

Chronicles of Narnia and as an able Christian apologist. Therefore, the decision to devote ample space to these dimensions of Lewis is understandable. The criteria for selecting what to include, what to leave out, what to focus on, and what to simply mention in passing is legitimate. Nevertheless, one may still wish for an account that touches all the important bases. Fans of the *Ransom Trilogy*, for example, might be disappointed given the scant treatment it receives in McGrath's biography. The Narnia books are clearly, and understandably, the stars.

All in all, while *C. S. Lewis. A Life* is by no means the definitive biography—can there be one?—it is an excellent introduction to the life and thought of C. S. Lewis, a man of penetrative intelligence and boundless imagination.

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Astrid Diener, *The Role of Imagination in Culture and Society. Owen Barfield's Early Work*, with a foreword to the first edition by A.D. Nuttala and a foreword to the 2013 edition by Jane Hipolito, Wipf & Stock Publishers, Leipzig, 226 pages. ISBN 978-1-62564-130-4 £25.00

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Although an influential member of the Inklings group and a good friend of C.S. Lewis as well as of Tolkien, Owen Barfield (1898 – 1997) did not share the notoriety of his fellow Inklings, since his main work was in the domain of philosophy and linguistics, and did not enjoy their immense readership. While he wrote poetry throughout his entire active life (one could mention *Orpheus: A Poetic Drama*, 1937) and authored a few works of fiction, mainly science fiction of the dystopian type (*Night Operation*, 1938 – 1984, and a few other), his fairy tale *The Silver Trumpet* (1925) did not rise to the wide acclaim and popularity of C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, dedicated by its author to Barfield's niece, Lucy Barfield. He is best known for his volumes on philosophy (*Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry*, 1957, *History, Guilt and Habit*, 1979), the history (*History in English Words*, 1926) and philosophy of language (*Speaker's Meaning*, 1967) and literary theory (*Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning*, 1928, *Romanticism Comes of Age*, 1944) and criticism (*What Coleridge Thought*, 1971), and also for being among the founders of anthroposophy in England and among the first translators of Rudolph Steiner's work into English. His rather unusually long active life span gave him the scope to see how human consciousness and its manifestations, especially imagination, evolved in modernity—and beyond.

Astrid Diener's study on Owen Barfield's early life and work, *The Role of Imagination in Culture and Society*, republished in a new edition in 2013, with a preface by leading Barfield expert Jane Hipolito, is organized in four main sections, to end with an appendix containing fragments from an interview of the author's with Owen Barfield taken in 1994, when the philosopher was 96 years old. The first section sets the cultural and historic background or, in Diener's terms, "The Intellectual Context: Owen Barfield, C. S. Lewis and Contemporary Philosophy", with emphasis on the philosophical duality that ripped through the minds of the 19th and 20th century and which Barfield savvily identified as the gap between mind and matter, subject and object, realism and idealism. The influence of earlier and contemporary philosophers—Hegel as well as Bertrand Russell—and Barfield's own position is followed, with special emphasis on Coleridge's impact, since it was the Romantic poet's critical and philosophical writings that reinforced his own ideas on the irreconcilable conflict between man and nature, between reason and imagination and the need to regain their unity. Moreover, like Coleridge, he saw this regained wholeness as a "productive unity": one instantiation is metaphor, which—as he observes in *Poetic Diction*—not only changes, but also expands, consciousness, as does knowledge of languages and incursion into their past (p. 45) This relation is traced through extensive quotes from the poet's own work and that of other critics, with links to Barfield's early writings *Poetic Diction* and *History in English Words* and leading to his influence of others: mainly of his friend C.S. Lewis, who acknowledges him as his "wisest and best of my unofficial teachers" (p. 53), without, however, refraining from also criticizing him in points where he considered his approach excessive, "anti-rationalistic, backward looking and escapist."

