

# AUTHOR AND READER: SENSE-GIVING AND SENSE-READING IN C.S. LEWIS'S "GOOD READING"



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## ABSTRACT

*In An Experiment in Criticism, C.S. Lewis demonstrates why, within traditional academic circles, he is best known and most respected for his accomplishments in regard to the study of English literature. Lewis's important monograph aims to illuminate a new direction in literary criticism, and succeeds marvelously. Interestingly, Lewis's analysis is paralleled at every turn by Polanyian insights. We have therefore yet a further instance of the intersection of the thought of these two men, and we again wonder at the absence during their lives of recognition of one another.*

What follows is a fragment of a much larger study that, circumstances permitting, might have been executed under the heading of "The Tacit Dynamics of Lewis's *An Experiment in Criticism*." The present essay will confine itself to examination of one from a long list of pregnant themes that arise from a Polanyian encounter with Lewis's important monograph, namely, the manner in which Michael Polanyi's notions of "sense-giving" and "sense-reading" usefully illuminate both the concept of "good reading" that stands at the heart of Lewis's book and the practice of literary criticism itself. We will begin by explaining what Lewis intends by "good reading." Following that, we will review Polanyi's sense-giving and sense-reading before, finally, indicating the role

they may play in comprehending reading and criticism alike. In the process many of the themes of the now-dormant larger study will naturally appear.

### Lewis's Project

So, what is the “experiment” featured in the title of Lewis’s book? In a tone perfectly reminiscent of his essays and Christian apologetic works, he states,

In this essay I propose to try an experiment. Literary criticism is traditionally employed in judging books. Any judgement [sic] it implies about men’s reading of books is a corollary from its judgement [sic] on the books themselves. Bad taste is, as it were by definition, a taste for bad books. I want to find out what sort of picture we shall get by reversing the process. Let us make our distinction between readers or types of reading the basis, and our distinction between books the corollary. Let us try to discover how far it might be plausible to define a good book as a book which is read in one way, and a bad book as a book which is read in another (Lewis 1961, 1; unless otherwise noted, parenthetical citations are to this source).

As we unpack the meaning of this opening paragraph of *An Experiment in Criticism*, we embark on a most interesting journey.

Under the terms of Lewis’s experiment, we will define “good literature as that which permits, invites, or even compels good reading” (104). What constitutes good reading? About this matter Lewis has much to say. At the most fundamental level, in the case of good reading, one is “receiving” rather than “using.” A good reader is open to the effect of the words he reads. He will be carried away. For this to occur, however, it is necessary to give oneself over to the text. Accordingly, Lewis frequently refers to the “surrender” required in order to practice good reading. Indeed, it is only in this act of allowing the impact to happen that we learn whether a text is truly worthy (32). In advance we cannot know. And, because we cannot know, a good reader suspends judgment in order to find out (116). A good reader may be enthusiastic, but, more importantly, he is open. And, vitally, the good reader is alert.

Lewis speaks of “look[ing] through the lens” of the words we read; this is the vehicle through which the impact of good reading occurs (31, 36). Here we are reminded of one of the most remarkable of Lewis’s essays, “Meditation in a Toolshed,” in which Lewis, referring to a beam of sunlight shining into a dark shed, notes that we may look *at* that beam or we may *look along* it (Lewis 1970, 212-215). In the former the beam is an object of our attention. We might, for example, measure its intensity or, were one a physicist, analyze it in terms of its constituent parts. But it is the latter (looking *along*) that primarily interests Lewis. Here we remain “inside” the beam enjoying

what it reveals (in this case, “green leaves moving on the branches of a tree outside and beyond that, 90 odd million miles away, the sun,” *ibid.*, 212). Looking *at* the beam precludes looking *along* it and thus prevents appreciation of the fruits that such experience yields. The point Lewis makes through this illustration is that these are two very different experiences. And, he adds, while the modern mind is apt to dismiss looking *along* as secondary in stature, or even as a mere illusion whose true character is captured by looking *at* (after all, what ensues from looking *along* is incapable of being measured or in any way demonstrated objectively), the two experiences possess equal validity (though very different roles in our lives).

