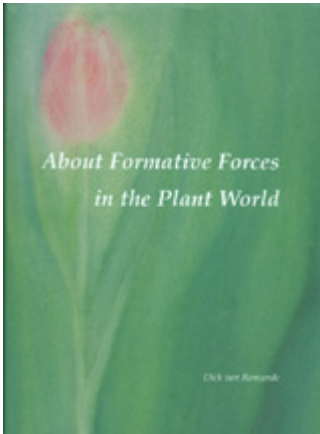


About Formative Forces in the Plant World

by Dick van Romunde, translated by Jannebeth Röell,
illustrations by Elly van Hardeveld



A book review by Richard Katz

The core teaching of this book is that plant study involves a deep penetration by the senses, mind and heart into the very activity of the formative forces.

Dick van Romunde's book is the fruit of a life's work that spans more than four decades — his practice of plant observation as a meditative discipline. It is filled with precise botanical observations of many plants, and illustrated by excellent color drawings by Elly van Hardeveld. Yet, this is more than just another plant guide, for its emphasis is on the way that plant forms (morphology) reveal the working of formative forces in Nature.

What are formative forces? The author makes no attempt at an abstract definition. Indeed, there is only a brief introduction to the material, stressing the *process* of observation, rather than conclusions. We are invited to use the author's observations as examples for our own activity of discovery.

Nonetheless, I will attempt an introduction to the idea of formative forces, as an entry point for readers who may not be familiar with the philosophical underpinnings of this work, which are found in the writings of Goethe, Steiner, Pelikan and other researchers in Goethean and Anthroposophical plant science.

Formative forces arise out of the realm of life energies — the etheric body — known in various traditions as vital force (homeopathy), chi (Chinese medicine), and prana (Ayurveda). They are a counterpoint to the physical energies and substances studied by the conventional materialistic science of our time. This reductionist science explains the formation of a living entity, such as a plant, as the elaboration of DNA programming in the cells and other biophysical mechanisms. By contrast, a true living science recognizes the etheric formative forces that interact with physical substance. They are like the guiding hands of the



Dandelion, showing the individual florets which comprise this composite flower (from Chapter 6).

potter that shape the clay as it turns on the potter's wheel. Yet, because they belong to a realm that is invisible to our ordinary sense impression, we only "see" these forces by their results, by studying the forms in nature.

The core teaching of this book is that plant study involves a deep penetration by the senses, mind and heart into the very *activity* of the formative forces. We cannot remain passive, detached onlookers with no relationship to that which we are observing. At the same time, our observation must be objective, in that it must be true to what we are observing, and not merely a projection of our inner moods or wishes (one of the problems with many so-called psychic "attunements").

In his preface to the book, Dr. Ernst Katz [no relation] outlines three stages of Nature study as a spiritual practice.

The first stage of Nature study is the phenomenological — unbiased and detailed observation.

For those more comfortable in the psychic realm, mastering this stage can be a real breakthrough to developing a relationship with the plant world. Before one seeks the teachings of a "deva," angel or other super-sensory being, it is helpful to ground one's observation in what is happening in the elemental activity on earth. Thus, the first step is to learn something about the shapes of its leaves, the color and geometry of the flower, the patterns by which the plant grows, and other sense-perceptible qualities. From this kind of meditative observation we can build an objective bridge to higher worlds.

The main body of the book consists of a rich array of detailed plant observations, conveyed both in words and visual images. Divided into seven chapters, it examines parallel-veined leaves, radial-veined leaves, feather-vein leaves, calyxes and involucra (the transition from leaf to flower), flower petals and sepals, flowers with radial symmetry, and flowers with bilateral symmetry. Anyone who has attempted to represent botanical observation with written or artistic expression will appreciate the fine quality of this work.

The second stage of Nature study is the creation of an inner picture or image of what has been observed.

Goethe referred to this as an "exact imagination." In this way what is observed "out there" can become an inner experience. This stage takes practice, often a going back and forth between observing with eyes open, and re-creating the experience in the "mind's eye" with eyes closed. A further development of this stage involves movement, the process in time by which the plant develops, the metamorphosis from one part of the plant to another, and the variation of form as one moves from one plant to another. This exercise is especially helpful when working with related plants, such as those in a particular plant family. When we go beyond static pictures to a dynamic relationship of forms, we have the possibility of re-creating within our own being the *activity* of the form-producing forces of Nature.

This second stage is what distinguishes van Romunde's book from the familiar plant guide. The observations are presented as a *narrative*: movement and

metamorphosis of leaf, stem, flower shapes, unfolding in a dramatic interplay of forces — swelling, contracting, suctioning, spreading, surface-building — and various rhythmical patterns and symmetries.

The third stage of Nature study is meditative inspiration.

Here the inner images and activities begin to reveal to us the qualities of the formative forces — the “gestures” in Goethe’s parlance — of the plant forms we have been observing. At the end of each chapter, van Romunde presents a “contemplation” of the major themes and gestures of the related plant forms discussed in that chapter.

From our work in flower essence research, it is this meditative stage, firmly grounded in the first two stages of precise observation and inner imaginative activity, that can lead to insight into the soul-healing qualities of flower essences.

About Formative Forces in the Plant World is an invitation to enter into a new intimacy with plant life, and like any relationship, this takes time, patience and persistence. This journey is transformative as well as informative. It is a practice that speaks to us as flower essence practitioners and researchers, and as human beings sustained by Nature’s life forces. We deeply appreciate the contribution that Dick van Romunde has made to help us along the path.

Some excerpts from book:

In the previously described plants having a torn apart petal structure, the reproductive impulse contained in the suctioning forces has a stronger effect, so to speak, so that the connection point is separated and both wings are created. In the double tulips and roses, the metamorphosis of the wings into stamens can be seen. This change of form, which takes place in some roses, is depicted in the picture below.



The tepal [petal/sepal combination] wings that metamorphose into anthers are those parts most strongly under the influence of the suctioning forces from the outer space. These forces are increased through the *tearing apart...* Opposite of this stands the relationship of the pistil with the inner space (figure 6-1c). The pistil of the Tulip is formed by three carpels which have inwardly turned margins grown together in such a way that they embrace an inner space divided

into three parts. In the middle of the place where these carpels meet is a column, called a style, from which sprout two vertical rows of seed buds....
The shape of the Tulip flower has two opposing gestures: one with an embracing character where an inner space is more or less closed off from an outer space, and the other with the tendency to promote a merging of the inner and outer space. The same contrast is expressed in the pistils with their embracing gesture of the seed buds and the outward directedness of the pollen on the stamens. The fertilization of the seed buds by the pollen leads to the formation of seeds and fruit and manifest the fruitfulness of the interaction between the embracing of an inner world and the surrender to the outer world.

