Has Romanticism Come of Age?

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The Two Halves of Romanticism

TO ANSWER THAT QUESTION ONE MUST FIRST DECIDE what Romanticism is. Any definition will be replete with caveats, so the working premise of this paper is broadly the definition that Owen Barfield supplies:

> As a literary movement … the Romantic Revival … [has] fallen into two distinct halves. On the one hand the pursuit of … pure Romance and the attaching to this of high human value. Strangeness and distance, these are the essence of this pure Romance. … The other half of the movement is metaphysical. It comes forward with a new theory of poetry … It makes much use of such words as *genius*, *imagination*, *creative* … (*RCA* 25-6).

The half occupied with 'pure Romance' Barfield immediately sets aside as not his subject here, and the metaphysical quickly resolves into a discussion of the imagination, which in the absence of Coleridge's contribution is like discussing *'Hamlet* without the Prince ' (*RCA* 24). And that discussion will become the very centre of *What Coleridge Thought* (1971) a book Barfield was planning when he published his final edition of *Romanticism Comes of Age* in 1966.

But first some reflection on Barfield's two halves. Although not perfectly accurate about the 'romances' of the Romantics—that is they are by no means all imbued with the 'strangeness and distance' that he believed marked romantic stories, nonetheless this division does reflect a problem that has dogged English poetry from that time to this—how to integrate a narrative with the metaphysical; how to incorporate a timeless and independent power into the temporal circumstances essential to the development of a story. It may be a disputable generalization, but those Romantics who did write narrative poetry—say Southey, Scott and Byron—either had no such power informing their narratives, or only the vaguest intuition of what such a power might be. There are some obvious exceptions, for instance Blake and Shelley, but either their narratives (Blake) or their metaphysics (Shelley) lack the coherence or comprehensibility to create a poetry that fully succeeds. *The Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel* are the most significant exceptions, showing that it can be done, but Coleridge did not go on to develop this combination of powers. The poets who had a metaphysical impulse found its expression chiefly in lyrics, notably in odes or ode-like poems; and their narratives lacked a compelling story—think of *The Excursion*—or were unable to incorporate the metaphysical.[1] The inner world is little evident in narrative poems, and the narrative little evident in poems with a clear metaphysical impetus.

This division is epitomized in *The Ruined Cottage*. Originally one half was the

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[1] This is the essential insight of M H Abrams's *Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric*. And a poem that is not a successful narratives may be best read as an ode, just as Wordsworth thought 'Tintern Abbey' had the structure of an ode, and *The Prelude* could be read similarly.

story of Margaret, and the other an intellectual history of the Pedlar—Wordsworth by another name. Margaret's remorseless journey towards death is told in compelling detail, and she is never relieved of her suffering, behind which one feels there is a determination in Wordsworth not to baulk at inevitable human destiny and the particularly grim path by which some people get there. On the other hand, the Pedlar tells a tale in which death is completely absent, and is a composite of his family background and the development of his intellect, the key mark of which is his discovery in nature of 'an ebbing and a flowing mind', which he compared to the ideal forms he found within himself. The curious consequence of this finding of a mind in nature comparable to the mind in man is that 'All things there / Breathed immortality', asserting, if not establishing, a relationship between the temporal and the timeless. This antithesis is the closest he gets to considering death. It is also close to what Barfield found in Steiner, that the 'I', the subject 'is not shut up inside the physical body … but out there in the flower and the stone' (*RCA* 40)—an insight perfectly matched by Wordsworth as recorded in *The Prelude*—but a match unnoticed by Barfield. And in its very terms Steiner's insight is a near perfect echo of Wordsworth's:

> From deep analogies by thought supplied,
> Or consciousness not to be subdued,
> To every natural form, rock, fruit or flower,
> Even the loose stones that cover the highway,
> I gave a moral life—I saw them feel,
> Or linked them to some feeling. The great mass
> Lay bedded in a quickening soul, and all
> That I beheld respired with inward meaning. (*1805* III 121 ff.)[2]

The two parts of *The Ruined Cottage* are utterly heterogeneous: one is a narrative, a life and death observed, externalized; the other an intellectual history, internal, the limited narrative a progress of the mind to an insight superseding the fear of death. But Wordsworth understood the problem and made a concerted effort to allow one to inform the other, and later inserted what is known as 'the reconciling addendum'. The Pedlar advises his companion to cheer up because in 'the high spear-grass on that wall, / By mist and rain-drops silver'd o'er,' he found such 'an image of tranquility' that

> … what we feel of sorrow and despair
> From ruin and from change, and all the grief
> The passing shows of being leave behind,
> Appear'd an idle dream and could not live
> Where meditation was …

[2] 'Matter has no inward in the Cartesian system' (*BL* I 90 Shawcross). Coleridge also provides the grounds for finding the 'I' or the subject out there when he writes, 'We cannot conceive even the merest *thing*, a stone for instance, as simply and exclusively *being*, as absolutely passive and *actionless*' (*Logic* 21). Barfield quotes another version of the same belief, 'Remember, that whatever *is*, *lives*. A thing absolutely lifeless is inconceivable, except as a thought, image, or fancy, in some other being' (*WCT* 44; *CC&S* 183).