Much the same holds for good reading. One could look *at* the words of the text. At the literal end of the spectrum, the reader, for example, might be counting instances of the use of a particular conjunction. At a more sophisticated level of “use” of a literary text, the reader may be focused on the events that are related therein (that is, the narrative or literal meaning) or in descrying in a poem or story a recipe for living. In contrast, when engaged in good reading, one experiences the rewards available only through giving oneself over to the words, listening closely, yielding to their effect, and allowing to happen what may thereby occur. One in the process goes beyond his prior self (his “subjectivity”) and affiliates with something greater (93). In the passionate final pages of the book, Lewis states that through reading “we seek an enlargement of our being. We want to be more than ourselves” (137). Lest we misunderstand, however, he closes with these words: “But in reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem, I see with a myriad eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do” (141).

One wonders where the impact of such surrender takes place. For Lewis, the answer is the imagination, the domain within which literary texts “work on us” (85). Actually, a close (and good) reading of Lewis indicates that imagination is not only a location but also a faculty or power whose operation populates that location. He speaks, for example, of “the attentive and obedient imagination” employed by good reading that is absent in those Lewis describes as “unliterary” readers (33-34) whose imaginations are marked by “extreme inertia” (55). In the same vein he then refers to “the fertile imagination which can build...on the bare facts” (34). But, while good reading depends on the operation of such a faculty, the reward of that activity is the resulting condition. In receiving an author’s words during good reading, we “go through and beyond them to an imagined something which is not itself verbal...Let us call this ‘imagined something’ the *content*” (88-89). Lewis adds, “The ‘recipient’ wants to rest in it. It is for him, at least temporarily, an end. That way, it may be compared (upward) with religious contemplation or (downward) with a game” (89).

Though Lewis never in his book employs the term, it is apparent that in good reading one is acting as an apprentice. In permitting the imagination to operate, we give ourselves over to, and thereby enter “into the opinions, and therefore also the attitudes, feelings, and total experience, of other men” (85). In doing so the good reader elects to act under the authority of the author (and that which is described). As a good reader, “We want to see with other eyes, to imagine with other imaginations, to feel with other hearts, as well as with our own” (137). Lewis observes, “One of the things we feel after 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” (138). This “is the specific value or good of literature considered as Logos; it admits us to experiences other than our own” (139). The good reader is driven by the conviction that “My own eyes are not enough for me. I will see through those of others” (140).

If there is good reading, then there must also be bad. And, indeed, much of *An Experiment in Criticism* is an account of what Lewis refers to as the “nonliterary” reader who would use the text to serve his egoistic purposes rather than surrender to it and welcome the always somewhat unpredictable resulting impact on the imagination. It is worth noting that in returning to a literary text through good reading, the riches keep coming. It is possible indefinitely to return to the well. Each encounter is “a fresh immersion in what it is” (85). The immediate point, however, is that an important objective for Lewis in writing his book is to preserve the understanding that there is such a thing as excellence (and thereby the converse) both in the reading and writing of literary texts. The purpose of the experiment, after all, is to establish the stature of pieces of literature through noting the sort of reading to which they give rise. There are different kinds of readers because there are different sorts of people. Not all perspectives, and hence not all manners of reading, are of equivalent value. There is in Lewis a persistent respect for people of every sort (see, for example, 76). But to possess such respect is not to extend equal regard to everything people say and do. In writing a book on good reading (and the superior literature that compels it), Lewis acknowledges the existence of excellence and expertise while standing foursquare against both the spirit of levelling and any related impulse to erode real qualitative distinctions between various instances of human expression and experience.

