

the transition to the medieval world. He also understood how the art forms of the medieval world died with the coming of the Renaissance. The way artists painted changed in the medieval world because of what people believed about the world in which they lived. The way people made music changed at the beginning of the medieval world, represented by such forms as the Gregorian chant. In his work as a scholar, however, Lewis focused on the origins and death of allegorical poetry and epic poetry.

In *The Allegory of Love* (1936) C. S. Lewis explains how allegorical poetry became the dominant form of storytelling in the West for a thousand years after the collapse of the Roman Empire. In this scholarly study, Lewis demonstrates how the Christian faith changed the very nature of love and marriage over this thousand year period from one in which marriage was only an economic transaction between two families to one in which marriage became a commitment of love between two people. Lewis marvels that a new kind of story appeared in the eleventh century that reflects the changing view of love and marriage. Because it is one of our culture's most popular kinds of story, it is hard to believe that this kind of story has not always been popular in every culture. It is the love story.

In *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (1942) Lewis explains how epic poetry works and traces its development in several different cultures. In its primary form, epic poetry like Homer's *Iliad* with its tale of the Trojan War focuses on the exploits of individual heroes and their admirable traits that the culture hopes to perpetuate from one generation to the next. In the development of epic to its secondary form, however, the epic story becomes the story of a great nation like Virgil's *Aeneid* and the founding of Rome. The last great epic poem in English was Milton's *Paradise Lost* published in 1667. The last great allegory in English was Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*

STORIES IN A FELLOWSHIP OF FRIENDS

In the early 1930s, C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien began the habit or discipline of meeting together each week in Oxford to talk about what they were writing and to exchange criticism of each other's

Dyson who with Tolkien had taken part in the critical conversation about myth that finally turned C. S. Lewis toward faith in Jesus Christ. The diary entry for Saturday, February 18, 1933 begins in the rooms of C. S. Lewis in Magdalen College where Warnie has gone to help his brother:

...in came J[ack]'s friend Dyson from Reading—a man who gives the impression of being made of quick silver: he pours himself into a room on a cataract of words and gestures, and you are caught up in the stream—but after the first plunge, it is exhilarating. I was swept along by him to the Mitre Tap, in the Turl (a distinct discovery this, by the way) where we had two glasses of Bristol milk a piece and discussed China, Japan, stationers, Dickens, house property as an investment, and, most utterly unexpected “Your favourite readings Orlando Furioso isn't it?” (deprecatory gesture as I get ready to deny this) “Sorry! Sorry! My mistake”. As we leave the pub, a boy came into the yard and fell on the cobbles. D[yson] (appealingly) “Don't do that my boy: it hurts you and distresses us”. We parted outside, D[yson] inviting me to dine with him in Reading on the 18th of next month, and J[ack] to dine and spend the night. “We'll be delighted to have you for the night too, if you don't mind sleeping in the same bed as your brother”. His part of the invitation I declined, but I think I shall dine....

This brief anecdote forms almost a perfect story. It has a clear beginning, a development, and a conclusion. More to the point, the story means something. Warnie did not write the diary for publication. The story meant something to him that we can share as we read over his shoulder. It is the story of the beginning of a friendship that would last for over forty years. The ability to tell a story involves the ability to weave the incidents together in a meaningful way. Warnie would have appreciated the fact that in French, the word for story and for history is the same word (*histoire*). The well crafted story, however, has an impact on the reader in its conclusion. It is

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not necessary that we know that Warnie and Dyson became friends afterward. The story tells us all we need to know and leaves us wanting to be part of the friendship.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF STORIES

The Inklings appreciated and told different kinds of stories. Hugo

RENEWING MINDS

it must involve positive belief. Tolkien's success with this aspect of

Charles Williams wrote an entirely different kind of story that appeared to be a conventional realistic novel, until things began to happen. Lewis explained that Williams wrote neither the classic novel nor the fantasy, but a third kind of story that begins with the supposal, "Let us suppose that this everyday world were, at some one point, invaded by the marvelous. Let us, in fact, suppose a violation of frontier." Williams is interested in both sides of the frontier in a way that illumines the material world but also provides a reflection of the spiritual world.

Lewis wrote yet another kind of story that in its way tripped between the realistic and the fantastic. He gained recognition as an important writer of science fiction when that genre first began to "take off." In a letter to Ruth Pierson, Lewis explained that he had realized "what other planets in fiction are really good for: for *spiritual* adventures." With the blossoming of science fiction a few years later in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the exploration of spiritual issues has become recognized as an integral feature of science fiction done well.

While Tolkien focused all of his literary energies on fantasy, other Inklings realized that the ideas Tolkien expressed had wider application throughout many forms of storytelling. In his lecture on Thomas Hardy given at Cambridge University in 1942, Lord David Cecil concludes his brilliant analysis of Hardy with the conclusion that Hardy's deep pessimism is only possible because he believed in the Christian virtues but did not have the Christian hope. Lord David points out that Christian teachers (alluding to Paul) have always taught that if the Christian faith is not true, then life is a tragedy. The deepest instincts of his heart as reflected in the very act of storytelling taught Hardy that the Christian virtues were true, yet Lord David noted that Hardy accepted "a philosophy of the universe that was repugnant to the deepest instincts of his heart." Lord David did not blush to add, "He may say, 'I am a Christian, but I am not a Christian.'"

or reincarnation, no one event has any more meaning or purpose than any other. The very act of telling stories that have movement from start to finish tells us something about the nature of the universe. His search for a meaningful universe drove Solomon back to Yahweh from the nature deities he had courted. Tolkien argued that this aspect of story represents good news that leads to a happy ending: "The Evangelium has not abrogated legends; it has hallowed them, especially the 'happy ending.' The Christian has still to work, with mind as well as body, to suffer, hope and die; but he may now perceive that all his talents and faculties have a purpose, which can be redeemed."

The human quest for meaning and purpose has always expressed it

In real life, as in story, something must happen. This is the trouble. We grasp at a state and find only a succession of events in which the state is never quite embodied in real life, the idea of adventure fades when the day-to-day details begin to happen In life and art both, as it seems to me, we are always trying to catch in our net of successive moments something that is not successive.

Narrative teaches us to notice the unique moments of life that break the endless cycle or dull repetition and give life its meaning.

As academic writing with its emphasis on brute realism and subjective expression dominated the critical market in literature, the culture quickly dropped poetry and meaningless fiction as viable artistic expressions of the culture, just as allegory and epic had been dropped several centuries earlier. The strong narrative of modern fantasy, detective stories, and science fiction in which the Inklings and their friends were involved became the new literary forms through which Western culture began to understand itself.

Harry Lee Poe is Charles Colson Professor of Faith & Culture and Special Assistant to the President at Union University. He is the author of Evermore: Edgar Allan Poe and the Mystery of the Universe (Baylor University Press) and the co-author (with Jim Veneman) of The Inklings of Oxford: C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Their Friends