Chapter II brings to the fore another major influence on Barfield's thinking, that of Rudolf Steiner, the founder of anthroposophy, an influence which, according to Astrid Diener, has been generally ignored by scholars, in spite of a few isolated links established between their themes and ideas (p. 61). This chapter begins by offering a broad and well documented view of Steiner's own philosophical position and the extent to which it departs from the generally held ideas of his contemporaries in order to establish the reason and the ambit of his impact on Barfield. He thought that anthroposophy had the advantage of having wrought a comprehensive system there where the Romantics, for instance, had been fragmentary and rather incoherent; it also had the strength of going one step further, from the system to its application. This point makes a smooth passage to the other facets of Barfield's personality and life analyzed in this volume: to how—and whether—the writer himself exercised himself in the role of cultural and social critic and cultural and social reformer (p. 99), as Steiner had.

Starting from a broad picture of a Europe in crisis in the '20s and how the stagnating economy and the depression deepened the feeling of insecurity and confusion and raised reactions from many contemporaries, the third chapter presents Barfield's attitude—intellectual, cultural, social—to what he sees as the modern (Western) world's failure to adapt to the major dislocation caused by the Great War (World War I). Diener directs her analysis to two aspects: one is Barfield's effort to identify the roots of this crisis, which he considers to be dualism—the divorce between idea and reality, as manifest in various areas from literary criticism to psychology and philosophy, a general dwindling belief in the “reality of ideas”; in this position he was met by other thinkers of the age, most notably by C.G. Jung. As a point of interest, his anticipation of William Fielding Ogburn's theory of “cultural lags” in *Social Change, with Respect to Cultural and Original Nature* (1922) is mentioned and commented on (p. 105).

The second aspect is the way Barfield views the direct impact of this divorce in the life of the individual: the alienation it brings, the suffering and the helplessness, a view which is revealed by both his philosophical writings and his prose (short stories) and shared by many other artists of the day—Wilfred Owen and T.S. Eliot to name but two—besides his friend C.S. Lewis. This alienation, leading to dehumanization in its most extreme forms, is conducive to reactions not only in the cultural life, but in social and political life as well, resulting in such anti-democratic and authoritarian systems as fascism: Barfield is among the first (1924) to denounce it as a threat to human freedom (p. 133) and evaluate its practices as similar to those of the Ku Klux Klan.

Once the underlying cause of the general crisis the modern world was going through had been identified by Barfield as a pervading dualism, the reader is invited to an excursion into the genesis of his attempt at a more concrete—*constructive* in the author's words—response to the general alienation of the individual and fragmentation in modern society. The approach identifies like-minded authors, such as Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot, whose own answers to the question share similar elements. Barfield's remedy is a reform of poetry—and of imagination in general, whose restorative and integrative power is emphasized in *Poetic Diction*; however, it shouldn't be confined to the esthetic side, but it should empower the individual to create an operative “philosophy of life”, to take a “more active and creative role in directing his own affairs” (p.145). The dualism and division inherent in the *zeitgeist* is at its most obvious in the social disparities of the time; thus his critical and reforming views were also directed at industrialism, seen as one of its main causes. He makes his own attempt at rethinking the function of industry, which should be that of creating human well-being instead of serving its own interests: this, in Barfield's view, should rely on a better—fairer—mechanism of distribution of the commonly created wealth, as presented by the movement called Social Credit, a form of socialism that had its relative success in the following years. However,

the degree to which the writer actually embraced and was a supporter of this movement still remains unclear from the last part of this chapter.

The volume, ending with the script of Barfield's interview to the author in 1994, presents him as a multidimensional personality, with diverse interests that ultimately are discovered to converge in a general distrust in any form of dualism and dichotomous thinking and in an earnest attempt at discovering ways of recreating the lost unity within the human mind, within the human nature, between man and nature. The discovery of this pathway is well served by the recapitulative final section in each chapter, by the copious and carefully selected quotes that enrich the text and sparkle like individual gems with the value of dictums (I personally greatly enjoyed note 42 p. 83, or the quote from Tillyard and Levis on p. 109, for instance), by the logical and flowing organization of ideas and the author's subtle explanations and firm statements. The wide readings behind them, many in areas that are not familiar or entirely comfortable to a literary critic—such as economics (ch. IV) or anthroposophy (ch. II)—and the warm personal tone, avoiding scholastic dryness, combine to make the text an intellectual adventure worth taking and recommend it as one of the most valuable works in the criticism on Barfield's writings. We may just hope the volume on his mature years is not years away from publication.