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## Death, Hope, and Wholeness in Owen Barfield's Fairy Tales

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### Death, Hope, and Wholeness in Owen Barfield's Fairy Tales

#### Abstract

This article discusses Owen Barfield's unpublished and published fairy tale writings, and why his works and ideas (e.g., death, hope, and wholeness) are valuable to consider for children and adult readers, though he is not as well known as other Inklings or mythopoeic writers. Some of the fantasy texts include *The Silver Trumpet* and "The Child and the Giant."

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## MEATH, HOPE, AND WHOLENESS IN OWEN BARFIELD'S FAIRY TALES

TIFFANY BROOKE MARTIN

READERS AWARE OF OWEN BARFIELD (1898-1997) usually associate him with fellow Inklings C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. Though not well known for writing fantasy or fairy tales, Barfield's first published book was *The Silver Trumpet* in 1925, pre-dating Lewis's and Tolkien's published fantasy,<sup>1</sup> along with five other fairy tales Barfield wrote around this time. While the tales are for a young audience, Barfield did not limit his stories to children. Lewis writes in "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to Be Said" that

The Fantastic or Mythical is a Mode available at all ages for some readers; for others, at none. At all ages, if it is well used by the author and meets the right reader, it has the same power: to generalise while remaining concrete, to present in palpable form not concepts or even experiences but whole classes of experience, and to throw off irrelevancies. But at its best it can do more; it can give us experiences we have never had and thus, instead of "commenting on life", can add to it. (48)

When written well, the unique quality of fairy tales can usher the reader into an experience that explores and expands on one's understanding of life. Max Lüthi corroborates this in claiming that "[f]airy tales are unreal but they are not untrue; they reflect essential developments and conditions of man's existence" (70). Similar to these perspectives, Barfield likely believed that fairy tales were educationally valuable because as an active anthroposophist emphasizing human consciousness and language, he agreed with Rudolf Steiner's views that included the importance of fairy tales for child development and was taught in Steiner's Waldorf schools.<sup>2</sup> For instance, Barfield's story "The Child and the Giant" was "written for his Upper School English class at The New School, Streatham in 1930" (Blaxland-de Lange 260). According to Jack Zipes,

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<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that the other Inklings had not written fantasy by this time. For example, Tolkien wrote *Roverandom* for his children in the late 1920s, but it was not published until 1998. Tolkien also wrote a series of illustrated Father Christmas letters for his children from 1920 to 1943, but these were not published until 1976.

<sup>2</sup> See Diener ch. 2 "The Anthroposophical Background" for a helpful summary of anthroposophy and Rudolf Steiner's ideas.

The fairy tale had been introduced into the school curriculum and published in primers in Great Britain and the United States at the end of the 19th century. This pedagogical trend continued and was reinforced in the 20th century, so much so that children were encouraged to act out and create fairy tale plays. With the help of teachers and librarians, the fairy tale became a staple of education throughout the West [...]. ("Origins" 34)

Besides their pedagogical merit, fairy tales as a genre appealed to Barfield due to his abiding interest in romanticism: "The questioning spirit of the Romantics enabled them to play a key role in fostering the rise of the literary fairy tale in Great Britain, for the symbolism of the tales gave them great freedom to experiment and express their doubts about the restricted view of the utilitarians and traditional religion" (Zipes, Introduction xv). The ability to question and exercise freedom and symbolism in conveying a particular message supports Barfield's decision to write fairy tales. The fact that "[f]airy tales are experienced by their hearers and readers, not as realistic, but as symbolic poetry" (Lüthi 66) is another reason this form is significant for Barfield throughout his life, since poetry was central to Barfield. This poetic principle also links him with an earlier writer of fairy tales, George MacDonald (1824-1905), who explored truth and imagination through the symbolic, dreams, and the unconscious outside of a Freudian framework.

When evaluating MacDonald's tales, Zipes explains, "Fairy-tale writing itself becomes a means by which one can find the golden key for *establishing harmony with the world*—a utopian world [...] that *opens our eyes to the ossification of a society blind to its own faults and injustices*" (Introduction xxiii; italics added). Because Barfield focused intensely on individual and communal harmony in response to societal problems, this is a commonality between MacDonald and Barfield in motive and narrative choices. Another similarity is that MacDonald and other Victorian fairy-tale writers, such as Edith Nesbit and Oscar Wilde, "felt the future of Britain and the young was at stake in their literary production" (xxix), and Barfield also wrote stemming from his concern for future generations. Zipes points out that such "tales reveal a profound belief in the power of the imagination as a potent force that can be used to question the value of existing social relations. There is also a moral impulse [...]. However, it does not lead to reconciliation with the status quo—rather, rebellion against convention and conformity" (xxiv). The tension between moralizing the message and overwhelming the reader with symbolism requires adeptness on the part of the author. The purpose should be not to preach but to question and to challenge readers to address social and cultural problems, and with the fairy tale genre's aesthetics and conventions, authors can communicate without coming across as merely didactic or dull.

MacDonald is a valid starting point for analyzing Barfield's fairy tales since Barfield and MacDonald have much in common regarding their emphasis on romanticism, the imagination, and death as a theme. They both are poets and considered visionary writers, and they appreciated some of the same authors such as Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg). At the age of 93, in response to an interview question about "[b]ooks or authors that have influenced or have resonated with you over a long time," Barfield stated that "[o]ther than Steiner[,] George MacDonald" (Lewis "gave me his copy of *Phantastes*") (Hipolito, "Introduction" 47n2). Although it is unclear when he first read MacDonald, Barfield valued MacDonald's writing since he "gave Lewis a copy of George MacDonald's *The Diary of an Old Soul* (1885)" (Lewis, *Collected Letters [CL] II* 172n65), a book from which Barfield quoted in his essay "Death." Lewis, in a letter (written around 9 Dec. 1935), told Barfield that MacDonald's book "is magnificent. You placed the moment of giving it to me admirably. I remember with horror the absurdity of my last criticism of it, and with shame the vulgarity of the form in which I expressed it" (*CL II* 172). In the late 1920s novel *English People*, one of Barfield's characters has "great respect for the likes of Traherne and George MacDonald" (Blaxland-de Lange 218), so Barfield had obviously read MacDonald earlier than the 1930s.

