

## A Literary Culmination and Its Importance for the West

Barfield shows that he has the greatest of abilities in integrating ideas, more than he does in terms of understanding the forces of destiny. He walks most clearly the path to the macrocosm. Interestingly, Barfield does not speak of the Double anywhere in his opus, other than calling him Burden in two books of a marked autobiographical tenor. And in *The Silver Trumpet* this is further elaborated in artistic terms in the development of the Gamboy twin sister character. In Barfield Spirit Recollection (path inward) is practiced artistically, mostly with the scope of clearing the field for Spirit Beholding (path to the macrocosm).<sup>1</sup> It is important that Barfield can achieve a measure of the former in order to lead his fellow human being clearly into the latter.

Tolkien on the other hand has experienced his Double and the “world Double” at large in all aspects of his life. He had to overcome it through life’s trials. He dedicates a great part of his *Lord of the Rings* to an artistic understanding of it in the figure of Gollum and in its relationship with Frodo. He knows most intimately the path to the microcosm. He walks the path to the macrocosm, and its consequent heightening of the thinking faculty, to some degree thanks to the help of Barfield.

When it comes to an understanding of the Christ, once more Tolkien and Barfield offer us two essentially and critically complementary facets of this immense being. And the gestures of this recognition are so clearly archetypal that they reveal the deeper being of the two authors. Tolkien yearns for the Christ and cannot but recognize him in the historical events of the New Testament. He also yearns for the cosmic Christ as the whole of *The Lord of the Rings* testifies. His clinging to Catholicism precludes him from fully arriving at the destination of the journey he so longs to reach.

Christopher Tolkien, based on his father’s notes, shows how his father’s continuous efforts to revise *The Silmarillion* may have worked against its original freshness. In effect Tolkien was attempting to reconcile his edifice of imaginations with what science has to say about world evolution. And the son concludes, “The old structure was too comprehensive, too interlocked in

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<sup>1</sup> For a fuller characterization of these paths, see Morelli, “Spirit Recollection and Spirit Beholding.”

all its parts, indeed its roots too deep, to withstand such a devastating surgery.”<sup>2</sup> This yearning could only have been satisfied by spiritual science.

How different Barfield is from his fellow Inkling. He cannot recognize the historical Christ on the basis of his karmic and cultural heritage. But everything leads him, even before he knows it, to a recognition of that cosmic power which forms the resolution of all polarities he studies. The Christ found in and above the terms of polarities is by essence the cosmic Christ, the being who brings harmony and reconciliation to what seems irreconcilable. Thus one could say that it is just a matter of time before Barfield can recognize the historical Christ, taking his departure from the cosmic Christ.

What is also most remarkable about the two authors, even when we only limit our gaze to the few works that have been explored in this book, is the extent of their understanding of the Christ Mystery in our time. Both authors announce the time of the Christ in the etheric and of the anti-Christ in different ways. In *The Rose on the Ash-Heap* Christ is announced in the figure of Lord of Albion first and in the Ringmaster later, and his opponent in the figure of Abdol. The whole spells the confrontation of Christ and anti-Christ central to our time. And the attainment of the Christ consciousness is sought through the transformation of thinking into imaginative consciousness and beyond.

In a very different way Tolkien announces the future in a fictional past. The human being has to meet his Double in the realm of Sauron, who plans his complete enslavement. His emissary, Saruman, portrays a modern anti-Christ, a new Inquisitor, capable of charming one and all through the power of his voice, the counter image of the Word. Saruman’s power reminds us of Dostoyevsky’s Great Inquisitor, he too an image of Anti-Christ.<sup>3</sup> Gandalf and Aragorn point the reader in the direction of those powers the human being can develop at the time of the Christ in the etheric.

Barfield perceives how the anti-Christ plays upon men’s lower appetites through *panem and circenses* at the Fun Fair. Tolkien rightly perceives machine magic of modern times as one of the most powerful tools of the adversary. He intuited what Steiner pointed out in terms of

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Caldecott, *The Power of the Ring*, 195.

<sup>3</sup> See the chapter “The Voice of Saruman” in *The Two Towers*.

“Ahriman [gaining] the possibility of establishing himself as a demon even in the very physical entity.”<sup>4</sup>

In summing up, the two authors indicate the path to the Christ in the present in the pursuits of two complementary aspects. In Barfield the movement towards nature clairvoyance is pursued systematically and brought to completion in Imagination. Tolkien treads the path to Inspiration, which could culminate in karmic clairvoyance, though the movement is cut short.

