

# Inklings Forever

---

Volume 7 A Collection of Essays Presented at the  
Seventh Frances White Ewbank Colloquium on C.S.  
Lewis & Friends

Article 27

---

6-3-2010

## Owen Barfield: Un-Regressed Pilgrim

Edwin Woodruff Tait  
*Huntington University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://pillars.taylor.edu/inklings\\_forever](https://pillars.taylor.edu/inklings_forever)

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), [History Commons](#), [Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Woodruff Tait, Edwin (2010) "Owen Barfield: Un-Regressed Pilgrim," *Inklings Forever*: Vol. 7 , Article 27.  
Available at: [https://pillars.taylor.edu/inklings\\_forever/vol7/iss1/27](https://pillars.taylor.edu/inklings_forever/vol7/iss1/27)

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for the Study of C.S. Lewis & Friends at Pillars at Taylor University. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Inklings Forever* by an authorized editor of Pillars at Taylor University. For more information, please contact [pillars@taylor.edu](mailto:pillars@taylor.edu).

# **INKLINGS FOREVER, Volume VII**

A Collection of Essays Presented at the Seventh  
FRANCES WHITE COLLOQUIUM on C.S. LEWIS & FRIENDS  
Taylor University 2010  
Upland, Indiana

---

**Owen Barfield**  
*Un-Regressed Pilgrim*

**Edwin Woodruff Tait**

This paper will use C. S. Lewis's *The Pilgrim's Regress* to compare Lewis's understanding of the spiritual life with that of Owen Barfield. I will argue that the eponymous "regress" reflects Lewis's belief (post-conversion) that the imagination did indeed point to truth, but that this truth could not be reached by the imagination directly but only by a humble submission to the eternal truth of historic, orthodox Christianity. Barfield, on the other hand, continued to believe that one could (using the terms of the *Regress*) sail directly to the Island in the West without returning to the "Landlord's Castle."

## Owen Barfield: Un-Regressed Pilgrim

Edwin Woodruff Tait, Huntington University

A great deal of ink has been spilled attempting to answer the question: Why did C. S. Lewis not become a Roman Catholic?<sup>1</sup> But as far as I know, no one has yet attempted to ask the question: Why did C. S. Lewis not become an anthroposophist? This paper is not an attempt to answer that question, but I do want to begin by addressing the question of why the question has not been asked.

Consider the following set of biographical facts about Lewis:

Having abandoned the Christian faith as a teenager, he was horrified to discover in his twenties that one of his closest friends belonged to a religious tradition that he regarded as dangerous and superstitious. Nonetheless, he could not deny the wisdom and good moral character of this friend, and eventually came to acknowledge a good deal of truth in his beliefs.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, this friendship played a major role in his movement from atheism through pantheism to Christian theism, finally including a belief in the Incarnation. And yet, contrary to what one might expect, he drew the line at embracing his friend's beliefs entirely, instead returning to a more mature and sophisticated version of his childhood Anglicanism. His friend was often known to express regret and puzzlement that Lewis failed to appreciate the claims of a religious tradition that had turned out (by Lewis's own admission) to get so many things right.

All the above applies to Lewis's relationship with the Roman Catholic J. R. R. Tolkien. But it also applies, in every detail, to Lewis's relationship with Owen Barfield. Furthermore, just as Lewis had many other Roman Catholic friends and correspondents in the course of his life,<sup>3</sup> so Lewis's anthroposophical friends included not only Barfield but several others, chiefly Cecil Harwood and his wife Daphne. Cecil Harwood and Barfield were the executors of Lewis's will,<sup>4</sup> and Lewis several times referred to what he regarded as a great improvement in Daphne's character as evidence that anthroposophy couldn't be entirely bad.<sup>5</sup> Anthroposophy was not just a fad experienced by some of Lewis's friends in the 20s—it was a constant presence in Lewis's life through his enduring friendship with Barfield and the Harwoods. Barfield in particular continued to insist that his own insights derived from his anthroposophy, and to marvel at Lewis's refusal to give anthroposophy due credit.<sup>6</sup>

Why then has Lewis's parallel "failure" to become Roman Catholic attracted so much attention? The flippant and superficial answer is that there are not very many anthroposophists, and there are a lot of Roman Catholics. But of course it isn't hard to find better reasons why it is natural for "merely Christian" admirers of Lewis, let alone those who are Roman Catholics themselves, to see Lewis's friendships with Roman Catholics as more intellectually significant than Lewis's friendships with anthroposophists. By any reasonable standard, Roman Catholicism is at least as orthodox an expression of Christianity as Anglicanism.<sup>7</sup> From a "mere Christian" perspective, Roman Catholicism is at the very worst a large and important expression of the central Christian tradition. And of course there are good reasons, persuasive to many wise and holy people, for thinking it to be a good deal more than that—for thinking it to be not merely "Roman" but simply Catholic, and for questioning whether "mere Christianity" is really an adequate expression of orthodoxy at all.