Looking at shared themes in MacDonald's and Barfield's writing can give the reader richer appreciation for the continuity and importance of these themes in fairy tales such as Barfield's. As a visionary, MacDonald was deeply introspective and delighted in philosophical and spiritual concerns: "[e]verything he wrote was filled with his sense of God, and with what he believed to be the truth about God and God's Creation" (Robb 20). The writing he is best known for now, and arguably best at crafting, is his fantasy for which he was famous during his lifetime. On "the centennial of MacDonald's birth, a leading article in the *Times Literary Supplement*" described MacDonald as "the man who did one sort of work better than anyone else has ever done it . . . the writing of what are commonly called his fairy stories"—high praise indeed (qtd. in Wolff 8). Citing MacDonald as one of "the three most important writers and defenders of fairy tales from 1840 to 1880" (along with Charles Dickens and Lewis Carroll), Zipes asserts that MacDonald's "quest for a new fairy-tale form stemmed from a psychological rejection and rebellion against the 'norms' of English society that would move [his] readers to look forward to change" (*When Dreams* 154). With his intimate knowledge of the poor and love of humanity, MacDonald's Christian ideals urged him to advocate cultural reform through his writing.

Similarly to MacDonald's interpretation, Barfield propounded that imagination is a way of life and a means to truth. MacDonald's aesthetic vision displays itself in his focus on truth, humanity, and divinity, and the strengths of

one's imagination (see his essay "Imagination"). On the subject of fairy tales, for MacDonald, truth and beauty are intertwined and give meaning to story, bringing joy to the reader (see his essay "Fantastic"). Fairy tales and fantasy have a high purpose and are not merely to amuse, enrapture, or teach. MacDonald enjoins, "The best thing you can do for your fellow, next to rousing his conscience, is—not to give him things to think about, but to wake things up that are in him; or say, to make him think things for himself" ("Fantastic" 232). This emphasis on thinking corresponds with Barfield's focus on human consciousness in his writing. Arousing one's soul and thinking for oneself comes strongly through the influence of Nature, and as "Nature is mood-engendering, thought-provoking[,] such ought the sonata, such ought the fairytale to be" (MacDonald, "Fantastic" 232). Nature and art, fantasy and music, should correspond; and both MacDonald and Barfield portray these interconnections in their fairy tales.

Both authors also share keen insight and a hopeful perspective about death and immortality. Tolkien wrote that "Death is the theme that most inspired George MacDonald" ("On Fairy-stories" 75). A few letters by MacDonald exemplify his belief that death is not a fatal ending but a hopeful beginning leading to a greater life (see *Expression* 99, 102, 243) and as a way to reunite with loved ones (*Expression* 298). One of Barfield's early writings was an essay entitled "Death," which Lewis praised in a letter dated 1 June 1930 to his friend Arthur Greeves: "I have also read an essay on Death, in typescript, which Barfield has sent me, which is to my mind one of the finest things there is.<sup>3</sup> He handles death as you would expect it to be handled by a pupil & lover of *Lilith & Phantastes*," two novels by MacDonald (*CL* I 899). Prior to this acclamation, Barfield submitted the piece (28 Apr. 1930) to T.S. Eliot for possible publication. Though Barfield apparently wrote "Death" in the 1920s or at the latest completed it in 1930, it was not published until 2008. Christopher Mitchell introduces and lauds the essay as "important [...] for what it reveals about Owen Barfield's thinking, not only on the subject of death, but also as his commentary on contemporary culture's uneasy relationship with it" (43). "Barfield's idea of death is integral to his thinking as a whole" and therefore worth understanding (44).

In "Death," Barfield cites a text by MacDonald (51-52) and repeats one line in particular—"To will to die is one with highest life"—to stress that this is

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<sup>3</sup> This essay and the theme of the afterlife was influential to Lewis and his spiritual and intellectual development both then and afterwards: "Fifteen years later, when Lewis was considering what might best comprise a book of essays in memory of Charles Williams, he listed this piece by Barfield, tellingly mistitling it 'Immortality.' In later years, immortality would become one of the most important topics in Lewis's own writings" (Hipolito, "C.S. Lewis" 231-32).

“the open secret; [...] the mystery at the heart of all the mysteries” (52). Barfield extrapolates this point: “My immortality begins from that moment at which I voluntarily will to die, and that part of me is immortal which so wills. For that which is already dead cannot die” (52). Later in the essay, Barfield continues his optimistic view of death: “Of what importance is it to anyone whether this pale impersonal shadow lives on or not? I cannot die—because I am dead already! Inestimable boon!” (53). This declaration leads Barfield to define “the second Open Secret—that the nothingness of the self (provided it is willed) is not Nothing, but Something” (53). For Barfield, immortality and “an unconquerable love of truth” go together (55), and he emphasizes love itself as “the ultimate source of all the meaning of the earth” (57).<sup>4</sup> Because many people are afraid of change, rather than seeing it as a way to become more whole, they often have an unclear understanding of life and death in general.

Barfield claims, “We [...] believe what we want to believe rather than what we ought. Hence the general shapelessness of our ideas” (58). Again, he stresses the need for cogent thinking because it affects all our beliefs and actions. Barfield explores these ideas, among others, about consciousness, will, and death in his fairy tales, with the tales reaching hopeful conclusions. It is helpful to group the following stories together because of related themes of death, hope, and wholeness; the use of children as protagonists; and Barfield’s increased incorporation of fantasy in his writing.<sup>5</sup>

#### “THE LITTLE PERISHER” (c. 1924)

The first of these tales is “The Little Perisher” (c. 1924) and appears to be an unpublished story originally titled “Mr. Cayley’s Bet.” The short story is about ten-year-old Alfred “Alf” Cayley, whom his alcoholic father abuses and calls the Little Perisher. Alf enjoys reading fairy tales, such as “The Ugly Duckling,” with the story’s narrator as a way of better coping with the pain of his present life, thus giving some hope and wholeness through story and imagination. Apparently though, the boy dies in the end due to neglect or abuse, for as the narrator puts it, the Little Perisher was now in fairyland, a far happier place where he can experience hope realized and wholeness fulfilled. The narrator then describes to his audience ways in which a person can enter fairyland.