Meditation finds the breath of immortality in the vision of the spear-grass. It is that power, synonymous with imagination, which discerns the timeless and the transcendental, the truths beyond the world of sense, and here and elsewhere in Wordsworth's poetry, the power that supersedes all human suffering. Finally Wordsworth hammers home his point in the very last lines of the poem, as the Pedlar declares, fortified by meditation, 'I turn'd away / And walk'd along my road in happiness'—a complete and almost brutal contrast to the road Margaret has taken. This is all well and good, but if the Pedlar has looked through death, Margaret hasn't, and so the truth of each tale finds no substance in the other, and the reconciliation of the realities of time with the timeless, between suffering and the power of meditation, is only the Pedlar's experience, not Margaret's.[3] But the Pedlar achieves his reconciliation through a relationship with nature, and the power of 'meditation' catalysed by the appearances of nature. It is a static relationship, and the growth of that informing power is its own history, not the impetus of a narrative, of a tale by Milton left unsung. As do all discussions of the imagination, Barfield's relates only to nature, not to narrative. This is a dilemma that, in one way or another, still haunts English poetry, and Barfield tacitly accepts that the two halves he has identified have little or nothing to do with each other. But are all narratives therefore condemned to be confined to tales of mortality?

Nature and the nature of the Imagination

Barfield believes that 'the true *differentia* [distinguishing mark] of imagination is that the subject should be somehow merged or resolved into the object' (*RCA* 30).[4] Thus he is in accord with the intentions of Coleridge and Wordsworth—that mind or subject should be incorporated into the object. But what we might expect him to attribute to the work of the imagination, he attributes to 'fancy'. Although 'oft-quoted', he quotes again Coleridge's 'We receive but what we give / And in our life alone does Nature live', and then asserts that these lines

> are matched by many passages in Wordsworth's *Prelude* which stress the importance of the products of fancy for the opening of man's eyes to the true spirit of nature. (*RCA* 15)

Unfortunately he gives no examples from *The Prelude,* which would have helped elucidate what he meant. But he is quite at odds with Coleridge's description of fancy, which 'has no other counters to play with but fixities and definites … is indeed no other than a mode of Memory' and receives 'all its materials ready made from the law of association' (*BL* I 305). There are no 'products of fancy', but rather fancy uses the materials of sense 'to play with'—as Coleridge disparagingly puts it. Fancy is not a source of power, and it is difficult to see

[3] Wordsworth came to understand that this was a problem, and when *The Ruined Cottage* became the first book of *The Excursion* he gave Margaret 'faith', of a kind with the Pedlar's 'meditation'; but it is merely tacked on, and doesn't solve the problem of the integration of the one with the other.

[4] This 'somehow' is vague, but Coleridge has a very distinct insight into the process, considered below.

how it opens 'man's eyes to the true spirit of nature'. The oft-quoted lines are crucial to Coleridge's understanding of the relations of mind and nature. He is probably reminding Wordsworth—who was struggling to find the life in nature that he had once known—that only a power issuing from us, from the mind or soul, can revive that lost life. No power issues *from* nature as such (Wordsworth probably disagreed, but that was their argument), and thus unempowered the appearances of nature are no more than 'beautiful and fair'—'excellently fair'—but 'I see, not feel, how beautiful they are'. The difference between seeing and feeling is the sole and whole difference between nature unified, alive and intelligible, and nature as discrete objects, dead and spiritless, unintelligible, lying like a weight on our weary eyes.[5]

What is difficult to explain is why Barfield associates those crucial lines with fancy. It would seem almost self-evident that the imagination must have something to do with the 'the Spirit and the Power, / That wedding Nature to us gives in Dower / A new Earth and a new Heaven' (*VL* 315-7), because it is precisely this union that Barfield believes the imagination seeks to achieve, resolving the subject into the object, dissolving the Cartesian dichotomy.[6] To illustrate his intention Barfield never uses those lines from Coleridge, nor those of Wordsworth's hoping to wed 'the discerning intellect of Man, / … to this goodly universe' (Preface to *The Excursion*), which is the task he assigns to the imagination.

Barfield's restricted reading of Coleridge's idea of the imagination is consistent with what he then adds: that 'only Steiner, as far as I know, has clearly apprehended this activity as part … of a long sober process of cognition that may end in a man's actually overcoming this dichotomy.' Through that imaginative cognition, the individual acquires 'a sort of picture-consciousness … in which the spiritual facts of life and creation come before the soul in the form of pictures' (*RCA* 16).[7] But is it right to speak of spiritual truths as 'facts', let alone connect these 'facts' with the more certain fact of 'creation'? Elsewhere in the book, pointing out the limitations of empirical or 'a purely static type of thought' Barfield notes that the etymology of 'facts' is '*facta*—"things which have been done"' (*RCA* 59)—which suggests that the truths of spirit are a species of fact as easily observed as the notices of sense.

