a candidate for entry. It was not trying to do that: its patrons didn’t want it to do that: had never conceived that art could do that or was meant to” (“Different Tastes in Literature” 124). In his *Preface to Paradise Lost*, Lewis says, “We may therefore allow poets to tell us (at least if they are experienced in the same kind of composition) whether it is easy or difficult to write like Milton, but not whether the reading of Milton is a valuable experience” (11). On the other hand, good art creates a unique experience, while the experiences offered by bad art are not of the same sort.

Of judging good art, Lewis’s principles work to form his framework. Lewis makes a poignant point with regard to the Christian, saying, “No one, presumably, is

really maintaining that a fine taste in the arts is a condition of salvation … Instead of judging readers' literary taste by the things they read, why should we not instead judge literature by the way they read it" ("Christianity and Culture" 168). In other words, define what constitutes "good reading" rather than what criteria make for "good books."

To Read Well. In his works *Experiment in Criticism*, "On Criticism" in *On Stories, The Personal Heresy*, and various excerpts of letters sent among his colleagues and family members, Lewis explains how to go about reading well and discreetly. For instance, *An Experiment* is at once "a winsome apology for Lewis's own reading habits and preferences, and a cogent critique of all forms of critical snobbery that rob readers of literary pleasure in the dubious name of "Good Taste" (Edwards 171). Yet, readers should be careful not to think too much of themselves for crafting a solid interpretation. Lewis explains what a poor critic might do to deem the goodness of a work. He says, "[I]nstead of telling us what is good and bad in a book, [the critic] invents stories about the process which led to the goodness and badness" ("On Criticism" 136). This invention of a process, or rather a list of what to look for and what to avoid, is not the approach Lewis called for. Again, Lewis wants to know what happens to the reader while reading and how this observation can illuminate the reader's discreet judgment of the book.

This discussion of reading well is not to assert that all Christians must read the exact same canon Lewis deems to be good literature in order to cultivate a reasonably good taste for art. If this were the case, then a reader might always be one book short from perfecting his or her insight on literature, and the desire to read would present too many daunting literary goals that could never be achieved. Imagine starting a journey in

reading good literature too late in life and hardly making a dent in the reading list; the constant disappointment would be overwhelming. Christ-followers as readers should not focus on being exactly like Lewis in literary criticism because that would require focusing too much on the task and expectations rather than the enjoyment of art. Lewis appears to have recognized his disposition to reading literature with such a cool countenance. Readers should take heed to Lewis' advice and cultivate their own style of critique that promotes good reading of literature, even controversial works.

To Read *Catcher*. *Catcher in the Rye* proves to hold some merit when judged according to Lewis's principles. He says in "Christianity and Culture," "If we are to convert our heathen neighbours, we must understand their culture" (171). Yet this understanding is done with grace and caution. Even as Lewis says, "I still maintain that what enraptures and transports is always good," he is not suggesting that readers should disregard their moral standards ("Different Tastes in Literature" 124). An exercise of good judgment is always essential.

One of the reasons *Catcher in the Rye* has continued to be popular, especially among teenagers, is because of its candid reflections on human nature. Lewis says, "Perhaps any book which has really excoriated any reader, however young, has some real good in it" ("Different Tastes in Literature" 122). When one reads *Catcher*, there is left in the reader a desire for something more. Holden finds a resolution in connecting with other people and his revelation suggests Christian love. This desire could point readers to the search for meaning, which Christianity offers. Lewis says, "How little people know who think that holiness is dull. When one meets the real thing...it is irresistible" (*Letters*

To An American Lady). Reading allegorical Christian-ized books on redemption may suggest to some readers a confirmation of Christianity's goodness, but the more challenging books that involve reading with discretion cause the Christian and non-Christian to exercise critical thinking. Lewis says more, "Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered" (*The Weight of Glory* 58). On this notion, *Catcher in the Rye* presents a bad philosophy that begs for something more. Frangedis summarizes the issue: "Holden Caulfield, like that of all human beings, is complex and, therefore, difficult to judge. Good literature, reflective of human life, is also very complex; therefore, it too deserves close scrutiny before one can pass a just verdict on its moral worth" (75). By this judgment, *Catcher in the Rye* may be deemed good literature because it reflects a character's experience that causes a contemplative reaction in the reader.

Conclusion

C.S. Lewis' framework of literary critique and its application to *Catcher in the Rye* provides readers with a rationale for discretion when reading controversial works. The issue resolved is not what specific criterion constitutes a bad book, but what discipline a reader should take to read well and therefore be a good judge of literature. Lewis set out to be a great poet but found himself in the throes of literary discussion of all sorts. His contributions to literary criticism are valuable, but his insights to the Christian faith are lasting. The biblical command for Christians to glorify God in all aspects of life is not to be disregarded when considering literature, but just the opposite. Christians should aim to be the best critics possible with fair and tasteful approaches to literature of

all types. As *Catcher in the Rye* suggests, man is searching for meaning, especially when transitioning from the stage of child-like innocence to the devastation of adult isolation. Lewis discovered that reading books could offer more than a memorable story and encouraged readers to seek the pleasure and joy that can be found in reading good literature.

