

NOTES FROM: *The Reading Life*, by C.S. Lewis

SUMMARY: Here we have an excellent selection of passages and quotes from C.S. Lewis about the love of books and reading. Having read the Narnia series growing up, Lewis is one of those people – among whom I include my parents – primarily responsible for my own love of reading, and if you're a reader as well, you're going to recognize one of our own kind in these pages.

One of the many, many interesting things about Lewis is his grown-up appreciation of children's tales, and his recognition of their supreme value, not only to young and promising readers, but to everyone who has grown up surrounded by words. Far from being a stage one grows out of, the rest of the world seems more magical after having read of dragons and enchanted woods.

All that being said, Lewis is also a champion of the general reader, and (rightfully) believes that classical texts are not so difficult as to preclude normal people like you and I from reading them and enjoying them. Plato and Seneca aren't difficult; it's the people who write about them today that make everything so needlessly complicated and forbidding!

“One of his students recalled that someone could quote any line from the book-length *Paradise Lost*, and Lewis would continue the passage from memory. Another student said that he could take a book off Lewis's shelf, open a page at random and begin reading, and Lewis could summarize the rest of the page, often word for word.”

“In reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself.”

“A children's story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's story.”

“When I was ten, I read fairy tales in secret and would have been ashamed had I been found doing so. Now that I am fifty, I read them openly. When I became a man, I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up.”

“He does not despise real woods because he has read of enchanted woods: the reading makes all real woods a little enchanted.”

“The simplest student will be able to understand, if not all, yet a very great deal of what Plato said; but hardly anyone can understand some modern books on Platonism. It has always therefore been one of my main endeavors as a teacher to persuade the young that firsthand knowledge is not only more worth acquiring than second-hand knowledge, but is usually much easier and more delightful to acquire.”

“The quality which had enchanted me in his imaginative works turned out to be the quality of the real universe, the divine, magical, terrifying, and ecstatic reality in which we all live.”

“I have lived nearly sixty years with myself and my own century and am not so enamored of either as to desire no glimpse of a world beyond them. As the mere tourist’s kind of holiday abroad seems to me rather a waste of Europe – there is more to be got out of it than he gets – so it would seem to me a waste of the past if we were content to see in the literature of every bygone age only the reflection of our own faces.”

“Clearly one must read every good book at least once every ten years.”

“The reader, we must remember, does not start by knowing what we mean. If our words are ambiguous, our meaning will escape him. I sometimes think that writing is like driving sheep down a road. If there is any gate open to the left or the right the reader will most certainly go into it.”