

**My Understanding of Owen Barfield's Interpretation of Myth.
This Includes My Layman's Explanation of "Original Participation"**

by Henry Gurr 3 Oct. 2001 Revised 3 January 2 2006 (v67)

The following pages are my explanation of Owen Barfield's unique idea of "original participation". It was written for my wife's, Mother Faith Hippensteel, and Naomi Frost Hewitt. Both were English majors with interest and knowledge of Myth. I hope this document will achieve a communication break-through for those who have not heard of Mr. Barfield's ideas. What emerges below is not only Mr. Barfield, from whom I first learned these ideas, but also many interpretations/extensions/projections of my own. And of course my own terms "peek out" all over! An expanded "theory" discussion is in three additional Appendixes. May you enter Mr. Barfield's world with ever increasing understanding and appreciation.

The discussion, applies to Mr. Owen Barfield's book "Poetic Diction", Second Edition, Wesleyan University Press, 1984 ISBN 0-8195-6026-X. Special focus is on Chapter IV, Meaning and Myth, pages 77 to 92.

The precursors to Mr. Barfield's ideas on original participation are seen in the first edition of "Poetic Diction" which came out in 1929. He first named and first discussed his original participation in his 1965 "Saving the Appearances" (Second Edition Wesleyan University Press, 1988, ISBN 0-8195-6205-X). Incidentally, "Saving the Appearances", is now listed in Philip Zalenski's book (1999) as being one of "The Best 100 Spiritual Books of the Century". Based on nominations by Thomas Moore, Natalie Goldberg, Roger Kamenetz, Harold Kushner, Lawrence Kushner, Christopher de Vinck, David Yount, Kabir Helminski Helen Tworkov, Ron Hansen, Frederic Brussat, Joseph Bruchac, Huston Smith, Lawrence Cunningham, and John Wilson. Contact me to view this Press Release.

Please inform me if you discover "layman's" explanations of Barfield's works by other authors. More information about Mr. Barfield's books, life, friends, and present day literary study, may be found at many WebSites, including the following: <http://www.owenbarfield.com/>

Some terms used by H. Gurr:

- 1) The time of "Ancient Civilizations" = A time of the Ancient Civilizations of the Nile, Tigris, Euphrates, and Indus River Valleys plus the classical Greek & Roman Civilizations.
- 2) The time of "Dawn People" = A time much, much earlier than mentioned above, during which all peoples were pre-historical hunter-gatherers.
- 3) "distinctive characteristics of original participation" = The recognizable perceptual patterns of Dawn People, as explained by H. Gurr below. To my knowledge, Mr. Barfield does not attempt a similar "compact" description.

Some terms used by Owen Barfield:

- 1) "Original participation" = The world view and patterns of perception of Dawn People as explained in the Original Participation discussion below. These perceptions, so vastly different and beyond our wildest imagination, constitute in Barfield's opinion, a different mode of consciousness, a fact conceded by the Encyclopedia Americana (1998): "Original participation" guided the perceptions and ideas of Dawn People and continued, despite considerable change in cultural practices, until the middle ages." Barfield shows

how the primitive people studied by Anthropologists over the last 100 years have characteristics similar to what he detects in Dawn People.

2) "Figures" = The "others" with whom Dawn People shared their world and their life. For example: Mithras, Persephone, Dionysus, Orpheus, Apollo, Psyche, Eros, Pan, Osiris, Mars, Saturn, Jupiter, and the Sun. Mr. Barfield claims there are hundreds more. He purposefully avoids the words, "Gods or Spirits", when speaking about original participation. The "others" may also be called "Active Spirit Creatures" with a mind and will, which we moderns might call Natural Forces, Natural Processes, Internal Human Body Processes, or Psychology.

3) "Evolution of Consciousness" = The gradual change of peoples' world view over the millennia. What we are consciously aware of, is vastly different from that of Dawn People. Of course, people of the future will "see differently" than we do now. Human perceptual processes active in the past, still continue in new forms that have recognizable relation to the previous.

Mr. Barfield's Interpretation of Myth.

In his "*Poetic Diction*" chapter "*Meaning and Myth*", when Mr. Barfield speaks of his "poetic" interpretation of Myth, he is thinking of a time, way, way, way, prior to the Classical Greeks & Rome and indeed way prior to the Ancient Civilizations of the Nile, Tigris, Euphrates, and Indus River Valleys. Indeed prior to practically any recognizable form of history.

For the purposes of this discussion let us allow the cave paintings in France and Spain to fall in the time period of "Dawn People". These paintings show beautiful images of animals, but I am not aware of archeological artifacts during these times which could be interpreted illustrating anything like the "Gods/Spirits" represented as human forms characteristic of "Ancient Civilizations People".

In his *Poetic Diction* Mr. Barfield explains the mode of perception of Dawn People. Based on his "poetic" reading of myth he says:

A) p86.9: "The language of primitive men reports them [i.e. "The Others" such as Dionysus, Persephone, Jupiter] as direct perceptual experience. The speaker has observed a unity, and is not therefore himself conscious of relation. But we, in the development of [our present] consciousness, have lost the power to see this one as one. Our sophistication, like Odin's, has cost us an eye...." ["These Others" such as Dionysus, Persephone, Jupiter properly understood, will be seen to be a "coded report" of natural physical processes and relationships.]

B) p88.3 He also says these Others were: "Reality once self evident, and therefore not conceptually experienced...."

C) p92.1 He also says of these inter-relationships in nature such as Orpheus, etc: "Mythology is the ghost of concrete meaning. Connections between discrete phenomena, connections which are now apprehended [by us] as metaphor, were once perceived as immediate realities. As such the poet strives, by his own efforts, to see them, and to make others see them, again."

"Direct experiences", "self evident", "direct realities",

In the above passages, Barfield's conclusions are quite different from those of other authors who have studied myth. In addition, Barfield is saying; What Dawn People saw, we moderns can not, and that is why even the "experts" have been lead astray. To penetrate the veil, we moderns must exert "great imaginative effort".

I will now present my own hypothetical model of what Barfield is directing our attention to in these passages. Much of what I present is never specified in Mr. Barfield's books, so it took me a long time to figure out what he was saying. Here I have propounded essentially my own "layman's" interpretation, so you the novice reader can more easily understand what Mr. Barfield is driving at. He is pretty opaque otherwise.

This hypothetical model is over simplified and presents assumptions/ projections which of course can never be known. But we can, as Barfield says, use our imagination!!! I am doing this as an exercise in "eye opening", so you too can enter Barfield's perceptual/conceptual territory. Then you too can properly read Barfield, and use his guidance to "breath new life into myth".

"ORIGINAL PARTICIPATION"; WHAT MR. BARFIELD THOUGHT.

THIS IS AN OVER-SIMPLIFIED AND EXAGGERATED HYPOTHETICAL MODEL SO AS TO "MAKE THE POINT"

1) In his books Mr. Barfield uses the term "original participation" to describe the response of dawn people to their world. The term "original" says/means he is considering the earliest origins of the response of humans to their world. The term "participation" is meant to suggest that the world of the earliest peoples was full of "others", with whom the earliest people shared their world and their life. These "others", whether animal, tree, rock, wind, cloud, storm system, rustling of tree leaves, light of dawn, all of spring time, etc..... were all Living Beings, (figures, creatures, actors, egos, etc...) and lived complete lives, similar by metaphoric analogy, to that of animals and/or the dawn people themselves. Many of these "others" have already been mentioned such as: Zeus, Mithras, Persephone, Dionysus, Orpheus, Apollo, Osirus, Logos, Mars, Saturn, Jupiter, and the Sun. Your favorite Mythology Book will list hundreds more, and still not exhaust the list!! ANY & EVERY perceptual entity of which Dawn People were aware, was one of these "others". And of course there were innumerable inter-relationships between all of these "others". We should take as literally true, to a fantastic degree exactly what Mother Hippensteel wrote in response to Q1: "Yes. They believed those Gods lived above and were in everything around us and in everything they did."