The language by which he expressed his idea of the spiritual belied what he believed, for he devoted a whole chapter to the very pertinent distinction between thoughts and thinking. Thoughts—'dead, dried up specimens' (*RCA* 55)—are the formed but inactive products of thinking, the difference between noun and verb, the Latin and the Greek use of language, comparable to the difference between *natura naturata* and *natura naturans*—one of Coleridge's key distinctions. If what is spiritual can be classed under fact, then spiritual truths

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[5] *The Ruined Cottage and the Pedlar*, ed. James Butler, Cornell UP, 1979; additions to MS D p. 373-4; and *The Ancient Mariner*.

[6] Cf *BL* I 129: 'Des Cartes was the first philosopher, who introduced the absolute and essential heterogeneity of the soul as intelligence, and the body as matter.' Barfield remarks that Coleridge's 'whole system of thought … was rooted in, and must stand or fall with, his critique of Cartesian dualism' (*WCT* 49).

[7] '… for spiritual truths can only be spiritually discerned' (*AR* 77).

become *spiritus spiritata* not *spiritus spiritans*.[8]

Had he said that 'imaginative cognition' is the beginning of a spiritual life, he would have been much closer to Coleridge's experience as described in the *Biographia*. The first stirrings of that life he puts down to the mystics who

> kept alive the *heart* in the *head*; gave me an indistinct, yet … working presentment, that all the products of the mere *reflective* faculty partook of death, and were as the rattling twigs and sprays in winter, into which a sap was yet to be propelled, from some root to which I had not penetrated … (*BL* I 152)

The reflective faculty deals with facts—'dead, dried up specimens'—the notices of sense, and is the work of the Understanding. The sap of these dried up twigs is Reason—the rise, race and royalty of which Coleridge spent much of his life enunciating. Through Kant, he develops the notion of a philosophic or artificial consciousness 'actualized by an effort of freedom' (236), that is, of the will, dividing 'all the objects of human knowledge into those on this side, and those on the other side of spontaneous consciousness', illustrated by the memorable metaphor of Cis- and Trans-Alpine Gaul, adding that 'citra et trans conscientam communen.' (236) But he also adds the caveat, 'The latter is exclusively the domain of pure philosophy'.[9] However Coleridge is not consistent. Both the organs of sense, epitomised by those who live in Cis-Alpine Gaul, and the organs of spirit, as characterized by those who seek Trans-Alpine Gaul, belong to all; and between them, as he says, there is communion, although 'the latter organs are not developed in all alike' (242).

However, because they do exist in all, they are capable of some degree of development in all, and 'their first appearance discloses itself in the *moral* being' (242), that is through an act of will.[10] One of Coleridge's most memorable metaphors—the butterfly or 'winged sylph' bursting from the chrysalis—characterizes the difference between 'the spontaneous consciousness natural to all reflecting beings' and the 'artificial' consciousness of the philosopher: 'They and they only' who understand that symbol 'can acquire the philosophic imagination', 'the sacred power of self-intuition' (241), which potential he elsewhere equates to faith, and therefore open to every human being.[11] This is a process visible in another under-read note on the imagination:

> But only as Man is capable of Ideas, is he a Philosopher by birth-

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[8] Barfield doesn't make the connection, but what he calls 'thinking' and what Wordsworth calls 'meditation' appear to be powers much alike. However, he does note that 'more than once' Coleridge uses meditation in the same way (*RCA* 117).

[9] 'I say then, that it is neither possible or necessary for all men to be PHILOSOPHERS. There is *philosophic* (and inasmuch as it is actualized by an effort of freedom, an *artificial*) *consciousness*, which lies beneath or (as it were) *behind* the spontaneous consciousness natural to all reflecting beings.' (BL I 236)

[10] Coleridge illustrated the distinction earlier in the *Biographia:* in respect of sense, 'Never could the eye have beheld the sun, had not its own essence been soliform," (*i.e. pre-configured to light by a similarity of essence with that of light*)"; and in respect of spirit, "neither can a soul not beautiful attain to an intuition of beauty" (*BL* II 114-5).

[11] Cf. 'And what is Faith?—it is to the Spirit of Man the same Instinct, which impels the chrysalis of the horned fly to build its involucrum as long again as itself to make room for the Antennæ, which are to come, tho' they never yet have been—O the *Potential* works *in* us even as the Present mood works *on* us!' (CN III 4088)

> right—and as far only as he is capable of an Ideal (practical product having its cause & impulses in *Ideas*, & its End, Aim, and Object in the approximate realization of the same) is Man a *Religious* Being.—But neither the one nor the other is possible except thro' the Imagination … (*CN* IV 4692)

Clearly this form of imagination belongs to the genus 'Man', the imagination that is potential in all human beings, a power realized in the two closely-related forms of ideas and ideals, of philosophy and religion, and is not just the secondary gift of philosophers, poets and artists—just as Sara Hutchinson, neither poet nor philosopher, was to realize the unifying vision at the end of Dejection.

