In *An Experiment in Criticism*, Lewis propounds a new system which is to be experimented in literary criticism. In the system, he proposes to judge literature by the way men read it, instead of judging men's taste by the things they read. This is possible because good literature can be read in a certain way and a bad one in another. Good literature is one that permits, invites and compels good reading but a bad one does the same for bad reading. Thus good reading or primary experience constitutes a key concept in the system as it is the test used to determine the worth of a book. But, then, what is good reading? According to Lewis, good reading consists in surrendering ourselves completely to a work of art by getting ourselves out of the way and by emptying ourselves, as it were, to make ourselves receptive to the work.

However, before launching into a detailed discussion about the system, Lewis first discusses the reading habits of the literary and unliterary, their response to myth, fantasy, realism and poetry as a preparatory measure. Let us first take up the reading habits of the literary and unliterary. Although there are many readers, all readers are not capable
of good reading. Only very few have the capacity to read and receive a profound literary experience. This special receptivity to literature is shown right from childhood. Though the same text book is prescribed for children the way they respond to it differs enormously. To categorise the two kinds of readers, Lewis uses the terms the "literary few" and the "unliterary majority or many", and each category has its special characteristics.

Firstly, the majority never read anything twice. Once a book is read they feel that it has been used and they cast it aside like yesterday’s newspaper. But the few, who are readers of great works, may read a book ten or twenty or thirty times in the course of their life.

Secondly, the majority though they also read often, do not value reading much and turn to it only as a last source and abandon it with alacrity when another pastime turns up. Reading is kept for railway journeys, illnesses or moments of enforced solitude. Or read it while listening to the radio or while engaged in a desultory conversation. But the few read wholeheartedly and also seek solitude and leisure to do so; and feel impoverished if they are denied opportunity for such attentive and undisturbed reading even for a few days.

Thirdly, when the literary read a great work of art for the first time, it is so momentous an experience that "only experience of love, religion, or bereavement can furnish a
standard of comparison. Their whole consciousness is changed. They have become what they were not before. "1 But it is not so with the unliterary majority. When they read a story or novel it is only a marginal experience and nothing much happens to them.

Fourthly, what the few read is constantly and prominently present to them. They mouth over favourite lines or stanzas in solitude, discuss books at length with others, and scenes and characters from book provide them with standards to interpret or sum up their own experiences. But the unliterary seldom think or talk of their reading because what they read has no impact on them — transient or enduring.

Lewis enumerates some yet more characteristics of the unliterary:

1) The unliterary, uncompelled, read nothing except narrative. But it does not mean that they all read fiction. The most unliterary sticks to the news. He reads daily with great relish who has married, rescued, robbed, raped or murdered whom, in places unseen by him, under circumstances unclear to him. He is not very different from those who read the lowest kind of fiction as both are interested only in events. But there is a difference. Because, "like Shakespeare's Mopsa, he wants to 'be sure they are true'. This is because he is so very unliterary that he can hardly
think of invention as a legitimate, or even a possible activity (the history of criticism shows that it took centuries to get Europe as a whole over this stile).

2) The unliterary have no ears. They read exclusively by eye. There is no difference for them between horrible cacophonies and exquisite rhythm and vocalic melody.

3) They are unconscious of style and prefer books badly written. So if you give an unliterary twelve-year old a book like *Treasure Island* you will often be disappointed. It looks like the right kind of fare for him but the precise descriptions, the realistic dialogues and the vivid characters are what put him off and soon he will lay it aside.

4) They enjoy narratives in which the verbal element is reduced to the minimum just enough to extract the event as we find them in strip stories told in pictures or films with the least possible dialogue.

5) They demand swift-moving narratives. Anything that is slow on long-winded annoys them.

Lewis elaborates more why the above mentioned characteristics exist in the unliterary. He says the unliterary "reads only narrative because only there will he find an Event". He is deaf to the aural beauty of what he reads because rhythm and melody do not help him to discover the event as to who did what to whom. He likes strip
narratives because nothing stands between him and the event there. And he likes a swift story because it is all events. His preference of style is rather deplorable but it has a reason. This happens because he pays attention for extracting the event. The result is an unhappy one. It becomes impossible for him to conceive, imagine and feel as invited by the words, and thus it deprives him a full and profound experience of what he reads.

Good writing offends the unliterary. It is either too spare or too full for him. For example, in describing a garden, if an author gives a precise impression of the garden, he calls it padding. On the other hand if he makes only a laconic statement about a specific activity in the garden it becomes a vacuum which is too bare for his imagination to breathe in. Both the problems are related to his having a defective imagination. He lacks disciplined and attentive imagination to make full use of a scene or emotion, and also lacks the fertile imagination to build on bare facts. Because of this deficiency, the unliterary demands specific qualities from literature to satisfy his needs.

What they therefore demand is a decent pretence of description and analysis, not to be read with care but sufficient to give them the feeling that the action is not going on in a vacuum — a few vague references to trees, shade and grass for a wood, or some allusion to popping corks and groaning tables for a banquet. For this purpose the more cliches the better.
Such passages are to them what the backcloth is to most theatregoers.²

It has been said earlier that the unliterary wants nothing more in his reading than the event. But all events are not of the same nature, and some naturally appeal to him more than the others. They are of three main types. Firstly, it is the exciting event which consists of imminent dangers and narrow escapes. In this type of event pleasure is derived from the winding up and relaxing of anxiety. The sensation of fear is mixed up with a certain amount of pleasure as it is evident in the experiences of gamblers and mountain climbers. Secondly, they enjoy stories with a mystery element in them which arouses, prolongs, exasperates and then finally satisfies their inquisitiveness. Thirdly, they enjoy reading stories which give them vicarious pleasure or happiness. They may be stories of love or success or high or wealthy life.

The pleasure derived from the above three elements are universal and not confined to the unliterary alone. But what is uncommon is that "the unliterary are unliterary not because they enjoy stories in these ways, but because they enjoy them in no other."³

We find that even among the literary readers there are some who cannot be called without false characterisation, true readers or lovers of literature because no matter how much they read they do not read literature for its own sake.
but read it either for personal or economic or social reasons.

The first among them are the mere professionals. We find this sort of people in some foreign universities where they cannot keep their jobs unless they keep on publishing articles "each of which must say, or even seem to say, something new about some literary work". Equally unfortunate are the reviewers. They have to read novel after novel as quickly as they can. So reading becomes mere work and the literature they read, no longer exists in its own right but becomes mere raw materials on which to prepare reviews. They might at one time have full response to literature but now professional pressure and overwork has destroyed genuine appreciation of literature.

Next comes the status seekers. In the way some families or circles are expected to take interest in hunting and sports they take it upon themselves as a social necessity to display some interest in the approved literature "especially the new and astonishing works, and those which have been banned or have become in some other way subjects of controversy." Readers of this kind have no taste of their own and they faithfully and at times vulgarly approve or disapprove whatever current literary fashion dictates. "They are entirely dominated by fashion. They drop the Georgians and begin to admire Mr. Eliot, acknowledge the 'dislodgement
of Milton, and discover Hopkins at exactly the right moment. They will not like your book if the dedication begins with To instead of For”.

The devotee of culture reads to improve himself to become a more complete man. He is sincere and may be a modest man. And his reading is not dictated by the prevailing fashion. In fact, he may restrict his reading too exclusively to the established authors of every age and nation. He remains content with few favourites and makes no experiments. But he is also not a true lover of literature. Because he is like a man who plays games only to improve his health. If a man plays solely for health, and not for its own sake, games become exercises and are no longer games.

This sort of laborious misreading is prevalent especially in our age among the literary Puritans. Making English literature a subject in the schools and universities has one sad result. The conscientious and submissive young people are indoctrinated in the early years that it is meritorious to study the great authors. They may be agnostics but they still have the Puritan conscience of their ancestors and they get into a very regrettable state of mind.

The Puritan conscience works on without the Puritan theology — like millstones grinding nothing; like digestive juices working on an empty stomach and producing ulcers. The unhappy youth applies to literature all the scruples, the rigorism, the self-examination, the distrust of pleasure, which his forebears applied to
the spiritual life; and perhaps soon all the intolerance and self-righteousness."

Literary Puritans makes solemn readers. But they are too serious as men to be receptive as readers. A serious or true reader reads according to what is intended by the author. "What is meant lightly he will take lightly, what is meant gravely, gravely." But Puritans read everything so seriously that they fail miserably in seeing any humour even in authors like Jane Austen and Chaucer. To become true readers they will have to come to the work with an open mind without any preconceptions.

Over and above these, the literary also misread because of certain misconceptions about literature. The misconception arises from a confusion between life and art which does not allow for the existence of art at all. "Its cruelest form is pilloried in the old story of the backwoodsman in the gallery who shot the 'villain' on the stage." The confusion has two levels. At the lowest level we have readers who want nothing but sensational narrative which they will accept only in the form of news. On a higher level there is a belief that literature gives us knowledge and teaches us truths about life. Dramatists and novelists are praised for theological and philosophical ideas in their works and the artistic inventions and designs are neglected. They are revered as teachers but not sufficiently appreciated as artists. In other words, literature of power is treated as a species

133
within the literature of knowledge. If a child has this habit it is less serious than that of an adult because it maybe transient. Between the ages of twelve to twenty we all get from novels a great deal of information and also misinformation about the world we live in but this use of fiction is abandoned as we grow older. We begin to seek information from more reliable sources, and that is why we have less inclination to take up a new novel to gather information than we had in youth.