2) Caution: The above analogy, "similar lives", does NOT automatically mean these "others" had human form, or appearances . (See item 9.) Clearly there is a great tendency to anthropomorphized, but by the word-history evidence offered by Mr. Barfield, original participation did not become anthropomorphized until the beginnings of civilization. In fact the absence of drawings anthropomorphized Gods/Spirits in the French Cave paintings, would support this conclusion.

3) These "others" **also included**, every heavenly object such as sun, moon, planets & constellations and as well, physical psychological & disease processes inside one's own body. For example Mr. Barfield says we have the word "panic", because in state of fright, the pounding heart, swelling temples and hot skin was literally Pan inside "knocking around". These Dawn People were aware of many perceptions and relationships to which we are blind. See 5) below for examples. Also see Astrology discussion in the Appendix II below.

4) The "distinctive characteristics of original participation" now follow: The earliest humans were in all manner of communication with these "others". Expressed in 20th century language, these "others" could invisibly silently and (almost) intangibly: talk-to, send and receive messages, move/fly through the air, etc.

These were the different methods of "influence". Here and in following paragraphs, remember the word "influence" means to be aware of a literal "in-flowing" of some sensed and hence, "real presence". For people with a participatory understanding, an influence from those "other's", meant a felt "in flow" of breath/life/wind/air/spirit, that came towards ones self and then moved inside-of ones body where the presence was again felt. (Note: In the above, Barfield would add the qualification that Dawn People did not know they had an insides! They just felt the "Active Spirit Creatures" as a presence, as a participation!) As you read below, remember this special meaning of in-fluence "= in-flowing of breath/life/wind/air/spirit. Dawn people could talk back to these "others" and share in the ongoing processes of life. And of course, Dawn People naturally observed that all these "others" had similar conversations with each other! Hence the term "participation". This word suggests that despite their vastly different physical shape and state of material substance, these "others", could function as if (in our terms), they had a mind, a will, and a soul.

5) My (some what extreme) examples to make a point, now follow:

a) We think a rock naturally falls down a mountain in response to invisible gravity. A Dawn Person accepts the fall as evidence that the rock naturally fell down the mountainside because it "desired" to reach it's home at the bottom with all the other rocks. And if Dawn Person was in the falling rock's path, the rock could willfully try to hit and hurt him or her. Rocks of course could be born and could die partly because everything else did, and mostly because that is just how they perceived it! In the previous paragraphs I have used the words "cause" and "because". However, we must take caution not to attribute this or any of our Modern thinking to Dawn People. They did not have, in any way, the concepts of "cause and effect" that are so clear to us. Likewise, we must never, think of Mythology as an attempt of ancient people to "explain this or that natural process", as is done by so many myth authors. Ancient People just lived with these "others". Original participation was the direct experience of living with "others", that's all!!

b) Echo is most assuredly an example of a Living Being. Although certainly invisible and intangible, (like the wind spirit essence), Echo never the less had the ability to consistently follow any Dawn Person wherever they went and clearly speak to them, in their own language! Echo definitely had ALL the consistent behavior of an other creature!! Pretty good confirmation of Dawn Person's world view!

c) A Dawn Person, I imagine, would have no trouble concluding that an invisible evil spirit creature entered into a sick person. "Possessed (in-fluenced) by evil spirits." Something different took control of the person. And the evil creature traveled systematically from one sick person to another. The disease micro-organisms, seen with our microscopes, are literally those evil creatures "possessed" by the sick person. These "other creatures" did indeed take control over that persons internal cellular processes for a cellular life and death struggle of competing forces! Indeed, even in our terms, the sick person is literally "in-fluenced" and then "possessed" .

d) Above I stated that pan-ic was the feeling when Creature Pan literally was felt to arrive. I can't say "arrive inside Dawn Person" because the Dawn Person did not know they had an inside! "Our inside" is a finely divided abstract concept that WE have available to OUR conscious awareness.

d') Similarly, in sexual arousal, a Creature Eros was felt to arrive and take over control of one's body by displacing what ever "Active Spirit Creature" up to that moment in control. This aroused person was the "in-flowed", and hence "influenced". In both cases Dawn Person was invaded by "another live being", similar I suppose, to the arrival of Aeolias with the wind in our face and hair. Eros still is active in our modern times, especially at Valentines Day! The little Cherubs, with tiny white wings, now used to illustrate a person falling in love, are a relic-left-over illustrations of Eros. These little Angelic Cherubs, still visible in our own time, are just one of the many proofs that the whole system of original

participation must have existed!

d") Aeolias, God of the Wind, brushing your face and rustling your hair and entering your lungs, would be an example of influence breath/life/wind/air/spirit moving to (and inside-of) your human body.

e) All of the above mentioned "internal creature in control" could be altered or changed by the "influence" from the planets, such as Venus, Jupiter, Saturn, Mercury, Mars, or other heavenly objects such as comets and super nova, which like wise sent messages, omens of bad luck.

As the centuries pass, the above motioned "connections" of Dawn People, were further augmented by connections (influences) of the four elements, air-earth-fire-water, as well as all the metals (and some chemicals), which in turn were felt to have similar (and additional) connections (influences). In addition there were the four humors" blood-phlegm-choler-melancholy, which likewise joined that psychology of others. A total web of influences and interconnections. Barfield helps us understand the steps by which science, starting 2500 years ago, gradually "pulled itself" free from this morass.

Although all the above assumptions seem to violate our laws or physics and our laws of logic, the total system of original participation made perfect sense to Dawn People and was very likely from their point of view fairly internally consistent. After all they had to survive by it in a very dangerous world. It had to work! Although Mr. Barfield's interpretation is sort of un-believable, but I nevertheless urge you to adopt this as a hypothesis. Then in your daily activities (and reading) start noticing how this hypotheses **fits and explains what you see!!** Of course these are conjectures and need to be looked into.

6) Here is a modern example of: participation: People in our society can get frustrated and quite angry at inanimate objects. Take a balky lawn mower that will not start or a computer that commits a series of frustrating disasters for the person who has just invested hours of typing. These frustrating objects have in fact sent a message to the person involved and that person will often curse and shout in reply, just as if they are talking to a knowing creature. Such a communication process would be all the more likely for Dawn People, who naturally responded to the inanimate objects of their world as if they were Living Beings. (I slipped! Did you notice my dubious "if they were" in previous sentence? You should have! Go back and cross it off!) [More explanation of Logos and Active Creature Examples are here.](#)

7) By proper "poetic reading" of myths, if Mr. Barfield is correct, we are in contact with the mental workings of the earliest humanity that we could identify as human. He is asserting a rather surprising idea: The mental structure of Dawn People is recent enough that we may know its distinctive characteristics (see item 4) through a study of the history of language and a proper poetic understanding. The manner of thinking of Dawn People is NOT lost to the mist of time long since past!!

8) Barfield expert, Donald Cruse, read this paper (in draft) and wrote the following (quote): ".....your paper deals in fact with the origin of language. For the 'dawn people', the 'others' were in fact the creative source of their ability to speak, they were the spiritual intelligences that collectively amount to what we mean by the 'Logos'.

"Barfield put it thus:

'.....the Semitic languages seem to point us back to the old unity of man and nature, through the shapes of their sounds. We feel those shapes not only as sounds, but also, in a manner, as gestures of the speech-organs-and it is not difficult to realize that these gestures were once gestures made with the whole body - once - when the body itself was not detached from the rest of nature after the solid manner of to-day,

when the body itself was spoken even while it was speaking.'