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<sup>4</sup> Barfield elaborates that “Psyche melts in the dark in the secret embraces of Eros; but as soon as she takes the lamp to him, he vanishes. Pure love cannot be written or spoken of, it can only write or speak. It would be well if more people understood this” (57). Lewis would later retell the Cupid and Psyche myth in *Till We Have Faces*, and it seems possible that Barfield’s “Death” essay was influential to some degree on Lewis’s ideas in his novel.

<sup>5</sup> Barfield’s fantasy works, *The Rose on the Ash-Heap* and *Virginia’s conte in Eager Spring*, are not primarily for children and thus not discussed here with his other fairy tales.

Since the narrator addresses his readers as "my excellent young friends" and "Wise young judges," this story was likely intended for younger readers. In terms of cultural commentary, the tale criticizes alcoholism and child abuse. For instance, Alf's father uses a belt as punishment without apparent cause. Alf somehow withstands this abuse though a fragile, small child, and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children is referenced in the text.<sup>6</sup> The story's conclusion reinforces Barfield's view about death and how alcoholism can contribute to various abuses and confused beliefs and thoughts. In the end though, fairyland triumphs, for it is a place of peace and hope for those who know and enter it as Alf does.

**"THE LAKE OF NIX (A FAIRY STORY)" (c. 1920-30s)**

Another unpublished story apparently written for a younger audience, yet with a somewhat unpalatable tone, is "The Lake of Nix (A Fairy Story)" (c. 1920-30s).<sup>7</sup> The only remark I have found about this piece asks, "was this rather brutal undated fairy story written to encourage [Barfield's] children to eat their soup?" (Blaxland-de Lange 260). If Barfield wrote this "to encourage his children to eat their soup," then it is unlikely that the tale was written in the 1920s, as the Bodleian Library shelfmark (Dep. c. 1083) information approximates, since his children Alexander and Lucy were adopted in 1929 and 1937 respectively, and since the Barfields began fostering Jeffrey in 1945 (Blaxland-de Lange 293).<sup>8</sup> Either Barfield wrote this in the 1920s before having children, or this tale was written later than supposed.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Barfield had a lifelong commitment to supporting the wellbeing of children; besides adopting and fostering children in the 1920-40s, he was involved with the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children especially during the 1960-70s and donated to the Child Welfare League of America in his later years, according to a check and statement saved in his 1995-96 correspondence files (see Catalogue, shelfmark Dep. c. 1067).

<sup>7</sup> The word "Nix" is open to interpretation as to why Barfield gives the story this place name. In its first definition as a noun, nix means "[n]othing; nobody"; the word can also be used as "'Beware!' 'Look out!'" or "as a children's truce term." In its second meaning as a noun, nix comes from the German word for a mythological water sprite or nymph, which relates to the tale's watery location.

<sup>8</sup> The date for Lucy's adoption is cited as 1935 in Blaxland-de Lange; however, Lucy was born 2 Nov. 1935 and was adopted 24 Mar. 1937, according to the Barfield's marriage certificate that was "endorsed with a note of its exhibition in the adoption of Lucy Jane Barfield" along with a note on the certificate "RE: The Adoption of Children Act 1926." Originally Geoffrey Corbett, Jeffrey (b. 6 June 1940) later changed his name to Jeffrey Barfield (Hooper, *C.S. Lewis* 759-60).

<sup>9</sup> This story was probably written in the mid- to late 1920s because of the address at the end of the typescript: 19, Wildwood Road, N.W. II. Barfield lived at this address in London

Like several of Barfield's other stories, the themes of death and marriage/human sexuality appear in this tale. In brief, the story is about a man and woman who dislike soup, marry each other, and choose to eat ice instead. They find ice to be extremely economical and raise their children (three girls and a boy) to eat only ice as well. The three girls, a.k.a. the Three Nuns, are brainwashed to agree with their parents that ice is the ultimate in nutrition. The boy, a.k.a. the Youngest of the Family, befriends another student at school and starts to eat soup, causing discord and sadness at home. Because the girls have only subsisted on ice, they gradually turn into ice, whereas the boy remains alive. When a Huntsman comes to ask one of the girls, Monica, to marry him, the Huntsman finds her in the form of an icicle. The mother tells him, "'Embrace her! and all will be well!' for she had read many pretty stories in which everything comes right in the end." This is not one of those pretty stories, for love does not undo the damage. Monica melts into "a little pool of water" at the Huntsman's touch, thereby finalizing her doom and causing the Huntsman to call her parents a "silly old couple." The Youngest of the Family calls his parents that as well as he "mop[s] up the pool" that had once been his sister. He proves himself the wisest of the characters in the tale, for certain economic measures are not always healthiest, which seems to be a cultural critique on Barfield's part based on his interest in economic reform (see Diener).

Besides the possible economic aspect in "The Lake of Nix," Barfield's essay on death offers an interesting reading of this story. He writes in "Death" that "[i]n a continuous subtle interplay between the bodily and the spiritual self we are free to substitute progressively the solidity of a constant will for the transient solidity of the flesh. The body is solid will. It is frozen will, and we have to thaw it again. We have to make it *our* will" (52). The words "frozen" and "thaw" in reference to exerting one's will over the body correspond with the girls' freezing as they suffer and eventually die from their diet of ice. Instead of exerting their will and thinking for themselves, they succumb to inaction and consequent death, and thawing in the case of Monica seals her doom since she cannot exert her will any longer. There is hope and wholeness, however, for the Youngest of the Family since he thinks for himself and makes healthy choices, unlike his sister's untimely death and the unpleasant lives of his other family members.

