Although C.S. Lewis was a novelist, a critic and a writer of popular theology, he is better known as a literary critic in the academic world. Some of his critical works have been acclaimed as major contributions to literary criticism, and his critical theories have attracted new interest in recent years because of their relevance to the contemporary situation in literature and their challenging propositions. Though the present study is concerned only with his critical theories, some of his critical works have also been examined along with his theories as they contain insights, views and theories.

The development of his critical theories can be traced back as far as his childhood. He was a precocious child and by the age of ten he had already acquired the habit of writing fiction and poetry. These childhood ventures into writing made him aware of the qualities essential for a good work of art. Some of the qualities he frequently mentioned in his letters to Arthur Greeves, his childhood friend, were clarity, conciseness, elevation of style, evocativeness and romantic charm.
Lewis' potential as a critic became evident while he was studying in the English school, Oxford University: his performance there indicated that he had the ability for extraordinary scholastic attainments, and also had original critical ideas as some of his tutorials there became seminal works for his published essays and books later.

Lewis firmly established himself as a first rate critic and "writer of exceptional imaginative power" after the publication of The Allegory of Love. Another book that won wide critical acclaim was A Preface to Paradise Lost. He also wrote one volume, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century (excluding drama) for The Oxford History of English Literature. It was highly praised as "being brilliantly written, compulsively readable, and constantly illuminated by sentences that are true as they are witty". Besides, he wrote essays on theory and also on major authors in poetry, drama, and the novel from Chaucer's time to the present. But his most important books on critical theory were The Personal Heresy and An Experiment in Criticism.

As Lewis responded to literature as a romantic, any discussion on his literary theory has to begin with his romanticism. Romanticism manifested itself quite early in his childhood, and at the centre of his romanticism was Sehnsucht. Sehnsucht is an intense kind of longing which borders on pain but which is a delight in itself. It can be
triggered, for instance, on seeing a beautiful sight. But its visitation can neither be forced nor discontinued at will. But when it comes, the delight is so intense that no other earthly joy can be compared with it.

Sehnsucht made a powerful impact on Lewis as a writer. It made him aware of the existence of a transcendental realm from where thrills of joy come. It also made him extraordinarily sensitive to the beauty of nature. As a critic, he formulated a theory on transcendental longing which found artistic expression in his novel The Pilgrim's Regress.

However, despite the presence of this romantic temperament, it is difficult to label Lewis as a romantic critic. Because he was very eclectic in his approach and did not subscribe to certain important romantic theories such as the expressive theory of art, the intentionality of the poet, the theory of genius and so on. But his eclecticism does not end here. His eclectic approach was applied to the Neoclassicists as well. He shared similar views with T.S. Eliot on tradition and the impersonality of art. He also had a common approach with the New Critics to textual analysis. But he disagreed quite strongly with Eliot on his view that only practicing contemporary poets could be judges of Paradise Lost. And Lewis also had no faith in F.R. Leavis'
belief that civilization could be saved by discreet literary criticism.

Lewis was a scholar with great natural intelligence, analytical power and dialectical skills; in addition he enjoyed polemics - both private and public. And one fortunate aspect of this rather disagreeable habit is that some of his best insights, views and theories on literature emerged from his polemical writings. One of such exposition is his book, The Personal Heresy. The book came out as the result of a controversy between E.M. Tillyard and C.S. Lewis on the role of the poet’s personality in a work of art. In this book Lewis defends the view that a poem is not the expression of the poet’s personality. He contends that in reading a poem we apprehend what the poet presents to us in the poem and his skill in presenting it but not his personality. When we read a poem we look at something with the poet’s eyes and see as he saw it. It is true that in the act of reading we come into contact with the poet’s consciousness in a very intimate manner as he is sharing it with us. Often this consciousness is mistaken as his personality but they are not identical. This is not his normal consciousness as it is a heightened one and comes only at certain times, so it cannot be his personality. In fact, an act of composition is an escape from personality rather than an expression of it. Let us illustrate the point with the example of a poet who is
presenting an intensely dramatic situation. In presenting the situation, though the character may be in the overwhelming grip of a particular emotion, the poet has already escaped from that emotion to be able to present it to us objectively.

In *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, Lewis is at his polemical best. In the book he defends Milton's epic against detractors, and he also refutes two errors in the interpretation of *Paradise Lost*. In his defense of *Paradise Lost* he contends that Milton's criticism is lost in misunderstanding because many modern readers are unfamiliar with the epic form and they set out to find in *Paradise Lost* "little patches of delight" as if they were reading lyrics, and when they are not found those readers get frustrated. This happens because the readers have no idea that in a long narrative poem the line is subordinated to the paragraph, and the paragraph to the book and the book to the whole; and they condemn those properties which the poet laboured hardest to attain. Lewis, therefore, believes that the study of Milton should be preceded by a study of the epic in general.

