

Introduction

This book follows on the heels of *Tolkien, Mythology, Imagination, and Spiritual Insight: The Enduring Power of The Lord of the Rings*. In that earlier book I was trying to reveal the general archetypal dimensions of Tolkien's work, which were the reasons I asserted for the enduring power and appeal of the trilogy. I purposefully framed the earlier book within a phenomenological approach, in which I let Tolkien's imaginations speak for themselves. From there I moved to the most general and accessible concepts of spiritual science: knowledge of the threefoldness of the human being in body, soul, and spirit; the four temperaments; and the ascent to the spiritual world through the elemental world and the lower and higher spiritual worlds. This was possible because of the clarity of the images in Tolkien's work and all the subsequent, extensive scholarly work about it, which creates a bridge to an understanding of Tolkien's opus.

As I was writing the book, it became clear that there is another very coherent element in Tolkien's work that can be noticed once we stop looking at the constitutive elements of his trilogy and instead apprehend it as a whole. What Tolkien weaves within his *Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings* emerges as a specific cosmology linked to the West as it continued the inheritance of the Mysteries of Atlantis and took new forms in the westernmost part of Europe.

The comprehension of Tolkien's deeper individuality moves in the same direction as what emerges from the theme he treats. Tolkien shows in his personality the connection to these Mysteries; his work articulates this spiritual legacy. Tolkien carries in his soul the desire, an almost lifelong obsession, of transmitting and translating these Mysteries of the past into the present.

After completing my immersion in Tolkien's literary legacy, I realized that I could address another question around which I had formulated a wish, and which up to then I thought impossible to realize. When I completed *Aristotelians and Platonists: Towards a Convergence of the Michaelic Streams in the Third Millennium*, I had what felt like the clear contrast of the work of Aristotelians and Platonists in natural science, psychology, and social sciences. I also repeatedly felt that this contrast can be lived and experienced in art forms that I am familiar with, as well as in the way artists relate to these and how they present their work. I felt this tendency more strongly than anywhere else in artistic workshops, especially when I could compare a very similar artistic experience (painting and music most strongly comes to mind) presented by various individuals.

However, the artistic realm of experience lies so far from my field of expertise that I did not feel qualified to pursue it even in the simplest terms. Thus I had no way to confirm what I felt.

My present work on Tolkien offered me a foothold into the artistic realm that lies closest to my realm of experience: working with biographies and myths, albeit “modern myths.” This exploration started to give me also a deeper understanding of Tolkien’s place in the frame of reference of the Michaelic Movement as a whole.

Tolkien was part of one of the most well-known and explored literary circles of the twentieth century, that of the Inklings. Here again I had the good fortune of an already thoroughly explored field of inquiry. The four most celebrated authors of the Inklings have left an abundant legacy and have themselves been studied from an abundant variety of scholarly perspectives.

When I turn my mind’s eye upon the literary foursome, two individuals form a stark and most interesting contrast in their being and literary styles: J. R. R. Tolkien and Owen Barfield. I felt it was an interesting contrast to pursue in light of my previous interests. I sensed that here too we have a Platonic/Aristotelian polarity, and I wanted to pursue it further.

To pursue this comparison/contrast, I found I had to penetrate Barfield’s biography and work as completely as I had previously done with Tolkien. To this end I followed four overlapping strands: what Barfield and others say about the author’s life, what Barfield’s most autobiographical fiction reveals about his soul journey, the content of Barfield’s worldview, and finally, and most importantly, the qualities at work in Barfield’s most purely fictional work.

It would be impossible to fully give life to this contrast without acquainting myself with the whole living reality of the two individuals (their biographies and the whole range of literary output), but I limited the focus of my inquiry on the contrast between their works of fiction. And among those, I focus on the ones in which the imagination reaches its highest manifestation, or those which are most accessible to my understanding. These are Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* and Barfield’s *The Silver Trumpet* and *The Rose on the Ash-Heap*. No need to anticipate here what the work tries to bear out in its results. Let it suffice to say that here are two individuals who pursue similar or parallel aims in diametrically polar ways. One example: both Tolkien and Barfield expressed the reality of the Cosmic Christ, but their perspectives could not have been more different. Both perspectives combined are crucial for an understanding of the Christ being in our time.

This study addresses another additional perspective to the ones mentioned above. Tolkien and Barfield, in dramatically different ways, stand out as two literary giants of the twentieth century. They offer us complementary perspectives to the needs of the West, or more broadly the needs of the people of the consciousness soul.

As much as I have gathered from experience, it is rare for any given individual to perceive the global dimension of both authors' work. People often take sides behind one without being able to recognize the work and validity of the other. And at times the difference becomes even stronger, a certain antipathy and aversion. It may take the form of dismissal or complete lack of appreciation.

When it comes to completion, this work purports to be an affirmation of both authors. However, it did not start this way. I read Tolkien when I was twenty-six, and it was an immediately transformative experience. It gave me a deeper feeling for historical reality.

I felt impelled to read Barfield upon suggestion from friends and worked through *Saving the Appearances* with inner reticence. Only later did I return to Barfield with the aim of looking at his most imaginative work. As part of a research project, I felt motivated to look deeper into all aspects of his work. Reading him became "interesting" as a research project, before it grabbed me. Over time I gained a deeper and deeper appreciation for Barfield's biography and the context in which his work arose. There were little moments of transformation: the impact of reading the *Silver Trumpet* or *The Rose on the Ash-Heap*; Barfield's characterization of the mission of the West in relation to central Europe; what he believes is required from Anthroposophy for the spirit of the West and of the consciousness soul; the inner coherence of all his work, particularly Barfield's articulation of the importance of achieving imaginative consciousness, of showing us how this was accomplished in himself, and what this leads to in the artistic field.

By the end of the research, I have become enthusiastic about the depth and reach of Barfield's work, as much as I have been of Tolkien's legacy, particularly of his trilogy, his *Silmarillion*, *Leaf by Niggle*, and *Smith of Wootton Major*, among others. Seeing more fully the two Inklings in perspective emboldened me to invite the reader to integrate the work of both authors. The challenge of rising above possible inner antipathies is well worth the trouble. It will offer a larger view on art and imagination, and will reveal itself fruitful in other aspects of our inner life.