#### "A STORY FOR ALEXANDER" (C. 1930S)

Another unpublished fairy tale with a somewhat happier tone is "A Story for Alexander" (c. 1930s), written for Barfield's oldest son. There is no date on the

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during the 1920s, based on two other documents with this address and timeframe (see Catalogue, shelfmarks Dep. c. 1102 and 1200).

handwritten manuscript; nonetheless, the story was probably composed in the 1930s since Alexander was born 30 Jan. 1928 and adopted in 1929. Scant information exists about Alexander, but C.S. Lewis refers to him as the "adopted baby" in two letters to Arthur Greeves.<sup>10</sup> In Jan. 1930, Lewis mentions visiting Barfield for four days: "For the first two days [Barfield's] wife and adopted baby were away, so we had the house to ourselves" (*Letters, Vol. 1* 856). Several months later, Lewis writes:

The Barfields have been making wine from the vine that grows on their cottage and next year when it is ready to drink we think of having a Bacchic festival. The adopted baby is to be the infant Bacchus. Harwood with his fat shiny face, on the donkey, will be Silenus. B. [Barfield] and I Corybantes. Mrs. B. [Maud] a Maenad. B. and I will write the poetry & she will compose a dance. You ought to come. (*Letters, Vol. 1* 912-13)

This letter paints a joyful familial scene unlike what happens in Barfield's tale for his son.

"A Story for Alexander" is about a little boy whose parents are imprisoned, and he is sent to live far from home with other children. Often lonely like other Barfieldian protagonists, the boy cries one night in great despair and is visited by a woman wearing "a blue cloak, spangled all over with stars." Her appearance and behavior is reminiscent of the wise, (grand)motherly figures in MacDonald's tales, as well as having similarities to Mary, the mother of Jesus. The woman tells the boy, "It was because I wanted you to be able to see me that I made you unhappy." She tells him furthermore that "One magic grows out of another," and "you have been given a special sort of eyes that only see me—magic ones." Confused about what unhappiness and magical insight have to do with each other, the boy listens to her story about the time when people could not see because they had "soft patches" in place of human eyes.

Some of the people began to experience increasing pain when the sun shone on their soft patches. Eventually, one of these people "could not keep still for the pain and at last he cried out in his misery 'Oh who is making my soft patches so sore?' Immediately he thought he heard a voice answer, "I was!" and at the same moment the pain suddenly ceased." The soft patches had now "broke open" because they "had been turning into eyes." As the man adjusts to his new vision, he realizes the voice was actually his experience "of the sun

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<sup>10</sup> See Lewis, *Letters, Vol. 3* 1646 for Lewis's drawing of the Barfield family in 1929. In his diary entry of 23 July 1933, Warren Lewis records, "The Barfield's [sic] attended the 11 o'clock [church] service; Alexander greatly interested, and stood on the pew most of the time, commenting on the proceedings in no inaudible voice" (Kilby and Mead 105). Alexander would have been five years old at the time.

flooding into his eyes for the first time," and he tells the other people that soon their pain will be gone once their soft patches are replaced with eyes.<sup>11</sup> The people "who believed him felt their soreness a good deal easier to bear now that they knew what it was all about and that they only had to wait patiently." This story within a story (a literary device Barfield also uses as fantasy sections in later fiction *English People* and *Eager Spring*) serves to affirm Barfield's principles: namely, the importance of increased consciousness and interaction with the physical and spiritual worlds to help bring about wholeness. The tale also represents acquiring sight as a somewhat isolating, painful process that nevertheless yields greater abilities and potential for enhanced community and knowledge if understood and applied well.

After her story, the woman teaches the boy a prayer to say whenever he cries hard and tries not to, for "[t]hen she would be able to help him one way or another." Assured by this, he is able to sleep quite happily. He does not experience such great despair to warrant her visiting him until as an adult: "Years afterwards, when he was quite grown up, and his magic eyes seemed to have grown stronger, he did see the blue lady again at a time when he needed her very badly." The narrator tantalizes the reader by not saying why this is the case other than "But that is another story," which is how Barfield's tale for his son ends. The ending does show however that imagination does not have to weaken or disappear with increased age but rather sharpens in the boy's case with his magic eyes. Now an adult, he can still connect with the fairy world and have hope and wholeness available to him.

### ***THE SILVER TRUMPET (1925)***

Barfield returns to these themes of isolation, death, consciousness, and female/male interaction frequently, and the text that best exemplifies Barfield's early work in fantasy as an expression of his philosophical and imaginative concerns is his best known fairy tale, *The Silver Trumpet*.<sup>12</sup> Barfield's biographer deems it as "[t]he only piece of imaginative prose from this early period which encompasses the full breadth of Barfield's mind, combining spiritual vision with incisiveness and humour [...]. This [story] had been completed by 20 October

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<sup>11</sup> There are similarities about blindness and longing for the light in Lewis's story "The Man Born Blind," now known by its real title "Light"; see Charlie Starr's *Light: C. S. Lewis's First and Final Short Story* (2012) for informative analysis about Lewis's tale. A copy of "Light" is in Barfield's papers at the Bodleian (see Catalogue, shelfmark Dep. c. 1062).

<sup>12</sup> The text has been published in three different illustrated editions: the first by Faber and Gwyer in 1925 and illustrated by Gilbert James; the second by Eerdmans in 1968 and illustrated by Betty Beeby (the text edition I quote from in this article); and the third by Bookmakers in 1986 with illustrations by Josephine Spence, Barfield's close friend and collaborator on his *Eager Spring*.