"This, of course, contradicts the Darwinian account that speech arose out of animal grunts. [Author Rudolph] Steiner states that it first arose out of song, wherein we were both singing, and being sung into existence at the same time.

Steiner doesn't use the phrase 'original participation', that was Barfield's contribution, but he did once describe early human consciousness as "like living within a hive of bees". And that the greatest 'relic' left in human consciousness after the 'bees' had departed, was 'Logos'." (End quote.) Our experience called logic is derived from the Ancient People called the Logos, another of those Active Living Creatures to which they responded. [More explanation of Logos and Active Creature Examples are here.](#)

9) When studying the Greek & Roman & Egyptian mythical stories, in encyclopedias or textbooks, the reader is shown pictures, diagrams, and sculptural images of the mythical "Gods/Spirits". Most often these "Gods/Spirits" are shown as having human form, i.e. anthropomorphized. Moreover the myth stories portray the Greek & Roman & Egyptian mythical "Gods/Spirits" as having distinctly human persona and human modes of living (i.e. even further anthropomorphized). The human form interpretation of myth is strongly supported by countless archeological artifacts which date back to these Greek & Roman & Egyptian times. Animal forms/persona are also shown as having a major part in Myth. In addition, the human and animal forms/persona are abundantly seen myths of other cultures, in both stories and archeological artifacts. However, as stated in 2) above, we may NOT automatically assume that the "others"/ "creatures" of original participation (Dawn People) are correctly visualized as having human (anthropomorphized) form.

Barfield does not much mention the human form interpretation of myth. But from Mr. Barfield's overall writing, I deduce the following: We moderns, given our non-participatory world view, inevitably misinterpret the Greek's and Roman's own understanding of myth. Our minds are most especially fixated to the inappropriate anthropomorphic interpretations, especially when we see pictures, diagrams, and sculptural images of the mythical "Gods/Spirits" shown in archeological artifacts. When we do this, we are left with a seriously changed/ distorted/ corrupted view of the Greek and Roman of myths. Barfield does not ever say "distorted" or "corrupted" but this is my conclusion. I believe to properly conceive the world view of original participation, especially for Dawn People, we moderns must first erase from our minds all traces how we habitually perceived how the Ancient Civilizations Peoples viewed their own myths. For example I do not think we should at all retain the "human form/human persona" interpretation of the "Gods/Spirits" such as we have assumed was used by the Classical Greece and Rome. Most especially mentally eliminate those archeological/pictorial/sculptural images of the "Gods/Spirits of classical Myth" you have ingrained into your mind. Forget what you learned from all the, books, magazines and encyclopedias you have seen. Barfield leads me to believe that a very large "portion" of Dawn Person's original participation was alive and well in Graeco-Roman times and continued right up through the Middle Ages. But I takes a specially trained "poetic eye" to get through to a proper sense of what was happening. (What Barfield thinks about images, groves, idols, and cults appears in a chapter on another topic. See "Saving the Appearances p109.4 and p110.3.)

So, if all those "human form/human persona" interpretations of the "Gods/Spirits" are not to be applied, why did the Greeks, Romans and Egyptians use them so extensively? I believe Julian Jaynes in his book [The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind](#) points to many correct answers. In discussing the history of ancient peoples, he points to much evidence that the earliest of

ancient peoples heard the voices of the Gods and effectively were controlled by those voices. Much of this fits in well with Owen Barfield's Original Participation. Mr. Jaynes offers evidence that these early people, whom I have called Dawn People, gradually lost this ability, and had to resort to going to special places to hear the voices, then for Classical times, they could not hear the voices at all. I suggest that the human images of the anthropomorphized "Gods/Spirits", along with shrines and groves, were "perception and memory prods" to help "reconnect" people with these voices that were once provided by the "Active Spirit Creatures" of Original Participation. These perception and memory prods, were similar to our modern use of words, poetry, or sacred scriptures to provide spiritual help to regain the needed experiences of original participation. I believe the practice of especially using human figures to represent the "Gods/Spirits" may have partly originated in ancient Egypt, where as is shown in the tomb paintings, actual humans wearing masks, played the part of the various "Active Spirit Creatures". Of course the need to use of humans to "play the parts" of a "Gods/Spirits" would **not** have been needed until such time the whole system Original Participation began to break down.

With the advances of culture, city life, and with further loss of Original Participation, the Classical Greeks and Romans themselves forgot the original reason for the shrines and statues of "Gods/Spirits". I conjecture that they gradually would, were likely to respond to these statues as mere representation of various "Gods", rather than re-living in the the statues presence, the true felt experience/emotion of Original Participation. This loss of the original "function" of the statues, would through the millennia, help contribute to the decline of the whole system of original participation. This would be another example of the relic theory, where we have the the change from function to form: The Shrines and Idols and Groves no longer provide true felt experiences of Original Participation (function), and are Dead Statues (mere forms) of a by gone system.

10) Mythology expert, Padraig Colum, and author of the mythology section of my encyclopedia stated; "The rustling of the leaves was supposed to be the murmuring voice of the goddess who lived in the tree. The hurrying stream was [supposed to be] a nymph rushing to join her lover, the sea." According to Mr. Barfield this is correct. Just remove the word "Supposed supposed to be"!! The passage now reads "The rustling of the leaves was the murmuring voice of the goddess who lived in the tree. The hurrying stream was a nymph rushing to join her lover, the sea."

Appendix I. SINGLE AND MULTIPLE MEANINGS.

1) Now that you have assimilated the above you are ready to consider

MR. BARFIELD'S IDEA OF SINGLE AND MULTIPLE MEANING AS APPLIED TO DAWN PEOPLE

At the top of page 91 Barfield says:

"For to the poetic understanding, myth presents an altogether different face. These fables are like corpses which, fortunately for us, remain visible after their living content has departed out of them. In the 'Classical Dictionary', the student of poetic diction finds delicately mummified for his inspection, any number of just those old SINGLE meanings, which the differentiating, analytic processes has desiccated and dissected" ***

"Single undivided meanings" refers to Dawn People's use of a single meaning for what we moderns would see as a collection of distinctly separate ideas. Continuing on page 91.4, he gives contrasting examples of his MULTIPLE vs. SINGLE meaning as shown below:

AN EXAMPLE OF OUR MULTIPLE MEANINGS RELATED BY METAPHOR

"We find [in our own] time poet after poet expressing in metaphor and simile the analogy between death and sleep and winter and again between birth and waking and summer and these, once more, are constantly made the types of a spiritual experience-- of the death in the individual soul of its accidental part and the putting on of incursion."

AN EXAMPLE OF DAWN PEOPLE UNDIVIDED SINGLE MEANING

"And in the beautiful myth of Demeter and Persephone we find precisely such a [single undivided] meaning. In the myth of Demeter the ideas of waking and sleeping, and sleeping, of mortality and immortality are all lost in ONE pervasive meaning""Mythology is the ghost of concrete meaning. Connections [in nature] between discrete phenomena , connections which are now apprehended [by us] as metaphor, were once perceived as immediate realities. As such the poet strives, by his own efforts, to see them, and to make others see them, again."

Three other examples of ancient people using a single word which to our thinking contained multiple meanings:

- a) The word "to shine" meant at once both physical light and human thinking. To illustrate this, consider that we use the expression "it dawned on me", or "light bulb came on" or "I had a "flash of insight", I got a glimmer of the idea", and many others.
- b) The physical light and human thinking are also combined in the word "lucid" . In my dictionary "lucid" means easily understood, clear, sane, rational. But the dictionary goes on to say "lucid" comes from Latin, "lucere", to shine and through the Indo-European root "leuk" relates to a whole series of words that mean Luminous.
- c) The ancients had one all pervasive meaning "pneuma" which, as already indicated above, included all at once: breath, living, wind, air, and spirit. Many words in use today have their origins in "pneuma", and STILL carrying those above mentioned meanings, show the stamp of original participation.
- d) The word "movement' once meant concurrently, space/geometry and human thinking.