Epic poetry is a species of the genus narrative poetry, and Lewis divides epic poetry into primary epic and secondary epic. This is simply a chronological division without any suggestion of one being superior to the other. Primary epic is oral, solemn, aristocratic, festive, public and ceremonial; and attains its effect through the use of stock-
words, phrases, whole lines and also a special diction which is familiar and yet non-colloquial.

Then Lewis discusses the subject of 'primary epic'. He says it doesn't have to be on a subject of national or cosmic importance. All it requires is that it has to be a heroic story, e.g. The Iliad. In the poem the Trojan war provides only the background for a personal story of Achilles. Concerning the subject of 'secondary epic', Lewis says Virgil was the one who invented it. He was interested in an epic to rival Homer, and he chose a national theme to satisfy the Roman spirit and found a solution by narrowing down his theme to a national legend and handling it with great skill. By discovering this procedure, Virgil discovered new possibilities for poetry itself; and any further development of the secondary epic proceeds from Virgil. In a way the secondary epic is more complicated than the primary as it has to create solemnity without external aids such as a hall, a garlanded priest and an altar. Moreover, the secondary epic requires even greater solemnity than the primary one as it is meant for a person in his armchair in the privacy of his room. So blaming it for being ritualistic is to blame it for being what it is intended to be.

Lewis next discusses the technique of 'secondary epic'. In general it is produced by the elevation of style. In Paradise Lost, grandeur is produced mainly by three things:
the use of slightly unfamiliar words and constructions, the use of proper names, and continued allusion to what heightens our sense experience, such as light, darkness, storm, flowers, and jewel. The effect is mainly achieved by unremitting manipulation of his reader. He makes him feel that he is attending an actual recitation. Another technique is the evocation of stock responses like constancy in love and friendship or loyalty in political life. Yet one more technique in epic style is continuity which is done by maintaining a sense of continuity between sentences, paragraphs and books.

In the Preface Lewis attempts to refute two errors that have been prevailing in Milton criticism for more than one hundred years. The first one is the doctrine of unchanging human heart. According to this doctrine the things which separate one age from another are superficial and if we strip people off their beliefs we find the same unchanging human heart. But Lewis points out that this method is absurd as it may deprive a work of its very essence and render it a mere abstraction. For example, we cannot study Hamlet after stripping off the revenge code as Hamlet no longer exists after stripping off that code. In the same way, we cannot study Paradise Lost after stripping off Milton's theology. So Lewis suggests that we rather put ourselves in the position of the character by embracing their traditions and beliefs.
and try to feel how they felt so that the full meaning of the poem may emerge.

The second error is the Satan-hero theory. Lewis contends that though Satan is a magnificent poetic creation it is not meant to be an object of admiration. And he believes that there are both literary and theological evidences in Paradise Lost which confirm this view. As Paradise Lost is an epic, Milton has to treat the satanic predicament in the epic from which involves treating the subject in a grand style by subordinating his absurdity to his misery. Moreover, Satan is the best drawn character in the poem as it is easy to draw a character worse than oneself. So a magnificent Satan emerges. But this is only one side of the picture. Milton also has clearly shown that Satan is full of absurdity. There is a co-existence in him of a subtle intelligence with an incapacity to understand anything. He is the cause of his own predicament. He develops a sense of injured merit after the exaltation of the Messiah as head of the angels though this does not do him injustice in any way. His revolt against God is suicidal as he is a derived being: it is analogous to "the scent of a flower trying to destroy the flower". His degradation is rapid and repelling. He comes to Eden as a spy but soon turns into a prying peeping Tom, and then by his own will turns into a toad and then finally a snake. This progression from hero to
snake was mistakenly considered by some critics as a miscalculation on the part of Milton who made Satan more glorious than intended and then attempting to rectify it again. But Lewis believes it was Milton's design to show Satan at the height of his glory and then trace what becomes of such self-intoxication when confronted with reality.

Lewis had a conservative temperament and his conservation is reflected in his attitude towards modern poetry, and the use of psycho-analysis and anthropology in literary criticism. Regarding modern poetry Lewis feels that it has differentiated itself too much from prose and as a result it has become too difficult for the common people to understand it. Moreover, even for the professionals who read it, the interpretation of poetry has become so subjective and variable that it is no longer possible to tell which is the right interpretation. So the future of such poetry is not promising. Lewis is equally sceptical about the use of psycho-analysis in literary criticism. Because some critics use psycho-analysis to infer the pathology of the poet instead of concentrating on his work and thus, it becomes a digression from genuine criticism. Secondly, Lewis has serious doubts about the interpretation of certain symbols by Freud which are too farfetched to be a contribution to literary criticism. Lewis also finds no merit in the use of anthropology as a critical tool. Anthropology's supposed
contribution is the discovery of the mythical or ritual origin of the romances. But these origins are only conjectural and they may or may not be true. Or even if they are true they have no literary relevance as they simply furnish facts about the origin of a poem and do not reveal anything about the literary equality of the poem.