1923, since C.S. Lewis had read it in manuscript by then and recorded his reflections in his diary" (Blaxland-de Lange 259). Walter Hooper describes it as "a fairy tale of the Hans Andersen kind" (Lewis, *CL III* 1598), and the story was a favorite of Tolkien's children. Lewis wrote Barfield in June 1936:

I lent *The Silver Trumpet* to Tolkien and hear that it is the greatest success among his children that they have ever known. His own fairy-tales, which are excellent, have now no market:<sup>13</sup> and its first reading—children are so practical!—led to a universal wail "You're not going to give it back to Mr. Lewis, are you?"

All the things which the wiseacres on child psychology in our circle said when you wrote it turn out to be nonsense. "They liked the sad parts", said Tolkien "because they were sad and the puzzling parts because they were puzzling, as children always do." The youngest boy [eleven-year-old Christopher] liked Gamboy because "she was clever and the bad people in books usually aren't." The tags of the Podger have become so popular as to be almost a nuisance in the house. In fine, you have scored a direct hit. (*CL II* 198)

Interestingly, over fifty years later in a letter dated 5 June 1989, another professor, Jim Cutsinger from Saint David's University College in Wales, writes along similar lines to Barfield: "Bed-time readings have all been of *The Silver Trumpet*—or rather of 'Mr Barfield's Book', as Leah insists on calling it. You should know that you are a great hit."

Though it is uncertain whether Barfield read them, two other pieces with similar titles and themes were produced before and at the same time as his fairy tale. The first, "A Little Silver Trumpet," is by Irish writer L[illie] T[homas] Meade (pseudonym for Elizabeth Thomasina Toulmin Smith [1854–1914]).<sup>14</sup> An 1886 issue of *The Critic: A Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts* includes this

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<sup>13</sup> According to the editors' introduction, *Roverandom* was a fantasy that Tolkien wrote for his children likely in 1926 after a summer holiday in 1925; the text was rejected for publication in early 1937 and not published until 1998. Tolkien attempted publishing the text not long after his children clamored often for Barfield's story, which makes one wonder if his children's enjoyment of Barfield's fantasy prompted him to revisit his story and try to publish it.

<sup>14</sup> Though not well known now, Meade was a prolific writer of children's literature and mysteries. She was the child of "Rev. R.T. Meade of Nohoval, Co. Cork; moved to England, 1874, working at the British Museum; m[arried] Toulmin Smith 1879; issued some 280 books, mostly girls' stories often concerning Irish girls entering English society [...] popularised the girl's school story still found in *Bunty*; ed. *Atlanta*, 1887-1898, a magazine for girls to which H. Rider Haggard and Robert Louis Stevenson contrib[uted]" ("L.T. Meade").

brief description: “the silver trumpet [is] the beautiful whistling of a little boy of the humbler classes, whose story is made deeply interesting. The little tale is quite original, and full of points that betray a true literary instinct, being at once sympathetic, strong and picturesque” (278). In the same year as Barfield’s book, with a nearly identical title, Charles Ballard published a one-page story “The Silver Trumpet: A Fable” in the *English Journal*.<sup>15</sup> This is of interest since the journal is published by the National Council of Teachers of English and Ballard taught at Morris High School in New York City, indicative of the cultural and educational value placed on fairy tales at the time. Both Barfield and Ballard had experience as high school English teachers; both valued music and the fairy tale form. Notably, the connection on either side of the Atlantic is that both authors use a silver trumpet to symbolize the power of imagination and music and the significance of sound in conveying one’s message to one’s audience—in other words, words alone are not necessarily enough. The mediums of print and speech are not always adequate or complete as forms of communication.

Some publication history gives additional background about Barfield’s first published book. A one-page typescript (with the note to “revise” at the top) in Barfield’s papers at the Bodleian appears to be an abstract by Barfield that reads as follows:

This story for children is about two princesses [Gambetta/Gamboy and Violetta/Violet] (or is it about only one?). Anyway a great many things happen to them in Mountainy Castle. When the silver trumpet is wickedly hidden in a hayloft, all the joy and beauty and music of life gradually wither away. But at last it is found again by a stableboy, who blows it experimentally with startling results. . . . [W]ith the help of the Little Fat Podger, Prince Peerio finds his way across the world to the castle, and, after triumphing over many surprising difficulties, succeeds in the end in making its doleful walls ring out with the trumpet’s penetrating and awakening call.

There is a penciled note that Barfield sent this abstract to someone (the name is illegible, but presumably related to publishing the story) on 30 Apr. 1967. Eerdmans reprinted *The Silver Trumpet* in 1968, and William B. Eerdmans, Jr., writes that “[w]e have, and will continue to advertise the book in educational circles” and that “we are confident that the book will be well received.”<sup>16</sup> A third

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<sup>15</sup> From the 1920s to 1940s, Ballard contributed several pieces, including poems, to the *English Journal*.

<sup>16</sup> Eerdmans also wrote to acknowledge Barfield’s signed contract to print *The Silver Trumpet* and to note the following: “I am happy to know that you like Betty Beeby’s work and that you feel as we do that she will do the kind of illustrations . . . that we both want

edition was published by Bookmakers Guild in Colorado in 1986, and various letters in 1986 indicate that sales were reasonable.<sup>17</sup>

In a letter written in early 1986, D(aniel?) Bade notes buying several copies of Barfield's books to help Barfield financially, though realizing this gesture is not much. Bade writes specifically about *The Silver Trumpet* that

the first part was beautiful, but the further I read the less I could understand. In particular I could not follow the relationship between the twin princesses. Partly my inability comes from never reading fiction or any other imaginative literature, apart from poetry. Apart from my difficulty in reading it, I was constantly delighted to find hints of those topics . . . develope[d] in your [other] articles and books. It was a joy to read and a book I shall return to and treasure. I have three copies which I purchased as gifts. I think people who grew up on fairy tales, Lewis & Tolkien may get more from it than I, who have never touched Tolkien, & only a slight acquaintance with Lewis' work.