Summary: As illustrated above, we have individual clearly abstracted single meanings words/concepts. And we may think ancient peoples combined MANY of OUR meanings into ONE single word. But word history tell us the reverse! Again and again as illustrated by the examples above, what we recognize as multiple (metaphorically related) meanings in fact evolved from what were once single words

2) Barfield is also saying that the, "differentiating, analytic" modern mind not only has "desiccated and dissected" but also invents completely erroneous "theories" of the origins of myth. These same erroneous theories appear in my encyclopedia, and I have a strong suspicion what appears in most encyclopedias and textbooks! You dear reader would have to closely study your *Poetic Diction* pages 89-90 to hear Barfield's appraisal of how four authors using MULTIPLE & ABSTRACTED & ANALYTIC meanings, were led to error

3) Barfield is saying that if we study these SINGLE meanings and use our metaphorical imagination we can poetically reconstruct a sense of original participation. We may thus gain a more satisfactory understanding of myth and its origins.

4) Barfield believes humanity is moving beyond our modern crisis to a new synthesis he calls "final participation". In other words he thinks the evolution of human consciousness will continue and produce

even bigger changes than already seen. shows the following passages taken from his various books: ("Final participation is a difficult idea to grasp, which can perhaps best be understood as "a self conscious rapport with the whole phenomenal world" (IOB 13) for in final participation "man's Creator speaks from within man himself" (BAR 66); we grasp fully our directionally creator relation with the divine. Final participation is not attainable simply through imitation of original participation. The models upon which Barfield draws in formulating his theory of final participation come not from the Greeks but from Goethe and Rudolf Steiner. As Barfield writes in "Saving the Appearances" final chapter, Final participation is indeed the mystery of the kingdom--of the kingdom that is to come on earth, as it is in heaven--and we are still only on the verge of its outer threshold.") For expanded explanation see: http://www.owenbarfield.com/Encyclopedia_Barfieldiana/Lexicon/Final.html

For more dictionary type meanings & examples,

consult: http://www.owenbarfield.com/Encyclopedia_Barfieldiana/Encyclopedia_Barfieldiana.html

Appendix II: Form vs. Function In Human Societies.

In this appendix we examine why and how certain "non-productive" social-cultural activities can become solidly entrenched in a human society. Lets again read the above Barfield passage marked with ***, but now with some editing: "These fables are like corpses [left-over relics] which, fortunately for us, remain visible [in form only] after their living [functional] content has departed out of them."

Barfield's statement is an example of the very real results of distinct and predictable social-cultural process which is the topic of this appendix. My son, David Gurr, first became aware of this process in linguistics, and subsequently helped me to see it in other socio-cultural areas.

David Gurr's "function-to-form relic" IDEA may be first given by an example: Consider various family names such as Hunter, Weaver, Miller, Shepherd, Smith, Carpenter, Cooper, etc. Such (last) names once designated what a person actually DID (function) for their living. Now these names are JUST A LABEL (form) having no other meaning besides identifying a particular person. As additional examples consider the British Royalty and the traditional ceremonial guards in England called the "Beefeaters". The Royalty and the Guards once served a real purpose (function) as follows. The British Royalty were the active rulers of the country and "Beefeaters" were a combat ready Palace Guard. But now they remain mostly for ceremony and public "spectator sport". (form): These two "revered traditions" are respectively royal "fan club" for the public and attraction for the tourist. These two traditions, are in a small way "a new function", but pale in comparison to the original function. If you want more examples, please ask. I am aware that some familiarity with this idea is needed before you will become convinced, and be able to see "formal relics" as indicators of a major and persisting human dynamic.

David Gurr's "function-to-form relic" THEORY may now stated as follows: Social-cultural practices become widely established in a society because they achieve a practical product or outcome (i.e. "function"). In any culture, there are necessary activities such as finding food, protection from danger, providing shelter, etc. These activities are necessary for survival (i.e. the function). Each new child must treat as valuable what they see (and experience) in the grown-ups around them. Then they must learn how to perform the same activities. And then as adults take up the responsibility of actually doing these activities the rest of their life. The survival of the community depends on it! This is how it should and must be. But inevitably some part(s) of the learned activity may be wrong or incomplete, especially in

times of rapid change like our own times. In addition, an even more serious problem arises. Each generation learns merely the more obvious surface "appearances" (i.e. the form) of what is to be learned but does not learn the original reason or the purpose (i.e. the function) for these activities. Consequently, as the cultural practice gets learned by each new generation, the purpose for completing a practical human effort tends, with the passing generations, to gradually get forgotten. As incredulous as it may seem, the real product or outcome, may correspondingly gradually diminish or cease. Or as mentioned above, some other derived function may "come into play". In the most extreme cases, the original "function" may be gone, but curiously enough, the more visible/learnable features, i.e. the "form", may still remain! So after several generations, people are performing actions that complete just the "surface appearances" (form), leaving out entirely what was at one time, the intended purpose of the activity (function). As Don Cruse points out below, often the loss of one function is replaced by (or shifted over to) another important function. In this case we may never realize a major change actually took place. Also David was quick to point out that the social-cultural processes herein discussed, have quite similar parallels in biological evolution, where there are dis-functional relic remainders of what were once functional life forms. These relics have resulted from the "twists and turns" evolutionary development.

The appearance of Astrology Horoscopes in nearly all newspapers provides a instructive example of a formal relic. Once upon a time, Astrology, using the stars and the sun, could accurately predict the seasons, migratory animal arrivals, and when to plant crops. The Astrologers used the signs of the Zodiac, as a very good and reliable "Sky Calendar" to accurately indicate the progression of our yearly cycle (function). The Astrologer, in part, really could accurately predict and foretell the future! This knowledge had a very important and successful real world purpose. However, present day Astrology, despite wide popularity, can make no accurate predictions. Moreover the "data base" used by Astrologers was set up well over 2000 years ago. Astrologers seem to be completely unaware that their system is more than one month out of sync with present day position of the stars relative to the earth.

By present day standards of science and the beliefs of most people, astrology does not deliver what it claims to deliver (loss of function). After more than 4000 years, Astrology is still exists in our society, illustrating the resiliency of formal relics. The "form" of the old Astrology is still here, but even the part that was true, accurate prediction of the seasons, is no longer present. The "form" of Astrology remains to remind us that there was once an ancient and functional system to foretell the seasons. Astrology is the "formal relic" remainder of what was once, in part, a practical system of astronomical predictions.

Astrology is a good example for yet a different reason. Astrology believers assert that the Signs of the Zodiac in a "newspaper horoscope" can be used to tell a person here on earth what to expect in their future. In other words, the Sun and the planets, traveling the Constellations, can send a message to humans, and thus influence events here on earth. This is to me a clear example of all the assumptions and communication processes of original participation, but still operative in the 20th Century! Astrology viewed this way is a "formal relic" of the entire system of original participation. The form remains, but since nearly all of original participation is gone, the part that remains is hopelessly devoid of use or meaning for the majority of modern society. The form remains, but the function is gone. Indeed a "formal relic" of Barfield's original participation as discussed above.