The belief that art is an account of real life persists among the literary in a subtle form. For example, there is a belief that tragedy is worth reading because it teaches us the tragic view of life. Lewis found this belief very common among his pupils.

This content is variously described, but in the most widely diffused version it seems to consist of two propositions: (1) That great miseries result from a flaw in the principal sufferer. (2) That these miseries, pushed to the extreme, reveal to us a certain splendour in man, or even in the universe. Though the anguish is great, it is at least not sordid, meaningless, or merely depressing.

Lewis disagrees with this view of tragedy. Because though a flaw in character may cause miseries in life, it will be wishful thinking to conclude that flaw in character
is the typical or usual or ultimate cause of human misery so as to make tragedy a comment on life.

Flaws in character do cause suffering; but bombs and bayonets, cancer or polio, dictators and roadhogs, fluctuation in the value of money or unemployment, and mere meaningless coincidence cause a great deal more. Tribulation falls on the integrated and well adjusted and prudent as readily as on anyone else. Nor do real miseries often end with a curtain and a roll of drums 'in calm of mind, all passion spent'. The dying seldom make magnificent last speeches .... There is no grandeur and no finality. Real sorrow ends neither with a bang nor a whisper.11

As the tragedian's concern is neither to give a faithful depiction of life nor teach a particular philosophy of life, what he does is simply select from reality what his art requires.

The tragedian dare not present the totality of suffering as it usually is in its uncouth mixture of agony with littleness, all the indignities and (save for pity) the uninterestingness of grief. It would ruin his play. It would be merely dull and depressing. He selects from the reality just what his art needs, and what it needs is the exceptional.12

Secondly, it is equally unfounded and untrue that miseries reveal certain splendour in man when pushed to the extreme. Tragedians end their stories with "a sublime and satisfying finale" not because such a finale is characteristic of human misery, but because it is necessary to good drama."13 But readers are deceived by these realistic
pretensions because of their belief that tragedy reflects true life and it conveys to us the tragic view of life. Lewis contends that in real life no tragic grandeur emerges from misery or sorrow. He identifies three types of sorrow. The first can be compared to Dante's spiritual journey through Purgatory. After having descended to the centre, he "ascended again terrace by terrace to the mountain of accepted pain" and finally rising to peace. The second can be compared to a puddle which "always grows wider, shallower, and more wholesome". The third gradually disappears just like any other mood. But there is no tragic grandeur in any one of these. And "to approach anyone in real sorrow with these ideas about tragic grandeur, to insinuate that he is now assuming that 'sceptred pall' would be worse than imbecile: it would be odious".14

There is yet one more erroneous belief that tragedy is truer to life than comedy. This seems to be wholly unfounded. Because "the raw materials are all around us ... It is selection, isolation and patterning"15 that make a play a tragedy or a comedy; and none is truer to life than the other. They are just like two nosegays plucked from the same bush. It is rather odd that some people who consider comedy less true to life than tragedy regard farce as realistic. The confusion "arises from a failure to distinguish between realism of presentation and realism of content".16 The
presence of realism of presentation can make a story quite realistic without realism of content. Thus Chaucer’s *Troilus* appears more realistic and convincing than the Miller’s Tale. The world of farce is a highly idealised world. "It is a paradise of jokes where the wildest coincidences are accepted and everything works together to produce laughter."17

All the three forms of art extract from life just what is suitable for their requirements, and when the raw materials are constructed into works of art and come to life in the hands of the artist their existence has no other design than to be works of art. Because,

Tragedies omit the clumsy and apparently meaningless bludgeoning of much real misfortune and the prosaic littleness which usually rob real sorrows of their dignity. Comedies ignore the possibility that the marriage of lovers does not always lead to permanent, nor even to perfect happiness. Farce excludes pity for its butts in situations where, if they were real, they would deserve it. None of the three kinds is making a statement about life in general. They are all constructions: things made out of the stuff of real life; additions to life rather than comments on it."18

However, what has been said is not to suggest that there is no wisdom, knowledge and experience to be found in the work of a great artist. He impregnates his work throughout with the flavour or feel of that actual life has for him. And we may expect to find many psychological truths
and profound reflections. But of course "all this comes to us, and was very possibly called out of the poet, as the 'spirit' (using that word in a quasi-chemical sense) of a work of art, a play. To formulate it as a philosophy, even if it were a national philosophy, and regard the actual play as primarily a vehicle for that philosophy, is an outrage to the thing the poet has made for us".19

It is certainly an outrage to a work of art but the matter does not end there. It is also a flagrant example of using instead of receiving it, and using inevitably impedes proper reception of the work itself. Because instead of immersing ourselves in it we may return to the work only to find out what it teaches and whether it confirms our beliefs. "The supreme objection to this is that which lies against the popular use of all the arts. We are so busy doing things with the work that we give it too little chance to work on us. Thus increasingly we meet only ourselves."20

In fact, in reading literature, instead of meeting ourselves, we should go beyond ourselves and encounter other persons and enter into their feelings and worlds which may move and affect us profoundly.

... one of the chief operations of art is to remove our gaze from the mirrored face, to deliver us from that solitude. When we read the literature of knowledge we hope, as a result, to think more correctly and clearly. In reading imaginative work, I suggest, we should be much less concerned with altering our own
opinions — though this of course is
sometimes their effect — than with
entering fully into the opinions, and
therefore also the attitudes, feelings
and total experience, of other men.²¹

In contrast to the above mentioned readers who misread
by seeking extra-literary things in literature a good reader
is guarded by the awareness that a good tragedy is not only
logos (something said) but also poiema (something made). The
same rule holds for a novel or a narrative poem. As "they are
complex and carefully made objects" our attention should be
directed to them, because

One of the prime achievements in every
good fiction has nothing to do with truth
or philosophy or a Weltanschauung at all.
It is the triumphant adjustment of two
different kinds of order. On the one
hand, the events (the mere plot) have
their chronological and causal order,
that which they would have in real life.
On the other, all the scenes or the
divisions of the work must be related to
each other according to principles of
design, like the masses in a picture or
the passages in a symphony.²²

While reading "our feelings and imaginations must be
led through 'taste after taste', upheld with kindliest
change. To achieve this, contrast will have to be maintained
between light and darkness, swift and slow, and simple and
complex with natural symmetry "so that the shape of the whole
work will be felt as inevitable and satisfying."²³ Moreover,
none of the parts "should exist solely for the sake of
others". "Every episode, explanation, description, dialogue—ideally every sentence — must be pleasurable and interesting for its own sake." 24

This is the kind of pleasure a good reader derives from his reading of literature because apart from getting totally immersed in the thoughts, attitudes and feelings of the artist, he also experiences as fully as possible the complex and rare delights of whatever a work of art has to provide for the reader. Whereas a literary misreader seeks a good thing in the wrong place and ends up using literature instead of receiving it.

Lewis regrets that the kind of misreading he is protesting against is encouraged in the universities by making English literature an increasingly important academic discipline. Many talented, ingenious and diligent persons with no real literary interest are forced to talk incessantly about books and they have to make books, things they can talk about. "Hence literature becomes for them a religion, a philosophy, a school of ethics, a psychotherapy, a sociology—anything rather than a collection of works of art." 25

Lewis next launches into his discussion on myth. He begins with the nature of myth and then discusses how the literary and unliterary responds to myth. Concerning the nature of myth Lewis enumerates the following characteristics:
1) It is extra-literary. Its effect on the reader does not depend on narrative elements or stylistic devices.

2) It has a sense of inevitability. It strikes us as a permanent object of contemplation rather than as a narration and captures us with its flavour on quality.

3) It has only minimal human sympathy. We do not project ourselves too strongly into the characters as the characters are like shadows in another world.

4) It is fatalistic as it deals with the impossible and preternaturals.

5) It may be sad or joyful but it is always grave.

6) It is awe-inspiring in nature and we feel numinous or mysterious feelings. We feel that something momentous has been communicated to us. In our recurrent effort to conceptualise myth, humanity has a tendency to allegorise myths and get the myths emerge more important than the allegorizations.

Lewis is concerned only with how myth acts on the conscious imagination of the mind as this alone has literary relevance, and he is silent about the pre-history of myth either as primitive science or fossil remains of rituals or as fabrication of medicine men on outcropping from the individual or the collective conscious.

The literary and unliterary have some superficial similarities, but they react to myth differently. For both of
them words are mere information and literary merits or faults
do not count. Both of them concentrate on the event. But for
the lover of myth he is moved as long as he lives whereas for
an unliterary as soon as the moment of excitement is over and
his curiosity appeased he will forget the event forever. The
myth lover's response to myth is extra-literary whereas the
others is unliterary. The myth lover gets what is provided by
the myth whereas the others do not get even one-tenth of what
it provides.

The degree of mythicality of a certain book at times
depends on who reads it. Two persons may read the same book
and one may find it only an exciting yarn but it may convey a
myth to another and be profoundly moved. Rider, Haggard is
one of such ambiguous authors. While two boys are reading his
romances the unliterary will find only excitement and danger.
But the literary will find the awful "which is quite
immeasurable with mere excitement. The unliterary boy's
response to the story is "Will the hero escape?" But the
myth lover boy's response will be "I shall never escape this.
This will never escape me. These images have struck roots far
below the surface of my mind".