Anthroposophy, on the other hand, is by its own admission a heretical expression of Christianity, and would be regarded by many Christians as not genuinely Christian at all. The movement's founder, Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925),<sup>8</sup> was an Austro-Hungarian philosopher and mystic influenced both by the German Romantic tradition and by his own alleged experiences of other worlds and spiritual beings. The central claim of anthroposophy, which was immensely important for Barfield's thought, was that the physical world experienced by humans is neither wholly objective nor wholly subjective,<sup>9</sup> but what Barfield would call an "appearance"—a "participated" reality shaped by human perception but not simply a private illusion. A further claim of anthroposophy—again of crucial importance for Barfield—was that the Eastern religious experience of union with Brahman and the Western consciousness of individuality represented two sides of human consciousness, neither of which could healthily exist without the other. Steiner's thought was both Christocentric and Eurocentric, arguing that the Incarnation of the Logos in Jesus was the fulcrum of human history, marking the point at which a true "ego" first appeared in human experience and paving the way for the development of individual selfhood in Western civilization. In the modern world, however, Steiner believed that Western human beings had become cut off from their own inner world and from the world around them (in Steiner's thought, this amounts to the same thing, since humans are connected to everything else through their own inwardness). This led to the domination of modern Western thought by the spirit of "Ahriman"—the demonic force representing materialism (corresponding to "Lucifer"—the demonic force representing pure spirituality disdainful of matter and of the necessities of human evolution).

Barfield came to anthroposophy in 1923 through his interest in Romanticism, particularly Coleridge. In his own accounts of Steiner's thought and career, Barfield consistently emphasized the importance of Steiner's early work editing Goethe's scientific writings (more conventional anthroposophical accounts stress instead Steiner's own spiritual experiences as the source of his ideas). Barfield's most concise and typical description of anthroposophy, found in the title of one of his collections of essays, was "Romanticism come of age," and he claimed in one of the essays in that volume that all of Steiner's thought was a development of Goethe's ideas.<sup>10</sup>

In 1926, when Lewis and Barfield began the extended argument which Lewis dubbed "The Great War" in his autobiography, Barfield's acquaintance with Steiner's work was, by his later estimate, quite limited.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, at one point in the course of the Great War Lewis suggested that Barfield had come to believe in Steiner's ideas owing to a lack of philosophical education and a reaction against the "trivial reasoning" of the modern world. Now that Barfield (under Lewis's tutelage?) understands better the power of "good reasoning" (by which Lewis seems to mean Idealist philosophy), he should not need Steiner any longer.<sup>12</sup> Of course, Barfield disagreed with this, and only became a more enthusiastic and profound disciple of Steiner as the years passed.<sup>13</sup> Since Barfield claimed that his thought did not appreciably change over the years,<sup>14</sup> I will summarize the main points of Barfield's mature position here before returning to the "Great War" and its relevance for the development of Lewis's thought during and after his conversion.<sup>15</sup>

According to Barfield, human beings once "participated" in the phenomena surrounding them without any clear sense of existing apart from these phenomena. This "original participation" is, in Barfield's categorization, identical with ancient paganism.<sup>16</sup> Pagans "peopled" the world with gods and spirits not in a clumsy prefiguration of

scientific explanation, but because they were incapable of seeing the phenomena as dead, purely material realities standing over against the living human observer. Instead, they saw the phenomena as manifestations of living beings “of the same nature” as themselves.<sup>17</sup> This “original participation” was, in Barfield’s view, broken in two ways: partially and gradually by the rise of logical thinking among the Greeks,<sup>18</sup> and dramatically and totally by the monotheistic faith of the ancient Hebrews.<sup>19</sup> The latter paved the way for the Incarnation of the Logos, an event which Barfield, like Steiner, regarded as central for the history of human consciousness.<sup>20</sup> Both Hebrew and Greek culture pointed forward to this event, the “rebirth of images” inaugurating the era of “final participation.”<sup>21</sup> As Barfield defines it, “final participation” is the conscious choice by the individual to see the world not as a dead, purely material reality external to the self, but as a “collective conscious” in which all human beings participate.<sup>22</sup> Whereas original participation was centered in the external world (the “gods” and “spirits” understood to lie “on the other side of” the phenomena”), final participation will be centered on human beings (“Christ living within me”).<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately, Barfield believed, the Incarnation of the Logos was not received by those most thoroughly prepared to receive it (the Jews). The crucifixion of Jesus indicated that the path from original to final participation would not be smooth and “gentle” but would involve the catastrophic loss of participation—a time of “idolatry” in which the phenomena would cease to be seen as living realities participated in by the observer, and would be regarded as dead things to be dissected and manipulated by the newly self-conscious human beings.<sup>24</sup> This loss of participation, while rooted in the growth of logical thought among the pre-Christian Greeks, first became noticeable in the Renaissance and gained steam with the Scientific Revolution. Western humans became conscious of themselves as individuals standing not only over against the external world but over against their own experiencing selves.<sup>25</sup> Again, as with the crucifixion of Jesus, Barfield suggests that this loss was not inevitable—that the path might have been smoother. He explicitly compares this “missed opportunity” leading to the loss of participation to the “felix peccatum Adae” in Augustine’s thought.<sup>26</sup> Overcoming the consequences of this loss—bridging the chasm between our experiencing, conscious selves and the world of phenomena—was, Barfield thought, the task facing the modern world.