When people do not learn the reasons that once informed, guided, gave purpose to their actions, the intended purpose (function) is forgotten and often no longer achieved! In our own time the words "cultural" or "traditional" often are an accurate indicator for a "formal relic". These words are a clue

identifying human actions that take place devoid of the original reason for doing them. The "function-to-form relic" now a purpose-less empty "form", is reverently continued generation after generation just for the sake of doing it! In summary: The empty "form" is now a revered "relic" of what was once a major socio-cultural practice "function". David calls the left-overs, a "formal relic". (a relic in mere "empty" form of a previous social-cultural function)

When you grow up in a society it is very difficult to see this **form vs. function** problem. People around you don't see the problem, because (nearly) everyone has forgotten (or never learned) their history. But once you do see this "problem" you will see countless examples everywhere, language, fashion, architecture, religion etc. And the consequences in misplaced effort, and confusion, are great indeed! The Forms vs. Function disparity will afflict you until you learn to recognize it! As a university physics professor, I believe that much of that which passes as education in our own time has the surface appearance (form) of learning and knowledge but not the real thing! The outward forms are preserved, but the true purpose (function) of education is not being achieved.

BARFIELD EXPERT, DON CRUSE REPLY: "I very much enjoyed reading your paper, and your exchange with NFH and MFH. Your son's "function-to-form relic" theory is also most interesting.

With regard to the later I would like to suggest that it is not always a complete loss of function that results from the status of 'relic', so much as an alteration. If I may take [what we now call] logic as an example. It started out as 'original participation' in the goddess Natura [closely related to the ancient concept called Logos], but when the tide of that participation withdrew, it left on the shores of human consciousness its skeletal remnants, which we now experience as logic, which is why logic ties into the outside world in so remarkable a manner, a problem that so concerned Einstein." [More explanation of Logos and Active Creature Examples are here.](#)

Appendix III:

Correspondence Between Henry Gurr, Faith Hippensteel and Naomi Frost Hewett.

Naomi Frost Hewett Reservations Concerning Mr. Barfield's Book "Poetic Diction" and Reply By Henry Gurr.

3 Oct. 2001

Dear Mother and Naomi.

First off let me thank you both for your answers to my July 2001 questions concerning book "*Poetic Diction*". I really enjoyed what you both had to say. Your thoughtful written responses have added to my store of knowledge and prompted much thinking as you will see below. Don't worry Naomi, your writing was perfectly clear. (Naomi's full response is included as Appendix IV below.)

In this reply I restate my original July 01 question (abbreviated), quote portions of your individual responses, and in turn reply to each. To facilitate later ideas to build on earlier ideas, the questions have been reordered but retain numbers indicating the original sequence. Throughout, I have tried to explain (again) Mr. Barfield's unique idea of "original participation" in hopes for a communication break-through. This discussion extends and amplifies my above "Owen Barfield's Interpretation of Myth plus Appendixes I, II, & III".

(Q2) QUESTION: Barfield says [Dawn People] people not only experienced Natura, as a living, breathing, moving figure, he says the same applies to Panic, Hero, Fortune, Fury, Earth, North, South, East, West and a host of others!. They lived with these creatures as living beings (original participation). They "walked and talked" with the these?what to call them? "figures"....in the old Myths. In original participation, people did not have to use metaphor, they were already THERE by direct experience!! BUT goes on to say that:".....Natura was in no way experienced, by these ancient people, as metaphor." WE are the ones who must use metaphor to get back to this old feeling because we are trapped in our own time.What do YOU think?

NFH SELECTED RESPONSE: I disagree. Because human beings are story telling animals. I do not think we can live human lives without metaphor. This is a major message of Lakeoff & Johnson in their book "*Metaphors We Live By*" as follows:

"Metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish -- a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language. Moreover, metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action. For this reason, most people think they can get along perfectly well without metaphor. We have found, on the contrary, that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.

"The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor."

[I, HSG, most definitely agree!! I also heartily recommend their more recent book *Philosophy In the Flesh*, which extends and make more forceful their arguments.]

HG REPLY: I fully agree with your wonderful quote (above) from Lakeoff & Johnson and so would Mr. Barfield. Thank you for including it. I will have to reread their book soon! Metaphor is a major part of "Poetic Diction", where Barfield as much as says 1) metaphor is a fundamental and inescapable part of the human perception system and MOREOVER 2) Metaphor is in a large part responsible for creating/building/evolving practically every word we moderns use, including many words we use in science. I am prepared to believe science is one giant "frozen metaphor. Mr. Barfield runs his (metaphor oriented) word-evolution theory "backwards" to deduce the presence and properties of original participation. In the process he shows that many of the words we now use, actually derive from ancient words that carried the assumptions, creatures, and processes of original participation!

In my following discussion I will make many assertions that of course never can be known with certainty. But we can use our imagination, form hypothesis, and construct a model as we mentally bring together all of our knowledge, that bears on the model so formed. I bring to my reading of Barfield, a long study of human perception which I have daily applied in my physics classroom for over 20 years. I see a very good coherence between what Barfield says and what I know. (What else would motivate me to do all this writing! Something I am NOT good at !) In many cases I have purposefully over state the case in order to "make the point". I am trying to say enough so you dear reader can receive Owen Barfield's thoughts with

"new eyes", at which point you can forget what I said. The rough, crude, ugly, inadequate scaffolding is discarded after the beautiful building is complete.

Mr. Barfield is not trying to tell us that Dawn People did not or could not use metaphor. He is trying to get us to pay attention to two clearly different modes of arrival:

- 1) How WE must attempt to enter the world of Dawn People, through deliberate and conscious and aware use of metaphor. (SEVERAL brain wave states somewhat simultaneously.)
- 2) Dawn People were "already there" through use of direct perception with no awareness of metaphorical tension. (ONE brain wave state.)

Perhaps the metaphorical perceptual (brain) processes of Dawn Peoples helped them in learning the perceptions they ultimately saw, but Barfield asserts that what they were doing was different from what he, or you, or I would have to go through to arrive at just ONE of THEIR direct perceptions: We must read a whole bunch of myths, comprehend word history, do something to escape all the modern abstracted specialized concepts flooding our minds, do something to cleanse our mind of all our anthropomorphized representations (statues, images, idols) of Graeco-Roman "Gods/Spirits, then construct in our mind some idea of the perceptual world of dawn People, and then metaphorically enter it (perhaps). By contrast, young Dawn Persons would absorb their world view of his/her tribe along with their Mother's milk. They would receive their world view by living it. They could watch what their family or friends were looking at (directed attention) and then (possibly) hear the names of the perceived entities. Some micro storytelling would be sufficient to fine tune their perceptions. Once the direct perceptions are in place, then they "live" in the world of original participation. I doubt that even with great effort, you or I could, with direct perception ALONE, enter this long forgotten world. We are just too far removed. As Mr. Barfield stated: We must use metaphor, but by contrast, they were already there!

Let me expand on the above. Compared to Dawn People, we have vast store house of modern highly abstracted words, meanings, and concepts. But it is these very modern modes of thinking (conscious awareness) that "gets in our way", and obstructs our ability to "see as they saw". We must make considerable effort to "shift gears" and attempt to enter what was the perceptual mode of Dawn People. To approach the perceptions of Dawn People, using our available concepts, we must use metaphor. We must hold and contrast several different meanings somewhat simultaneously.

Barfield asserts that they did not have the abstracted individualized (specialized) words/meanings/concepts, that are accessible to us. For them by contrast, metaphor played a much lesser role in how they looked out at nature. Certainly they did not need the collection of our multiple meanings necessary for us to enter just ONE of their immediate perceptions.

Many authors in seeking the origin of myth, have called Dawn People an "Era of Mighty Super Poets". This theory is one consequence of modern concepts getting in the way of a proper understanding of the origins of myth.