Curiously, Barfield reflects Coleridge's method more than he seems to recognize. Thus in order to reveal 'the spiritual significance of nature' there is 'first the purely subjective experience, artificially induced, and then the reaction of this upon nature'. Barfield's phrase is very close to Coleridge's artificial or philosophic consciousness, which is 'actualized by an effort of freedom' (*BL* I 236). This is an effort made by the subject, and so is 'purely subjective' as Barfield says. What Coleridge describes as the acquiring of 'the philosophic imagination' or 'the sacred power of self-intuition' (*BL* I 241), Barfield does not recognize as his own 'cognitive imagination'. [12] For him the work of the imagination has yet to begin, and which he will principally associate with poetry, not with 'imaginative cognition' or, in other words, with the primary imagination.

The 'opening of man's eyes to the true spirit of nature'

Coleridge: the precedence of mind and subject

Throughout his works in seeking the resolution between mind and nature, Coleridge begins with mind, as does Wordsworth in his primary statement of intent—the Preface to *The Excursion*—where he also connects mind and beauty—an idea of Reason. Nothing, he says,

> can breed such fear and awe
> As fall upon us often when we look
> Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man,—
> My haunt, and the main region of my song.
> Beauty—a living Presence of the earth,
> Surpassing the most fair ideal Forms
> Which craft of delicate Spirits doth compose
> From earth's materials—waits upon my steps;[13];

[12] Faith, meditation, imagination, self-intuition, self-consciousness, philosophic consciousness, philosophic mind are all closely related words for Coleridge and Wordsworth.

[13] The precedence of mind is also evident in *The Ruined Cottage*: speaking of the deep feelings that had from boyhood 'impress'd / Great objects on his mind' the narrator records that the Pedlar 'as he grew in years / With these impressions would he still compare / All his ideal stores, his shapes and forms'. (*RC* MS E 138-140) The 'ideal stores' precede the 'impressions' of great objects. Subject precedes object.

Wordsworth, Coleridge and Barfield all believed that the mind as subject and nature as the object must be informed by a common power in order to unite them. But if the power is common to mind and nature, then logically one might begin with either and experience the same power. Early in his career Coleridge believed that one could begin with sense and end in the presence of God, illustrated in This Lime-tree Bower my Prison. He addresses the scene before him '… richlier burn, ye clouds! / Live in the yellow light, ye distant groves! / And kindle, thou blue Ocean!'—so that Lamb 'Struck with deep joy may stand', gazing until 'all doth seem / Less gross than bodily: and of such hues / As veil the Almighty Spirit, when he makes / Spirits perceive his presence.' The power is expressed emotionally, as joy, as it often is by both Coleridge and Wordsworth when the union of mind and nature is felt in the blood. But this mood or hope did not stay long with Coleridge, and for the rest of his life he insisted that to realize that union one must begin with mind, with the timeless or transcendent, and not with the phenomenal or material.

Why? one might ask. In *Church and State* he wrote, 'In every living form, the conditions of its *existence* are to be sought for in that which is *below* it; the grounds of its *intelligibility* in that which is *above* it' (*CS* 183). Mind as above nature is the source of its intelligibility, and mind is ultimately God, whom Coleridge often synonymizes with Reason, for 'Reason is from God, and God *is* reason, *mens ipsissima*' (*SWF* II 1281).[14] Coleridge also distinguished the appearances of nature from the laws of nature, just as he did the Understanding and the notices of sense from Reason and the ideas of Reason. Whatever that power was it lay in the ideas and the laws and their reciprocal relationship, not as a response to the phenomenal. He put this most forcefully in the *Biographia*:

> The highest perfection of natural philosophy would consist in the perfect spiritualization of all the laws of nature into laws of intuition and intellect. The phaenomena (*the material*) must wholly disappear, and the laws alone (*the formal*) must remain … the theory of natural philosophy would then be completed, when all nature was demonstrated to be identical in essence with that, which in its highest known power exists in man as intelligence and self-consciousness; (*BL* I 256)

The principle produces a method, which begins with a necessary separation of mind and nature: [15]

> He absents himself from her only in his own Spirit, which has the same ground with Nature … not to acquire cold notions, lifeless technical Rules, but living and life-producing Ideas … essentially one with the germinal causes in Nature, to learn her unspoken language, in its main radicals … for this does he abandon for a time the external *real*, in order

[14] S T Coleridge, *Shorter Works and Fragments*, (*SWF*), 2 vols, ed. H. J. Jackson and J. R. de J. Jackson, (Princeton U. Press, 1995).

[15] He is speaking of 'the Artist' but the method applies to all who would seek that re-union.

> to return to it with a full sympathy with its internal & actual—[16]

Coleridge believed that if one begins from appearance or the phenomenal, it would be no more than a copying of the outward or superficial, no more than an aesthetic experience. Only by finding in oneself—through self-consciousness or self-intuition—'living and life-producing ideas' can the individual be at 'one with the germinal causes in Nature'—that phrase again expressing the difference between appearance (the real) and the internal (the actual).[17] Nature's language is not found in her appearance, only in her 'radicals', in her 'germinal causes', which are, in Coleridge's thesis, at one with the ideas disclosed through self-consciousness.