At the time of the “Great War” in the late 1920s, Barfield was expressing these ideas in a less systematic way. Indeed, the key point made in *Saving the Appearances* and elsewhere, that what people usually call “the real world” is a construction based on our perceptions, is first found on Lewis’s side of the debate, as part of an attempt to convince Barfield of the naiveté of his reliance on intuition.<sup>27</sup> Barfield would eventually make this basic epistemological point a centerpiece of his mature view of the world. I am always inclined to be suspicious of the claim that any thinker does not change or develop (especially when made in the first person, as in Barfield’s case), but it does appear to be true (to my limited observation so far) that Barfield’s later thought consisted of the defense and elaboration of the basic intuitions present in the “Great War” debate.

The basic claim defended by Barfield and criticized by Lewis in the “Great War” was that imagination was a source of truth. Lewis initially attacked not the claim itself so much as the connection between imaginative truth and propositional truth. Lewis maintained an agnostic stance with regard to the possibility of an ineffable “truth”

perceivable by the imagination in moments of inspiration. But he insisted that any propositional claims made after the moment of inspiration had subsided must be judged on their own terms and not taken on trust on the basis of the supposed ineffable truth perceived in the moment itself.<sup>28</sup> In support of this, he pointed to his own imaginative experience, which he argued led him at different times to completely opposite conclusions: leaving him, for instance, “sometimes convinced of the insignificance of the human spirit in the scheme of things, and sometimes of its divinity as lord of space and time and creator of all that it seems to be enslaved to.”<sup>29</sup>

The initial disagreement thus turned out to be whether “truth” should be defined primarily in propositional terms (as an accusative plus an infinitive, in Lewis’s formulation), or whether, as Barfield claimed, “truth” was “reality itself taking the form of human consciousness.”<sup>30</sup> (Lewis responded that Barfield defined “the real” as whatever bits of his experience he happened to like.<sup>31</sup>) For Barfield, truth in this sense—human experience of reality—was an ever-changing “torrent,” and the propositional truth beloved of Lewis was inevitably an inadequate cross-section of that torrent.

Eventually the controversy took the form of treatises (written in homage to medieval scholasticism) written by each of the participants in an exercise book and passed back and forth from one to the other (this book was acquired by Ed Brown and exists in the C. S. Lewis and Friends Collection here at Taylor). At this stage Lewis expounded his metaphysical system, which was that of “Subjective Idealism” as taught by the English Hegelians. (This view is described in *Surprised by Joy* as the “New Look” and appears in *The Pilgrim’s Regress* as the teaching of “Mr. Wisdom.”)<sup>32</sup> According to this philosophy, ultimate reality consists of “Spirit,” which is conscious of itself in the form of individual human minds. The individual is thus both a limited, mortal being bound up in a physical body and, at the same time, the infinite, immortal mind which knows no limits and no death. When the individual dies, the immortal mind “relapses” into the state of pure Spirit. Subjectively, this is extinction, but on this theory our subjective experience of limitation and mortality is essentially illusion.

Lewis found Samuel Alexander’s *Space, Time, and Deity* invaluable in developing his understanding of the relationship between limited human beings and infinite Spirit. Alexander distinguished between “enjoyment” and “contemplation.” In any mental act, Alexander argued, there is the act itself, which is “enjoyed” (i.e., directly participated by the subject), and the object, which is “contemplated.” So, for instance, right now I am enjoying the act of speaking and am contemplating the Great War. Just before I got up to speak, I was contemplating the act of speaking about the Great War, and enjoying apprehensions as to whether you would all think I’m an idiot. Lewis maintained—and never changed his mind as far as I know—that you could not do the two things at once, though you could flicker back and forth between them so fast that they might *appear* simultaneous.<sup>33</sup> Lewis used the distinction in a number of ways throughout his career—recall Screwtape’s advice to Wormwood to make sure that the patient “enjoyed” sinful thoughts while contemplating the object of anger or lust, but “contemplated” virtuous thoughts, which would make it impossible for him to “enjoy” them.<sup>34</sup> In the “Great War,” Lewis deployed this distinction in defense of his idealist metaphysics. “Spirit” can be enjoyed but never contemplated. (The famous first stanza of the Tao Te Ching appears to be saying something very similar, at least in one interpretation.)<sup>35</sup> The mature, Christian Lewis would express this conviction in terms of

God's transcendence as the sovereign Creator, of whom even mental images are essentially idolatrous (if one forgets their limited and tentative nature for an instant). But the Lewis of the "Great War" used this same conviction to reject any conception of a divine reality that could be experienced directly.