Past and future meet and fertilize each other if one can bring Tolkien to shed light on Barfield and vice versa. Unbeknownst to himself, Tolkien has truly achieved the goal he set himself to reach in his youth, of writing “a body of more or less connected legend . . . which I could dedicate to England.”<sup>5</sup> Tolkien revived the early tradition of the West of Hibernia that Great Britain and Ireland lost most thoroughly, according to many and according to Barfield himself. In his *History in English Words* Barfield concludes, based on his philological studies, “In England the whole Celtic nation and language died early out of the common consciousness, and it died even more suddenly than the persons of Teutonic myth.”<sup>6</sup>

Keep in mind that the Celts followed and merged with the civilization of Hibernia, knowledge of which survived but little in later consciousness. And only late in life did Steiner offer us a flavor of these Mysteries in just a few lectures. He did not offer us any insight about the extent of their mythology. This is not to say that Tolkien offered us a precise and uncorrupted idea of what these myths could have been.

In the Inklings the treasure of the past in Tolkien met with the promises of the future in Barfield. Through the latter the human being of the Consciousness Soul can understand what is imagination, why it is important, how it can be pursued. The West, quite rightly according to Barfield, can no longer find a way forward based solely on its cultural heritage. The essential missing part has to be sought from the center, as we will explore shortly.

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<sup>4</sup> Steiner, *The Karma of Vocation*, lecture of November 26, 1916. Steiner refers here to what the human being does in rarefying air (driving air out of space) by creating a vacuum as in the steam machine. What is said of the steam engine is only all the more true when human beings have recourse to electricity or nuclear radiation, or tinkers with the genome, to name but a few of technological possibilities.

<sup>5</sup> Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography*, 99–100.

<sup>6</sup> Barfield, *History in English Words*, 75.

Through Tolkien and Barfield two inheritances potentize the mission of the West. Tolkien clearly looks to the past that holds the greatest potential for the future of the West. He brings to the surface of consciousness the legacy of Hibernia, which “stands in a certain sense at the starting-point of modern spiritual life, in that it has given impulses to this modern spiritual movement, and yet has taken over much from the older spiritual movements in which the primeval wisdom of man was enshrined.”<sup>7</sup> The Hibernian Mysteries are Mysteries of the cycles of time; they continuously interweave past and future.

In Hibernia, a “culture in waiting” preserved the unity of the Atlantean Mysteries in light of the coming of Christ at Golgotha. Here paths to the macrocosm and microcosm stood united, whereas they separated in post-Atlantean civilization at large. The unified Mysteries of Atlantis went two separate ways after the Flood. The Mysteries of the macrocosm went the northern route and inaugurated ancient Indian and Persian civilizations. The Mysteries of the microcosm went the southern route and ushered in Egyptian civilization. In Greece the confluence generated on one hand the Apollonian way to the macrocosm and on the other the Dionysian way to the underworld. Roman civilization marked the severance of the Mysteries from culture at large, and these were preserved at the margins of culture.

In spiritual science the paths that separated over the millennia—from ancient India to Ancient Egypt and Greece—united once more. Rudolf Steiner made these Mysteries accessible to all human beings through his sacrificial deed at the end of the year 1923 at the Christmas Conference. The Mysteries of Hibernia were then revealed for the first time by the highest initiate of the time in the prelude to the Christmas Conference.<sup>8</sup> At this crucial turning point of time past and future intersected and cross-pollinated each other.

In spiritual science once more the totality of the Mysteries is presented to the human soul, most clearly of all in the polarity of Spirit Recollection (microcosm) and Spirit Beholding (macrocosm) that stands out in the first and third panels of the Foundation Stone Meditation, inviting us to truly live and truly think respectively. In between, harmonizing the two, lies the path of feeling of Spirit Mindfulness, which is the most direct path to the Christ.

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<sup>7</sup> Steiner, *Mystery Centers*, lecture 7 of December 7, 1923.

<sup>8</sup> Steiner, *Mystery Centers*, lectures of December 7, 8, and 9, 1923.

We could say that Tolkien brings us back the awareness of the Great Mysteries of the West, which stand “in a certain sense at the starting-point of modern spiritual life” and prophetically point to modern times: the Saturn Mysteries that tread the paths to macrocosm and microcosm at whose center is found the cosmic Christ. And Barfield points to the Mysteries that have come from the East to the West over millennia and are now calling to a meeting with the spirit of the West. In Anthroposophy we have the new “Great Mysteries” that join anew paths to the macrocosm and to the microcosm. The West has to turn to Central Europe if it wants to bring renewal to culture out of the fountainhead of the spirit. This is the movement that Barfield completes.