Another difference between the literary and unliterary
is that though some literary may have no taste for myth,
there are no unliterary who have taste for myth. Because the
unliterary, would not accept the impossible and
preternaturals. They can fantasize but they hate the fantastic. So Lewis next turns his attention to fantasy and describes how it appeals to different kinds of readers.

Fantasy is a term used both in psychology and literature. In literature it means any narrative that deals with the impossible and preternaturals. A few examples are "The Ancient Mariner", Gulliver and The Wind in the Willows. In psychology, the term fantasy can mean the following things:

First, it is an imaginative construction in which what is imagined is taken as reality by the patient. In this state of mind, "The commonest events are twisted, often not without ingenuity, into evidence for the treasured belief". "A man [may] believe that he is the long-lost son of noble and wealthy parents and that he will soon be discovered, acknowledged, and overwhelmed with luxuries and honours". This can be called Delusion.

Second, it is a pleasing imaginative construction entertained by the patient without the delusion that it is reality. In this kind of reverie, the dreamer indulges in "military or erotic triumphs, of power or grandeur, even of mere popularity ..." It becomes his prime consolation and realities become distasteful to him and thus he becomes incapable of making any efforts to achieve happiness in real life. The person who imagines himself to be a Don Juan will
take no initiative even in making himself agreeable to the
women he meets. This can be called Morbid Castle-building.

Third, the nature of the activity is the same as above but
it is indulged briefly and moderately and kept
subordinated to other normal activities. This can be used
even creatively as we can day-dream about or visualize the
books we want to write. This can be called Normal Castle-
building.

Normal castle-building can be of two types: the
egoistic and the disinterested. In the first kind the dreamer
makes himself the hero and everything is seen though his
eyes, and all the achievements are his. He is the lover, the
millionaire, the wit par excellence or the greatest living
poet. In the second kind the dreamer is not the hero but is
simply a spectator. Thus a person who may not have a chance
in reality may day-dream about an Alpine holiday in
Switzerland. But here the attention is not focused on himself
but on the imagined mountains. In this kind of reverie some
children may imagine and "feign a whole world and people it
and remain outside it". This is the beginning of literary
invention if the dreamer has any talent. It is true that
there also can be a transition from egoistic to disinterested
castle-building leading to creation of fiction.

As far as the reading of fantasy is concerned the
unliterary prefer the egoistic castle-building type. They
project themselves into the most enviable characters of the
story and take vicarious pleasures in their triumphs or love
or wealth or distinction; and this provides materials for
further day-dreaming.

However, the unliterary do not like literary fantasies
or fantastic stories. They detest them and consider them fit
only for children. They may like to read stories with
"monstrous psychology and preposterous coincidences" but they
demand at least superficial realism which bears plausible
resemblance to reality. The reason is simple. Though they are
not deceived by their castle-building to be reality, they
want to feel that they might happen. The woman reader knows
that she is not as attractive as the heroine in the book but
she wants to feel that given money and opportunities she also
might. The man reader knows that he is not rich and socially
successful but if he could win a sweepstake or make a fortune
without talent he might. As the hope of realising their
dreams is not totally negated they keep themselves
entertained in castle-building. But anything that hints the
impossible and the unattainable ruins their pleasure.

A story which introduces the marvellous,
the fantastic, says to him by
implication, I am merely a work of art.
You must take me as such — must enjoy me
for my suggestions, my beauty, my irony,
my constructions, and so forth. There is
no question of anything like this
happening to you in the world."27

145
Thus egoistic castle-building marks the reading of the unliterary throughout. In this he can fantasize a great deal. But again he hates the fantastic and he has a total aversion to literary fantasy as it is too fantastic, too unattainable, or preternatural and out of the world for him to participate and indulge in vicariously. But this does not happen to the literary reader. Disinterestedness characterises his reading and he can remain a neutral observer. He is simply seeing with the author’s eye and imagining or dreaming with his imagination, and thereby extending his being. Thus while "Disinterested castle-building may dream of nectar and ambrosia, of fairy bread and honey dew; the egoistic sort dreams rather of bacon and eggs or steak." 28

Therefore, from observing the reader’s response to fantasy, it is possible to tell whether a reader is literary or unliterary. They also respond to realism differently, but apart from readers response to realism, modern critics response to realism is equally significant. Now let us see what Lewis has to say about it.

Realism is a term in criticism to denote the form of literature in which life is represented as realistically as possible. There are two kinds of realisms: realism of presentation and realism of content. In realism of presentation the story has things to see, hear, taste or touch. It is "the art of bringing something close to us,
making it palpable and vivid, by sharply imagined detail. We may cite as examples the dragon 'sniffing along the stone' in *Beowulf*; ... Falstaff on his death-bed plucking at the sheet; Wordsworth's little streams heard at evening but inaudible by daylight."

In realism of content the story is probable or true to life; and Lewis cite Constant's *Adolphe* as an example of such a story because though the story has great realism of content there is a total lack of realism of presentation.

[In *Adolphe*] a passion, and the sort of passion that is not very rare in the real world, is pursued through all its windings to the death. There is no disbelief to be suspended. We never doubt that this is just what might happen. But while there is much to be felt and much to be analysed, there is nothing to be seen or heard or tasted or touched ... we do not know what anyone looked like or wore, or ate. Everyone speaks in the same style. There are almost no manners. I know very well what it would be like to be Oreste (or Adolphe); but I should not know either if I meet him, as I should certainly know Pickwick or Falstaff and probably old Karamazov or Bercilak."

The two kinds of realism are quite independent of one another.

You can get that of presentation without that of content, as in medieval romance; or that of content without that of presentation, as in French (and in some Greek) tragedy; in both together, as in *War and Peace*; or neither, as in the *Furioso* or *Rasselas* or *Candide* ... all four ways of writing are good and masterpieces can be produced in any of them."
However, realism of content is the dominant taste at present. This is the influence of the great novels of the nineteenth century. But it will be dangerous and also disastrous to erect this historically conditioned preference into a critical principle. Yet some such assumption seems to lurk tacitly in the background or much criticism and literary discussion. "We feel it when books are praised for being ‘comments on’ or ‘reflections’ (or more deplorably ‘slices’) of life. We notice also that ‘truth to life’ is held to have a claim on literature that overrides all other considerations."\(^32\)

Another reason for the emergence and dominance of this undeclared literature principle could be "... the widespread neglect or disparagement of the romantic, the idyllic, and the fantastic, and the readiness to stigmatise instances of these as escapism."\(^33\)

Now let us probe further into the proposition by the literary Puritans that literature should be true to life. First of all we must decide as to what sort of literature can be said to be true to life. A possibility is that if a book can convincingly demonstrate to a sensible reader that in its grim or empty or ironic description, it has depicted what life is like we say that it has this property. But again being true to life can mean two different things: the sort of
thing that might conceivably happen or the sort of thing which usually happens and is typical of human life. Oedipus belongs to the first and Middlemarch to the second. In the first one "such and such behaviour would be probable and characteristic of human life, given the situation". But the situation is most unlikely to occur. For example, "The chances against anyone’s being exposed as an infant, then rescued, then adopted by a king, then by another coincidence killing his father, and then by another marrying his father’s widow, are overwhelming."34

In the second one it is more probable, perfectly ordinary and so typical of human life. "These are the sort of things that might happen to anyone. Things like them have probably happened to thousand. These are such people as we might meet any day. We can say without reservation, ‘This is what life is like.’"35

The two kinds of realism we have just discussed may be distinguished from literary fantasies like Furioso and "The Ancient Mariner" but they should also be distinguished from each other. And one will soon notice that till modern times most of the stories were of Oedipus type and not that of Middlemarch because the former type talk about the unusual and the exceptional which make the stories remarkable. But if the kind of events found in Middlemarch were to be narrated to people they would have said, "This is what happens
everyday. If these people and their fortunes were so unremarkable, why are you telling about them at all".36 Because there has been a universal way of introducing stories in conversations since time immemorial by using expressions such as the following:

Men begin, "The strangest sight I ever saw was — or 'I’ll tell you something queerer even than that' or 'Here's something you'll hardly believe'. Such was the spirit of nearly all stories before the nineteenth century. The deeds of Achilles or Roland were told of because they were exceptionally and improbably heroic, the matricidal burden of Orestes, because it was an exceptional and improbable burden, the saint’s life, because he was exceptionally and improbably holy ... The Reeve’s Tale was told because what happens in it is unusually and all but impossibly funny."37

If we are so radical realists as to insist that all good fiction must be true to life there are only two possibilities open to us. One is to maintain that all good fiction must belong to the second type which is the family of Middlemarch. But that will put us in a rather absurd position. Because we shall be going against "the literary practice and experiences of nearly the whole human race"38 which is a rather too formidable an antagonist. The second is to maintain that exceptional and atypical stories of Oedipus’ type are also true to life. But that won’t be a realistic position either. Because "if we are sufficiently determined, we can just — only just — brazen it out. We can maintain
that such stories are implicitly saying 'Life is such that even this is possible. A man might conceivably be raised to affluence by a grateful convict. A man might conceivably be as unlucky as Balim ... A city might conceivably be taken by a wooden horse. And we should have to maintain not only that they are saying this, but that they say it truly." 39