A further disagreement between the two concerned the law of non-contradiction. Lewis showed himself (here as in his later career as a Christian apologist) prone to sharp either/or dichotomies, which he presented as logically inevitable. Recall that Lewis rejected the idea that truth could be derived from imaginative experience based on the supposedly incompatible judgments derived from that experience. As Barfield pointed out, these judgments (the "greatness" versus the "insignificance" of the human spirit, for instance) were so vague and general as to be almost meaningless. Similarly, Lewis found Alexander's enjoyment-contemplation distinction convincing, while Barfield mocked it as "Box and Cox."<sup>36</sup> At this point in his career, Barfield was groping toward what he would later describe as the concept of "polarity"—that reality often consists of two apparently incompatible poles each of which in fact includes the other. Barfield argued that even logical propositions were rooted in an act of what he called "esemplastic imagination."<sup>37</sup> Without the imagination, logic becomes mere tautology. One define a hippopotamus as an animal that has pink intestines, but only by imagination can we look at such an animal and say "this is a hippopotamus."

The intensity of the "Great War" should not blind us to the basic convictions the two men already shared. Both rejected a purely materialistic conception of reality. Both believed that human consciousness was in some way the means through which Spirit expressed itself. Lewis admitted to Daphne Harwood in 1933 that on the main point where he and Barfield differed—whether there was a supernatural world that human beings could experience—Barfield had been right and he had been wrong.<sup>38</sup> The Great War came to an abrupt end in part, it appears, because Lewis's movement toward Christianity caused him to lose confidence in the primary point he had been maintaining—the either/or relationship between mortal human experience and the divine reality of Spirit. Barfield's attempts to interest Lewis in further discussion of these points were rebuffed, and there the matter rested.<sup>39</sup> In later speeches, essays, and interviews, Barfield speculated a good deal concerning the relationship of Lewis's later thought to the issues raised in the Great War. Since Lewis did not do this directly, the "conversation" has been rather one-sided. Any attempt to get at Lewis's side of the story suffers from the varied and possibly contradictory nature of the evidence.<sup>40</sup> The only work I am aware of in which Lewis directly addressed the issues of the Great War was the essay "Bluspels and Flalanspheres," published in 1939 as part of the volume *Rehabilitations*.<sup>41</sup> In this essay, Lewis declared that he was a "rationalist" who did not believe that the imagination was a vehicle of truth, but only a condition for it—the position he had maintained in the "Great War" (though obviously he had changed his mind on other aspects of the debate).<sup>42</sup> However, the early date of the essay means that we cannot be sure that Lewis did not change his mind later on. Unfortunately, the later evidence is indirect, and comes from Lewis's imaginative work. Peter Schakel has argued that Lewis's fantasy writing of the 50s and 60s shows that he had come to agree with Barfield on the role of the imagination as a source of truth.<sup>43</sup> Whether that is true or not is not the task of this paper to determine. Rather, in the time remaining, I wish to examine Lewis's first fictional work as a Christian, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, published in 1933. This

was the same year in which Lewis told Daphne Harwood that Barfield had been right on the central question of supernatural reality, and six years before the publication of “Bluspels and Flalansferes.” Thus, we are dealing in this work with a Lewis who was clearly a Christian but just as clearly did not yet agree that imagination was a direct source of truth, whether or not he came to do so later.

For those unfamiliar with this early work by Lewis: *Pilgrim's Regress* is the story of a young man named John, brought up in Puritania, a land shadowed by the fear of the Landlord at whose sufferance all the inhabitants live. (Puritania appears to be a caricature of Victorian/Edwardian Protestantism—Lewis took umbrage at the suggestion by Sheed and Ward that this represented his own upbringing, but this was surely a reasonable inference).<sup>44</sup> The Landlord may choose to turn them out at any time, and his relations with the tenants are governed by a set of arbitrary Rules whose content seems impossible to determine exactly. The Landlord's castle, a place of terror where the tenants go when their lease expires, sits on a range of forbidding mountains to the east. John flees from Puritania (and the Landlord) in search of an Island he has seen in the West in fleeting and occasional visions.<sup>45</sup> He is delighted to be told by “Mr. Enlightenment” that the Landlord doesn't really exist, but this knowledge brings him no nearer to the Island.<sup>46</sup> After a series of adventures representing various aspects of post-Enlightenment Western reductionism (a degraded form of romantic poetry leading to sensuality, avant-garde poetry that mocks the very idea of beauty, Freudian analysis which imprisons John briefly before he is freed by Reason, etc.), John and his traveling companion Vertue (who is motivated by a self-imposed sense of duty rather than by John's “sweet desire”) arrive at a deep chasm in the earth. They encounter an old lady called “Mother Kirk” who informs them that the chasm is called “Peccatum Adae,” and that only she can carry them across.<sup>47</sup> Seeking an alternative to submission to Mother Kirk, John and Vertue travel first north (encountering various aspects of what Lewis saw as the “hardness” and cruelty of early-twentieth-century thought, including a cruel caricature of T.S. Eliot and the literally chilling “Mr. Savage,” representing various forms of totalitarian violence), and then a short way to the south, of the main road. By this time Vertue has become sick and John has to carry him. John seeks help and healing for his friend at the house of Mr. Wisdom, who tells him that the land on the other side of the chasm (including the Island) is not simply a figment of his imagination but also does not “exist” in a way that would enable him to reach it. (This is the Subjective Idealism Lewis had defended in the Great War.)<sup>48</sup> Mr. Wisdom's teachings, while noble and beautiful, do not satisfy even his own children, and John and Vertue interpret them in diametrically different ways.<sup>49</sup> (Here we see Lewis's continuing concern for logical consistency and his impatience with paradox or Barfieldian “polarity.”) Vertue flees the house of Mr. Wisdom and climbs into the mountains to purify his flesh of the taint of mortality, while John follows out of sheer loyalty to his friend (even though he interprets Mr. Wisdom's teachings in a much more optimistic way), having been warned by a mysterious “Man” that the two of them must keep together.<sup>50</sup>