Lewis was more of a reactionary critic than anything else. An in his book An Experiment in Criticism he is reacting against an extreme form of evaluative criticism prevailing in the universities at that time. In this book he proposes a new system of criticism in which literature is to be judged by the way men read it. He says this is possible because a good book is read in one way and a bad one in another way. And a good book is one which permits, invites and compels good reading. Thus good reading is a key concept in his system. According to him good reading consists in surrendering ourselves totally to a work of art to make ourselves receptive to the work. And this total surrender has something in common with love, religion and intellectual attainment.

Thus in the system, reading is made the basis for our judgement, and any literature which has the power to compel good reading can be considered potentially good literature. However, to distinguish the good from the bad, Lewis uses double distinctions. He puts some books beyond the pale, and
then from within the pale the better has to be separated again from the worse. In judging readers, he does the same. To quote him, "we make a broad but hardly disputable division between those who read seldom, hastily, hazily, forgetfully, only to kill time, and those to whom reading is an arduous and important activity. But within the latter class, we distinguish 'good' from 'bad' taste".  

Then Lewis enumerates the advantages of the system. Firstly, it fixes our attention on the act of reading. Books are only potential literature and they become actual only when read. So also is literary taste. It is a potentiality till we read literature. But in reading, both scholarship and criticisms find their fulfilment as their sole function is to multiply, prolong, and safeguard experiences of good reading. The system thus helps us to get away from abstraction and focus our attention on the act of reading literature itself. Secondly, the system "puts our feet on solid ground, whereas the usual one puts them on quicksand". So it is risky because one begins to condemn somebody's taste on the strength of an inference. For example, my taste may be condemned simply because I like a particular author. But one's condemnation is based on either one's own isolated personal reaction, like my own, or the prevalent view of the literary world. If it is the former, as one has not heard my view it is a one-sided judgement and one is never sure that
one is right. So one's condemnation of my taste is simply insolent. But if it is based on the prevalent view how long is it going to prevail. Because literary judgements change according to the vagaries of fashion, and dethronements and restorations are almost monthly events and one can trust no judgement as permanent.

But suppose one goes the other way round and observes the reading habit of men one will find oneself standing on firmer ground. For example, suppose one had encouraged me to talk about Lamb and discovered that I was ignoring things he really has and reading into him a great deal that he does not have and also that I seldom read what I so praised and the very terms of praise revealed how completely it was for me a stimulant to wishful reveries of my own. And suppose one went around and on testing others, one found the same kind of result, one has solid ground to presume that Lamb is probably a bad author as the worst kind of reading is used by those who enjoy Lamb. Thus the observation of how men read provides a strong basis for judgement on what they read, as "the distinction between attentive and inattentive, obedient and willful, disinterested and egoistic mode of reading is permanent, if ever valid, valid everywhere and always". 6

Thirdly, it would make critical condemnations difficult. Lewis considers this an advantage as condemnation has become too easy which has produced detrimental effects on
sane criticism. All the great names in English literature have been condemned except half a dozen protected by the current critical establishment. These dethronements are a great waste of energy as the real function of criticism is not to denigrate somebody's favourites but to help him to enjoy something better. In the established system, in judging books, a critic puts some books beyond the pale and some within. But often the books he puts beyond the pale may be books he has never read. However, in the new system it works in the open. If we can observe the reading habit of people, we can assign those habits to the 'literary' and 'unliterary'. If we find that a book is read only in one way and no other we have a prima facie case that the book is bad. But on the other hand, if a book is passionately and constantly loved and reread by the reader or readers, we can with certainty say that the book has to be good no matter what the critics or the current literary fashions say.

In An Experiment in Criticism, apart from advocating a new system of criticism to replace the present evaluative system, particularly the judgemental and condemnatory type, Lewis also refutes certain literary assumptions of his age. The dominant one among them was the assumption that civilization could be saved by literary criticism. But Lewis had no interest in a substitute religion as his critical
position was aesthetic rather than moral. And in *An Experiment in Criticism* he emphatically denies that literature is to be valued for telling us truths about life and as aid to cultural propaganda.

Thus as a critic, Lewis was a complex man: he was a romantic who could not be called a romantic critic, he was a conservative man whose conservatism did not prevent him from being eclectic as he would not hesitate to learn from different schools of criticism if it suited his taste; he was a conservative man who was also a reactionary. These qualities put him at odds with his times at times. But they also made him an original critic and thinker.

The present dissertation is an exploration of Lewis' works to study his insights, views and theories on literature and to assess his contribution to the modern critical tradition.