In the left margin next to Bade's confusion about "the relationship between the twin princesses" Barfield adds the note "symbolizes Hamlet" —giving insight into his development of their characters.<sup>18</sup> The two princesses also illustrate Barfield's interest in polarity:

[O]riginally, the more active sister is not actually portrayed as being evil, nor is the more contemplative sister portrayed as being wholly good. But both are depicted as suffering each from her own particular weakness: the active one tends towards being a bit of a bully, the contemplative one to being a little too dreamy and therefore a bit feeble. Either of them, in a way, balances the other's weakness. Neither of them is completely whole without the other. Balance, in fact, is the very principle of their existence. But this balance between them is from the beginning a very precarious one. Without the active energy of the one, the beauty and idealism of the other has no power; and without the beauty and idealism of the other, the energy of the first sister turns into an exercise of sheer brute force. (Diener 153)

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to have. . . . I'm sorry to learn that you will not be in the country when *The Silver Trumpet* appears, as I'm sure that your presence here would have an effect upon the sales."

<sup>17</sup> The letters are at the Bodleian (see Catalogue, shelfmark Dep. c. 1062).

<sup>18</sup> The two princesses might also represent sacred and profane love, which Barfield explores in *Orpheus* and elsewhere, and Lewis writes about in *Till We Have Faces*.

As hinted at in the tale's abstract above, the two princesses are really one person in a sense. Barfield does not assert this as fact but presents this as a possibility, thus creating another ambiguous end for the reader to interpret.

To turn to the story itself, it opens with the birth of the two princesses, and in fairy tale fashion, a witch is on the scene. Although Miss Thomson is "a nobody" and "a witchery sort of woman in her old age," she is a kind witch (6).<sup>19</sup> At the Christening Breakfast, her gift to the princesses is for them to be alike; then she adds, "As long as you both live, you shall love each other more than all else in the world. As long as one of you is living, both shall *be*" though this does not mean that the girls will necessarily be happy (9).

The characterizations of the two princesses through their names and name changes relates to Barfield's thematic focus. Gambetta and Violetta are Italian, feminine names that are then changed to English, more masculine names, Gamboy and Violet, though Violet still retains feminine connotations.<sup>20</sup> In his wisdom about the magical power of names, the Lord Tullywich changes their names so that the girls can be distinguished from each other. In terms of gender criticism, Violet is good because she is feminine and weds Prince Courtesy who comes with a silver trumpet seeking a queen, whereas Gamboy is bad because she is masculine and practices dark magic.<sup>21</sup> Gamboy strongly opposes Violet's desire to marry Prince Courtesy, but Violet's love for him overrules all else, thus breaking the spell Miss Thomson placed on the princesses (35-36). Violet and Courtesy wed, rule Mountainy Castle, and have a daughter, Princess Lily. Suggestive of flowery loveliness, innocence, and purity, Violet and her daughter Lily are named after plants, a connection with nature and the environment around them, indicating their participating more fully with life in contrast to Gamboy. According to the *OED*, the oldest form of the word "gam," refers to the mouth and "prominent or ugly teeth" (*n.*<sup>1</sup>). A later form of "gam" is slang for "[a] leg" (*n.*<sup>3</sup>), which relates to the etymology for "gambit" from the

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<sup>19</sup> Diener describes Miss Thomson as "a genuine precursor of Terry Pra[t]chett's shrewd Granny Weatherwax whose witchcraft mainly consists in giving very down to earth advi[c]e" (153). Thomson is a name that describes processes in physics related to electrons and light (in honor of British physicist Sir J.J. Thomson), and given Barfield's lifelong interest in electricity and physics, it does not seem too farfetched that Miss Thomson's name might be related to these principles. The witch is thus a scientist of sorts, giving her more credibility and power despite being a commoner ("Thomson").

<sup>20</sup> Etymologically, "violet" has both feminine and masculine forms, with the more modern forms being masculine.

<sup>21</sup> The Amalgamated Princesses are represented unfavorably by association with Gamboy as their leader, since as a unit lacking individuality, they are weak and easily ruled. Later on, Gamboy lies to them that they shall all be queens, when in reality, she plans to rule as much of the world as possible (137).

Italian *gambetto* “tripping up the heels (in wrestling)” —using the legs not as a dancer but as an aggressor. Gambetta/Gambo is reduced to body parts and therefore is incomplete. The fact that Gambo relies on a magic book *Excerpta* demonstrates the problems of being incomplete, not whole, since the book's title refers to parts not wholes. An excerpt is a piece, an abstract, a way to pick and choose selections that meet Gambo's immediate purposes, rather than a lasting, unified force. Her name refers specifically to the leg and mouth, which, in her misusing these parts (i.e., evil missions and abuse of language), negatively portrays what should be applied beautifully in such ways as dance and music to both engender joy and unity and reflect the harmonious spirits of dancers (e.g., Violet) and musicians (e.g., Prince Courtesy).

As a primary framework for Barfield's text, the traditional princess and the frog fairy tale appears in altered form. A dwarf known as the Little Fat Podger is Curator of the Royal Dump and makes the king laugh with his wit and dancing. The Little Fat Podger builds a mechanical toad and hopes to amuse Queen Violet with it. Instead, the toad frightens the queen to death and causes the infant princess to be scared of toads, creating misunderstanding and interfering with an adequate appreciation of the natural world.<sup>22</sup> The king condemns the dwarf; however, wise Lord Tullywich exiles the dwarf yet declares him dead. Aunt Gambo takes advantage of her niece's fear, dominates Lily and the king, and brings ruin to the region.