Separated from Vertue, John finds refuge at the cave of a hermit named “Father History,” who proceeds to instruct him (John, like a true modern, knows almost no history) in the history of the “country” in which he lives.<sup>51</sup> Father History informs John that there are two ways by which the Landlord makes himself known—the “Rules” John had known in a degraded and confused form in Puritania, and a series of “pictures” which



the Landlord smuggled into regions controlled by the Enemy (who kept his subjects illiterate, making the Rules useless). The illiterate people who depend on pictures rather than Rules are known as “Pagans,” while the only nation who could read was (originally) the “Shepherd People.” John dislikes the Shepherd People intensely, but Father History tells him that their “narrowness” was necessary in order to preserve the precious knowledge they had been given.<sup>52</sup> Father History identifies John as a Pagan, in spite of his Puritanian origin, and identifies the “Island” with the pictures sent to the Pagans by the Landlord. History describes two major groups of Pictures sent by the Landlord in relatively recent times: pictures of a Lady (i.e., courtly love) and pictures of the landscape itself (Romanticism).<sup>53</sup> While the Pictures cannot be defeated or prevented by the Enemy, they always become corrupted eventually (leading to a new set of Pictures being sent by the Landlord). The only way out of this endless cycle is through the Rules, and for John personally the only way to find what he seeks is to be united to Vertue by the Landlord’s Son, the same, Father History tells him, who united the Pagans and the Shepherds.

I have gone into some detail here, because Barfield claimed to have been told by Lewis that he, Barfield, was Father History. Lionel Adey understands this to be a criticism of Barfield, since the other figures John has encountered represent “erroneous ideas.” But this is far from clear in the case of Father History. Clearly his teachings are inadequate, by themselves, to get John across the chasm. But they point him in the right place—to the “Landlord’s Son.” And they do help him get across the chasm indirectly—Father History’s talk of the Landlord and the Rules so terrifies John that he flees the cave, encounters Reason who challenges him to a duel, and in flight from her encounters Death itself. Death tells John that it is he whom John has been fleeing all the time, and that the only way to escape Death is to die. Finally surrendering, John climbs down the cliffs and entrusts himself to Mother Kirk, along with Vertue, who has preceded him. They fling themselves into the water and reach the other side.<sup>54</sup>

This, however, is not the end of the story. After being instructed inside the mountain on the other side of the chasm, John and Vertue journey to the seacoast, where they expect to board a ship for the Island. But it turns out that the world is round (though very small, apparently)—the Island is simply the promontory on the far side of the mountains on which the Landlord’s castle sits. Fear and desire—Rules and Pictures—the demands of the law and the lure of beauty—turn out to be the same thing. With a new sobriety and courage, John travels back across the ground he has traveled, together with Vertue and an angelic guide. He sees the country with new (and more austere) eyes. The house of Wisdom turns out to be Limbo, and the choices to both sides of the main road are much more limited, and much more horrifying, than it had appeared on the outbound journey. (One particular character, Mr. Sensible—contended worldliness—turns out not to exist at all.) The book ends with John in sight of the Landlord’s Castle, at the surprising end of his pilgrimage.<sup>55</sup>

What does this remarkable (if not particularly successful) book tell us about Lewis’s attitude to the issues of the Great War? To begin with, the identification of Father History with Barfield should not be pushed too far. Barfield’s memory of just what Lewis said appeared to be quite vague, and Lewis may have exaggerated in order to honor his friend. Father History’s story, after all, terrifies John because it points him back toward the Landlord of his youth and humble obedience to the Landlord’s Rules. But Barfield consistently criticized Lewis for his emphasis on moralism and on humble

submission to a transcendent God, and Lewis's primary criticism of anthroposophy in the 1933 letter to Daphne Harwood is its lack of belief in such a transcendent Creator.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, Father History's account of the role of the "Shepherd People" and the Rules does sound a great deal like Barfield's later account of the "withdrawal from participation" in ancient Hebrew culture, in contrast to the "original participation" of paganism. Father History's account of the various sets of pictures sent down by the Landlord could be interpreted as a kind of "history of consciousness"—and yet not really, because there doesn't appear to be any progress from one set to another.<sup>57</sup> Rather, as in Lewis's mature thought, the action of God in history is presented in terms of preservation against the persistent tug of the Enemy's corruption. Perhaps the best way to interpret Father History is as a summary of what Lewis thought he had learned from Barfield—which may not have been what Barfield intended to teach.