Thus if we are to grant the argument it becomes necessary to take a good deal of swallowing, and it forces us into an entirely artificial position as we get quite close to thinking up something to defend a desperate thesis. Besides, it goes against our own experience and the experience of others in reading stories as that was not the message communicated to us by them. Because while reading them we did not get the impression that they were telling us any truth about life. Rather they seemed more like remote accidents. And neither the story tellers nor the readers were "thinking about any such generality as human life". "Attention is fixed on something concrete and individual; on the more than ordinary terror, splendour, wonder, pity, or absurdity of a particular case. These, not for any light they might throw hereafter on life of man, but for their own sake, are what matters." 40

But if stories of this type are well done we get what is called hypothetical probability. In this kind of probability the story becomes probable if the initial
situation occurred. "But the situation is usually treated as if it were immune from criticism". In the earlier ages it was accepted on the authority of the poet. But in the more sophisticated period the situation is accepted only as a postulate. We have to allow it to be granted that Lear divided his kingdom or that the 'riche gnof' in the Miller's Tale was gullible or that calumnies against one's own wife by the most suspicious characters would be believed. But the author is not saying that this is what happens in life. He is simply saying this:

'Suppose this happened, how interesting, how moving the consequences would be. Listen. It would be like this.' To question the postulate itself would show a misunderstanding, like asking why triumphs should be triumphs. It is the sort of thing 'Mopsa' does. That is not the point. The raison d'être of the story is that we shall weep, or shudder, or wonder, on laugh as we follow it.

If that is the purpose of the story, it would be rather perverse to make any efforts to formulate a realistic theory of literature from such stories. Because they are never meant to be representations of life, nor valued for being so.

The strange events are not clothed with hypothetical probability in order to increase our knowledge of real life by showing how it would react to this improbable test. It is the other way round. The hypothetical probability is brought in to make the strange events more fully imaginable. Hamlet is not faced with a ghost in order that his
reaction may tell us more about his nature and therefore about human nature in general; he is shown reacting naturally in order that we may accept the ghost. 43

Thus it is obvious that a certain amount of realism of content is definitely desirable. It makes the strange, the unexpected and the mysterious acceptable to the readers. However, it becomes entirely another matter when we start demanding that all literature should have realism.

The demand that all literature should have realism of content cannot be maintained. Most of the great literature so far produced in the world has not. But there is a quite different demand which we can properly make; not that all book should be realistic in content, but that every book should have as much of this realism as it pretends to have. 44

But this principle is not always understood. Literature is very often treated as an aid to something for which it was neither meant nor designed. "There are earnest people who recommend realistic reading for everyone because they say, it prepares us for a real life, and who would, if they could, forbid fairy-tales for children and romances for adults because these 'give a false picture of life' — in other words, deceive their readers". 45

This is a clear misconception about literature. Because literature is primarily a work of art and it is neither meant to prepare us for life nor mislead us with false ideas or philosophies. And literature does not deceive us if we read
according to how it was meant to be read by the author. Only the egoistic castle-builders are deceived by an apparent or superficial realism in what they read because they wish to be so deceived. But an apparent realism would not deceive the literary reader at all. (He requires "a much more subtler and closer resemblance to real life). Nor are we deceived by the Odyssey or Beowulf. Nor any novel deceives the best type of readers. "He never mistakes art either for life or for philosophy. He can enter, while he reads, into each other’s point of view without either accepting or rejecting it, suspending where necessary his disbelief and (what is harder) his belief."47

Finally, while discussing realism it will be proper to look into the charge of escapism in reading literature. In one sense every kind of reading is an escape as "it involves a temporary transference of the mind from our actual surroundings to things merely imagined or conceived. This happens when we read history or science no less than when we read literature. But the question is what we escape into." Because people can escape into all kinds of things. Some can escape into egoistic castle-building. This can be either harmless or brutal or prurient or megalomaniac. Some others escape into divertissements, a good example of which is The Midsummer Night Dream. Others escape into disinterested castle-building aided by works like the Arcadia or the
Ancient Mariner. And yet others escape into realistic fiction as every fiction is a construct and offers a complete escape from the reader’s immediate distress.

Thus escape itself is neither good nor bad as it is common both to bad and good reading. But escapism has a derogatory sense as "we suggest, I suppose, a confirmed habit of escaping too often or for too long, or with the wrong things, or using escape as a substitute for action where action is appropriate, and thus neglecting real opportunities and evading real obligations."

However, each kind of escapism has to be judged on its own merit. Before we proceed further we’d better clear up one point first. Fantasy itself does not lead one into escapism whether one writes it or read about it. So the Renaissance and the nineteenth century which were both periods prolific in literary fantasy were also periods of great energy and productivity.

Change of escapism against some very unrealistic fantasies are often associated with that of childish or infantilism. So it may be worthwhile to find out what sort of childishness is to be approved or disapproved. First, though we usually associate fantasy and childhood and consider childhood to be the right age for fantasy, this is not really so.
Most of the great fantasies and fairy-tales were not addressed to children at all, but to every one. Professor Tolkien has described the real state of the case. Certain kinds of furniture gravitated to the nursery when they became unfashionable among the adults; the fairy-tale has done the same. To imagine any special affinity between childhood and stories of the marvellous is like imagining a special affinity between childhood and Victorian sofas. If few but children now read such stories, that is not because children as such have a special predilection for them, but because children are indifferent to literary fashions. What we see in them is not a specially childish taste, but simply a normal and perennial human taste, temporarily atrophied in their elders by a fashion.50

Secondly, when we used the word 'childishness' as a term of disapproval we should refer only to those considerable characteristics which can be improved by outgrowing them and not those sane people would like to retain. For example, in the physical level we have to outgrow the muscular weaknesses of childhood but would like to keep its energy and power of rapid recuperation. On another level, we may get rid of childhood qualities like fickle-mindedness, jealousy, ignorance, boastfulness and fearfulness but nobody in his right senses would not like to keep its tireless curiosity, imaginative intensity, the facility of suspending disbelief and the readiness to wonder, pity and admire.
The power of growing up is to be valued for what we gain, not for what we lose.
Not to acquire a taste for the realistic is childish in the bad sense; to have lost the taste for marvels and adventures is no more a matter for congratulation than losing our teeth, our hair, our palate, and finally our hopes.51

Therefore, having a taste for fantasy cannot be condemned as childish in the bad sense simply because the taste appeared in early age unless it has some intrinsic defects of its own. So also is a taste for the marvellous. And any criticism which instills a fear for sharing with the young any literary work without considering its intrinsic merit is unfair.

Lewis has another major concern—poetry. He first analyses the response of the literary and unliterary to poetry, and then gives some very clear statements on modern poetry. He says in general the unliterary hardly read poetry. He has heard a few women here and there repeating verse. These are usually gnomic and comments on life. But their feelings are not much engaged and their imagination, not at all; and they use them as their grandmothers would have used proverbs or biblical quotations. "This is the little trickle or puddle still left in the dry bed where ballad and nursery rhyme and proverbial jingle once flowed".52 Even among the literary, now a growing number do not read poetry. And modern poetry is read by only very few people, apart from poets,
critics or teachers of literature; and there is a reason behind this decrease in the number of readers of poetry.

These facts have a common significance. The arts, as they develop, grow further apart. Once, song, poetry, and dance were all parts of a single dranenon. Each has become what it is now by separation from the others, and this has involved great losses and great gains. Within the single art of literature, the same process has taken place. Poetry has differentiated itself more and more from prose.53

If we are to think in terms of diction, it may sound paradoxical that poetry has not differentiated itself further from prose. Because the language of poetry and prose has grown closer since the time of Wordsworth as the special vocabulary and syntax of poetry have been banished. But the approximation in only superficial as the same thing cannot be said about content. What Pope said in "The Rape of the Lock", or what Homer said in the Odyssey and Dante said in the Divine Comedy could have been said in prose as well. And most of the qualities Aristotle demanded of a tragedy could be found in a prose play. This was so because despite the differences in language, the content of poetry and prose overlapped or almost coincided. But we find the opposite in modern poetry.

... modern poetry, if it 'says' anything at all, if it aspires to 'mean' as well as to 'be', says what prose could not say in any fashion. to read the old poetry
involved learning a slightly different language; to read the new involves the unmaking of your mind, the abandonment of all the logical and narrative connections which you use in reading prose or in conversation. You must achieve a trance-like condition in which images, associations, and sounds operate without these. Thus the common ground between poetry and any other use of words is reduced almost to zero. In that way poetry is now more quintessentially poetical than ever before; 'purer' in the negative sense. It not only does (like all good poetry) what prose can't do: it deliberately refrains from doing anything that prose can do. 54

The natural and inevitable consequence of this is that the number of readers of poetry has steadily suffered diminution. Modern poetry has become too difficult for many to understand. If poetry confines itself to only what poetry can do it becomes so pure that "the art of reading poetry requires talents hardly less exalted than the art of writing it, readers cannot be much more numerous than poets. If you write a piece for the fiddle that only one performer in a hundred can play you must not expect to hear it very often performed." 55 And the less frequently it is performed the more meagre is the chance of extending its appreciation, enjoyment and admiration to a wider audience. The same thing is happening to modern poetry.