Several places you, Naomi, say that humans are first and foremost "storytellers" and as such can not build up their ideas concerning the world without story telling. You have a conclusion which would seem to deny Mr. Barfield's approach. For my part I can accept that story telling can have a great amount of impact, and most certainly be greatly involved in the cultural evolution of the mythical stories. Change would be especially speeded up as more and more people were removed from a purely nature

environment by the compounding effects of advancing civilizations; city life, writing, ability to make images, accounting procedures, mathematics, beginnings of science, etc. Barfield would add, word and concept evolution. Correspondingly, our ever more highly abstracted, finely divided specialized single meanings, enter the storytelling. Science is an example here. All these factors contribute to the speed of change, and accelerate us away from the world of Dawn People.

But added to storytelling, I believe that direct experiences are also pretty fundamental. I believe that direct perception of nature and storytelling could operate on each other to build up a stable system perceived immediate realities for Dawn People. We may assume that the modern human biological frame, and brain, appeared on the evolutionary scene well over 100,000 years ago. It is possible to imagine the basic participatory components of original participation persisting from this time until 12,000 years ago, when the first civilizations appeared. Rapid changes clearly have happened ever since. But despite these considerable changes, the distinctive characteristics of original participation persisted into the Middle Ages.

Above I stated that directed attention, naming of the perceived entities, and some storytelling would be sufficient to fine tune the perceptions of original participation and maintain in stable form the distinctive characteristics (see page 3, item 4) of original participation. I do something like this when I help my students to "see" the perceived immediate realities of physics:

- 1) First off, my physics is a lived experience. My "real world" perceived immediate realities of physics continually and automatically guide and refine and reinforce what I "see". These actions in mutual reinforcement, together bring me to a solid continuing stable world view. Very seldom do I see events in the physical world that challenge or contradict what I "know".
- 2) My stable world view "works"! I try to transfer the same self reinforcing system to my students by the following steps.
- 3) My students (and I) operate inside a culture that "sets students up" so they are somewhat ready to "see what I see".
- 4) I must be aware of, use, proceed from, and build on, their existing base of lived experiences. And then,
- 5) As a teacher I (mostly) teach AS I have been taught. I repeat again (mostly) WHAT I have been taught. A genuine case of cultural transfer.
- 6) I use a combination of a) directed attention, b) finger pointing, c) eye pointing. Then,
- 7) I Name, define, and story-tell until the students are "with me".
- 8) The students complete carefully chosen "hands-on-real-world" direct experience in laboratory work. They are guided by a procedure and my "hand waving". This helps them achieve the correct perceptions.
- 9) The student's laboratory reports and exams help me confirm that they "see what I see".
- 10) I hope and trust that my students' newly learned physics perceptions and system of knowledge, in future, will help them better achieve a productive successful life, free from economic and personal injury. Otherwise they and I have wasted our time.

It should be mentioned here that much of what I direct my students attention to in physics is a pure invention of the human mind. Let me use several major topics of physics as examples: Not only are Gravitational, Electrical, and Magnetic Fields, invisible and intangible, they may or may not actually exist! Ditto for all of the 100 or so fundamental elementary particles, such as electrons, protons, neutrons, photons, etc. These are all human constructs (inventions) that form a "system of actions" which explain the feelings of our body and the readings (data) of our scientists instruments. Mr. Barfield would say the following: Something is indeed "there", but "what is truly there" is probably not as is presently conceived

by modern science, and we probably will never be in contact with "what is truly there". In other words we will never know "reality".

Although these invisible and intangible constructs of physics are true ghosts (spirit creatures?) in the above sense, they nevertheless will, efficiently, consistently, safely, and with continuity guide any 20th Century person in their daily life. To achieve this, the student must apply considerable effort to learn these same imaginative constructs called physics. (I might add that "pure invention of the human mind" applies to practically every thing learned by humans.) I can imagine that in essence, the system of original participation was not much different: For Dawn People, their system also "worked". Persephone was just as real to them, as an electron is to me. (There! I've finally pounded it out on these keys!)

BARFIELD EXPERT, DON CRUSE ADDITIONAL COMMENT: "I very much enjoyed reading your [HSG] paper, and your exchange with NFH and MFH. With regard to NFH's reservations, I would like stress something that I think she did not quite understand. Which is that the 'dawn people' were completely unselfconscious, and that the transition from their direct experience of spiritual realities ["Others", Living Beings], to the use of metaphor came with the development of self consciousness. The more we became individuals, our consciousness no longer tied into the bloodline, the more we began to make use of metaphor. I admit that it is extremely difficult to image ourselves as being totally unselfconscious, but I think that this is needed to understand 'original participation'."

[HSG Comment: The change from 'dawn people's completely unselfconsciousself to our modern's full self consciousness seems to have exactly coincided with the the gradual loss of original participation, and the corresponding loss of the ability to experience the "others" and hear voices. It is easy to conjecture that the former was the cause of the latter.}

(Q_) NFH INTRODUCTION p1.3, SELECTED RESPONSE: "I am concerned that there are many stages to the process of what I believe Barfield is pointing toward. In my own formulation, I believe this [Barfield's interpretation of myth] is a false splitting of metaphor from knowledge."

HSG REPLY: I am not sure what (specifically) makes you say this. This is the very LAST thing Barfield would want to do. He is always concerned with how to achieve full and whole meanings , and metaphor is an integral part of that human process. He repeatedly distresses the separations caused by the "dissecting, differentiating, analytic mind" and the corresponding separations caused by the all too prevalent subject-objective form of thinking characteristic of our own time.

Please remember Barfield's central focus in the "Poetic Diction" pages 89-90 I have Xeroxed for you. He is trying to depose (cast aside) the "Generation of Mighty Super Poets Theory" as being the origin of myth. As I have discussed in great detail above, he wants us to contrast and think about two alternatives:

- 1) Our response to received mythical stories (achieved primarily through our use of metaphor) versus,
- 2) The response of Dawn People to their own world. (primarily direct perception of immediate realities).

They could and did probably use metaphor, but they did not need metaphor to look at their world any more than we need metaphor to look at our puppy dogs in preparation to feed them. Mr. Barfield is not trying to split metaphor from knowledge. If anything he consistently shows how metaphor is how we connect with meaning and a constant generator of all kinds of knowing and new knowledge. Mr. Barfield wishes us, on these pages, to see the essential outlines of, what he later called, original participation.

(Q6) QUESTION ABBREVIATED: Below the center of page 88, Mr. Barfield says "these earlier meanings appear in the world of earlier people without individualized poetic effort".....What do YOU think?

NFH SELECTED RESPONSE p12.3: "We have a notion of first peoples, a romantic notion Barfield seems to share, that their cultures changed little over time. In fact they are dynamic as well, and ritual, myth, metaphor are the ways we all integrate new "things" into our lives."

HG REPLY: Indeed cultures evolve and change and indeed you have pointed to some of the mechanisms. Mr. Barfield's whole literary career has been a study of the history of change in words and their meaning. (Note word story in history!) He should of all persons well know the processes of change. He is an expert in word history, and in how metaphor pushes the leading edge of change thus evolving all the words we use. Metaphor, the leading edge of change, is the topic of two chapters in "Poetic Diction". The chapters are titled "The Making of Meaning". It is in fact Barfield's systematic study of history of words and attendant change of meaning that has lead him to realize the existence and major outlines of original participation. He calls his overall conclusions an "evolution of conscience".

In his discussion of original participation, Barfield wants us to think about a time, well in advance of Ancient Civilizations. Although the change of society from 100,000 b.c. to 10,000 b.c. could have been rather slow, as mentioned above, I believe the distinctive characteristics of original participation (see page 3, item 4) do not required static conditions. The basic system of original participation Barfield proposes, was so successful it persisted, despite considerable change. In fact many of the distinctive characteristics of original participation did survive rather well up to the Middle Ages, with remnants persisting to this very day! The mechanisms of change you mention, DID gradually eliminate original participation. Modern science has been a big factor. Barfield's book "Saving the Appearances" fills in the story of what he thinks happened and discusses how we can repair some of the inevitable damage caused by the elimination of participation.