Works Cited

Brown, Devin. *A Life Observed: A Spiritual Biography of C.S. Lewis*. Brazos Press, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2013.

Clark, David George. *C.S. Lewis: A Guide to His Theology*. John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2008.

C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*. Cambridge University Press, 1961.

---"Christianity and Culture." *Christian Reflections,* pp. 14-44. William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1967.

--- *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis, Volume 1: Family Letters*, 1905-1931. Zondervan, 2009.

---"George Orwell." *On Stories*. Harper Collins, 1947.

---*God in the Dock*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2014.

---*The Four Loves*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1991.

--- "Learning in War Time." *The Weight of Glory,* p. 33. Harper Collins, 1976.

---*Mere Christianity*. Geoffrey Bles, 1952.

---"On Criticism." *On Stories*. Harper Collins, 1947.

--- and E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Personal Heresy*. Oxford University Press, 1939.

---*Preface to Paradise Lost*. Oxford University Press, 1942.

"The Catcher in the Rye." *Novels for Students,* ed. by Diane Telgen, vol. 1, 1997, pp. 116-137. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX2591400016/GVRL?u=vic_liberty&sid=GVRL&xid=82900c03.

Edwards, Bruce L. *C.S. Lewis: Life, Works, and Legacy*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007.

Frangedis, Helen. “Dealing with the Controversial Elements in The Catcher in the Rye." *The English Journal*, vol. 77, no. 7, Nov. 1988, pp. 72-75. *JSTOR*, doi:10.2307/818945.

Graham, Sarah. J.D. *Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye: A Routledge Study Guide*, Taylor and Francis, 2007. *ProQuest*, ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=3060603.

Jacquette, Dale. “Salinger’s World of Adolescent Disillusion.” *Philosophy and Literature*, vol. 39, no. 1 Sept. 2015, pp. 156-77. *ProQuest*, ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1784797971?accountid=12085.

Katz, Michael R. “The Fiery Furnace of Doubt.” *Southwest Review*, vol. 97, no. 4, 2012, pp. 536-46. *Academic OneFile*, link.galegroup.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/apps/doc/A310366854/AONE?u=vic_liberty&sid=AONE&xid=52f4c9c1.

Lacy, Robert. “Sing a Song of Sunny.” *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 113, no. 2, Spring 2005, pp. 309-16, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/27549670.

Ohmann, Carol and Richard Ohmann. “Reviewers, Critics, and The Catcher in the Rye.” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 3, no. 1, Fall 1976, pp. 15-38. *ProQuest*, ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/1297304487?accountid=12085.

Miller, Jr., James E. “‘Catcher’ in and out of History.” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 3, no. 3, Spring 1977, pp. 599-603. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1342942.

Mizruchi, Susan. “The School of Martyrdom: Culture and Class in Catcher in the Rye.” *Religion & Literature*, vol. 47, no. 2, Summer 2015, pp. 21-40. *EBSCOhost*, ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=117378590&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Pinsker, Sanford. *The Catcher in the Rye: Innocence Under Pressure*. Twane Publishers, 1993. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, link.galegroup.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/apps/pub/9780805719338/GVRL?u=vic_liberty&sid=GVRL.

Powell, Lawrence Clark. “Catching Up with ‘The Catcher.’” *ALA Bulletin*, vol. 55, no. 6, June 1961, pp. 478-79. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25696174.

Roemer, Danielle M. “The Personal Narrative and Salinger’s Catcher in the Rye.” *Western Folklore*, vol. 51, no. 1, Jan. 1992, pp. 5-10. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1499640.

Salinger, J.D. *Catcher in the Rye.* Little Brown and Company, 1951.

Slabey, Robert M. “The Catcher in the Rye: Christian Theme and Symbol.” *College Language Association Journal*, vol. 6, no. 3, Mar. 1963, pp. 170-83. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/44324419.

Taylor, Bryce A. “Holden Caulfield: Sort of a Christian.” *Religion & the Arts*, vol. 18, no. 5, Dec. 2014, pp. 653-71. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1163/15685292-01805003.

Thomas, R. Murray. *What Schools Ban and Why*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 2008. *ProQuest*, ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=3001265.

Walsh, Chad. “Impact on America.” *Light on C.S. Lewis*, edited by Jocelyn Gibb, Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966.

Whitfield, Stephen J. “Cherished and Cursed: Toward a Social History of The Catcher in the Rye.” *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 70, no. 4, Dec. 1997, pp. 567-600. *ProQuest*, search.proquest.com/docview/215291916/fulltextPDF/D2940101EB904180PQ/1?accountid=12085.