For the moment, poetry's area in the map of reading has shrunk from that of a great empire to that of a tiny province—a province which, as it grows smaller, emphasises its difference from all other
places more and more, till in the end this combination of exiguous size and local peculiarity suggests not so much a province as a 'reservation'.

Modern poetry is of such an illusive nature cognoscenti can explicate the same piece in utterly different ways. We can no longer expect one explication to be right and all others to be wrong. "The poem, clearly, is like a score and the readings performances" and different renderings have become possible and admissible. So it is no longer a question of which rendering is right but which one is the best.

What is the future of such poetry? The hope that it may be simply a transient affair dies hard. And some hope that it will soon perish "asphyxiated in the vacuum of its own purity" yielding to a new form of poetry which is more congenial to the passions and interests of the laity. Others hope to raise people through culture till poetry could gain again a wide audience. But Lewis is haunted by a third possibility. As the teaching of Rhetoric in the ancient world lasted for more than a thousand years, it is not impossible that modern poetry has the same destiny.

The explication of poetry is already well entrenched as a scholastic and academic exercise. The intention to keep it there, to make proficiency in it the indispensable qualification for white-collared jobs, and thus to secure for poets and their explicators a large and permanent (because a conscript) audience, is avowed. It may possibly succeed.
Without coming home any more than it now does to the 'business and bosoms' of most men, poetry may, in the fashion, reign for a millennium; providing material for the explication which teachers will praise as an incomparable discipline and pupils will accept as a necessary moyen de parvenir.  

Now to return to the reading of poetry, Lewis says as far as modern poetry is concerned no unliterary read it. So it is difficult to differentiate the reading of the literary and unliterary. But the literary who read poetry these days often fall into the common mistake the literary often make in reading — using poetry instead of receiving it. And they insist on keeping their own understanding or experience of the poem ignoring what the author's intention is or how it was understood by his contemporaries. Concerning this problem Lewis offers the following suggestion.

There seems to be two answers. One is that the poem in my head which I make from my mistranslations of Chaucer or misunderstandings of Donne may possibly not be so good as the work Chaucer or Donne actually made. Secondly, why not have both? After enjoying what I made of it, why not go back to the text, this time looking up the hard words, puzzling out the allusions, and discovering that some metrical delights in my first experience were due to my fortunate mispronunciations, and see whether I can enjoy the poet's poem, not necessarily instead of, but in addition to, my own one? If I am a man of genius and uninhibited by false modesty I may still
think my poem the better of the two. But I could not have discovered this without knowing both. 58

However, in reading some modern poems, the misreading just condemned may be the right technique to be used. Because the words in a poem permit various interpretations each of which may be as valid as the other.

The words, perhaps, were never meant as anything but raw material for whatever each reader’s sensibility may make of them, and there was no intention that one reader’s experience should have anything in common with another’s or with the poet’s. If so, then no doubt this sort of reading would be proper for them. It is a pity if a glazed picture is so placed that you see in it only your own reflection; it is not a pity when a mirror is so placed. 59

Another fault found in the reading of the literary is that though they pay enough attention to the words when they read poetry ignore the aural aspect of poetry. This is done deliberately even by professionals. He gives the example of a member of the English Faculty of his university whom he heard saying, "Whatever else matters in poetry, the sound doesn’t". If faculty members ignore the sound in a cavalier manner, students often betray a total unconsciousness of metre through ignorance. Lewis attributes this astonishing state of affairs to two causes: 1) In some schools, in order to cure children of sing-song they are taught to report poetry not according to lines but speech groups. This is rather short-
sighted as sing-song in children is not a defect. It is the first form of rhythmic sensibility. All other variations and subtleties are developed later on the basis of this metronomic regularity. 2) It is possible that young people are exposed too early to vers libre before being trained on metrical poetry. This is something like trying to make children run before they learn to walk. And they grow up unconscious of the aural beauty of poetry.

Thus far Lewis has been taking preparatory steps to introduce his experiment in criticism by discussing good and bad reading, the reading habits of the literary and unliterary, the nature of myth, fantasy, realisms and poetry, and also readers’ response to them.

In his experiment, Lewis wants to judge literature by the way men read it. This, he believes, can be done because good literature can be read in a certain way and a bad one in another way. But then what is good literature? Lewis defines good literature "that which permits, invites, or even compels good reading; and bad, as that which does the same for bad reading". If good literature permits good reading, then it follows that good reading is the test used to determine the literary worth of a book. And according to Lewis, good reading is the kind of reading in which we surrender ourselves completely to a work of art by getting ourselves out of the way and by emptying ourselves to make ourselves
receptive to the work. And a book which can be passionately and constantly loved and reread by a person who really and truly reads it has to be good. However, Lewis frankly admits that to make distinction within the pale is more difficult than the location of the pale itself.

Then Lewis enumerates the advantages of his system. First, it fixes our attention on the act of reading. Books on the shelf are only potential literature and they become actual only when read. So also is literary taste. It is only a potentiality till we read literature. Both scholarship and criticism fulfill their role only if they aid reading as "their sole function is to multiply, prolong, and safeguard experiences of good reading". And thus a system that helps us to get away from abstractions by being centred in literature is what we need.

Secondly, the system "puts our feet on solid ground, whereas the usual one puts them on a quicksand". The usual one is risky because you begin to condemn somebody's taste on the strength of an inference. For example, suppose one discovers that I like Lamb. Being sure that Lamb is bad one condemns my taste as bad. 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 hasn't heard my view it is 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

You know that Lamb would not have been a black mark against me fifty years ago. You know that Tennyson would have been a far blacker mark in the thirties than he is now: that dethronements and restorations are almost monthly events. You can trust none of them to be permanent. Pope came in, went out, come back. Milton hanged drawn and quartered by two or three influential critics - and their disciples all said Amen - seems to have survived. Kiplings stock, once very high, fell to the bottom of the market, and now there are signs of a faint rise. 'Taste' in this sense is mainly a chronological phenomenon ... All you can really say about my taste is that it is old fashioned; yours will soon be the same.

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 Lamb really has and reading into him a great deal that he doesn't 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 believe that Lamb is
probably a bad author as the worst kind of reading is used by those who enjoy Lamb. Therefore,

Observation of how men read is a strong basis for judgement on what they read, but judgements, in what they read is a flimsy, even a momentary, basis for judgement on their way of reading. For the accepted valuation of literary works varies with every change of fashion, but the distinction between attentive and inattentive, obedient and wilful, disinterested and egoistic, modes of reading is permanent; if ever valid, valid everywhere and always. 62

Thirdly, it would make critical condemnation difficult. Lewis considers this an advantage as it is now too easy and thus easily abused with detrimental effects on sane criticism.

In criticism, whichever method we use, whether we judge books by their readers or vice versa, we always use double distinctions: we put some books beyond the pale and then find out the better from the worse within the pale. If we start with books, we draw a line between commercial trash, thrillers and pornography and serious literature. If we judge readers we do the same. We make a broad and 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 then, within the latter class, we distinguish 'good' from 'bad' taste." 63
In the present system, in drawing the pale, a critic claims that he is judging books. But in fact, the books he puts beyond the pale may be books he has never read. So the only guide he has are the low prices of these books and the lurid pictures on the cover. If a book judged by a cognoscenti like him to be merely commercial trash now and it turns out to be classic after some generations he will certainly cut a poor figure indeed in the eye of posterity. But Lewis’ system 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 cheap looking book is a life-long delight even of a single reader, whatever the opinion of friends or foes may be, we should not dare to put it beyond the pale.

The current method can be risky. For example, the works of critics on science fiction betrayed great ignorance. They treated it like a genre though in the literary sense it is not at all a genre. There is nothing common to them except the use of a particular machine. The first category of writers, which belongs to Jules Verne’s family, primarily interested in technology. The second category uses the machine to produce Märchen or myth. The third category uses it for satire. This became the favourite form of satire once
in America to attack the American way of life and not using it was denounced as unAmerican. In the last category, the great mass of hacks simply wrote "to cash in on the boom in science fiction" and used remote planets and even galaxies as the backcloth for their spy-stories and love-stories which seemed to have no real reason why should occur there instead of here in any town or city on earth. Perhaps you can class all of these categories together if you want to. But "it is as perceptive as classing the works of Ballantyne, Conrad and W.W. Jacobs together as "sea story" and then criticising that".64

Lewis' system has sharp differences with the current system for books within the pale. In the established system "the differences between distinctions within the pale and that primary distinction which draws the pale itself, can only be one of the degree. Milton is bad and Patience Strong is worse, Dickens (most of him) is bad and Edgar Wallace is worse. My taste is bad because I like Scott and Stevenson; the taste of those who like E.R. Burroughs is worse."65

But in Lewis' system he draws a distinction not of degree but of kind between readings. Because "the judgement that someone is, unliterary is like the judgement 'This man is not in love', whereas the judgement that my taste is bad is more like 'This man is in love, but with a frightful woman".66 Thus even a book considered to be bad is not
rejected outright but an approach which combines criticism with optimism is favoured because where is the impossibility that the frightful woman with whom you are in love has hidden qualities and virtues which yield only to considerate and patient search?