Signifying the cultural work of the text, through Gambo's abuse of rhetoric/language and magic, the treasury is emptied, and the townspeople are poor and restless under mismanagement. In a social critique, Diener analyzes the fairy tale as follows:

[T]he narrative reflects Barfield's awareness not only of his own personal weakness or that of his predecessor Coleridge, it also reflects his awareness of more general feelings (inherent, for example, in the philosophy of the early twentieth century)—feelings of resignation over the powerlessness of ideals [...] [such as with] fascism [...]. *The Silver Trumpet*, with its illustration of the mechanism of a brutal authoritarian regime of terror and repression, is an uncanny anticipation of what was to occur in European history. In this respect, the story is a powerful plea for the absolute and acute urgency to counteract these developments—a plea for doing so by bringing the world of ideals back to life. This

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<sup>22</sup> “Robots have their origins in the mechanical toys or automata of the Middle Ages” (Ashley 96), and the dwarf's mechanical toad might be a criticism of technology since Barfield represents robots in other negative contexts in *The Rose on the Ash-Heap* and *Night Operation*.

ultimately meant for Barfield [...] a fundamental change in the contemporary social and economic system. (154-55)

Expanding on traditional elements of the fairy tale form, Barfield addresses the modernist problems of language corruption, economic instability, and political division. Though the text might seem aimed at a child audience, there are layers of meaning that can appeal to a wide readership.

Change comes to Mountainy Castle when, several years later, Prince Peerio arrives looking for Lily after falling in love with her picture. Of course, Gamboy turns the prince into a toad to obstruct his plans. Meanwhile, a stableboy goes up to a loft to sleep but finds the trumpet that Gamboy hid there long ago, and he blows it. The stableboy rights the evil that Gamboy committed. A commoner exerts change that affects the kingdom: "As the last note [of the silver trumpet] died slowly away, everybody in the Castle stirred slowly, like a man waking from sleep" (122). The music arouses memories and prompts action: the King confiscates the trumpet, the townspeople realize how Gamboy has abused her position all these years causing great harm to them and the royal family, and Lily determines that she must not live locked away in a tower. During this course of events, Prince Peerio, still a toad, encounters Miss Thomson. She cannot undo Gamboy's spell and tells Peerio someone must love him as a toad for him to be human again.

True to fairy tale form, Princess Lily manages to overcome her fear by the greatest, most unifying power, love. She kisses the toad, transforming Peerio into a prince and leading to their marriage. Peerio's name can refer to peerage indicating that he is noble, but the root form "peer" also implies that he is an equal noble and not exalted over Lily. They must mutually rescue each other from what constrains them. Marriage, with its unity of the male and female, brings restoration and healing, in keeping with Barfield's views on human sexuality.

After Peerio and Lily wed, the prince blows the trumpet several times, and Gamboy is transformed into Violet and reunited with King Courtesy. Love triumphs as stronger than death. While it could not be confirmed, "some say that deep down in the grave," Gamboy "lies buried in that churchyard" instead of Violet (142-43). Violet and Gamboy seem to change places in death and life, possibly alluding to the fact that according to Barfield in his essay "Death," that life does not end with death when people are already dead in a sense, thus emphasizing hope for mortals as also immortal. Perhaps in the fairy tale, the princesses are one and the same, brought into balance by the restoration of the trumpet. Verifying Barfield's beliefs about music, the Little Fat Podger proclaims early in the story that "Music hath charms [...]. Harmony [...], Form versus Chaos—Light v. Darkness—and the Dominant Seventh. It's all one" (31).

The tale ends with much "rejoicings" and "reunions" (147) in a great dance with all the story's characters from the royal family to the dwarf to the townspeople, regardless of class, signifying the harmonizing power of music. This unity also corresponds with the wholeness that has been achieved for individuals and relationships and the kingdom by the end of the story. Division and death are defeated.

**"THE CHILD AND THE GIANT" (1930)**

Another fairy tale that emphasizes music, and the last story for consideration in this article, is "The Child and the Giant," which Barfield wrote in 1930 while teaching at a Steiner school. Not published until 1988 in *Child and Man: Education as an Art* (now known as *Steiner Education*), the type of publication denotes the pedagogical value of Barfield's endeavor. In Jan. 1989, Jean-Claude Lin with the press Verlag Freies Geistesleben in Stuttgart, Germany, initiated the publication process of the text in German. Lin writes Barfield that "it was a delight to read your little tale 'The Child and the Giant' in the last two issues of 'Child and Man'. . . . [W]e would very much like to publish an illustrated edition of it. . . . I am aware that the tale was composed for a very specific occasion and age-group. But I think that that is no problem since many of the traditional fairy tales can also be qualified in the same way." Lin also remarks on Barfield's "sense of humor" as "hard to come by," an obvious attribute in *This Ever Diverse Pair*. On 9 June 1989, Lin writes, "I am now trying to set up a modest collection of fiction (for fourteen- to eighty[-]four-year-olds! or thereabouts) of which your little tale could be the opening number. What I'm thinking of is tales, novels (historical and fabulous) and other pieces of a strongly imaginative nature, works which touch on the spiritual development of man," reasons for which Lin selected this story along with *This Ever Diverse Pair* as representing his goals. In May 1990, Lin sent potential illustrations for the text and asked Barfield, "Would you like to write a short Afterword to your Tale on the circumstances of its creation or on your life-long interest in the orphic theme? It could be clothed in a kind of biographical note and would certainly be of much interest to the readers." The tale was published in 1991, and Lin tried to find an English-version publisher for the story as well.

According to a letter dated 7 Feb. 1992, Laurel Gasque writes that Lin sent German editions of "The Child and the Giant" to the publishers Pan Macmillan in the UK and Eerdmans in the USA for consideration. In another letter (30 May 1992), Gasque awaited word from Pan Macmillan about whether they would publish this story as well as *The Silver Trumpet* and *Eager Spring* but seemingly without success. Almost a year later (2 Feb. 1993), Gregory Wolfe from the journal *Image* was quite enthusiastic to publish the story:

As you know from your recent visit with Laurel Gasque, we at *Image* would like to publish your children's story, "The Child and the Giant." We think it is a wonderful example of what Lewis and Tolkien called "mythopoeia." Not only that: it also condenses *Poetic Diction* and several other books into the fairy tale form!

I have written to the German publisher in Stuttgart to ask for their permission.

I would like to have your permission as well.<sup>23</sup>

We hope that publication in *Image* will help Laurel in her efforts to find an American publisher to bring it out in book form.