### A Polanyian Dimension

Early in *The Study of Man* Polanyi states, “the sender of the message will always have to rely for the comprehension of his message on the intelligence of the person addressed” (*SM*, 21-22). A moment later he adds, “This holds, of course, also at the point from which a statement is issued” (*ibid.*, 22). We then receive a clarifying summary: “nothing that is said, written or printed, can ever mean anything in itself: for it is only a *person* who utters something—or who listens to it or reads it—who

can mean something *by* it. All these semantic functions are the tacit operations of a person” (ibid.). These words are a portal to fruitful, even life-changing vistas on a wide number of subjects, not the least of which is the dynamics and rewards of “good reading” as well as those of literary criticism itself. Before moving on to these, however, let us dwell on two concepts—“sense-giving” and sense-reading”—employed by Polanyi to better explain what is taking place in the delivery and receipt of meaningful written communication.

In 1967 Polanyi published an article (republished two years later in *KB*) which articulated at length the meaning of these two concepts. Writers are in the business of sense-giving. This is achieved via selection of words, the order in which they are expressed, etc. In drafting a message or reporting an experience (factual or fictional), the writer is simultaneously struggling to capture a meaning (that, intriguingly, emerges precisely through that struggle) and shape the imagination of the reader. Among the chief factors involved in sense-giving is “*conceptual subsumption*” through which the writer challenges the reader to understand in terms of common nouns or universals (Polanyi 1969, 190; cf. Fennell 2013). Polanyi emphasizes that the author, in originally experiencing that which he intends to relate in his writing, was himself groping for meaning. This groping consists of the well-known Polanyian triad of (first) a personal integration of (second) incoming clues resulting in (third) a focal result. What makes writing a particularly interesting phenomenon is that the author engages in a second instance of integration of clues as he works to provide “a verbal account of this experience” (Polanyi 1969, 186). This is “the performance of a practical skill” (ibid.) in regard to which human ability varies markedly. Strikingly, Polanyi refers to the first of the integrations as sense-reading and the second as sense-giving. During the latter, when the author puts words to paper in order to affect the envisioned reader, those words are selected to serve as subsidiary clues to a meaning that the author intends to communicate (“subsidiary” because, while vital to the reader’s arriving at the meaning, the clues are, during the reading at least, tacit in their operation and not themselves the object of his attention).

That the words are in fact separate from the meaning that, through personal integration, they yield is made clear by Polanyi by reference to his habit of reading correspondence at the breakfast table. Polanyi is fluent in several languages, but his son, who joins him at the table, understands only English. Periodically, Polanyi finds a letter sufficiently noteworthy that he wishes to share it with his son. Passing the letter to him is sometimes all of a sudden arrested by the realization that the missive is written in a language other than English. Clearly, then, the meaning of the letter, though relying for its conveyance on the words employed by it, is independent of those words. The same meaning, it would seem, could have been communicated by the subsidiary clues afforded by the words of other languages.<sup>1</sup> To employ the terms used in Polanyi’s

last book, *Meaning*, words typically serve as “indicators.” Under the “from-to structure of language,” words receive their meaning from that to which they refer. Significantly, however, while this is the norm for “[t]he most elementary use of language,” the matter is quite different in the case of metaphor (*M*, 69 ff).

There is, of course, yet another instance of sense-reading in this account. This is the one that occurs when the author’s words have their impact on the reader. When words, written or spoken, serve their purpose, we do not observe them focally but instead permit them to act subsidiarily, the result being that “*we look through the word at its meaning*” (Polanyi 1969, 184). Polanyi emphasizes that the reader in sense-giving is making decisions through use of his “powers” (ibid., 188). Central among these powers are intuition and imagination, the integration of which defines the process of discovery (ibid., 201-206; cf. Polanyi 1966, 85-93). What appropriately occupies our mind at this point is the role of imagination. For example, where, as noted above, the writer employs “*conceptual subsumption*,” the reader exercises “*conceptual exemplification*” (ibid., 190). Thus, while reading in a novel or poem of a bloodied horse in a daze wandering through a field of dead and wounded soldiers, the reader achieves understanding through allowing the words via their “interiorization” to summon up images of the objects intended by the writer.<sup>2</sup> That is, the writer presupposes and capitalizes upon prior experience on the part of the reader. Due to that prior experience, the reader is able to understand the writer’s description in terms of the categories through which that experience exists and carries forward. Polanyi, drawing on Piaget, elsewhere refers to this process of *seeing as* or *seeing in terms of* as “assimilation” (Polanyi 1974, 102-105; cf. Fennell 2016; Broudy 1988). Exemplification, however, consists of more than confirmation of existing categories. Assimilation is often, especially in response to powerful new experience or in an encounter with masterful literature, accompanied by what Polanyi labels “adaptation” (Polanyi 1974, 105). Here the categories of prior experience, initially inadequate, are extended. The result is properly understood as “education,” the consequence being not only a dramatic moment of realization but also an enhancement of the store of concepts and images in terms of which subsequent experience may be understood.<sup>3</sup>