... the very fact that people, or even any one person, can well and truly read, and love for a lifetime, a book we had thought bad, will raise the suspicion that it cannot be as bad as we thought.

... Always, there may be something in it that we can't see. The *prima facie* probability that anything which has ever been truly and obstinately loved by any reader has some virtue in it is overwhelming. To condemn such a book is, therefore, on my system, a very serious matter. Our condemnation is never quite final. The question could always be without absurdity reopened.67

Lewis says that his system is more realistic because it takes into account the fact that distinction within the pale are more difficult to determine than the location of the pale itself; and even after having determined them they are more precarious and reversible. "So there can be no question of finally debunking or exposing any author who has been well inside the pale. We start from the assumption that whatever has been found good by those who really and truly read probably is good. All probability is against those who attack".68
One result of the system would be to silence those critics who have condemned all the great names in English literature except half a dozen protected by the current critical establishment. And if the system can effect the desired result, certainly criticism will see happier days again. Because, "these dethronements are a great waste of energy. Their acrimony produces heat at the expense of light. They do not improve anyone's capacity for good reading. The real way of mending a man's taste is not to denigrate his present favourites but to teach him how to enjoy something better." 64

So far Lewis has been talking about the system working under ideal conditions. But the system has admittedly some snags. The most obvious objection is that the same book may be read in different ways. For example, some passages in fiction or poetry can be used by some schoolboys as pornography. Thus, "what damned a book is not the existence of bad readings but the absence of good ones. Ideally, we should like to define a good book as one which 'permits', 'invites', or even compels 'good reading'. There are some books which permit good reading but resist bad reading. "If you took up Samson Agonistes, Rasselas or Urn Burial to pass the time, or for excitement or as an aid to egoistic castle-building you would soon put it down." 71 As far as invite is concerned, it comes into our conception of a good book, because good
reading is not forced attentive and disciplined reading. Instead of leaving us to do all the work a good author demonstrates through "his writing that it deserves, because it rewards, alert and disciplined reading". But 'permit' is the final test of a book. "The ideally bad book is the one which a good reading is impossible. the words in which it exists will not bear close attention, and what they communicate offers you nothing unless you are prepared either for mere thrills or for flattering day-dreams."72

Secondly, it may be objected that taking a stand on readings rather than books is turning from the known to unknown. But this objection is not as formidable as it seems. We can put some readers outside the pale as unliterary and then distinguish the better from the worse within the pale. In the case of the unliterary it is perfectly easy to get some external evidence. They do not talk about reading and if they do they are inarticulate. Reading plays a very small part in their life and every book is tossed aside like an old newspaper after it has been used. Thus the unliterary can be diagnosed with certainty. And with certainty you can also discover the existence of a good book if the reading habit is the opposite of how an unliterary reads a book. If "there is passionate and constant love of a book and re-reading, then, however bad we think the book and however immature or uneducated the reader, it cannot."73
In determining the taste of the literary, test by external evidence fails us. But to compensate for that there is something we find useful: we are dealing with articulate people and they provide us with external evidence. They talk and write about their favourite books. And from their conversation we can find out whether they need a particular author for the right reason. For example, a person may love Dante as a poet and another may love him as a Thomist. The person who reads him as a Thomist can ignore completely his literary merits and therefore, he is not a good reader of literature.

Even the literary are exposed to some hazard of being prejudiced when they read on "author who is at present under a cloud" such as Shelley or Chesterton or Milton as we tend to confirm the bad opinions we already had of him. The result is a foregone conclusion." And this is no longer perceptive reading. To correct this, the reader must possess a positive attitude towards the book. "We can find a book bad only by reading it as if it might, after all, be very good. We must empty our minds and lay ourselves open. There is no work in which holes can't be picked; no work that can succeed without preliminary act of good will on the part of the reader." 

Lewis' system is basically an attempt to find an alternative to excessive evaluative criticism. He is sceptical of the necessity of strictly evaluative criticism
because it neither seems to help better understanding and appreciation of literature nor help in multiplying, safeguarding and prolonging good reading and it has become rather harmful by becoming excessively condemnatory in the pronouncements. He prefers Arnold’s view of criticism as it is a saner and more objective way of criticism as knowledge is pursued for its own sake. Secondly, in his criticism, evaluation plays only a very minor part. As "Criticism is for him ‘essentially’ the exercise of curiosity, which he defines as the ‘disinterested love of a free play of the mind on all subjects for its own sake’. The important thing is ‘to see the object as in itself it really is’." 76

The critic, then, has to show to other the nature of the work by describing its character and leave it to them to respond to it. It is his function to press his evaluations in others. "The great art of criticism is to get oneself out of the way and to let humanity to decide". 77 Besides, the critic is warned not to adopt a policy of ruthless perfectionism. He may have his idea of perfection but at the same time he should be willingly accessible to the second best as well. In other words, like MacDonald’s God he has to be "easy to please, but hard to satisfy".

Lewis believes that criticism as conceived by Arnold is a very useful activity. But he finds hardly any value in the present firm of evaluative criticism which consists in
pronouncing judgements on the merits or demerits of books for the supposed benefit of readers. Because apart from his dislike for condemnations he considers evaluative criticism to be of only secondary importance and sees it only as an aid to good reading. He says, "for me it stands or falls by its power to multiply, safeguard or prolong those moments when a good reader is reading well a good book and the value of literature thus exists in actu." 78

He is doubtful whether, in his experience, any evaluative criticism has ever helped him understand or appreciate better any great work of literature. He finds some other critics more useful and he ranks them according to their usefulness as the editors, textual critics, commentators, lexicographers, literary historians and then the emotive critics, and evaluative critics rank after all of them in usefulness.

Among the evaluative critics he is particularly critical of the Vigilant school of critics because of their exaggerated zeal.

To them criticism is a form of social and ethical hygiene. They see all clear thinking, all sense of reality, and all fineness of feeling, threatened on every side by propaganda, by advertisement, by film and television. The hosts of Midian 'prowl and prowl around'. But they prowl most dangerously in the printed word". 74
In their zeal the Vigilants have attacked authors not only outside the pale but those who were well within the pale, such as Milton, Shelley, Lamb, Dickens, Meredith, Kipling and De La Mare. They have become the watch dog against whatever is thought to be "vulgarity, superficiality, and false sentiment" and are determined to seek them out and expose them wherever they lie hidden.

It is difficult to determine whether the Vigilants help or hinder criticism. Because there is no common ground on which we can judge the merit of their criticism as they use extra-literary views to evaluate literature. "They labour to promote the sort of literary experience that they think good; but their conceptions of what is good in literature makes a seamless whole with their total conception of the good life. Their whole scheme of values, though never, I believe, set out en regle, is engaged in every critical act."80

It is to be admitted that all criticism is in one way or another influenced by "the critic's views on matters other than literature". But aesthetic considerations usually moderate one's judgement and help one to suspend disbelief or belief or repugnances. But for the Vigilants they combat the views or attitudes anti-thetical to them so fiercely that they do not allow this liberty to mitigate their pronouncements.

175
Nothing is for them a matter of taste. They admit no such realism of experience as the aesthetic. There is for them no specifically literary good. A work, or a single passage, cannot for them be good in any sense unless it is good simply, unless it reveals attitudes which are essential elements in the good life. You must therefore accept their (implied) conception of the good life if you are to accept their criticism. That is, you can admire them as critics only if you revere them as sages. ... run round in a circle, accepting them as sages because they are good critics and believing them good critics because they are sages.

The harm this school can do has become quite clear. We have seen in the political sphere the havoc wrought by committees of public safety which become as dangerous as those they are formed to combat. The same thing is now going on in criticism.

The use of the guillotine becomes an addiction. Thus under Vigilant criticism a new head falls nearly every month. The list of approved authors grow absurdly small. No one is safe. If the Vigilant philosophy of life should happen to be wrong, Vigilance must already have prevented many, happy unions of a good reader with a good book. Even if it is right we may doubt whether such caution, so fully armed a determination not to be taken in, not to yield to any possibly meretricious appeal - such 'dragon watch with unenchanted eye' - is consistent with the surrender needed for the reception of good work. You cannot be armed to the teeth and surrendered at the same moment.
Besides, apart from being unfavourable for the proper reception of a good work, such a belligerent attitude runs another risk. In the attempt to save yourself from a bad author it may "blind and deafen you to the shy and elusive merits — especially if they are unfashionable — of a good one". But there is yet a greater danger — a surfeit of criticism has been posing a cultural threat to the young people, especially in the universities.

Everyone who sees the work of Honours students in English at a university has noticed with distress their increasing tendency to see books wholly through the spectacles of other books. On every play, poem, or novel, they produce the view of some eminent critic. An amazing knowledge of Chaucerian or Shakespearian criticism sometimes co-exists with a very inadequate knowledge of Chaucer or Shakespeare. Less and less do we meet the individual response. The all important conjunction (Reader Meets Text) never seems to have been allowed to occur of itself and develop spontaneously. Here, plainly, are young people drenched, dizzied, and bedeviled by criticism to a point at which primary literary experience is no longer possible. This state of affairs seems to me a far greater threat to our culture than any of those from which the Vigilants would protect us". 83

Lewis concludes An Experiment in Criticism with an exposition of his views on literary good. He opens his exposition by trying to answer the question why we read literature. He says that we read literature because we do not
contain in ourselves the sources of "all the information, entertainment, advice, rebuke and merriment". Then he differentiates two levels of literature: literature of knowledge and literature of power. Literature of knowledge is concerned with instruction and literature of power is concerned with giving pleasure.