(Q1) QUESTION: On the center of page 89 "Poetic Diction", Mr. Barfield says that our words: panic, hero, fortune, fury, earth, North, South, even Nature (Goddess Natura), were once experienced (not as abstract concepts but) as Living Beings. These were "Creatures" with whom Dawn People shared their world.What do YOU think?

NFH SELECTED RESPONSE p1.9: To be in panic --heart racing, belly clenching, paralyzed of hyperkinetic, is so powerfully different and yet so very physiological and recognizable and aversive-- that one feels "not oneself". to go from there to "being possessed" or "ridden by or visited by a powerful outside force is no great leap."

HG REPLY: You have actually made Barfield's point! For dawn people it was no leap at all! Take as hypotheses, that Dawn People made such assumptions as a daily natural occurrence. For example the shepherd would say his sheep got frightened and bolted into the woods because Pan "got into them". Thus we have the word panic (pan-ic). Mr. Barfield says we can apply the same form of thinking to the words: hero, fortune, fury, earth, North, South, even Nature (Goddess Natura). Make this assumption, and the next time you read myth, see if you arrive at more coherence and new insight.

(Q1) QUESTION CONTINUED: These were "Creatures", "Living Beings" with whom Dawn People shared their world.What do YOU think?

NFH SELECTED RESPONSE p3.1: I am not clear from this passage in Barfield as to what he means by "Living Beings". Stories told give us as characters in our stories. p4.8 If Barfield means by Living Beings, he means that extra experience that comes with the reading aloud of a fine poem-- so that the poem itself seems alive and the listener feels thereby touched or connected, then I am with Barfield.

HG REPLY: Your well written essay, above, on how storytelling can create "living Beings" is well taken. Repeated storytelling of myth could indeed create, from cold zero, the creatures of "UNIVERSAL Mediterranean Myth. Mr. Barfield agrees with you in his statement concerning modern day poets. As such the poet strives, by his own efforts, to see them [Mythical world connections], and to make others see them, again."

But there is an Alternate Hypothesis for your consideration: Take all you have stated and remembering the process of building up the sense of "Living Beings" by storytelling, now ADD one more idea: The Names you gave, p3.8, Mithras, Persephone, Dionysus, Orpheus, Apollo, and Osiris just might carry the mark of early human's response to nature. They are a hint of origins. These creatures of myth point us back to an entire system, an entire world view. These "pervasive universal" creatures, were an original a response to NATURE. These named creatures just might refer to "perceived natural processes". The names, and perceived natural relationships, persist long after the social system that created them has long ago disappeared into the mist of history. Once these apparent "Living Beings" were established as a response to Nature, storytelling kept the Mythical Beings alive, long after the Dawn People's environment that established the "others of nature", had evaporated. Relics indeed!!

(Q7) QUESTION ABBREVIATED: Mr. Barfield tells us, Page 91, we must take the proper poetic process, to breath new life into myth.....What do YOU think?

NFH SELECTED RESPONSE p12.9-13.5: In this [breathing new life into myth], perhaps some of us are on the opposite side of folks who understand scripture as "literal", rather than story/myth. This same "literalism".....

HG REPLY: Mr. Barfield has written a great deal about how "literalism". has clouded and confined the thinking of peoples in modern times, especially when interpreting the writings of ancient peoples. Perhaps you are thinking Mr. Barfield's original participation interpretation of myth in too literal. Well, try what he says for a while, and perhaps you will "see what I see". Much of what he says "fits" what I know very well. Not only do the residuals of ancient myth that I see still in our present society (relics), confirm what he says, but the trail of word and meaning change he discusses is to me very compelling. His history of words points back to a clear presence of some sort of world view of Dawn People. In major outlines, their view could well be something like his original participation.

Appendix IV. Text of Henry Gurr's Original Questions. Response of Naomi Frost Hewett Follows Each Question.

Dear Dr. Gurr,

Thanks for thinking of me! As Chuck is on the internet and Suzanne has just left, this seem-ed a good time to answer you on Barfield's comments re metaphor. I've sent along part of the last chapter of Peter Brown's CULT OF THE SAINTS by way of help in clarifying what I shall say.

I am concerned that there are many stages to the process of what I believe Barfield is pointing toward. In my own formulation, I believe this is a false splitting of metaphor from knowledge. Which is most curious, since teachers of science are often found telling little stories to help students remember or understand.

Question 1. On the center of page 89 Poetic Diction, Mr. Barfield says that our words: panic, hero, fortune, fury, earth, North, South, even Nature (Goddess Natura), were once experienced (not as abstract concepts but) as living beings. These were "Creatures" with whom Dawn People shared their world.What do YOU think?

NFH Response. I believe that the experience of "panic", say, perhaps in a dream or chased by a leopard, was told to others in story context. To be in panic --- heart-racing, belly-clenching, paralyzed or hyperkinetic, is so powerfully different and yet so very physiological and recognizable and aversive --- that one feels "not oneself." To go from there to "being possessed" or "ridden by" or "visited by" a powerful outside force is no great leap. Powerful ecstatic states, like powerful aversive states, change our perceptions. There is either intense focus or intense inwardness. One feels extraordinarily alive--yet with a loss of individuality. One "merges" into a kind of unity.

Now, Pearcean semiotics suggests 3 levels of meaning: (semantic)---in which we focus on differences among things; (metaphoric)---in which we place 2 dissimilar things side by side and discover new/abstract meaning derived from their similarities (see here Lakeoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*); and (unity)---in which we perceive "eternity in a grain of sand and infinity in a flower."

I am not entirely clear from this passage in Barfield as to what he means by "living beings." Stories told give us living beings as characters in our imagination. Each myth is a story. I believe that cultural myths evolve and develop out of many stories, told by many people over time, because they are remembered and clustered with similar (though often ambiguous) other versions so that archetypal characters emerge that make sense to folk in that particular culture.

For example, the martyred innocent (child of God and mortal) who dies and is resurrected through various means, is a universal Mediterranean myth given a shape that is recognizable to us as Christianity.

Examples of other religions using the same myth include Mithras, Persephone, Dionysus, Orpheus, Apollo, and Osiris. Christianity had broad appeal by virtue of this recognizable and omnipresent cultural motif and made use of it.

However, one important thing has changed for European Americans. We are literate. That is, we get our myths not by recreation from symbolic reminders (as the history paintings on First People teepees), nor on the breath and in the dramatic presence of storytellers or sacred dramas. We get our myths --- at least in Barfield's time --- mostly from written literature. From written words that have the living breath wrung out of them. (I won't go into Elvis and MTV and Star Trek here.)

We know that the rhythmic cadence and song of poetry spoken alone affects brains very differently than poetry printed on the page, that a script differs from the movie. In fact, one misses part of what a poem is/means unless one gives it voice.

If Barfield means by "living beings" that extra experience that comes with the reading aloud of a fine poem--so that the poem itself seems alive and the listener feels thereby touched or connected, then I am

with Barfield and the muses still live. Because I can attribute this extra dimension of lived experience easily to a spirit that the poet breathed in (was inspired by) and which also helps me receive the poem into myself. When I memorize this poem so that when I experience a similar feeling, state, or re-cognition, the words which have become a part of both the experience and the lived connection may come alive again for me to share, as I did above with Blake's "to see the world in a grain of sand, an infinity in a flower." Note the error here, to which memory is prone--to take a rhyming word and substitute, giving a very different meaning--but perhaps a new poem.