Other parallels between *Regress* and Barfield include the attacks on reductionistic materialism (including the hilarious exchange between John and Mr. Enlightenment, in which the latter explains that anthropologists have explained away stories about the Landlord as garbled reports based on sightings of animals escaped from a zoo),<sup>58</sup> and the "via media" between two demonic extremes (though for Lewis the extremes are different than for Barfield, and Steiner comes in for fairly mild criticism as a son of Mr. Wisdom who has been dining nocturnally with the southern magicians).<sup>59</sup> But perhaps the most striking and moving echo of Barfield in *Regress* is the sequence after John escapes from Father History's Cave. Death's warning to "die before you die," and John's agonized decision to plunge into the [baptismal] waters, echo an essay by Barfield on "Death" recently published for the first time in *VII*.<sup>60</sup> This posthumous essay appears to date from around 1930—Lewis reported having read it at that time, and described it as worthy of a disciple of George MacDonald. (Indeed, it is possible that what I find to be echoes of Barfield in this section of *Regress* are really echoes of MacDonald, but certainly the similarity between *Regress* and Barfield's essay shows the profound spiritual kinship between Lewis and Barfield after Lewis's conversion.) These parallels are all the more interesting because Barfield was resolutely one of the "once-born," with little use for sudden conversions or breaks, and insisted in his later remarks on Lewis that Lewis's conversion really wasn't as sudden as Lewis suggested. Barfield himself, he reported, had "just [gone] along steadily feeling more and more certain of some things."<sup>61</sup>

The major difference between Barfield and the Lewis of the *Regress* lies in the eponymous *Regress* itself. While Barfield believed that what is commonly called "nostalgia" (Goethe's *Sehnsucht*, Lewis's "Joy" or "Sweet Desire") is the most precious thing in human life, he believed that this always leads on, not back. For Barfield, as the early "Great War" letters show, truth is reality in human consciousness and thus always involves a temporal dimension. Any abstract, propositional statement may be true at one point in the evolution of consciousness and false in another. Furthermore, while Barfield believed that propositional logic is "either meaningless or inadequate" when it attempts to describe Reality, he believed that the human faculty of imagination *was* adequate to grasp reality, if properly trained and nurtured.<sup>62</sup> Hence he lacked the genuine apophaticism that made the pre-conversion Lewis vehemently deny the possibility of "getting to the other side of the chasm," and the post-conversion Lewis insist over and over that God is the Great Iconoclast.<sup>63</sup> To suggest that even the human imagination could simply lead onward and upward to an ever fuller representation of divine reality would be, for Lewis,

not only presumptuous but ungrateful. The terror of his conversion stemmed from the recognition that the Island was in fact the Landlord's Castle. No doubt Lewis's sense of filial guilt with regard to his recently deceased father played a role (though I don't want to engage in Freudian reductionism) in his conviction that his newfound faith in God committed him to return to a renewed and enriched version of the religion of his childhood. Tolkien found this infuriating; the more placid Barfield found it puzzling and frustrating. But for Lewis (whatever psychological factors may have shaped him) this decision flowed naturally from his essentially Platonist view of the world (according to which whatever is true is true timelessly), his horror of chronological snobbery (learned, ironically, from "Father History" aka Barfield), his deep dislike of the modern world and the trendy fashions of his own generation, and most of all his awareness of that deep chasm in the earth called Peccatum Adae. While Barfield could compare the loss of participation to the sin of Adam, they are not the same thing. The former occurs relatively late in human history and can be transcended by the evolution of consciousness. The Fall of Adam as Lewis and orthodox Christianity understand it occurs at the beginning of human history, is located in the will more fundamentally than in the intellect, and can be overcome not through evolution but only through repentance and return.

Barfield's simultaneous kinship with and difference from Lewis make him a worthy subject for study by Lewis's admirers (even apart from the intrinsic appeal of Barfield's thought and personality). Barfield and Lewis shared many of the same concerns, and this allows them to serve as foils for each other. They shared the same quest for a Western island glimpsed in the fantasies of boyish imagination, and continuing to guide their respective pilgrimages throughout their lives. But at that chasm called Peccatum Adae their ways converge. Where Lewis turned back to the neglected (and often distorted) truths of his childhood faith, Barfield, like one of Tolkien's elves, took ship for the West on a vessel compounded of Romantic poetry and German occultism, and propelled by the slow-burning furnace of his peculiar imagination. Whether he made landfall, and on what shores, is open to question and is ultimately beyond our ken. But the quest that he and Lewis shared ought to be our quest too, and we owe it to him to take the alternative he offers seriously, if only for the sake of the man who claimed to have learned so much for him, even as he took, in the end, a different way to the same goal.

---

<sup>1</sup>I would like to express my appreciation to the staff of the Wade Center in Wheaton, IL for their help in my research for this paper. All quotes from unpublished sources come with their kind permission. Thanks are also due to my wife, Jennifer Woodruff Tait, who checked and completed my references.