Furthermore, literature of power can be divided into two components: Logos (something said) and Poiema (something made). And their distinguishing functions are described as follows:

As Logos it tells a story, or express an emotion, or exhorts or pleads or describes or rebukes or excites laughter. As Poiema, by its aural beauties and also by the balance and contrast and the unified multiplicity of its successive parts it is an object d'art, a thing shaped so as to give great satisfaction ... these two characters in the work of literary art are separated by an abstraction, and the better the work is, the more violent the abstraction is felt to be. 64

Out experience of the Poiema gives us keen pleasure. This is what attracts people to literature to seek again and again the pleasure experienced in it. But pleasure is an extremely vague abstraction. "It denotes too many things and connotes too little". We are no longer sure "whether it is more like revenge, or buttered toast, or success, or adoration or relief from danger or a good scratch". But in
the case of literature it has to be that pleasure which gives particular pleasure proper to it.

We can say that the shape of the Poëma gives us pleasure though this is not a very precise expression. Because when we read or listen to music the parts succeed one another in time and when the word 'shape' is applied to the whole we are using only a metaphor. This becomes clear when we compare it to the shape of a vase or a house. We don’t participate in the shape of a vase when we look at it but it is otherwise when we read a story as we do participate in the story.

The parts of the Poëma, are things we ourselves do; we entertain various imaginations, imagined feelings and thoughts in an order, and at a tempo, prescribed by the poet. One of the reasons why a very exciting story can hardly elicit the best reading is that greedy curiosity tempts us to take some passages more quickly than the author intends. This is less like looking at a vase than like 'doing exercises' under an expert's direction or taking part in a choice dance invented by a good choreographer ... And if the Poëma, or the exercises, or the dance is devised by a master, the rests and movements, the quickenings and slowings, the easier and the more arduous passages, will come exactly as we need them; we shall be deliciously surprised by the satisfaction of wants we were not aware of till they were satisfied ... Looking back on the whole performance we have been led through a pattern or arrangement of activities which our nature cried out for.
The satisfaction derived from the experience tells us that it is good for us. But the impact of the performance is "not good as a means to some end beyond the Poëma, the dance or the exercises" but it is felt immediately and is good for us here and now.

The relaxation, the slight (agreeable) weariness, the banishment of our fidgets, at the close of a great work all proclaim that it has done us good. That is the truth behind Aristotle's doctrine of Katharsis and Dr. I.A. Richard's theory that the 'calm of mind' we feel after a great tragedy really means 'All's well with the nervous system here and now.'

But, Lewis accepts neither Aristotle's nor Richard's doctrine in toto. He cannot accept Aristotle's because the world has not agreed yet on what it means, and he cannot accept Richard's because it comes perilously close to sanctioning the lowest and most debilitating form of egoistic castle-building. "Tragedy, for him enables us to combine, at the incipient or imaginal level, impulses which would clash in explicit action — the impulse to approach, and the impulse to shun the terrible." But Lewis illustrates the absurdity of this argument by pointing out that it is not possible for Pickwick to combine at the incipient level his wish to give money and also his wish to keep it. Thus the incipient level becomes "a place where you can eat your cake
and have it, where you can be heroic without danger and
generous without expense". 88

However, despite his disagreement with Aristotle and
Richard Lewis admits that these are the right kind of
theories to stand against those who find the value of
literature in views and comments on life or philosophies of
life. Because both of them place the value of literature in
what it does to us here and now instead of placing it in
remote and improbable consequences.

The Logos also forms an integral part of the Poiema and
by being so it becomes a work of art. But this is not to de-
emphasise its importance as without Logos, Poiema cannot even
exist.

... the imaginations, emotions, and
thoughts out of which the Poiema builds
its harmony are aroused in us by, and
directed towards, the Logos and would
have no existence without it. We
visualise Lear in the storm, we share his
rage, we regard his whole story with pity
and terror. What we thus react to is
something, in itself, non-literary and
non-verbal. The literature of affairs
lies in the words that present the storm,
the rage, the whole story, so as to
arouse these reactions, and in ordering
the reactions into the pattern of the
'dance' or 'exercise' ... The pattern
gives it finality and a sort of grace. 89

In reading literature, unlike reading science, we don’t
have to believe or approve the Logos. Most of us neither
believe that Dante’s, universe is real nor Donne’s
"Apparition" sensible and edifying nor Kipling’s views the wisest. Then what good is there in occupying our mind with stories that never happened and entering vicariously into the feelings we would like to avoid in our persons or fixing our inner eye on things that can never exist such as the Mariner’s skeleton ship or Dante’s earthly paradise. Lewis has this to say on the matter.

The nearest I have yet got to an answer is that we seek an enlargement of our being. We meant to be more than ourselves. Each of us by nature sees the whole world from one point of view with a perspective and a selectiveness peculiar to himself ... We want to see with other eyes, to imagine with other imaginations, to feel with other hearts, as well as with our own. We are not content. We demand windows. Literature as Logos is a series of windows, even of doors. One of the things we feel often reading a great work is ‘I have got out’ or from another point of view, ‘I have got in’, pierced the shell of some other monad and discovered what it is like inside.90

Therefore, good reading has something in common with love, moral action and intellectual activity. In love we escape from ourselves into others. In moral action, in every act of justice or charity, we place ourselves into the place of others transcending our own competitive particularity. In the pursuit of knowledge we have to reject "the fact as they are for us in favour of the facts as they are". This happens
because there are two contrary impulses ever at a tussle in our nature.

The primary impulse of each is to maintain and aggrandise himself. The secondary impulse is to go out of the self, to correct its provincialism and heal its loneliness. In love, in virtue, in the pursuit of knowledge, and in the reception of the arts, we are doing this. Obviously this process can be described either as an enlargement or as a temporary annihilation of the self. But that is an old paradox; he that 'loseth his life shall save it.'

Finally, Lewis concisely and eloquently reiterates the main thrust of his argument concerning literary good.

Literature enlarges our being by admitting us to experiences not our own. They may be beautiful, terrible, awe-inspiring, exhilarating, pathetic, comic or merely piquant. Literature gives the entree to them all. Those of us who have been true readers all our life seldom realize the enormous extension of our being that we owe to authors. We realize it best when we talk with an unliterary friend. He may be full of goodness and good sense but he inhabits a tiny world. In it, we should be suffocated. My own eyes are not enough for me. Even the eyes of all humanity are not enough. Very gladly would I learn what face things present to a mouse or a bee.

In reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in a Greek poem, I see with a thousand eyes, but it is still I who see. Here as in worship, in love, in moral action, in knowing, I transcend myself and am never more myself than when I do.
Then, in conclusion, let us sum up the main points once more. In *An Experiment* one observes that Lewis wants good reading to form the basis of judgement of literature. According to him, good reading is total immersion into a work of art to make ourselves receptive to the work. But there are two kinds of readers; the literary and unliterary, and only the literary few are capable of good reading and receiving a profound literary experience. What they read remains constantly with them and they enjoy reciting them, discussing them, and using the characters to interpret their own experiences. But what the unliterary read does not affect them much. They also never read anything twice and they do not discuss their readings. They have no ears for aural beauty, are not conscious of style and they read only narrative.

However, all the literary are also not true readers. Some professionals in certain universities have to keep on publishing supposedly new findings on literature to retain their jobs. Reviewers also have to read book after book to write reviews. The pressure of work in these professionals and reviewers destroys the genuine appreciation of literature. For the status, seeker, reading what they literary fashion dictates is a social necessity and thus approves or condemns whatever the fashion dictates and thus has no taste of his own. The devotee of culture is no true
lover of literature either, because he reads literature only to improve himself to become a more complete man. Thus he is too serious a man to be perceptive as a reader.

In addition to these, the literary also misread because of certain misconceptions about literature. This misconception involves a confusion between life and art which does not allow art to have an existence of its own. The confusion has two levels: at a lower level there are readers who want sensational narrative in the form of news, and at a higher level there are readers who read literature because it teaches them knowledge and truths about life. And writers are revered more as teachers than appreciated as artists. Thus literature of power is treated as a species within literature of knowledge. This habit is found among children who read novels for information and persists among adults as well in a subtle form who believe that the value of tragedy lies in teaching us the tragic view of life. This view consists of two propositions: (1) that great miseries result from a flaw in the principal sufferer; (2) that these miseries when pushed to the extreme reveal certain splendour in men. But Lewis disagrees with these views of tragedy because though a flaw in character may cause miseries in life there are so many other things as well which inflict miseries on mankind, and that flaw cannot be called the typical or usual or ultimate cause of human misery to make tragedy a comment on
life. Moreover, it is the tragedians concern neither to give a faithful depiction of life nor teach a particular philosophy of life, and what he does is simply select from reality what his art requires.

Secondly, it is equally unfounded that miseries reveal certain splendours in man when pushed to the extreme. Lewis contends that the tragedians end their stories in a satisfying and sublime finale not because such finale is characteristic of human misery but because it is required by good drama.