In the garden at Highgate, Coleridge experienced an example of this process. He was 'musing on the ordinary exclusive attribution of Reality to the phænomena of the passive Sense'—'the lovely Lace-work of those fair Elm-trees', which as such were part of what he called a 'sensual trance', when he suddenly exclaims, 'I received the solution of my difficulty, flashlike, in the word, BEAUTY! in the intuition of the *Beautiful*—… Beauty is *implicit* knowlege—a silent communion of the Spirit with the Spirit in Nature (*CN* IV 5428). The intuition of beauty releases a power which discloses and unites him with the same power or spirit in nature.

There is a clear distinction between the appearance of and the power in nature: the appearances of nature are not the laws of nature, and without that intuition of beauty he would have remained in a 'sensual trance', unable to find the spirit in nature because he would not have been looking for the grounds of its intelligibility above nature. His eyes have been opened to the true spirit of nature.

Barfield: the precedence of the phenomena and the object

Barfield begins at the opposite pole, with the phenomenal, with a determination to save appearances. In order to do so, he invokes Steiner's reading of Goethe. It is a perfectly logical place to begin, and he is quite aware, and accurate, about what he is doing: 'Goethe's interest—as a knower—was directed to the world around him. It was … an *objective* interest … Goethe was a scientist before he was a philosopher … Coleridge began from the opposite end', but

> The truth at the core of things is one and the same from whatever direction it is approached, and … starting from opposite poles, Goethe from the pole of Nature and Coleridge from the pole of Pure Reason, meet.' (*RCA* 147-8)

[16] LL II 222 and CN III 4397-8. The key phrase is 'living and life-producing Ideas', the ideas of Reason. If so, this generation, or creation, in the finite mind is comparable to that undefined creation in the infinite mind, for, as Coleridge declared in *The Friend*, 'God is Reason', and as he said in the *Opus Maximum*, 'to suppose God without Ideas, or the realizing knowledge of all the particular forms potentially involved in the absolute causativeness, would destroy the very conception of God' (OM 223). Cf. ' … an Idea in the Subject, i.e. in the Mind, is a Law in the Object, i.e. in Nature' (*F* I 497).

[17] For Coleridge, 'the actual' preceded, and was the reality of, 'the real'.

To find the meeting place, Barfield posits a concept borrowed from Goethe—that of 'the *Urphänomenon* or prime phenomenon'—which he says, 'Coleridge *defined* under the name of "idea"' (*RCA* 148), and he takes the two as different names 'for the same concrete entity'; in that idea 'all distinction between subject and object disappears'.[18] The laws of nature are at one with the ideas derived from 'Pure Reason', which suggests that the laws of nature, which Barfield claims are self-evident in the appearances of nature, may disclose the ideas of mind. As discussed above, Coleridge refused that association, and distinguished observation from intuition, the phenomenon from the idea. Coleridge certainly believed that the laws of nature and the ideas of the mind are of a kind, but he also believed that nature's 'radicals', her 'germinal causes', which lie behind her appearances, could only be derived from the intuitions of the mind.

Goethe's method, according to Steiner, is that the observer, though beginning with 'the ordinary method of induction', when reaching

> a certain point (the "prime phenomenon"), stops there and endeavours to sink himself in contemplation *in* that phenomenon than to form further thoughts *about* it. It implies a certain … *chastity* of thought, a willingness not to go beyond a certain point. The blue of the sky, said Goethe, *is* the theory. To go further and weave a web of abstract ideas remote from anything we can perceive with our senses in order to 'explain' this blue—that is to darken counsel. (*RCA* 34)

But where is that 'certain point'? What is the prime phenomenon? Barfield does not tell us. One must observe so much, stop thinking, or having thoughts about the phenomenon, and then contemplate it, initiate the 'cognitive imagination'. Although his use of *Urphänomenon* is singular, and therefore one might expect some kind of description of *the* phenomenon underpinning *all* phenomena, an 'absolute' of some kind, Barfield does not suggest what this might be.

Two pages later the prime phenomenon is pluralized—*Urphänomene*, essentially repeating what he has already said, although in making both the singular and the plural 'prime', he makes the concept more difficult to grasp: is there one, original phenomenon, or many, each its own original? He is outlining Steiner's *Principles of a Theory of Knowledge implicit in Goethe's Outlook*:

> In it Steiner exemplifies and defines more closely those *Urphänomene*—the 'prime phenomena', such as the blue of the sky—behind which it is really meaningless to try and penetrate. These are the true 'laws of nature'. They are apodeictic. (*RCA* 36).[19]

As noted above, Barfield believes that the appearances of nature are self-

[18] Nothing could be more alien to Coleridge than describing an idea, or the power of ideas, as 'concrete', implying a material phenomenon existing in time and place.