Barfield anchors the future of the West to the cardinal impulses coming from Central Europe in the form of Anthroposophy. This offers him the hope that the modern human being needs. On the other hand it can be surmised why Tolkien’s pessimism remained in his old age. Close to him lay the answers that could quell a great deal of soul unrest. How can an understanding of destiny be enhanced by a clear idea of karma and reincarnation that does not deny all that Christianity stands for? How can the cycles of evolution indicate a direction towards the Christ, and the new manifestations of his being? Both these central questions would have altered Tolkien’s pessimistic outlook for the best.

Barfield’s relationship to the spirit of Central Europe is finely nuanced when the author speaks biographically. Knowing German intimately, Barfield underlines his close affinity with the language, which “can express philosophical ideas and thoughts more easily and accurately sometimes than English,” thus allowing him to give rigor to his thinking. But he admits, “I am nevertheless English, and tend to bring things down to earth.”<sup>9</sup>

Barfield characterizes the contrast between the English-speaking West to Central Europe as that of the Consciousness Soul/Intellectual Soul respectively. The latter still has awareness of link between inner and outer; not so the consciousness soul.

The English people, who carry the Consciousness Soul par excellence, embody the modern scientific spirit to the utmost. And this science applies most and foremost to man’s physical body. English outlook is so materialistically founded that it constantly draws the clearest of boundaries between matter and spirit. This means at first the complete severance of microcosm from macrocosm.

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<sup>9</sup> Sugerman, *Evolution of Consciousness*, 3–4.

The way out of this predicament is to move from a clear understanding of the limits of scientific method to knowing why imagination is true; being able to understand the reality of imagination, when one cannot apprehend it yet, in order to direct one's efforts toward it. This is what Barfield spent a whole life demonstrating: "The consciousness soul will only say 'I know,' when it can add: 'because I have experienced.'"<sup>10</sup> And in practical terms, in order to reach imagination, we must move to a theory of knowledge as was first made manifest in Goethe and then in Steiner.

The above can best be done through the spirit of Central Europe, through the Intellectual Soul that has an instinctive impulse to grasp the meaning of life, best exemplified in the Germanic spirit. The people of Central Europe want to plunge into the abyss to find meaning; this is the abyss from which Faust descends to the Mothers; the abyss in which Goethe discovers the primeval plant; the one from which Freud forged the theory of the unconscious. "One might almost say that the Ego in central Europe lives always at the point of incarnation and the Intellectual Soul is that point."<sup>11</sup> The Intellectual Soul is naturally fashioned for understanding the Mystery of the light in the darkness and the Mystery of the Resurrection.

Barfield leads us then to a clear understanding of how Consciousness Soul and Intellectual Soul—through their English-speaking and German-speaking representatives—complement each other. "It is the function of the intellectual soul to inspire—of the consciousness soul to correct. Only the intellectual soul knows what is the meaning of life—but the consciousness soul knows what is *not* the meaning of life—and therefore either is helpless without the other."<sup>12</sup> The Consciousness Soul serves us as a constant reminder of death; that there is no resurrection without death.

In an image of what the two national spirits have to say to each other, Barfield envisions a dance with two spirits graciously interweaving motions and exchanging words:

As they meet, the Spirit of the German nation calls across to the Spirit of the English: "Seek life! Know yourself! Go down with Faust to the Mothers, to the Eternal Feminine, go down into the teeming earth and rise again in full certainty, having found both yourself and the world."

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<sup>10</sup> Barfield, *Romanticism Comes of Age*, 150.

<sup>11</sup> Barfield, *Romanticism Comes of Age*, 154.

<sup>12</sup> Barfield, *Romanticism Comes of Age*, 163.

The English folk-soul calls back:

“Seek death! Yes, *know* yourself and the world! Do not merely *believe* in the old way, substituting one creed for another. Rather live in the very breakdown of all belief. . . . Immerse in the destructive element! And so learn to tear your true self from all thought and all feeling in which the senses echo. Leap, with Hamlet, into the grave, in order to wrestle there. Seek death!”<sup>13</sup>

We could say that Barfield strives lifelong to adapt the message of spiritual science to the spirit of the West; to render it operational, to overcome the tendency to espouse it as a comfortable set of beliefs and/or a lifestyle.