There is yet one more erroneous belief that tragedy is truer to life than comedy. This seems to be totally unfounded as the materials for both tragedy and comedy are extracted from life around us, and it is the selection and patterning that makes one comedy and the other tragedy and none is truer to life than the other. Therefore, the only sensible thing for a true reader is not to look for a philosophy in tragedy but to wholly immerse oneself in the work and experience as fully as possible the rare delights provided by the work.

As background to his experiment, Lewis also has discussed myth, fantasy, realism and poetry. Concerning myth he describes it as a story with the following characteristics. It is extra-literary and its effect does not depend either on the narrative elements or stylistic devices. It has a sense of inevitability. It is fatalistic as it deals
with the impossibles and preternaturals. It may be sad or joyful but it is always grave. It is awe-inspiring in nature and we get mysterious or ominous feelings. It has only minimal human sympathy and we do not project ourselves too strongly into the characters.

The literary and unliterary respond to myth differently. Both of them may read the same myth and both may get some excitement. But for the literary who is a lover of myth is moved by the myth as long as he lives, whereas for the unliterary the excitement is over as soon as his curiosity is appeased. Two persons may read the same book and one may find it only an exciting yarn but it may convey a myth to another and be moved profoundly. Another difference in response between the literary and unliterary is that though some literary may have no taste for myth, there are no unliterary who have a taste for myth. Because the unliterary would not accept the impossibles and preternaturals as they can fantasize but hate the fantastic.

Next Lewis turns his attention to fantasy which is a term used both in psychology and literature. In literature fantasy means any narrative that deals with the impossibles and preternaturals. In psychology, fantasy can mean the following: (1) Any imaginative construction in which what is imagined is taken as reality. This can be called Delusion; (2) A pleasing imaginative construction entertained
incessantly by the patient without the delusion that it is reality. This can be called Morbid Castle-building; (3) A pleasing imaginative construction which is indulged in moderately and briefly and kept subordinated to other activities. This can be called Normal Castle-building. Normal Castle-building can be again divided into the egoistic and the disinterested. In the first kind the dreamer makes himself the hero and everything is seen through his eyes and all the achievements are his. It is possible that there can be a transition from egoistic to disinterested castle-building leading to literary creation.

As far as the reading of fantasy is concerned, the unliterary prefers the egoistic-castle-building type. Because in this type he can project himself into the most enviable character of the story and take vicarious pleasure in his triumphs, love, wealth or distinction. Thus egoistic castle-building marks the reading of the unliterary as he can fantasize a great deal in this, but he hates any fantasy which precludes self-indulging reverie. On the other hand, disinterestedness characterises the reading of the literary. He remains a neutral observer and sees with the author’s eye, and allows his imagination to remain detached.

Readers respond to realism differently as well. Realism is a form of literature in which life is represented as realistically as possible. There are two kinds of realism:
realism of presentation and realism of content. In realism of presentation the story has things to see, hear, taste or touch. But in realism of content the story is probable or true to life. Realism of content is the dominant taste at present. This is the influence of the great novels of the last century. But it will be dangerous to erect this historically conditioned preference into a critical principle. Yet such an assumption seems to lurk tacitly in the background of much criticism. Because books are praised for being true to life or being comments on life. Another reason for the emergence of this undeclared critical principle is the widespread neglect and disparagement of the romantic, the fantastic and the idyllic which are stigmatised as escapism.

Lewis probes further into the preposition that literature should be true to life. Being true to life can mean two things: the sort of thing that might conceivably happen or the sort of thing which usually happens and is typical of human life. Oedipus belongs to the first and Middlemarch to the second. If we are to maintain that literature should be true to life, then we should either demand that all good fiction should belong to Middlemarch's family or that even stories of Oedipus type are true to life. The former puts us against the experience of the whole human
race; and the latter forces us into an indefensibly artificial position. Thus both of the positions are absurd.

Moreover, while reading these stories we don't get the impression that they are telling us any truth about life. Neither the writer nor the reader might be thinking about such a generality as human life as the attention is fixed on specific situations with their terror on splendour or pity or absurdity.

Then Lewis gives his views on poetry. He begins with a description of how the literary and unliterary respond to poetry, and follows up with a discussion on the condition of modern poetry. He says in general the unliterary do not read poetry and not all the literary read poetry. As far as modern poetry is concerned, apart from poets, critics and teachers of literature, only very few read it.

This has happened because poetry and prose have grown apart. Poetry has differentiated itself further and further from prose. As far as diction goes, poetry has come closer to prose since the time of Wordsworth after the abolition of the special diction for poetry. But the same thing cannot be said about content. Earlier there was hardly any difference between the content of poetry and that of prose. What Dante said in the Divine Comedy could have been said in prose as well; and a prose play could have satisfied the qualities Aristotle demanded of tragedy. But this is no longer the case.
with the content of modern poetry. As modern poetry aspires to 'mean' and also to 'be' it says things which cannot be said in any fashion in prose. So in a way poetry has become purer. But this extreme differentiation from prose and this purity has generated problems of its own. Poetry has abandoned all logical and narrative connections and to read it one has to get into a trance-like condition to let sounds, images and associations to operate on their own. If reading old poetry requires learning a slightly different language, now reading modern poetry requires the unmaking of one's mind.

Modern poetry is of such illusive nature that the same poem can be interpreted in entirely different ways by the cognoscenti. So it is no longer a question as to which interpretation is right but which is the best. As the common ground between prose and poetry has been reduced almost to zero, modern poetry has become too difficult for many to understand it, and reading poetry requires no less exalted talent than writing it. As a result the number of readers of poetry has suffered diminution; and now poetry's area in the map of reading has shrunk from that of an empire to a tiny province.

What is the future of such poetry? A belief persists that it may be only a transient affair as it is bound to die asphyxiated in the vacuum of its own purity. Others hope to
raise people through culture till poetry could gain again a wide audience. But Lewis is haunted by a third possibility. As the teaching of Rhetoric in the ancient world lasted for a thousand years, the teaching of poetry also may have the same destiny and last as a scholastic exercise in the universities for a millennium.

In *An Experiment in Criticism*, Lewis proposes to judge literature by the way men read it instead of judging men's taste by the things they read. He says good literature permits, invites, and compels good reading. And good reading consists in surrendering ourselves completely to a work of art by getting ourselves out of the way and by emptying ourselves to make ourselves receptive to the work. If any book compels good reading and if one can read it again and again it has to be good. In distinguishing good books from bad books, Lewis uses double distinctions. He puts some books beyond the pale, and then finds out the better from the worse within the pale.

In addition, Lewis enumerates the advantages of the system. Firstly, it fixes our attention on the act of reading. The function of criticism is to multiply and safeguard experiences of good reading and the system fulfils this function. Secondly, the system puts our feet on solid ground. This is so because observation of how men read is a strong basis for judgement of what they read as the
distinction between attentive and inattentive mode of reading is permanent and if ever valid, valid everywhere. Thirdly, it would make critical condemnations difficult. Lewis considers this an advantage as condemnation has become too easy these days. 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 Lewis' system it works in the open. Even an unimpressive book if it is a life-long delight of a single reader we dare not put it beyond the pale. Fourthly, the proposed system is more realistic. Because it is based on the assumption that whatever has been found good by those who truly read is to be good. So the question of totally debunking an author who has been well inside the pale for sometime does not arise.

One result of the system would be to silence those critics who have condemned all the great names in English literature except half a dozen protected by the current critical establishment. If the new system can produce the desired effect, criticism would certainly see happier days.

Lewis concludes An Experiment in Criticism with a discussion on literary good. He opens his discussion by trying to answer the question, why we read literature. He says that we read literature because we do not possess in ourselves sources that can supply all the information or
advice or entertainment we want. Then he analyses the components of literature by differentiating two levels of literature: literature of knowledge and literature of power. Literature of knowledge is concerned with instruction and literature of power is concerned with pleasure.

In Lewis’ assessment literature of power can be divided into two components: Logos (something said) and Poiema (something made). As Logos, it tells us a story or expresses an emotion or pleads an argument or excites laughter. The Logos is an integral part of the Poiema and by being so it become a work of art. But the elements with which Poiema builds its harmony are directed towards the Logos and they cannot even exist without it. Thus the two are interdependent and complementary. As Poiema it gives us pleasure by its aural beauty, by balance and contrast, and by the unity and harmony of its successive parts. But Poiema can give us pleasure only when we participate in its various successive parts by using our imagination, thoughts and feelings at a tempo prescribed by the poet. The effect of such participation is a feeling of satisfaction or relaxation which shows that it is good for us here and now; and this is the truth behind Aristotle’s catharsis. Therefore, literature is to be valued for its capacity to give us aesthetic pleasure and not for any comments it gives on life.
A special characteristic of literary reading is that, unlike scientific or other informative reading, we don’t have to believe or approve the Logos. So believing in the authenticity of Dante’s universe or the real existence of the Mariner’s skeleton ship or the historicity of Thetis rising from the sea to comfort Achilles is not essential to enjoy the work. What good is there then in occupying our hearts with stories which never happened and things which didn’t even exist? Lewis says we read literature because we want to enlarge ourselves by seeing with other eyes, imagining with other imaginations or feeling with other hearts. In reading, as in worship, love and moral action we transcend ourselves and by so doing we attain the highest self-realization.