[19] Not for Coleridge: 'If we affirm of a board that it is blue, the predicate (blue) is accidental, and not implied in the subject, board' (*BL* I 269).

evidently the laws of nature. He has no time for explanations of nature in respect of its 'main radicals' or 'germinal causes'—instead asserting that to seek such knowledge 'is to darken counsel', weaving 'a web of abstract ideas'. By contrast, Coleridge believed this a legitimate method: '… natural science, which commences with the material phenomenon as the reality and substance of things existing, does yet by the necessity of theorising … as it were instinctively, end in nature as an intelligence' (*BL* II 256-7).

Nonetheless, somewhat inconsistently, Barfield acknowledges 'that it was by this method that Goethe discovered … the principle that all the parts of a plant can be regarded as metamorphoses of the leaf … [and] a bone in the human skeleton unknown to science—the *os intermaxillare*' (*RCA* 34). His argument is that although a valid process in itself, it is 'obvious and elementary'. Goethe's later method demanded 'a little effort', which resulted, for instance, in his colour theory, which dismissed Newton's work as not a 'theory of colour … but only the conditions under which colour is possible'. Similarly, Darwinians 'have not presented science with a way of getting at the unity which underlies these innumerable variations' of species' *(RCA* 34). But Goethe's theory of colour is psychological. This may be what Barfield means by contemplation, the stopping of rational and scientific thinking at some point, and seeking a deeper unity, which if not available by induction, must be psychological or metaphysical.

Coleridge's contemplation, or meditation, or development of philosophic consciousness was independent of observation or the notices of sense, and only completed when he had reached a *ne plus ultra.* He conceived of an 'antecedent unity' and 'antecedent power' which informs all modes of being, but precedes experience of phenomena: 'a World demands its own adequate Antecedent Unity, which must therefore be present *to* all and *in all* … it is highly reasonable to believe a Universal Power, as the cause and pre-condition of the harmony of all particular Wholes … ' (*AR* 76). Barfield quotes a longer extract of this passage (*WCT* 44) but omits those sentences. That 'Universal Power' may be considered "The superessential Will [that] is the Root of all, the ground, and Antecedent of all Reality, Eternal Antecedent of Co-eternal Being, the Unnameable' (*CN* V 5813). The word 'antecedent' occurs three times in the longer extract from *Aids to Reflection*, and twice at the beginning of the note.

It might be possible to match the antecedent unity with the concept of an *Urphänomenon*, but Barfield offers nothing which corresponds to Coleridge's 'superessential Will'. And doubts hang over the status of the concept—singular or plural, law or laws, material or immaterial, time-bound or timeless—although the clue is probably in the name. In their plurality, Barfield resolves these phenomena into 'types' or 'laws' which are '*neither subjective nor objective*'; but if they originate as ideas subjectively and laws objectively, or which precedes which, or if indeed there is a precedence, he does not discuss. This is a conflation Coleridge *never* permits, because the lower is always understood by the higher, which remains apart as intelligence, that intelligence which is Reason—('Reason is from God, and God *is* reason, *mens ipsissima*')—the source

of the ideas or intuitions, such as beauty, that make the objects of perception intelligible. It is also unclear what role systematic or cognitive imagination has in the revelation of *Urphänomene*. Coleridge calls this method into question when he declared that the 'solution of phenomena can never be derived from phenomena' (*F* I 500).

Barfield held to his belief that the appearances of nature are the laws of nature. But on the very last page of *Romanticism Comes of Age*, he says 'we have no right to think that sense-perception is the indispensable witness to reality. Thinking is … that factor in man "through which he inserts himself spiritually into reality"' (*RCA* 254). There are two realities here, one the spirituality consequent upon thinking, and the other the reality into which man 'inserts' himself—which would appear to be the principal reality of the two, and which 'we normally attribute to perception'. Coleridge did not conflate these two realities, and attributed the primary to thinking and the consequences of thinking.

The primary imagination and the primary perception

'We are to seek therefore for some absolute truth capable of communicating to other positions a certainty, which it has not itself borrowed; a truth self-grounded, unconditional and known by its own light' (*BL* I 268).

'This principle, and so characterised manifests itself in the Sum or I am' (*BL* I 272).

'We begin with the I know myself, in order to end with the absolute I am' (*BL* I 283).

Coleridge, begins with the 'I AM', 'the superessential Will', from which all proceeds. The conclusion of the *Biographia* relates the perception of the visible to this originating 'I AM':

> the upraised Eye views only the starry Heaven which manifests itself alone: and the outward Beholding is fixed on the sparks twinkling in the aweful depth … only to preserve the Soul steady and collected in its pure *Act* of inward Adoration to the great I am, and to the filial Word, that re-affirmeth it from Eternity to Eternity, whose choral Echo is the Universe. (*BL* II 247-8)

The outward beholding of the phenomenal is the surety for the inward act of adoration, an act that progresses from the I AM to the 'filial Word', from God to the Logos, to the power that informs all that is temporal through the ideas of Reason. The 'actual' lies not in the material, but in the mind, divine or human, of which the material or 'real' is but an echo: 'Of all, we see, hear, or touch, the substance is and must be in ourselves … the life which is in us in them likewise'; or we are faced with the 'dreary … belief that everything that is around us but a phantom', a world without the Word, a world merely phenomenal and unintelligible (*LL* II 222).