Barfield and Tolkien were thrown together by destiny in Oxford University’s arena, and brought closer through C. S. Lewis into the circle of the Inklings. Barfield had some appreciation for Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* but failed to see that his masterpiece is actually *The Lord of the Rings*. Barfield also recognized that Tolkien’s idea of sub-creation stands much closer to his idea of conscious participation than any of C. S. Lewis’s ideas. Though Barfield could help Tolkien tread new paths of thinking, he did not fully understand Tolkien’s being and therefore could not help him go further on the path from Romanticism to Anthroposophy.

When we look at the two individuals, something else appears in retrospective that augments the importance of their meeting. Each karmic path complements the other. The sum total of their work offers the gestures of a “literary culmination.” Though incomplete, as we have argued, it is already a monumental achievement.

Tolkien is that soul that carries memories from previous lives, both in concrete memories and in the inspiration of his literary materials. His is a soul turned towards the past. He has a clear memory of an event that has taken place in the distant past: the Flood that brought the civilizations of Númenor/Atlantis to an end. He exudes through his art the content of the initiation Mysteries of the West. He relates most to that art that flourished under the encounter of Paganism and Christianity in England, the one that produced the *Crist* or *Beowulf*. Much of the literature that Tolkien appreciated most was the result of the “two golden centuries” (8th–9th centuries) during which the Celtic Christian missionaries from Iona and Lindisfarne met with the Benedictines from Canterbury, York, Wearmouth, and Jarrow. Stratford Caldecott sees this as “a Christian civilization . . . that proved capable of assimilating the best traditions of Paganism and raising them

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<sup>13</sup> Barfield, *Romanticism Comes of Age*, 166.

to a new cultural level.”<sup>14</sup> We could say that this is the expression of the Platonic School of Chartres in England—bringing together the best of the Mysteries of the past with the message and content of Christianity—though, strictly speaking it precedes Chartres in time.

Tolkien walks first and foremost the inner path, the path to the microcosm. His life is an external repetition of the trials of the Mysteries. And yet in his work, chiefly in *The Lord of the Rings*, he marvelously integrates inner paths of Frodo/Sam with the outer paths of Gandalf, Merry, and Pippin. In Tolkien live the reverberations of a life dedicated to the Mysteries. They speak to him like an echo. These Mysteries span the distances of eons and point the way to the future. Last, Tolkien is that kind of soul who immediately recognizes the Christ and has to place Him at the center of all considerations. In Tolkien we clearly have a Platonic soul, one of those that Steiner also characterizes as an Old Soul.

For Barfield, on the other hand, there is no need to know of his previous incarnations, at least for what concerns his opus. It is in fact quite striking to see the reverse movement. In his imaginations—chiefly the two early tales here explored—his future work is announced and mapped out. The movement here is from the present into the future.

Barfield is in all things the polar opposite of Tolkien. He is clearly fit to challenge the outward-looking culture of our time because he can see what lies in front of the eyes of the modern human being that she most commonly misses. His is the path outward. When he looks to the past, he clearly recognizes Aristotle above Plato. All the more clearly his Middle Ages are those of the Scholastics, whom he can emulate at all levels of thought. He has little to say about the School of Chartres.

Barfield’s soul is that of an old Pagan who intuits the coming Christ. He finds himself at home in Anthroposophical cosmology and in the realm of pure thought. He is not just comfortable, but completely versed, in everything that Steiner elaborates in his *Philosophy of Freedom*. He does not yearn to place the Christ at the center of all his inquiries, as Tolkien does. Rather the Christ is at the center of all polarities he studies; but this is the cosmic Christ, not the historic one. In him therefore we have all the traits of what Steiner calls an Aristotelian, and a Young Soul.

In literature as in many other fields of inquiry we find here an example of what qualities the “culmination at the end of the twentieth century”—which Steiner talked about in the final years

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<sup>14</sup> Caldecott, *The Power of the Ring*, 19.

of his life—could offer to a new culture.<sup>15</sup> At the time of this possible culmination, Aristotelians and Platonists incarnate together for the first time in history. This means both tremendous opportunities and obstacles. The challenges for Tolkien and Barfield to meet in a productive way stemmed from being so bewilderingly different. It is no wonder that they had little to say to each other and that they made recourse to C. S. Lewis as a bridge to their respective inner worlds. And yet there was already a movement of recognition going both ways.

To modern human beings of the third millennium, Barfield and Tolkien still have much to say—witness the number of people who come to Anthroposophy through Barfield, or the worldwide appeal of *The Lord of the Rings*. What the two authors left incomplete—particularly in their meeting of minds—we can now bring to fruition by understanding the reasons for their literary success and affirming their differences and complementarities.

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<sup>15</sup> See Morelli, *Aristotelians and Platonists*, Chapters 7, 8 and 9.