So, if this means that the moment of understanding, as in inspiration = spirit = living being, I can agree.

Question 2. He says these words (panic, hero, fortune, fury, earth, North, South, even Nature (Goddess Natura), were once experienced (not as abstract concepts but) as living beings. These were "Creatures" with whom Dawn People shared their world.) are just a few of the more obvious words which we derive from Dawn People Myth. He implies there are hundreds more.What do YOU think?

NFH Response. Again, I'm not sure entirely what is meant by "Dawn People Myth." What I believe is that we learn much of what is useful from stories--either from our own or other people's. Morals are taught through stories, not commandments. Laws are understood and applied through stories. When we share what is most important about us as people, we tell stories. If the listener can identify her or his inner process with the teller, then the story feels "true."

Here is another example from a philosopher of religion--John Wisdom:

Two elderly ladies who are long-time friends have gone to buy a hat for one of them to wear to an important family wedding. After trying on hat after hat, finally the one friend exclaims, "Oh, my dear, that's the one! It's YOU!"

The mysterious living beings/spirits of beauty have smiled on the woman wearing the hat in a unique way that her friend recognizes--leading her to her excited statement. "Why, yes," answers the friend, "I do think it becomes me." Somehow she is more of her best self wearing this hat. And once she has worn the hat, the memory of her search for it, her friend's exclamation, and the special times she wears it become attached to it meaningfully. Now, if the hat and its story are handed down -- the hat may acquire a name as if it were a living thing--perhaps "Nomi's wedding hat" or "Grandma's Grandma Hat." The meanings accrue, are coded into a name, and are sometimes creatively un-encoded (and then re-encoded) into a story (which can never be told the same way twice).

Now, of course, such names may become artifacts that seem disconnected when their stories are no longer known. I would go further to say that all names/nouns have stories somewhere in their histories. So, if Barfield is referring to this kind of story, I'd agree.

Question 3. On the end of page 88 Poetic Diction, Mr. Barfield says that at the time of Mythology, the root

meaning of our word "to shine" meant simultaneously 1) human thinking and 2) what we call physical light.What do YOU think? (NOTE: The thinking aspect of "to shine" may show up in our times as possibly our "flash of insight", or "light bulb came on", or "lightning bolt" , or "it dawned on me" or possibly even "Zeus".)

NFH Response. I agree. What happens in a person's physical body when she/he experiences an AHA? The eyes open, the mouth opens, there is energy. Where there was twilight or the horizon (NFH here drew horiz.line)_____ there is now (NFH here drew horiz.line with sun glow rays) ______|/_____. We often close our eyes to think when we are muddled and lost. We open our eyes when we know.

It would be interesting to check out the following:

1. Does the visual cortex "light up" with an AHA?
2. Do blind people also experience this in the visual cortex?

Question 4. And then he says this old word "to shine" is..... "the echoing foot steps of the goddess Natura."What do YOU think?

NFH Response. Yes, if one remembers we are of and with and infused by Nature rather than separate from her. To "objectify" Nature is to falsify ourselves, temporarily at least.

Question 5. He says that BACK THEN, people experienced Natura, as a living, breathing, moving figure. BUT goes on to say that.....Natura was in no way experienced, by these ancient people, as metaphor. They experienced panic, hero, fortune, fury, earth, North, South, even Nature Goddess Natura) as direct living concrete experiences. They lived with these creatures as living beings (original participation). They "walked and talked" with the these?what to call them? "figures"....in the old Myths. In original participation, people did not have to use metaphor, they were already THERE by direct experience!! WE are the ones who must use metaphor to get back to this old feeling because we are trapped in our own time.....What do YOU think?

NFH Response. I disagree. Because human beings are storytelling animals, I do not think we can live human lives without metaphor. As & Lakeoff & Johnson note , and I agree:
"Metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish..... a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language. Moreover, a metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action. For this reason, most people think they can get along perfectly well without metaphor. We have found, on the contrary, that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.....If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do everyday is very much a matter of metaphor."((page 3) *Metaphors We Live By*)

What perhaps has changed, thanks to the changes to which Barfield is alluding, is our lack of recognition that we are metaphorical creatures.

Question 6. Below the center of page 88 Poetic Diction, Mr. Barfield says "these earlier meanings appear in the world of earlier people without individualized poetic effort". I think Barfield is telling us that we modern people are very hard pressed to imagine what the world of these earlier people was like. We are enormously different. We (even our experts) end up using the logic of science and the language of science and the processes of science but get it all wrong. He describes the grip of all purpose "logical thought" (logomorphism) on the last half of page 90.....What do YOU think?

NFH Response. I guess I partially agree with Barfield here. An example from a course I took on Cargo Cults is apropos here. Europeans wrote home about native peoples worshiping canned goods, nails, hammers--placing them on altars, beseeching them as though they were gods. Europeans railed about how natives stole these items and others like them in quantity, despite serious punishments when they were caught. Using a Freudian term --- actually a misunderstanding, incidentally, of Europeans --- this was called a primitive native/superstitious/"fetishism". That is, the Europeans found little meaning in these everyday commodities, other than their practical usefulness. Therefore, they assumed that ritual use of these items was unsophisticated, to put it kindly, i.e. "stupid".

Europeans made this false assumption because they didn't care to learn the story-world of the native peoples. For them, white-skinned strangers arrived in boats made of things (metal) which should sink, and offloaded all kinds of stuff into their world. In the native world, in balance with their gods, the land and all things living are theirs to use, sent by the gods whom they dutifully thank. That is the arrangement they have with their gods of giving/receiving/giving. Now these strange people have brought new and wonderful things to them from their gods and are saying the natives cannot have them. So, either the gods have changed the rules of their world, unbeknownst to the original people whose gods they are, or the strangers are liars and thieves trying to keep all these gifts for themselves and have intercepted delivery! Now, how shall one ask one's gods what's up? One takes the nails and hammers and canned goods and creates a ritual, just as one thanks one's god for rain or harvest or healing, in order to ask the god what's happening.

We have a notion of first peoples, a romantic notion Barfield seems to share, that their cultures changed little over time. In fact they are dynamic as well, and ritual, myth, metaphor, are the ways we all integrate new "things" into our lives.

Question 7. Page 91 is where Mr. Barfield puts all his ideas into action. He tells us how we should have a proper "poetic understanding" of myth. He says that the living content of these Myths has been drained out of them. (In other words, these are relics. There has been a near total loss of function with only the form remaining). He says, the "analytic process" (i.e. science) caused this. He says we must take the proper poetic process he describes, to breath new life into myth.....What do YOU think?

NFH Response. I think that breathing "new life" into myth is exactly what Joseph Campbell and Paul

Tillich and Susan B. Anthony, to name a few historic figures, have done. In this, perhaps, some of us are on the opposite side of folks who understand scripture as "literal" rather than story/myth. This same "literalism" is as old as debates during Yeshua's time between adherents of oral Torah and those who held that only the written canon was God's true word. Today these literalists sit on the Supreme Court--naively reasoning they can determine the "original intent" of the signers of our national Constitution. Literalists are also found among those who think the genetic code is determinative without lived experience.

I've written this all in one sitting. I hope it makes sense. With kindest and best wishes, Naomi

P.S. Good talking with you! Thanks for including me. THE GAIA HYPOTHESIS is the name of the book I was trying to remember. That one is still [packed from our move] in my boxes.

Note added in proof: If I were to do this over, I would add a paragraph about Damasio's work on the development of consciousness through bodily feelings, and the ways (per Jerome Bruner) we are programmed to connect as cause and effect events that happen next to each other in time and space. In shared Humankindness.

Naomi