At the heart of a discussion of “the tacit dynamics of tacit knowing” (itself based on his well-informed analysis of scientific discovery), Polanyi highlights the role of the “questing” or “striving” imagination. Here the term refers to an active faculty that, in the grips of an end in view, “evokes” the subsidiaries that are “the means of its own implementation” (Polanyi 1969, 200). He states, “the striving imagination has the power to implement its aim by the subsidiary practice of ingenious rules of which the subject remains focally ignorant” (ibid.). In this discussion Polanyi is referring not only to the practical achievement of learning to ride a bicycle but also to the capacity of children to learn to speak a language which, it turns out, is an equally practical

challenge (the organism, situated in a problematic environment, needs to make sense of its surroundings in order to thrive and, indeed, to survive). Here we receive a glimpse of Polanyi's philosophical anthropology. Humans share with other organisms the challenge of coping successfully with challenging conditions. Given human intelligence, this activity in the case of man consists to a considerable degree of exercising control over those conditions. It is in the nature of the human being to possess the capacity to imagine a suitable outcome as well as to execute a mechanism to arrive at that end (typically without focal awareness this is occurring). In appreciating the grandeur of this activity, it is important to remember it consists of adaptation as well as assimilation. As noted above, in making sense we often successfully accommodate that which is novel. In the case of a story, for example, the reader may strive to recognize what counts as a moral action or what appropriately ranks as a (plausible) outcome of such action. It is possible, however, in an encounter with an extraordinary literary work, for our existing store of images of moral actions and outcomes to be insufficient to grasp that which is recounted. While some readers will in this case reject the story and regard it as bizarre or flawed writing, others, possessing a "roaming vision" of possibilities (ibid., 201), will more receptively modify and extend their store of images, thereby making available a richer (or at least expanded) store of images in terms of which to understand subsequent literary (and, incidentally, real-life) encounters in the future. Reading confirms our grasp of the world; but it also at times extends it. A comparable analysis exists for poetry.

### The Tacit Dynamics of "Good Reading" and Literary Criticism

In the closing section of this brief encounter with *An Experiment in Criticism*, our objective, drawing upon Polanyi's *The Study of Man* and relevant chapters from *Meaning*, is to elucidate and apply relevant observations from those works in order usefully to further illuminate Lewis's portrayal of good reading as well as the meaning of literary criticism itself. Let us begin with the former.

We have already made some progress in outlining a Polanyian understanding of Lewis's "good reading." This advance consisted of recognizing the role played in writing of conceptual subsumption and in reading by conceptual exemplification, as well as in discerning the "education" that occurs in the latter when engaging with superior literature. We have also begun to more fully appreciate the critical role played in good reading by the successful appeal to the reader's imagination. Above all, we have come to see how words tacitly operate in pointing to a meaning beyond them. This, however, is only the beginning.