There are at least two book-length treatments of why Lewis did not become Roman Catholic: Christopher Derrick, *C. S. Lewis and the Church of Rome: A Study in Proto-Ecumenism* (Ignatius, 1981), and Joseph Pearce, *C. S. Lewis and the Catholic Church* (Ignatius, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> In the case of anthroposophy, see Lewis's admission of this in a letter to Daphne Harwood, March 28, 1933, in *Collected Letters* 2:107 (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> For instance: Bede Griffiths, Jim Dundas-Grant, H.H. Havard, Don Giovanni di Calabria, etc.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.discovery.org/cslewis/articles/writingspblcdmn/will.php>

<sup>5</sup> At some point after July 1940 (the document refers to a book by Harwood published in that month) Lewis addressed to Barfield a testimonial vouching for the character of Barfield and the Harwoods and declaring

---

that while he disagreed with Steiner's ideas, he disagreed with them no more than with "those of many philosophers who are more widely influential than he in modern England." See *Collected Letters* 2:420-21.

<sup>6</sup> "Introduction," in *Romanticism Comes of Age* (first ed. 1944; augmented ed. 1966; American ed. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), 17.

<sup>7</sup> In other words, it would be very hard for an Anglican to condemn Roman Catholicism as unorthodox without condemning a number of other Anglicans by the same standard.

<sup>8</sup> For a collection of material on Steiner, presented from an anthroposophist perspective, see <http://www.rudolfsteinerweb.com/>

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Thorson misunderstands this point in his essay, "'Knowledge' in C. S. Lewis's Post-Conversion Thought" (*VII* 9 [1988]: 91-116, cited at 109): "The phenomena are of course subjective, not objective." This allows him to dismiss too readily Schakel's suggestion that Lewis's later fantasies indicate agreement with Barfield. Thorson assumes (incorrectly) that imagination was for Barfield (and hence for Lewis, if Lewis came to agree with Barfield) purely subjective, whereas Barfield saw imagination as participation in a reality that both transcended and included the individual.

<sup>10</sup> "From East to West," in *Romanticism Comes of Age*, 35-37.

<sup>11</sup> Barfield to Lionel Adey, Dec. 12, 1971, p. 2, Wade Center Collection: "'I had read very little Steiner in 1926. Incidentally I had not then learned German. *The Philosophy of Freedom*, then called in the English edition *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*, was the one most relevant to my bicker with CSL. *Christianity as Mystical Fact, Occult Science: An Outline*, and many of the *Lecture Cycles*, particularly on the Gospels were among the works that had particularly impressed me."

<sup>12</sup> Letter 10 in Great War series, (Wade Center collection, Wheaton) pp. 5-6 of letter, 1:66-67 of collection (hereafter cited as 10:5-6).

<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, I have found a certain wariness of Barfield among other anthroposophists, on the two occasions in which I have had personal conversations with them—at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion (San Diego, 2007) in one instance, and on the Beliefnet discussion forums in another.

<sup>14</sup> See "Lewis and/or Barfield," in *Owen Barfield on C. S. Lewis*, ed. G. B. Tennyson (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 104-19, cited at 107.

<sup>15</sup> Barfield's most systematic exposition of his ideas can be found in *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (1957; 1<sup>st</sup> American ed. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1965, the version cited here; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Wesleyan University Press, 1988).

<sup>16</sup> *Saving the Appearances*, 186 (the last sentence of the book).

<sup>17</sup> *Saving the Appearances*, 42: "The essence of *original* participation is that there stands behind the phenomena, *and on the other side of them from me*, a represented which is of the same nature as me."

<sup>18</sup> Barfield suggests that one can place some kind of break between Plato and Aristotle, with the former looking backward to Ancient Near Eastern and perhaps even prehistoric religious thinking, and the latter forward to the Middle Ages and the modern world. See *Saving the Appearances*, 104.

<sup>19</sup> See chapter 16, "Israel," in *Saving the Appearances*, 107-15. The faith of Israel was, Barfield claims, both a "withdrawal from participation" and a "deepening of participation" (114).

<sup>20</sup> See chap. 24, "The Incarnation of the Word," in *Saving the Appearances*, 167-73.

<sup>21</sup> Barfield cites the phrase "rebirth of images" from Austin Farrar's book of that name, cited in *Saving the Appearances*, 172.

<sup>22</sup> See *Saving the Appearances*, 132, 135, 137.

<sup>23</sup> See *Saving the Appearances*, 172: "Original participation fires the heart from a source outside itself; the images enliven the heart. But in final participation—since the death and resurrection—the heart is fired from within by the Christ; and it is for the heart to enliven the images."

<sup>24</sup> See for instance chap. 9, "An Evolution of Idols," in *Saving the Appearances*, 58-64. For the importance of the rejection of Jesus by the Jews, see *Saving the Appearances*, 171-72.

<sup>25</sup> See for instance Barfield's discussion of Goethe's love affairs in "Goethe and the Twentieth Century," in *Romanticism Comes of Age*, 164-83, cited at 170-71.

<sup>26</sup> *Saving the Appearances*, 171-73.

<sup>27</sup> Letter 10 in Great War series, p. 6/67: "The 'real world' is a construction from sense, one sense confirming another, details supplied by memory and imagination, theory, hypothesis." Note the comment on the next page (7/68) that "we have been through all this," indicating that the point had been made earlier in their discussions. Compare chapter 1, "The Rainbow," in *Saving the Appearances*, 15-18.