As the editors of the *Biographia* point out, this passage has some parallels with the conclusion of Volume I, which declares that the primary imagination is 'the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception'. As an agent it

acts, and its act is 'a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM' (*BL* I 304).[20] It seems unlikely that the 'eternal act of creation in' and the 'pure *Act* of inward Adoration to' are substantially different acts. In other words, all human perception is formed and informed by a creative power resembling or imitating the creative relationship of the Logos and the I AM.[21] It is a repetition of the infinite act *in* the finite or human mind; an '*Act*', and therefore in some measure a function of the will. As he says, he 'layed stress on the words, *human* mind—excluding thereby all results common to Man and all sentient creatures…' (*CN* III 4397, f49). It does not just happen, without volition, passively, unconsciously. It is not therefore, to anticipate my conclusion, akin to that perception of the visible by all sentient creatures, the sensual trance in which, by and large, we all live.

Whatever that uniquely human perception is, it is of what is *in* us not outside us; but what is outside is an echo of that inward creation, just as the mind makes the senses, and not the senses the mind. The nature of that voluntary act takes many forms in Coleridge's works, from the deliberate to no more than a tendency of the will, from the Mariner's failed attempt to pray—eventually answered—to a sudden intuition of the beautiful solving a 'difficulty' as he walked in the Gillmans' garden.[22] Under other conditions, it is also the work of the philosopher, such as described in Chapter 12 of the *Biographia*, and it is hard and difficult work:

> Speaking of the original unific Consciousness, the primary perception, & its extreme difficulty … take occasion to draw a lively picture of the energies, self-denials, sacrifices, toils, trembling knees, & sweat-drops on the Brow, of a philosopher who has really been sounding the depth of our being—.[23]

The primary perception is a unified consciousness, and it reaches into 'the depth of our being': given that he has asserted that human perception is a finite repetition of the infinite act of the I AM, it is very difficult to accept that the primary perception of this note is not also the *human* perception of the *Biographia*, and therefore the task of the imagination to realize, the primary or philosophic imagination educing the primary perception, in which subject and object are one, a perception anything but passive.[24]

However, the critical consensus is that this primary power is no more than our ability to perceive the visible world, no more than the organization of

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[20] That both phrases use 'in' and not 'by' is often overlooked. Of all we see and hear the substance is *in* ourselves, *in* the I AM, and not a world separated from us or God *by* the act of creation, not the watchmaker and the watch.

[21] Cf. *CN* IV 5243: '… a finite will can become personal, an I am, only under the condition of the Eternal Logos enlightening it.'

[22] *CN* IV 5428.

[23] *CN* III 3295. Kathleen Coburn suggests that the phraseology echoes 'Kant in the first *Kritik* in the unification of self-consciousness in apperception.' In the *Biographia* (*BL* I 153) Coleridge acknowledges the difficulty he has had with apperception.

[24] 'If the mind be not *passive*, if it be indeed made in God's Image, & that too in the sublimest sense—the Image of the *Creator*—there is ground for suspicion, that any system built on the passiveness of the mind must be false, as a system' (*CL* II 709).

sense perception, which Coleridge relegated to the Understanding.[25] Thus, Shawcross, the first 20th century editor of the *Biographia*, declared that 'the primary imagination is the organ of common perception, the faculty by which we have experience of an actual world of phenomena'. I A Richards, a couple of decades later, said the same, but upped the rhetoric: 'The Primary Imagination is normal perception that produces the usual world of the senses, "That inanimate cold world allowed / To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd", the world of motor-buses, beef-steaks and acquaintances…'(*Coleridge on Imagination*, 1934, p. 58). Infamous and unfortunate words, still asserted to this day, and in diametric opposition to what Coleridge was actually saying, the sad result of the British critical mind—'not notorious for mental vigilance or philosophical depth' (*RCA* 12)—taking refuge in a comfortable materialism. No 'sweat-drops on the Brow' for them.[26]

I have traced this power through Coleridge's work in order to demonstrate how differently it can be understood compared to the received reading. Unfortunately Barfield, who in many respects has illuminated Coleridge's thought with much greater insight than almost anyone else runs perilously close to the reading which I think is the reverse of what Coleridge thought:

> Primary imagination … is an act, but it is an act of we are not normally conscious. It becomes secondary, whether philosophically or poetically, when it is raised to, or nearer to, the level of consciousness and therewith becomes expressible. Whereas the only thing that could be called the "expression" of primary imagination as such is the familiar face of nature herself. The "rules" of secondary imagination are, however, still "the very powers of growth and production," [*BL* II 65] for that is what they were already at the primary stage, when they were simply the laws of nature. (*WCT* 77)

The severe limitation Barfield puts upon the function of the primary imagination, the lack of volition, its only expression the 'familiar face of nature', reversing what Coleridge means by primary and secondary, leads him straight back into the camp of Shawcross, Richards, et al. Barfield, who got so much right about Coleridge, got two critical things wrong—limiting the laws of nature to the appearances of nature, and describing the primary imagination as no more than a barely conscious act permitting us to perceive only the phenomenal and therefore unintelligible world.