Within a survey of living things, Polanyi in *The Study of Man* observes that "man alone can command respect, and in this sense we humans are the top of creation" (SM, 59). He adds, "The distinctive qualities of man are developed by education. Our

native gift of speech enables us to enter on the mental life of man by assimilating our cultural heritage. We come into existence mentally, by adding to our bodily equipment an articulate framework and using it for understanding experience” (ibid., 59-60). In this statement we see what an author, through prompting Lewis’s good reading, makes possible. The author of such literary work is an agent of Polanyi’s “education,” for such an individual is engaged in illuminating “the top.” The significance of this service cannot be overstated. Insofar as the author of superior literature is a creator of our cultural heritage, by appreciating such work we participate in this creation and thereby become a vehicle of its transmission. Through our personal participation we carry out the author’s intentions. To say it somewhat differently, the creative artist (Polanyi in *Meaning* directs our attention to music, drama, painting, sculpture, etc. as well as literature) via “the gratification of [his] mental passions creates objects destined to gratify the same passions in others” (ibid., 60). Such works, as well as acts of discovery and noble actions (that is, exemplars), “enrich the mind of all humanity” (ibid.). The result is a “cultural firmament” (ibid., 61) in and through which, both as individuals and a species, we find meaning. Authors of literary works, through promotion of good reading, make possible “participation in timeless and ubiquitous things” (ibid.; cf. *PK* 374-379; see also Fennell 2014). Indeed, it is through such participation that those things unfold. In such instances, we are, for Polanyi, such meaning coming to understand itself. Good reading, therefore, assumes the greatest significance imaginable.

Through the appreciation of literature that good reading makes possible, the reader enters a “fellowship” defined by acknowledgement “that we share with [the author] the same firmament of obligations” (*SM*, 66). In this relationship, artists are “our masters,” for it is they who articulate and thereby set standards, the concerted attempt to live in light of which constitutes what Polanyi widely refers to as our “calling.” As Lewis forcefully argues in *The Abolition of Man*, it is precisely such an effort that defines “man.” We are therefore not surprised to find Polanyi referring to “the particular calling of literate man in the universe” and then stating, “a supreme trust is placed in us by the whole creation, and it is sacrilege then even to contemplate actions which may lead to the extinction of humanity” (*SM*, 69). Through the joint efforts of author and reader, which is to say, through sense-giving and sense-reading, such extinction is forestalled (cf. Polanyi 1959, 97-99; see also Polanyi 1974).

Let us, as promised, close our abbreviated study of Lewis’s monograph with a Polanyian account of literary criticism itself. In *The Study of Man* Polanyi asserts that “the craving to understand actuates the whole mental life of man. This craving is satisfied most fully when it grasps an idea which promises yet to reveal large, still unfathomable, implications” (*SM*, 84). And, earlier, he states “that every act of understanding somewhat rectifies our being and...that a conversion to a truer way of *being a man* will induce a better *understanding of man*” (ibid., 82-83). As we consider literary

work in light of this framework, two questions that inevitably arise are the degree to which the author succeeds in promoting such an outcome, and how it is possible to know whether that judgment is true. In a chapter from *Meaning* titled “Validity in Art” Polanyi addresses these questions head-on. Our discussion will integrate what Polanyi has to say there with additional relevant observations from *The Study of Man*.

As the critic assesses a literary text, he is acting, as earlier did the author, both as a representative and on behalf of standards above and beyond himself.<sup>4</sup> While writing, the author attempted to act responsibly in light of his grasp “of truth and rightness” (*SM*, 90). The critic’s task is to determine, *under that very same authority*, the degree to which the author succeeded. In its purest form, literary criticism consists of an “encounter” (*SM*, 95) between author and reader in which clarity of judgment is made possible by the light afforded by the standards of the literary enterprise. Given the existence of such standards, it is possible to test the work to see how well it fares. Just as is the case for evaluation of claims made in science, the question at the heart of literary criticism is whether the work successfully yields coherence—that is, does it provide the subsidiary clues as well as the necessary stimulus to provoke, via the imagination, a meaningful coherent whole? As Polanyi notes, “To move man aesthetically is to move his imagination to make such integrations” (*M*, 106). But, he warns, “there can exist no strict criterion for coherence, our judgment of it must always remain a qualitative, nonformal, tacit, personal judgment” (*M*, 100). Of course, standards are always to some degree in flux, and we ought to expect disagreement both about their nature and the manner in which they are applied. Further, the understanding of standards as well as their application is unavoidably personal. But they are not, Polanyi emphasizes, arbitrary or subjective. He anticipates the predictable objection by asking, “But who is to assess this value?” (*M*, 100). Polanyi, already conceding the absence of strict criteria, adds that “[t]he pursuit...is obviously fraught with value judgments, and by doubts about how to exercise such value judgments” (*ibid.*). The very existence of the enterprise, however—whether it is science, literature, music, drama, or visual art—exists only in light of some consensus regarding its nature and how it is to be judged. As Polanyi states,