<sup>28</sup> Lewis, GW 2:2-6.

- 
- <sup>29</sup> Lewis, GW 2:4.
- <sup>30</sup> Barfield, GW 4:2, July 28, 1927.
- <sup>31</sup> Lewis, GW 6:16.
- <sup>32</sup> See *Surprised By Joy* (Orlando: Harvest, 1955), 197-211; *Pilgrim's Regress* (London, Bles, 1933, rev. 1943), 120-135.
- <sup>33</sup> Lewis's classic statement of this distinction is found in the essay "Meditation in a Toolshed," originally published in *The Coventry Evening Telegraph* (July 17, 1945); reprinted in *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970, 212-15). See also Lionel Adey, *C. S. Lewis's "Great War" With Owen Barfield* (Victoria, B.C.: University of Victoria Press, 1978), 32-33; *C. S. Lewis: Writer, Dreamer, and Mentor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 36-39.
- <sup>34</sup> *Screwtape Letters* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1942), 26-27.
- <sup>35</sup> I believe that the apophaticism which Kallistos Ware found in Lewis, as we were reminded by Prof. Schakel on Thursday, is a mature and Christian development of this position held by the young Lewis. As Lewis put it in "Apologist's Evening Prayer": "From all my thoughts, even from my thoughts of thee, / O thou fair Silence, fall, and set me free." (*Poems*, San Diego: Harvest, 1964, 131).
- <sup>36</sup> Adey, *Great War*, 57.
- <sup>37</sup> Barfield, *Poetic Diction* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press), 191.
- <sup>38</sup> *Collected Letters* 2:107-108.
- <sup>39</sup> See *Collected Letters* 2:199 ("I wish I could Christianize the *Summa* for you—but I dunno, I dunno! When a truth has ceased to be a mistress for pleasure and becomes a wife for fruit it is almost unnatural to go back to the dialectic ardors of the wooing.") Barfield notes Lewis's dislike of resuming the discussion at several points in *Owen Barfield on C.S. Lewis*.
- <sup>40</sup> One excellent attempt to synthesize Lewis's views on meaning, truth, and imagination is Charlie Starr, "Meaning, Meanings, and Epistemology in C. S. Lewis," in *Mythlore* 25:3/4 (2007). Starr's analysis suffers from failing to take the "Great War" into consideration, but one can't cover everything in one article!
- <sup>41</sup> Now most readily available in *Selected Literary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969, ed. Walter Hooper), 251-265.
- <sup>42</sup> "Bluspels and Flalanspheres," 265: "Reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning."
- <sup>43</sup> He argues this in both *Imagination and the Arts in C.S. Lewis: Journeying to Narnia and other Worlds* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002) (see p. x), and throughout *Reason and Imagination in C. S. Lewis: A Study of Till We Have Faces* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984); see especially his reference to the disillusionment with reason evident in Lewis's early poem "The Philosopher," arguing that the poem glorifies an "a direct, almost intuitive knowledge, almost Wordsworthian. . . Wholeness comes not through pure reason, or the union of reason and imagination, but through total commitment to the imaginative" (95-96) and his suggestion that until late in his career, Lewis's tension between reason and imagination "prevents in practice the full understanding of myth Lewis advances in theory" (91-92). See also Adey, *Great War*, 118-119.
- <sup>44</sup> *Collected Letters* 2:170, letter to Arthur Greeves ("Sheed, without any authority from me, has put a blurb on the inside of the jacket which says 'This story begins in Puritania (Mr. Lewis was brought up in Ulster)'—thus implying that the book is an attack on my own country and my own religion.")
- <sup>45</sup> *Pilgrim's Regress* (hereafter *PR*), 32.
- <sup>46</sup> *PR*, 34-38.
- <sup>47</sup> *PR*, 76-82.
- <sup>48</sup> *PR*, 122-125.
- <sup>49</sup> *PR*, 130-133.
- <sup>50</sup> *PR*, 138-142.
- <sup>51</sup> *PR*, 148-160.
- <sup>52</sup> *PR*, 153-155.
- <sup>53</sup> *PR*, 157-159.
- <sup>54</sup> *PR*, 164-172.
- <sup>55</sup> *PR*, 172-173, 176-199.
- <sup>56</sup> *Collected Letters* 2: 108.
- <sup>57</sup> See *Saving the Appearances*, 107-115.

---

<sup>58</sup> *PR*, 36-37.

<sup>59</sup> *PR*, 131.

<sup>60</sup> *PR*, 167; "Death," Owen Barfield, *VII* 25 (2008):48-60.

<sup>61</sup> Barfield, transcript of interview with Lyle Dorsett, Nov. 19, 1983, p. 45. Marion Wade Center, Wheaton College.

<sup>62</sup> See *Saving the Appearances*, 96-98.

<sup>63</sup> Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1961 ), 66 ("Images of the Holy easily become holy images--sacrosanct. My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself. He is the great iconoclast. Could we not almost say that this shattering is one of the marks of His presence?")