The story was reprinted in the third issue of *Image* (Spring 1993); however, it does not appear that the story was produced in book form as its own text, other than in two compilations in 1998 and 2008.<sup>24</sup> The story's headnote in the 2008 reprint claims that the fairy tale "delightfully exhibits many of Barfield's interests in a lighter mode" (174). While this is true in a sense, the "lighter mode" is somewhat overshadowed by the theme of death and the behavior of an evil woman, as well as the fact that the Giant of the story's title eats humans. These elements could prove disturbing to some young readers. As Lüthi writes, however, "[i]t would be wrong to purge our fairy talks of all cruelty and all frightening characters for the sake of children. All these things are not, after all, portrayed realistically in the fairy tale, but figuratively, and thus the evil figures are not perceived as living people but as symbols of evil" (114). This trademark of fairy tales adds to the story as the child encounters and grows through troubling experiences, and the story ends with a transcendent, lovely quality reminiscent of MacDonald's tales.

To summarize, "The Child and the Giant" is about an orphan boy who lives with a Giant in a forest. Sad that the child will one day grow up and no longer be able to play with him, the Giant seeks the wise Owl's advice. The Owl instructs the Giant to "cut open your breast and take out one of your heart-strings" and "make an Aeolian Harp, by stretching it tightly between two trees." Upon hearing the music, the boy "will not *want* to grow up." The string must remain intact; "if it is cut, the child will suddenly grow through all the years he has missed in between" (175). The child revels in the music and is now able to "understand the language of the birds and beasts just as well as the Giant" (176). He talks to a Swallow and the Owl and wants to know what it is like to be able to fly. Instead, the Owl asks him, "What does it feel like to be a child?" to which

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<sup>23</sup> The letter has a checkmark next to this line with the penciled date of 9 Feb. 1993, presumably indicating that Barfield wrote Wolfe granting publication permission.

<sup>24</sup> See Masters's *Owen Barfield: A Waldorf Tribute* and Anderson's *Tales Before Narnia: The Roots of Modern Fantasy and Science Fiction* respectively.

he replies, "it feels like being *me*" (177). The Owl tells him to go ask the White Fairy this question so that the child can answer it better. When looking for the White Fairy, the boy encounters an old woman much like a witch. She cuts the Giant's harp-string to reply to the boy's question about "what it feels like to be a child" and exclaims, "That will teach you what you want to know" (178). At this moment, the Giant dies, but death is not the ultimate end.

Grieved at the loss of his friend and his music, the isolated protagonist learns to care for himself and hunt with a bow and arrow. The boy finds "the Giant's huge bones all picked cleaned by the crows," and angered by the sight of the Owl sitting on the Giant's skull and its former "bad advice" to him, the boy plans to kill the Owl (179). However, the Owl orders him to gather the bits of the harp-string and the Giant's breastbone and make a harp. The boy does so and plays music, and the animals stop to listen. Part of the Giant lives on in using his heartstrings and breastbone to make music now with a good purpose. After the music, the animals "returned to their natural movements and occupations, and now each creature seemed to know what it was doing and to be speaking of it to the others" (181). This reaction to the music underscores Barfield's recurring theme about the transformative nature of music and its ability to unite spirit and matter. (This scene is also similar to one with Orpheus and the animals in Barfield's later play *Orpheus*.)

At this point in the narrative, the boy looks in a pool that he has avoided for a long time and realizes he is a man, whereat the swallows say he is a poet. The Owl, embodied as the White Fairy, declares that a man and a poet are "the same thing." The child now a man asks her, "Why did you do all this?" In response, the White Fairy says, "To teach you what it feels like to fly" and takes him up into the sky. The narrator concludes that "they are floating there still for all I know" (181). Such an ending "imaginatively portrays [Barfield's ninth-grade students'] emergence from their 'chrysalis' of the lower school into the new learning environment of the upper school" (Hipolito, "C.S. Lewis" 232). The instructive quality of the tale is clear—children must grow up and become self-sufficient, often through difficult, painful means. Yet the story is not didactic; death serves as a door for the boy to find hope and wholeness for himself and with nature. The story also portrays the harmony one can experience with other creatures through music and language as well as the joy and freedom one can find in imaginative expression.

While Barfield's fairy tales fall into the British Diversionsary period (1900-49) of children's fantasy stories defined as mostly centered on joy and "entertainment as a key objective" (Smith 3), Barfield did not write fairy tales only for a child audience or as mere entertainment or pedagogical pieces. Zipes indicates, "Fundamental to the feel of a fairy tale is its moral pulse. It tells us what we lack and how the world has to be organized differently so that we

receive what we need" (*Irresistible* 14). In writing and valuing fairy tales, Barfield would agree that they can inform us about "what we lack" and why change should occur, but moral messages are not his priority as much as to challenge readers to reform their thinking and live out their imaginations productively.

Barfield's fairy tale beginnings continued throughout his writing career, notably in *This Ever Diverse Pair* (1950). Though the text revolves around a legal career, it ends with some revealing remarks about the character Burden who is sentenced (in a dream) by a judge to live with a poor family as their domestic assistant. In his limited spare time, Burden's reading material will be supervised. Significantly, "[t]he three young children in the family are all fond of fairy-tales, and it will be part of the prisoner's duties to read aloud to them and after a time to endeavour to narrate to them *ex tempore* similar stories of his own invention" (137). After finishing his nightly duties with the children, Burden will need to read to "the lady of the house, whose eyesight is weak," selecting such texts as William Blake's writings and the *Mabinogion* due to the lady's taste for "literature of a fanciful and vaguely mystical description" (137-38). Assigning this type of reading to compensate for Burden's lack of imagination and excessively precise thinking is part of "what is needed by the whole man in order to make him truly whole" (136). The judge believes this sentence of living and working with common people, reading fairy tales and fantasy, and telling similar stories to children will help "right the balance" in Burden (136). This example, along with the fairy tales in this article and throughout his oeuvre up to his final published book, maintains Barfield's message that death is not the end, hope exists, and imaginative literature can help humanity find wholeness.

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