The scientist, applying nonstrict criteria to the evaluation of scientific merit, does so in the conviction that these criteria are universally valid, and the scientific opinion of the time endorses this claim. It requires such value judgments to be “objective” and relies on them to be so. Accordingly, their validity is attested to by the authority of scientists *as a body*—not simply by the authority of the personal judgment of the contributing scientist. This success of science in universally imposing such self-set standards of value lends support to a similar practice in the life of the arts (*M*, 101).

There are periods in which disagreement about criteria for evaluation is deep and fundamental. But if the conflict were irresolvable or boundless we would no longer have a subject about which to disagree.

Ideally (and in fact typically), the nature of the standards underlying criticism is not deeply controversial. In the case of literature, careful and more informed readers to a considerable degree share a notion of profundity and excellence. They recognize greatness in writing when they see it. This in turn gives rise to an experience of reverence for the truth thereby revealed. In this moment, Lewis's surrender within good reading becomes "submission to greatness" and, in an instance of the education noted earlier in regard to such reading, "we are now looking *up* to our object, not down" (*SM*, 97). In assessing the literary text, and in electing to respond in this fashion, it is always possible we are wrong. But that possibility, so to speak, comes with the territory. "That [the] grounds of artistic creation [and evaluation] are ultimate does not mean ... that they are infallible" (*M*, 103). To refrain, however, for this reason from aesthetic judgment is equivalent to refusing to permit literary work its full expression and thereby from having the impact it was intended to produce. Moreover, any rejection or modification of a critical judgment is possible only in light of alternative self-set standards. And none of these, neither those originally forwarded nor those offered in their place, are deliberately chosen (*M*, 103-104). Rather, they are taken from the setting in which the critic was formed, to which he is committed, and for which he stands. This is a setting that, in the case of art, is especially influenced by the creative individual. Yet, to a considerable degree it is inevitably the product of tradition. Coherence, strictly speaking, can never be a purely private affair. Making sense, even in the most avant-garde dimensions of the arts, is a community enterprise informed and animated by a sense of a truth that has yet to be fully grasped. Thus, the author, no less than the reader, remains an apprentice acting in submission to that which is greater and he can only hope wholly to understand.

It would be seriously misleading, however, to leave it at this. In *Meaning*, as throughout his many writings, Polanyi finds in science both the epistemology and the human dynamics that serve as a penetrating model for other, quite diverse, activities. But, in a vital respect that largely defines the endeavor, art differs from science. While the artist, as does the scientist in regard to a prediction, "sets forth a claim that [his creation's] value is universally valid...[,] the maker of a work of art claims more than this" (*M*, 102). For Polanyi, "the artist detaches his product from his personal life, but by this very act he includes his own unique artistic problem and his solution of it in the frame that demarcates the property he offers to the public" (*ibid.*). He adds, "It is only the artist who detaches himself as an artist from himself as a private individual and embodies *this* artistic person in his work. Scientists cannot do this. But therefore all art

is intensely personal *and* strictly detached; and it must...claim universal validity for the *personal* self-set standards it obeys” (ibid.).