Barfield read Coleridge as closely as was then possible. In the late 1960s the

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[25] '… the Understanding … may be defined the conception of the Sensuous, or the faculty by which we generalize and arrange the phaemomena of perception' (F I 156).

[26] Further examples: 'Coleridge did indeed mean this "simple act of seeing" when he talked of the primary imagination…', Kathleen Wheeler, *Sources, Processes and Methods in Coleridge's* 'Biographia Literaria', 1980; 'From a series of sense images not necessarily visual the primary imagination forms an intelligible view of the world', (James Engell, BL I lxxxix, 1983); '… we have only to note that in deducing the emergence of physical perception, we have deduced the equivalent of Coleridge's Primary Imagination', (Nick Reid "Coleridge and Schelling: The Missing Transcendental Deduction." Studies in Romanticism 33 (1994): 451-79, p.466); '… the idea that the aesthetic (secondary imagination) fashions a unity that consciousness and everyday perception (primary imagination) lack is extracted easily enough from a careful reading of the *Biographia*…', Christopher Stokes, *Coleridge, Language and the Sublime*, (Palgrave 2011), 162

Collected Coleridge was far from complete. His study of Steiner prepared his path back through the Victorians to the philosophical prince of romantic imagination, happily dropping most the arcane terms of Steiner's metaphysics along the way. In a world dominated by critics wary of such terms as the transcendental, Barfield put us back on track in the pursuit of Coleridge's thought, beginning with the recognition that his whole system 'was rooted in … his critique of Cartesian dualism' (*WCT* 49), and that 'to speak at all of the unity of intelligence and nature is of course flatly to contradict Descartes' (*WCT* 62). He understood that Reason was a transcendent, metaphysical power, the ground of all Coleridge's thinking and almost everything Barfield says illustrates and enforces this and related insights: thus Reason is 'unindividual and transcendent' (*WCT* 100, 152; *RCA* 151), and in Reason we find 'the power of Ideas' (*WCT* 94).

But he does not, as both Coleridge Wordsworth did, identify Reason with the imagination in its primary form: 'It is wonderful, how closely Reason and Imagination are connected' (*F* I 203n); and imagination is ' … but another name for absolute strength / And clearest insight, amplitude of mind, / And reason in her most exalted mood'. When Barfield declares 'the act of thinking is the ground of Being itself, the Being of all things. It is a logic in which one feels the presence of the Logos' (*RCA* 152), he is all but echoing Coleridge's "[w]ithout this latent presence of the 'I am', all modes of existence in the external world would flit before us as coloured shadows…' (*WCT* 227); he believes that the Logos is a creative principle (*RCA* 60, 127*)*, and thus imagination initiating the work of Reason, is 'the realm where language is born' (*RCA* 253); the act of thinking is distinguished from thought, and thus distinguishes alike the active from the passive, *natura naturans* from *natura naturata* and imagination from the despotism of the eye (*WCT* 21)—from which Wordsworth too would escape. And in Barfield's emphasis on polar logic, we find the source of one of Coleridge's favourite adages, 'Extremes meet', an example of which is Reason and Sense united in the being and appearances of nature, just as Wordsworth sought to unite an irradiating intelligence with natural phenomena, so finding again the Paradise he once saw in the splendour of the grass.

Barfield's rightness about Coleridge could be endlessly exemplified, and the caveats minimal. But his tendency to begin with phenomena in order to render the phenomenal intelligible leads to a mistaken conception of the primary imagination, confusing it with passive perception. His failure to recognize Wordsworth's great and Coleridgean vision of Reason and the imagination as almost synonymous is an essential element missing in his understanding of romanticism. He confines the primary imagination to the job of sensory perception, and thus the secondary imagination, without the power of ideas as educed from Reason, has only the fixities and definites of fancy to play with. And by beginning with phenomena, Barfield is unable to fully separate the imagination as subject from the appearances of nature as object. Coleridge found the 'actuality' that preceded 'reality' in the subject-object relationship

within the 'I AM'. This freed the mind from immediate involvement with any particular object and, at least in principle, would enable the incarnation of the productive Logos as much in a narrative as in nature.

Barfield claimed that 'anthroposophy included and transcended … the whole Romantic philosophy' and that it 'was nothing less than Romanticism grown up' (*RCA* 14). But until the primary imagination is considered as a finite form of an infinite power, separate from all forms of the objective, existing, as Emily Bronte put it, even 'Though earth and man were gone', then Romanticism, at least that of Coleridge and Wordsworth, has yet to come of age. Until then, and while the hundred years of nonsense about the primary imagination as the agent of everyday perception continues to be promulgated in our universities, poetry will lapse into phenomenology—dealing with objects dead and spiritless; novels will be limited to tales of mortality; and history, in Eliot's words, little more than 'a mere chronicle without meaning'.[27]

[27] The Relativity of Moral Judgement.