This feature of art has profound consequence for literary criticism: “Art has no tests external to art. Its making and acceptance must therefore be ultimately grounded on the decision of its maker, interacting, it is true, with both tradition and the public’s present inclinations, but nevertheless interacting by and through the maker’s own judgments” (*M*, 103). Still, Polanyi emphasizes, we see here the operation of self-set standards, and the artist, in bending to their authority, understands himself to be serving a reality that exists independent of him. In a fascinating summary, Polanyi, while noting the indispensable guiding role of such universal standards, states that the artist “may be the first ever to recognize them, yet he feels himself bound by them, not superior to them; for to him his innovation of standards appears to be a discovery” (ibid.). Because this is precisely what occurs also in science, Polanyi’s conception of scientific discovery reassumes its primacy. In the case of art the model offered by science has not been supplanted or overruled but instead is extended to accommodate aspects of artistic creation that do not exist for the scientist. In short, art (including, of course, literature) is even more personal than scientific discovery. Due to this fact, literary criticism must in its operation pay respect to a degree of personal idiosyncrasy that would, at best, be irrelevant in science. Practically speaking this means that the critic must be prepared to learn from the writer. In the end, however, even the artist is to be evaluated in terms of what our standards indicate to be the truth. But in the case of literature, as well as for the arts in general, the critic is open in a manner that is not appropriate for science itself.

The greater complexity of art and literature does not, however, alter the central point: the creative offering is to be judged in terms of the consequences resulting from giving ourselves over to it. The essential question is whether the literary work gives rise in the imagination to novel instances of integration that the reader experiences as meaningful. This is the fruit of good reading. It is the job of the literary critic for both Lewis and Polanyi to determine whether the work in question bears such fruit. Where Polanyi dwells on the outcome, Lewis in *An Experiment in Criticism* directs our attention to the sort of reading that makes that outcome possible. There is good reason to believe that Polanyi, in appreciation of the role played by sense-giving and sense-reading, would be intrigued by Lewis’s experiment and would have no objection to it.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>This is true at least in the simplest cases. Although Polanyi does not himself make the observation, surely he would grant that in the more sophisticated uses of words, differing languages communicate shades of meaning that are not comprehensively translatable. Polanyi in fact cites such

an example: French offers two words of quite different meaning (*savoir* and *connaître*) where English has just one (“to know”).

<sup>2</sup>“The relation of a word to that which it denotes is established by a tacit integration in which we rely on a subsidiary awareness of the word for directing out attention to its meaning...this integration deprives the word of its existence as an observed body and makes it in a way transparent” (192). Such integration, it is important to note, is both a “performance” (193) and an achievement which can be executed more or less well.

<sup>3</sup>“Our education is largely based on absorbing communication about experiences that are novel to us and are recorded in a language we don’t understand” (Polanyi 1969, 188). Polanyi adds, “An unintelligible text referring to an unintelligible matter presents us with a dual problem. Both halves of such a problem jointly guide our minds towards solving them and will in fact be solved jointly by the understanding of the objects referred to and the words referring to it. The meaning of the things and of the terms designating them is discovered at the same time. I have said that this dual act of sense-reading is the paradigm of the educational expansion of our mind; it also bears on the process by which a child learns to understand speech” (ibid., 189).

<sup>4</sup>Let us make an important distinction that will frame the discussion of literary criticism. It is possible, of course, to *talk about* literary criticism, referring to it as an object. But, as we will see, to *practice* literary criticism in the manner described by Polanyi, one would have to be open to the literary text in order to be able to discern its impact (and subsequently to judge the text on the basis of the presence or absence of such impact). That, in turn, would depend on Lewis’s good reading. It is true, however, that under Lewis’s “experiment” an observing critic might, strictly speaking, be able to judge a work on the basis of whether it prompted good reading in others. That is, the critic would not himself need to have that encounter with the work (though it might be risky as well as suspect to trust reports from those others). For Polanyi, genuine assessment of the work is a personal experience that can take place only directly. While something useful might be learned by the critic through noting the quality of the reading of the text on the part of others, for the critic himself to know whether the work is superior and whether the author has truly met the standards in light of which he endeavored, the critic would need on his own to surrender to the text and experience the consequences of it for himself.

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